

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

Matthew 5:4

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 5:4. Our study this morning brings us to the second Beatitude or beautiful attitude. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." At first glance, this might seem like one of the strangest verses in the Bible. John Stott says this verse can almost be translated, "Happy are the unhappy." The first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," is primarily intellectual. It has to do with what you think about yourself in the presence of God. The second beatitude, on the other hand, "Blessed are those who mourn," is the emotional counterpart to the first beatitude. It has to do with the feelings that seeing your sin before a Holy God produce. Let's turn our attention to our text. Matthew, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following Words:

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:1-12

I. THE MEANING OF MOURNING

The word "mourn" is the Greek word *πενθέω* (pentheo). It means grief or sorrow of heart that is usually expressed by tears. In Luke's account we read, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh" Luke 6:21. Paul desired that the Corinthians would be filled with grief rather than proud. He said, "And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn" 1 Corinthians 5:2? If being poor in spirit means to realize that before God you are like a spiritual beggar who is broken and desperately in need of grace, to mourn, then, is an extension of that brokenness.

While this statement can seem a bit paradoxical (meant to grab us), it is a statement that warrants our attention and study because a person who doesn't mourn or who isn't broken to some degree over his or her sin has no assurance that he has a truly converted heart. One of the signs of true conversion is that a person's disposition toward sin is radically changed. What they once gloried

in is now seen in the light of God's holiness. What they once took pleasure in is now seen in the light of Christ's sacrifice.

Turn over to 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 for a moment. Here, Paul speaks about two kinds of grief or sorrow. He writes, "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."

A. Worldly sorrow (grief).

Worldly grief says, "I've been caught or found out; there are consequences that I must pay; my life will never be the same."

B. Godly sorrow (grief).

Godly grief, on the other hand, says, "My sin has offended God, who created me, loves me, cares for me, supplies me with all I need, patiently puts up with my stubbornness, willfulness, and heart idolatry."

If there is no change in the way a person views sin, there is no evidence that a person has been reborn. Mourning over sin, as we will see in our study, doesn't only happen at conversion, but it's an ongoing mark of a true believer. As a matter of fact, the more a person walks with God and feeds on His Word, the more the light is turned up on His sin – this is God's grace in the life of the believer. The more the light is turned up on sin, the more brokenness and mourning we ought to see in our lives. J.C. Ryle once said, "A right knowledge of the way to heaven is to feel that we are on the way to hell...To be sensible of our corruption and abhor our own transgressions is the first symptom of spiritual health...We must know the depth and malignancy of our disease in order to appreciate the Great Physician."

MOURNING ISN'T POULAR

The world has sought every way under the sun to avoid sorrow. We live in a world that loves to laugh. Pleasure dispensers sell cheers and chuckles, all for a neat profit. For many, life is all about a good time and the next high. The world doesn't like mourners; mourners are like a wet blanket.¹ Moderns have structured their lives in such a way as to maximize entertainment and amusement to try and drown out any feelings of sorrow, guilt, despair, brokenness, shame, regret, and grief. Their *philosophy* is "forget your troubles and seek to be as happy as you can." Their *motto* is "eat, drink, and be merry." But the pursuit of pleasure is only a temporary bandage and it cannot stop the bleeding of a heart ravaged by sin. The saddest thing in life is not a sorrowing heart, but a heart that is incapable of grief over sin. If we are honest with ourselves, we often laugh at the things we should weep over, and weep over the things we should laugh at. Jesus

¹ D.A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1978), 19.

offers a sobering warning in Luke 6:25 when he says, “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”

Why is there such a lack of spiritual mourning today? I would submit to you that it’s because the doctrine of sin has been so neglected. Unfortunately, a healthy view of sin doesn’t top most lists of church growth strategies (that’s a tragedy). Church attenders don’t like to hear it, and unfortunately, some pastors are either unconvinced of its reality or afraid of its repercussions. But the second Beatitude shows us the necessity of facing our sin. What is the Bible’s view of sin? Turn over to James 4:8-10 for a moment. James says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched (sorrowful) and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom (heaviness, sadness). Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” Consider the words of the 19th century hymn *Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted*:

Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted

Ye who think of sin but lightly

Nor suppose the evil great

Here may view its nature rightly,

Here its guilt may estimate.

