The Miracle of Godly Grief

2 Corinthians 7:5-13

Sermon

We are currently in our series, "Entrusted with a Miracle". This morning we are going to step aside from the book of Ephesians. I want to talk about the Miracle of godly grief that leads to repentance. Repentance is not a joyful topic, at least not at first. It reveals something wrong about us, and we don't like that. However repentance, if embraced, is a joyful and glorious experience. That I can repent and run to the loving arms of my Father, and that His mercies are new every morning, and His arms are open wide to embrace the repentant sinner is glorious! Countless days, with Bible open, early in the morning, God reaches down and lovingly taps my shoulder and reminds me of something that I need to get right. And He fills me with a miracle, godly grief over my sin, and He shows me what to do – who I need to apologize to, what boundaries I need to establish, what prayers I need to pray, what actions I need to do, and He welcomes me back to Himself and reminds me of His unfailing love. Repentance is an ongoing exercise for every Christian…and along the way our conviction that God is a God of love and mercy is confirmed and deepened.

The Bible talks a lot about repentance, John the Baptist and Jesus both began their ministries preaching everywhere, "repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mt. 5:17..) So we need to talk about repentance if we are to be people of the book…because the book talks a lot about repentance.

One of the frequent things a parent will often say to their child (maybe when the child is being punished or the parent is setting some sort of rule the child disagrees with) is, "I'm not trying to make your life miserable, I truly want what's best for you." How much more our Heavenly Father? When He correct us. When He chastens us for sin. When He redirects our course. God doesn't delight in our "grief" when we're corrected, but He rejoices in the fruit of repentance.

What do I mean by "godly grief" – I mean a sorrow, a sadness, a mourning that is a "God" oriented sorrow. A sorrow over my sin because of broken fellowship with God and broken relationships with others, especially those who are in the family of God. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn…they will be comforted." (Mt. 5:4). BUT…it's a sorrow that leads to action and flourishing and joy – righting the wrong, restoring the relationship, in one word – repentance. This is different than a sorrow that comes from the mere consequences of sin. Godly grief is different than sorrow that is simply sorry I got caught, or sorry that I now have to suffer because of my sin. Worldly grief over sin points at the fault of others for my sin. Worldly

grief makes excuses and argues about the injustice of the consequence for sin. Godly grief takes FULL OWNERSHIP for MY PART and seeks to restore and right the wrong. Worldly grief focuses on the part of others. Worldly grief seeks to cover its tracks, and set things in place where I won't get caught again – because I don't want to go through the pain of getting caught again. Godly grief is a sorrow over my sin that comes from a conviction that my sin has offended and has deeply hurt the love of my life, God ***first***, and ***second*** others, and I now long to DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT because godly grief takes action as we'll see in this passage.

Why do I call godly grief a *miracle*? Because we would NEVER be concerned about how our sin has offended God, were it not for the work of the Holy Spirit within us. God grants to us, through the Holy Spirit's conviction, a godly grief that leads to true and genuine repentance. In the same way that a seed planted will yield fruit. Godly grief planted by the Holy Spirit in the sinners heart will yield the fruit of genuine repentance. Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:25 that it is God who grants repentance. Were it not for God placing within us a godly grief, we would never repent. Therefore, in all things, even in our repentance, God receives the credit and glory.

Here is the main point this morning: ***Godly grief over sin is a miracle of God and it produces genuine repentance and reconciliation with God and others.***

Grief and true repentance can be misleading: What does real repentance look like? Can we know when someone has TRULY repented? Are grief and repentance the same thing, so that when someone demonstrates sorrow for sin – maybe they've apologized or they are sobbing in front of me - can I say, "they've repented!"? When someone doesn't sob at all, does that necessarily mean they don't have godly grief? What does godly grief LOOK LIKE? Can we even know the difference between godly and worldly grief or can only God know? I think we can know as well because godly grief yields the fruit of repentance, and I think this passage helps us to understand the difference between godly and worldly grief.

What was the conflict between Paul and the Corinthians? 2 Corinthians is one of many letters written by Paul to Corinth (some think there were as many as 5 letters – matters of conflict take a lot of time and attention). The general theme of the letters to Corinth is correction. Paul had to write to Corinth to correct them on several issues – but perhaps the biggest problem overarching all of these issues was a rejection of Paul's authority as an apostle to correct them regarding all of these things. This was perhaps the worst of all, because if people in the church can't be corrected then immorality abounds and the church becomes the devil's playground. For this reason, much of Paul's letters to Corinth are devoted to him proving himself to be an apostle with authority whose warnings and corrections were to be heeded.

