

Genesis 18:20-33

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:6-15

Luke 11:1-13

## Grief and Loss, Part 5

We've finally come to that place in our sermon series where we'll be introduced to a very deliberate way of approaching loss and grief. And like everything else in this chapel, the focus is Jesus Himself and who we are in Him when we face these heartbreaking times in our lives.

First sermon, 108 billion people, all have died, all experience grief. Which means there are 108 billion different ways to grieve the loss of a loved one—parent, child, spouse, friend.

Our problem today is that we want to be quick about it; a few weeks, maybe, and then move on with life. If it takes longer than that, then there's something wrong—or at least that's how we're made to feel.

Until just a few generations ago, someone who lost a spouse, for example, would wear mourning clothes for a year. The women would wear long, black, heavy dresses and often a veil; a sign of profound loss, and the veil was intended to hide the tears. This dress was worn every day, at home, at town, at church. Men got off a bit easier—because their work required them to wear all kinds of things, they would at least wear a black mourning band on their sleeve. In either case, the drapes in their homes would be lowered or closed for the entire year and no 'fun' happened in the home (nor did they go out for 'fun'): it was a house of mourning—all engineered to acknowledge the loss of their loved one and the emptiness they felt without them. But at the end of the year, the curtains were pulled open, the mourning clothes would come off, bright colors went back on, and like a snake shedding its skin, they were ready to start life again. The mourning clothes were a visible sign of their inward pain and loss. Others saw it, recognized it, and treated them accordingly which, in its own special way, helped them to work through the process.

And that's not all. In a lot old-world European communities, across much of the Near and Middle East, throughout all of Latin and South America, and everywhere in Asia (well, pretty much the whole world except North America), one of the most time-honored professions in a town was that of the professional mourner—and this goes all the way back to biblical times and is still practiced in quite a few communities today. When a family suffered a loss, they would fill the house and yard with hired professional mourners to weep and wail and grovel on the ground in gut-wrenching grief, crying the tears and giving vocal expression to what the family sometimes couldn't express because they were too emotionally numb. And these professional mourners would sometimes stay around the house for weeks. And somehow hearing the crying and watching the tears produced a healing catharsis in the family that was grieving as they connected their hearts to the sounds of the grief all around them.

How different from our culture today where everything is supposed to be great and awesome and happy and upbeat and over-the-top and encouraging and affirming, and where hurt, pain, discomfort, and sadness are treated almost like a contagious disease. Oh, there are lots of supporting words and gestures, but every week they seem to be fewer and fewer and you know, you just know, that behind your back they're probably thinking, "Can't they just get on with their lives?!"

It seems like in today's world, we're forced into a balancing act between wanting to honor the place/memory of the one who died, wanting to put the loss behind us without giving the impression of dishonoring their memory, and trying to avoid becoming fixated in the grief—choosing to dwell in it—because it can easily become our drug of choice (I like the sympathy, hugs, notes, concerned looks because 'who' do I become once I'm "over it" and will everyone still pay attention to me?). There is, no doubt, a whole physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual tug-of-war that goes on inside of every person who faces tragic loss.

Today, however, we want to be reminded about that one person Who will never turn away from being with you, and about faithfully committing yourself to that one person Who stands by you to carry you through to the other side of despair. Not to the place where you forget the one who has died, but to the place where the pain of their absence is sanctified and you have the grace to carry on without feeling emotionally crushed. And like I said at the beginning, I'm talking about walking through this emotional minefield with Jesus Christ.

Now what I say today presupposes one vital, absolutely necessary condition: that a relationship has been forged between you and Jesus BEFORE the circumstance occurs. What do I mean? For example, back in 1990-91 during Operation Desert Storm in the Middle East, someone back home discovered Psalm 91 and began cranking out prayer cards and bumper stickers and little devotional booklets that flooded the mail of American military units in the Persian Gulf. Tanks and armored personnel carriers were driving down desert roads with Psalm 91 bumper stickers almost as much as cars back home did in support of the troops. You know which psalm I'm talking about: **"He will deliver you from the perilous pestilence; hide you under the shadow of His wing; you shall not be afraid of the arrow that flies by day nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday; a thousand may fall at you side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you."**

And people were eating this up—folks back home loved it; soldiers in the field loved it; everyone believed that nothing bad would happen to our troops. But they failed to read the whole psalm: **"Because you have made the Lord the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling, for He shall give His angels charge over you. Because you have set your love on Me, therefore I will deliver you; I will be with you in trouble; I will satisfy you with long life."** Everybody wanted all the good stuff and all the good promises and all the good help and all the good protection without realizing that a precondition of relationship with God was necessary! And that's what I'm talking about today.

Did you notice that all of our texts this morning focused on asking God for help? Did you also notice that the confidence in asking comes from being in a relationship with God through Christ? If we are, indeed, walking in the love of Christ and yet fail to relinquish our grief into His

hands, oh, what a waste of His strength; oh, what a weight we needlessly carry. And all of this seems to come together in our New Testament reading from Colossians 2:6-15, and I would encourage you to have that passage open as we quickly move through this text. There are four things here that I want you to see.

