

Blessed are Those Who Mourn
Matthew 5:4

Introduction

This morning we will be looking at one of the many paradoxes in the Christian life. A.W. Tozer wrote an article once entitled, *“That Incredible Christian”* in which he sets in contrast some of the paradoxes of the Christian life.

“The Christian believes that in Christ he has died, yet he is more alive than before and he fully expects to live forever. He walks on earth while seated in heaven and though born on earth he finds that after his conversion he is not at home here . . . the Christian appears at his best in the heavenly places but does not fit well into the ways of the very society into which he was born.”

For the Christian to be victorious he must live in a pattern contrary to the common pattern of mankind. *“That he may be safe he puts himself in jeopardy; he loses his life to save it and is in danger of losing it if he attempts to preserve it. He goes down to get up. If he refuses to go down he is already down, but when he starts down he is on his way up.”*

“He is strongest when he is weakest and weakest when he is strong. Though poor he has the power to make others rich, but when he becomes rich his ability to enrich others vanishes. He has most after he has given most away and has least when he possesses most.”

“He may be and often is highest when he feels lowest and most sinless when he is most conscious of sin. He is wisest when he knows that he knows not and knows least when he has acquired the greatest amount of knowledge. He sometimes does most by doing nothing and goes furthest when standing still. In heaviness he manages to rejoice and keeps his heart glad even in sorrow.”

“He believes that he is saved now, nevertheless he expects to be saved later and looks forward joyfully to future salvation. He fears God but is not afraid of Him. In God's presence he feels overwhelmed and undone, yet there is nowhere he would rather be than in that presence. He knows that he has been cleansed from his sin, yet he is painfully conscious that in his flesh dwells no good thing. He loves supremely One whom he has never seen and though himself poor and lowly is familiar with One who is king of all kings and Lord of all lords, and is aware of no incongruity in so doing. He feels that he is in his right altogether less than nothing, yet he believes without question that he is the apple of God's eye and that for him the Eternal Son became flesh and died on the cross of shame.”

“The . . . Christian is both a confirmed pessimist and an optimist the like of which is to be found nowhere else on earth. When he looks at the cross he is a pessimist, for he knows that the same judgement that fell on the Lord of glory condemns in that one act all nature and all the world of men. He rejects every human hope out of Christ because he knows that man's noblest effort is only dust building on dust. Yet he is calmly, restfully optimistic. If the cross condemns the world, the resurrection of Christ guarantees the ultimate triumph of good throughout the universe. Through Christ all will be well at last and the Christian waits the consummation. Incredible Christian!”

The Christian life is one of great paradox. This morning we are going to look at Matthew 5:4, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* The paradox of this beatitude is that the Christian cannot be happy unless he is first sad. To the world this seems like foolishness and sheer stupidity. The two are contradictory - opposite of each other. Yet, for the Christian, this is a vital truth and part of the message of the gospel of hope that we seek to share with the world. How can this be? What does Jesus mean here? To answer those questions we have to remember the context in which our precious Lord spoke them.

Review

Jesus' ministry was now well underway and the people are wondering if He could indeed be the Messiah. He spoke with authority in both His teaching and in His proclamations about God. He was performing wonderful miracles that could only be done by God. But if this was Messiah, when would He establish His kingdom? And how can they become part of it? The religious leaders were already against Jesus because He did not follow their traditions and He had already rebuked them for their false righteousness.

In this sermon, Jesus the King presents His kingdom program, and if you want to enter into His kingdom, your righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and pharisees (5:20). The scribes and Pharisees considered themselves righteous because they were good at keeping their extensive list of do's and don't's that they had compiled for themselves over the centuries. However, self-righteous works will not get you into the kingdom. True righteousness is a matter of the heart which says, *"I love you Lord, please be merciful to me, the sinner, and help me to do whatever pleases you."*

As Jesus begins the sermon, he makes a series of statements which we call the "Beatitudes." This is not a list of the things you must do to enter the kingdom or even to become righteous. It is a list of the blessings the righteous person receives because his or her character is as described.

Last week we looked at the foundational characteristic of the kingdom citizen of being "poor in spirit." By the way, every true Christian is a kingdom citizen. Our "citizenship is in heaven" according to Philippians 3:20 and Colossians 1:13 makes it clear that God *"has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."*

Being "poor in spirit" does not have anything to do with finances or material wealth. The only benefit to being materially poor is a greater awareness of your desperate need resulting in a greater willingness to seek and accept help. Jesus said in Matthew 5:3 that the poor in spirit were blessed because they are in the kingdom of heaven. The word "poor" there means "destitute," "impoverished," "begging poor." These are people that realize their utter spiritual bankruptcy. They know without a shadow of a doubt that no good thing dwells in them. They understand that they are without spiritual merit or means to gain it on their own so they cannot earn spiritual reward or heaven. Those who are poor in spirit know that you come to God on His terms or not at all, and that demands complete humility. Pride is gone, self assurance is gone, and they come to God empty-handed begging for His mercy and His grace, which God gladly grants in Christ Jesus.