Mark the Sacrifice appointed,

See who bears the awful load;

’Tis the WORD, the LORD’S ANOINTED,

Son of Man and Son of God.

It’s important to note that Jesus isn’t saying, “Blessed are the grim, cheerless Christians.” We need to be clear about the fact that Jesus is not sanctioning a joyless or laughterless Christianity. Solomon reminds us that a merry heart is good medicine (Proverbs 17:22). Charles Spurgeon once said that some preachers he had known appeared to have their neckties twisted around their souls. The man who mourns is sorrowful, but not morose. He is broken, but not miserable. He is serious, but not solemn. He is sober-minded, but not sullen. He is grave, but never cold.

Neither is Jesus saying, “Blessed are those who are mourning over the difficulties of life.” We live in a Genesis 3 fallen world and the effects of sin are ever present. Life is full of trial and tragedy, affliction and adversity, suffering and sadness, sickness and sorrow, disease and death. But mourning over the difficulties of life, in themselves, is not the application of Jesus’ teaching. What are we to mourn over?

II. THE BELIEVER MOURNS OVER TWO PRIMARY THINGS

A. His own sin before God.

The great puritan John Owen once said, “I do not understand how a man can be a true believer, in whom sin isn’t the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble.” The believer knows that the seed of

every sin lies resident in our hearts (we are totally depraved). He sees the leprosy of his own heart. He knows his falseness. When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord he said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" Isaiah 6:5. When Isaiah saw the reality of his own sinfulness against the backdrop of God's holiness, he was grieved.

Paul also mourned over his sin. In Romans 7:18-20, 24-25 he said, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

B. The sin of the world he lives in.

The one who truly mourns over his own sin will also sorrow over the power and effects of sin of others and the world he lives in. As believers, we ought to be broken over the infectious nature of sin in the world. When we read the newspaper or watch the news and see the moral muddle, the perpetual unhappiness, and suffering of mankind, it should remind us of the heinous nature of sin and leave us sorrowful and broken. The Christian knows that all the brokenness in the world is a result of sin, and he is grieved by it.

David in Psalm 119:136 said. "My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law." Jeremiah, the weeping Prophet also mourned over the sins of his people. He said, "Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people" Jeremiah 9:1. Just four chapters later, he said of Israel, "But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock has been taken captive" Jeremiah 13:17. Paul wrote, "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ" Philippians 3:18. Are you broken over the utter lostness of the world you live in? How many of us have forgotten about the "snaps"? Moment by moment sin is throwing men and women into hell. Are we grieved? Are we broken? Do we care? Or are we so consumed with our happiness that we have bought into the lie that mourners are like wet blankets?

Truth be told, many of us, myself included, probably do more condemning than we do mourning over the sin of the world. We are eager to walk with Jesus through Matthew 23 and condemn the Pharisees, but we stop short of the end of the chapter where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing" Matthew 23:37 (cf. Luke 19:41-44).

D.A. Carson writes, "The Christian is to be the true realist. He reasons that death is there, and must be faced. God is there, and will be known by all as Lord or Judge. Sin is there, and it's unspeakably ugly and black in light of God's purity. Eternity is there, and every human being is rushing toward it. God's revelation is there, and the alternatives it presents will come to pass: life or death, pardon or condemnation, heaven or hell. These are realities, which will not go away. The man who lives in light of them, and rightly assesses himself and his world in light of them, cannot but mourn. He mourns for the sins and blasphemies of his nation. He mourns over the erosion of truth. He mourns over the greed, the cynicism, and the lack of integrity. He mourns that there are so few mourners." John Stott says, "There are such things as Christian tears, and too few of us weep them."

III. THREE MARKS OF A MOURNING SPIRIT

A. A sober sensitivity to sin.

B. A quick and complete confession of sin.

Mourning over your sin means that you stop running, stop covering, stop hiding, and stop blaming. You say, "I did it, it's my sin, my guilt, and no one else's; I've offended God." Solomon said, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" Proverbs 28:13. Though David was far from imperfect, we can learn from his confession of sin. He said, "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 32:5. John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" 1 John 1:9. The man who disciples me early in my walk with Christ once said, "The mark of a man isn't necessarily how little or how often he sins, but rather the amount of time he allows to lapse between the time he sins and the time he repents."