**THE FIRST STEP** in any hard place, even grief, is to know your true place in Jesus Christ. Look at what Paul is saying here in verse 6: Not only are we to receive Him, taking His offer of eternal life into our life (and remember, Jesus is more than an offer; He's a person and we need to take HIM into our lives), we're also supposed to walk in Him—in other words, every word, every action, every thought, every emotion is to be yielded to and taken captive by the Son of God. And that's so we can experience the joy, protection, and peace of verse 7; fitted with roots that don't shake in a storm no matter what kind of storm it is; built into an emotional and spiritual house that isn't full of cracks and holes; established in a faith that can stand the test of time because it's the only thing that can carry us to the other side; and abounding in that faith and life to the point where Jesus flows out of us and touches the lives of others. If you want a place to begin working through grief and loss, this is where you start: in a relationship with Jesus.

**THE SECOND THING** to help in the middle of a tragic loss is to understand, biblically understand, not what the world says, not what romance novels say, not what marriage and family counselors say, but what Scripture says about who you are in Christ and who Christ is in you. If you are married in this life, the Bible says that you and your spouse are one flesh—ever since God presented Adam with Eve in the Garden of Eden. On this earth, together, you are one flesh, complementing each other physically, emotionally, and spiritually—here. But when you die, there is no longer a giving or receiving in marriage in heaven. In answering a debate about who is married to who in heaven, Jesus says in Matthew 22:30, **“You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage.”** And that's because while our loved ones complement us in this life, we are truly fashioned and made for one person and one person only—and if we know that, accept that, trust in that, and relinquish ourselves to that, then the road of loss becomes a bit easier to bear. Who are we made for? Back to Colossians 2:9-10, **“For in Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him.”**

This idea of being complete in Christ comes from the Greek word *pleroo*—to cram full of, to over fill and level off, to bloat with satisfaction, to bring to complete fulfillment—*pleroo* is where we get our word plethora from, something in abundance above and beyond what's necessary. When we lose someone in our life and we're left with this gaping hole in our heart and daily routine, it's not that Jesus just replaces that person and we forget. No. Rather, if we're in a relationship with Jesus, He'll begin to slowly fill up that hole with His own heart, sanctifying the loss by grafting that emotional wound deep into His own wounds and offering you His strength in exchange for your emptiness. But you have to believe that you are complete in Him.

**THE THIRD STEP** that encourages us is that, when it seems like our world has ended and everything inside of us has died, we can find courage and hope in the fact that we have already died in Christ. That sounds a bit strange; what do I mean? Colossians 2:12 reminds us that we have been **“buried with Jesus in baptism.”** We have died to sin. We have died to this life. We

have died to this world. And in that dying, Satan has nothing to cling to except that which we allow him. The great thing about dying with Jesus is the fact that we are knit to the One Who has conquered death and the grave. And it gets better as that verse continues, **“You were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, Who raised Him from the dead.”** Why is that important? Verse 13 tells us why, **“And you, being dead in your trespasses** [Satan no longer has legal claim over you—He can’t prosecute or convict a dead man!], **He has made alive together with Him.”** That means there is no emotion the enemy can cling to, nothing the enemy can flare up, nothing the enemy can push down, nothing the enemy can depress, nothing the enemy can enrage, nothing the enemy can haunt, and nothing the enemy can blame you for—no emotion, no circumstance, no tear, no sorrow, no remorse. He can’t touch them if you are dead and buried in the wounds of Jesus. How can that be?

**THE FOURTH STEP** is to believe something so important that it can change your life—well, dying with Christ is a life changer; an eternal life changer. But to believe what Scripture is about to say, right here and now, is an immediate life changer, especially when Satan is trying to use your loss to his advantage because he’s betting that you don’t know this. Verse 15 says, **“Having disarmed principalities and powers, Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them.”** In the Greek sense here, this means that Jesus completely and totally divested Satan of every strength, power, authority, trick, tool, lie, subversion, entitlement, or ability he had; he has no more teeth; the air has been completely let out of him; he’s a chicken with his head cut off; and he can’t commandeer and enflame your hurt and grief and turn it against you.

The enemy wants you to cling to and cope with grief (because the longer you hold onto it the longer he can manipulate your emotions). The world wants you to manage your grief (because the more strength you exhibit in carrying your grief the less you need the grace of Jesus). Jesus wants you to relinquish your grief—not the memory or the love, but the grief—so that He can bury it in His own death and relieve you of that burden; sanctifying the loss, sanctifying the memory, sanctifying the love as He draws you deeper into His own heart which will never fail you.

Four little things with which to face your loss and grief:

- Walk in a relationship with Jesus.
- Know that you are made complete in Jesus alone, no one else. Others complement you; Jesus completes you.
- Everything you are and feel is buried in the death of Christ.
- He has pulled Satan’s teeth so that he can’t toy with your emotions any more.