Now in 2 Corinthians, which is probably the fourth letter to Corinth, Paul refers to a previous letter – scholars refer to that letter as "the letter of tears":

For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. (2 Cor. 2:4)

The hard things Paul had to write didn't bring him joy; it grieved Paul. There is never joy in confronting someone's sin. He was in anguish to write such a harsh letter to them, but he knew that it was needed. Corinth was in sin, and they had become "puffed up" in their sin, and even worse, they were denying Paul's authority to say anything about it. Church, you need to know that pastors and church leaders can feel that way as well. We often talk about "Pastoral care" and what we mean by that is care that pastors provide. But what about "pastoral care" meaning care for pastors? One of the greatest ways you can care for me and for the elders of our church is to listen and truly reflect on what we tell you or when we ask something of you – especially when we have to tell you something hard. It's not fun telling people hard things. And we're not perfect, we can get it wrong, but God holds us accountable to do our best to "watch over your souls". Hebrews 13:17 – "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account." We have to give an account to God for this.

So Paul writes this letter, he sends it, and he waits, and waits. They didn't have zoom back then! He couldn't just text and get a reply or instant message on facebook. Paul and his companions travels to Macedonia and there they meet with Titus who brings to Paul the response of Corinth to his letter…and they both are GREATLY COMFORTED. Corinth has responded favorably and with humility and repentance and both Paul and Titus are comforted:

But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, [7] and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. (2 Cor. 7:6-7)

A miracle happened that Paul had no doubt been praying for. Godly grief within the Corinthians produced repentance and Titus witnessed and reported the fruit of it to Paul, and they both were comforted and rejoiced because they knew that God had worked in the hearts of the Corinthians.

If we have this idea of God as a stern judge standing over us with arms crossed glaring down at our sin…we don't understand the heart of God. God is depicted in the story of the prodigal son as the Father who hikes up his robe and runs full speed to his son with tears of joy and rolls around in the dirt with his son or daughter and weeps upon your neck and holds you tightly. That's the heart of the Father when we repent and return to Him! Our sin GRIEVES God

and our repentance OVERJOYS God who is willing to run to us at the very moment we repent and return to Him.

Now I want for us to consider three things together: ***First***, we'll see that the godly grief of the Corinthians provided closure for Paul and Titus. He had written a hard letter and was concerned about them receiving it well – Paul now had closure. ***Second***, we'll consider what godly grief looks like and what it produces – namely, repentance. ***Finally***, Paul is going to share some very descript evidences of true repentance for us.

1. Godly grief provides closure (v.8)

> For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it – though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. (v.8)

Paul had closure because their grief turned into something greater than grief. What does it mean to "grieve". The word Paul uses refers to severe mental distress, sadness, and sorrow. It is often accompanied by tears and uncontrollable sobbing. Sometimes it isn't accompanied by any outward/physical signs at all - we have to be careful thinking that no tears means no grief. But inside there is a deep sorrow when someone is "grieved". But before we jump to thinking that tears and "grief" is *always* a good "grief" please remember that there is a "godly" sorrow, and a "worldly" sorrow. Paul was grieved as well. Sin causes grief. We just need to learn this lesson that sin will always cause you and others grief. You will always, as Galatians 6 reminds us, reap destruction and grief from sin, if not now than later. But, when you sin and there is godly grief, it will turn it into something greater. Paul says, "I grieved because of my letter, but I don't regret it now…because your grief was "***only for a while***". We think that genuine godly grief lasts on and on…and that's exactly the opposite of what godly grief does. Godly grief is sorrowful, but it turns into something far better – it turns into repentance and restoration and joy.

2. Godly grief produces repentance (vv.9-10)

Notice in v.9 Paul says, "I rejoice, not because you were grieved (I didn't take joy that you were sad as though your pain brought me joy) but because you were ***grieved into repenting***." Notice that "grief" and "repentance" are not the same thing – they were grieved INTO repenting. Grief was the root and repentance was the fruit. One is a condition (grief), and the other is the action (repentance). There is a grief that does NOT repent – it's called worldly grief and it leads to death. But there is a godly grief into repenting – and it leads to salvation – salvation from sin and restoration with God and others. This is important because a show of emotion, sadness, weeping does NOT necessarily mean that the person is experiencing godly grief. They could be sad over what they lost, over getting caught, over the sentence they will

have to face. The word ***repentance*** means a change of mind that results in a change of action or direction. King David is a good example of godly grief that leads to repentance.