C. A growing hatred for sin.

The psalmist in Psalm 97:10 says, "You who love the Lord, hate evil!" There are many more, but here are a few reasons to hate sin:

- Every sin is treasonous and rebellious towards God's glory.
- Every sin betrays the beauty of Christ.
- Every sin reveals faithlessness in my heart.
- Every sin nailed Christ to the cross.
- Every sin is accompanied with a price, broken fellowship with God.
- Every sin has a hand in ruining and destroying.

NURTURE A SPIRIT THAT MORNS OVER SIN

Sin plays a deadly game on the conscience and the heart. It cools your zeal for God and numbs us toward future sinful thoughts and actions. Sin may taste good for the moment, but it's like acid to your soul. At any given moment, you are either growing in sensitivity and hatred for sin or you are hardening your heart and becoming callous and rebellious in your sin.

IV. SPIRITUAL COMFORT IS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO MOURN OVER THEIR SIN

for they shall be comforted

There is no comfort that can compare with what God gives to those who mourn. But what exactly is the comfort that Jesus extends to those who mourn? When Jesus entered the synagogue at Nazareth on the Sabbath day before he began his formal ministry, He read from the scroll of Isaiah. Quoting Isaiah 61:1-2 Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19). What is the liberty or freedom that Jesus is speaking about in this passage? It is a freedom from the tyranny of sin.

A. It is the comfort of forgiveness of sin.

Believers are the only people in the world who are free from the guilt and condemnation of their sin. David writes, "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him" Psalm 103:10–13. The psalmists in Psalm 130:3-4 reminds us, "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared."

B. It is the comfort of knowing that we have been reconciled to God.

C. It is the comfort of our "blessed hope."

Some bright morning, when this life is over, in a new heaven and new earth, the kingdom of God will come to its glorious consummation. John writes, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" Revelation 21:4.

Paul reminds us in Romans 8, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the

redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" Romans 8:22–25.

As a believer becomes increasingly aware of his own sin and sees the burden of sin in the world around him, he is broken and mourns. But this mourning is short lived as the Spirit brings the comfort of future glory into view. As believers, we know there is a future glory coming. We know that a day will dawn when Christ will return and every particle of sin will be banished from the earth. This will mean the end of pride, selfishness, envy, anger, suffering, sickness, and death. In that day, there will be no more sin to confess, for we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). We will be once and for all freed from sin's bondage and decay (Romans 8:21). What a hope we look forward to! Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted!

EXAMINE YOURSELF

If you have never been sorrowed over the sin in your life (not just the consequences, but the sin itself), then you must carefully consider whether you are really a Christian. When a person is truly converted, the Holy Spirit takes up residency in the person. One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to convict us, that is, to make us sensitive to the blackness of our sin. Where we once loved our sin, now we, in increasing measure, as we grow in Christlikeness, come to hate it and are grieved by it because we see it as an affront and an assault on God's infinite beauty and holiness.

Martyn Lloyd Jones says that it is a good thing for every man to pause at the end of the day and meditate upon himself, to run quickly over his life and ask, "What have I done, what have I said, what have I thought, and how have I behaved with respect to others?" If we examine ourselves like this we will all find that we have done things which we should not have done, said things which we should not have said, thought things which we should not have thought, and related poorly to those around us. This reality of sin should bring a sense of sorrow and mourning.

It is only the man who cries out, "Wretched man am I! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" that can go on to say, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." If we truly mourn, we will rejoice and be comforted. It is when a man sees himself in his unutterable helplessness that the Holy Spirit reveals to him the Lord Jesus Christ as his satisfaction. Through the Spirit, he is able to see that Christ died for his sins and stands as his advocate in the presence of God. It is that provision in the person and work of Christ that brings comfort to the heart of a broken believer. Sorrow leads to joyous comfort!

HELPFUL INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 5:4

Approved by God are the beggarly poor in spirit, who understand that they have nothing in themselves to commend themselves to God and look to Him alone for grace, for theirs (and theirs alone) is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who are broken by and sorrow over the affront of their sin, for they (and they alone) shall be (immediately and continually) comforted.

Next Week: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (v. 5).

CLOSING BENEDICTION:

Hear this benediction, from David in Psalm 51:16-17, as we bring our corporate worship to a close, "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." And all God's people said, "Amen!"