King David committed adultery with a woman named Bathsheba, and then he had her husband, Uriah, murdered to cover up his sin. Psalm 32 gives us a graphic picture of David's "grief" that was godly: **For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. [4] For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah* [5] I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:3-5)**

Notice that David's grief is directed UPWARDS towards God. In Psalm 51 which is another Psalm related to the sin of David he writes, "have mercy on me God!", "wash me thoroughly!", "blot out my transgressions", "***against you and you only have I sinned!"*** That's godly grief, "against you and you only have I sinned God". God forgave David, immediately, but there were consequences for his sin and David willingly bore the consequences because David had a godly grief that led to genuine repentance. David didn't look back and regret that his sins were exposed. Paul says to the Corinthians, "you suffered no loss". They didn't get upset with those who exposed their sin. They didn't look for ways to quickly cover and make it harder for their sin to be exposed next time – that's worldly grief and it leads to death. It destroys the person and it has the potential to bring everyone else connected to them down as well. When we sin, we need to BEG God to grant to us the miracle of godly grief.

3. The evidences of "fierce" repentance (vv.11-13)

What does "fierce" repentance look like? There is a very real condition called the "Momma Bear" condition. Where it doesn't matter who it is or how big he might be…if momma bear sees her little cubs getting hurt, she becomes fierce, strong, extremely courageous, and she takes action. Repentance is like that…the individual has grieved before God, and now…they perform deeds in keeping with their repentance. Paul describes repentance in this way in Acts 26 – "**performing deeds in keeping with their repentance." (Acts 26:20)**.

Repentance does extreme things! Your relationship with God and your salvation are far more important than anything you could possibly lose. You know very quickly if someone has truly repented by whether they take decisive action or just talk around the problem – "well I don't want to be too extreme, or go too far…let me just pray about that a bit to see what I need to do." Jesus tells us to TAKE IMMEDIATE AND DECISIVE ACTION against that which would cause us to sin:

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away (that's a bit extreme, that's radical). For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. (Mt. 5:29)

Repentance means the loss of things. It may mean that you will need to "fiercely" remove any and all temptations. Repentance means doing what is inconvenient because you care deeply about the relationships you've hurt. Repentance means putting to death the relationship that came between you and God and NEVER looking back. Repentance destroys the technology that cost thousands of dollars – who cares about money, God is INFINITELY more valuable. Repentance confesses deep, dark, uncomfortable secrets to a brother or sister you trust because you know you need help and accountability. Godly grief that leads to repentance sees God as worthy of doing anything and everything to be vindicated from sin.

It seems that the report Paul received included some clear fruits of repentance: **"For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you"** – this is an immediate, eager, commitment to act in haste and right the wrongs you've done. **"what eagerness to clear yourselves"** – the word for "clear" is used for a "defense". This is not a defense for someone innocent, this is like the defense given by the guilty prisoner before the parole board - they have to build a case to convince the board they won't do it again and can be released. If you've sinned against someone they may not welcome you back in quickly. If someone has sinned against you multiple times, you need to forgive, but it's ok to keep them at arms length. There is a difference between forgiving and forgetting. You may need to build a case, and if you've sinned multiple times your case may take longer to build. **"What indignation" and "what punishment"** – repentance produces an intense hatred towards sin that results in taking extreme action against it! There is a scene I love in "Fireproof". The main character played by Kirk Cameron is addicted to pornography, but he has experienced godly grief and he turned his life over to Jesus. He's at his computer and a temptation pops up on the screen. He realizes what he must do…he takes his computer outside, and takes a baseball bat and smashes the computer into pieces. That's what fierce repentance looks like. Paul says, **"what fear"** – the fear of the Lord, the fear of returning to your sin, the fear that comes from church discipline and being cut off from God's people. **"what longing and what zeal"** – a longing for things to be made right. A longing for godliness and righteousness. The Corinthians had a longing for Paul and Titus because of the way they hurt them. **"At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter."** Notice they "proved" that they had repented. God can and often does restore relationships. The Corinthians had restored Paul and Titus' trust and fellowship through the fruits of repentance. God can purify relationships but it can take time.

That God would grant to us godly grief that leads to repentance is good news. God can restore, and God will forgive because your forgiveness has already been paid for by the blood of

His Son. Jesus has taken the just wrath of God for your sin upon Himself on the cross – He took YOUR PLACE. so that you can be forgiven AND restored. What must you do? Repent and trust in Christ for the salvation that He provided though His death and resurrection. When you do that God runs to you with open arms. Repentance is a glorious word – it means that we can have a fresh start.

Pray