That is the description of those who are poor in Spirit which is the character demanded of those that will enter the kingdom of heaven. It is upon this foundation that we come to the next statement of Jesus in this sermon in Matthew 5:4, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*

The Comfort of the World

What Jesus says here is in contrast to what the world believes. The Greek word here translated as "comforted" (παρακαλέω / parakaleo) means to *"cause to be encouraged or consoled, either by verbal or non-verbal means."* The Oxford dictionary defines comfort as 1) *"a state of ease and freedom from pain or constraint. . . 2) consolation for grief or anxiety."*

There are several ways in which the world tries to bring comfort. One of them is to ignore the problems. That mentality is seen in a song from some years ago that was voted #1 for its class of music - *"Don't worry, Be Happy."* The song never gave a reason not to worry except to combat it by glibly putting on a happy face. A couple of generations earlier another song essentially said the same thing with its line, *"Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile."* This effort to ignore troubles fuels the drinking and drug culture. Nothing has been solved, and in fact the problems may become worse because of the drinking or drugs, but at least you did not have to think about the distress and misery for a while.

Another way in which the world believes that comfort comes is by replacing sadness with happiness which is done by changing your circumstances or focusing on something you enjoy. Our marketing culture tries to convince you that some product or service will do this for you. Buy this or that and you will be happy. No matter what the problem, there is some product out there being sold to try to replace your sadness with happiness. Not attracting enough attention? Guys and girls are sold all sorts of stuff to solve that problem. For girls it tends to be clothes, make up, hair products and perfume, for guys it is something to get rid of dandruff, bad breath and body odor. Gym memberships and exercise equipment are sold so that you can become happy about the shape of your body - which is then offset by all the restaurant and food commercials so your taste buds and stomach can be happy. This training to associate material things with happiness begins early with all the commercials directed at children.

There is also the quest to gain happiness through entertainment. Neil Postman wrote a book many years ago entitled *“Amusing Ourselves to Death”* which is an apt description of our society’s mad chase after fleeting happiness. The book is a critique of our media culture that has turned even what should be educational and help us to live responsibly into entertainment and amusement. Remember that amuse is the opposite of muse which means to *“become absorbed in thought,” “a state of deep thought.”* The original meaning of amuse was to *“divert the attention of so as to deceive”* (Webster). Its usage now means *“to pass or cause to pass the time pleasantly,” “To entertain or occupy in a light, playful, or pleasant manner.”* Our society has a great preference for amusement because it is a diversion from the pain that can be caused by deep thought. It is an escape from reality. That is why many people must always have some sort of media playing - radio, music, TV, Ipod, etc. If it was quiet, they would be alone with their thoughts and that too scary. The original meaning of amusement still applies and our society is deceived.

King Solomon had been down the path of seeking pleasure and found that it too was futility (Ecclesiastes 2:1). Jesus said in Luke 6:25, *“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”* Why? Because those laughing had amused themselves and were deceived about the harsh realities of life. The laughter would end, the penalty of sinful pleasure would have to be paid, and they would be held accountable for all their actions.

The laughter of the world will be turned to sorrow in two ways. First, in the present. Talk to those who have pursued worldly pleasure and are now paying the cost: The alcoholic who destroyed his family and his health. The party animal that became a drug addict that fried his brain and can no longer function normally. The man or woman suffering from sexually transmitted diseases because they bought Satan's lie about sex outside of marriage. The woman who is now sterile because of an abortion and has killed the only child she will ever conceive. The homosexual who is dying in a hospice with AIDS. All of these tragedies because of the pursuit of a few fleeting moments of pleasure.

The second sorrow comes after physical death, because unless the sinner repents and turns to Jesus Christ in this life, they will spend eternity in hell where there will be much *“weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 13:42,50).

These are the reasons that Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:2-5, *“It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.”*

Mourning which Shall be Comforted

But what is the mourning that Jesus is talking about here in Matthew 5:4? The word mourn here (πένθος / penthos) is a strong word for sorrow and grief. There are nine words in Greek that can be used to speak of sorrow and this word is the strongest of them. It speaks of a sorrow of the heart that is usually expressed with weeping and laments. It was used to describe Jacob's grief when he thought Joseph had been killed by wild animals (LXX - Genesis 37:34). It was used of the disciples' mourning

for Jesus before they knew He was raised from the dead (Mark 16:10). It is used for the world's business leaders mourning over the destruction of their system of commerce during the tribulation period (Revelation 18:11,15). The strength and emotion of the word is seen in its usage in conjunction with the death of a loved one or for something that has ceased to exist, but it is not limited to that.

The sorrowful mourning described by Jesus here is mourning over sin that comes from Godly sorrow. Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10, *"I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to [the point of] repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to [the will of] God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to [the will of] God produces a repentance without regret, [leading] to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death."* Godly sorrow over sin leads to repentance, and repentance leads to life. This mourning is seen in David in Psalm 51:3-4 as he considered his sin, *"For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge."* It is also seen in Job, a man who was described as *"blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil"* (Job 1:1). Job goes through a lot of suffering which causes him a lot of questions. God does not answer Job's questions but instead only reveals more of His power and nature. The result of this was Job's repentance in 42:5-6, *"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; 6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes."*

Spiritual poverty, the first beatitude, leads to mourning over sin, the second beatitude. Neither of these beatitudes is a blessing in themselves, but they result in blessing. Being poor in spirit results in entering the kingdom of heaven. Mourning over sin results in comfort from God. Note again what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, and repentance leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness is God's comfort. There is no greater joy that can be known than that of God's forgiveness and comfort. James says something similar to this in James 4:8-10. *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."* The starting point of drawing near to God is being poor in spirit and mourning over your sin.

Mourning is a missing element in too many professing Christians in America with too little difference between them and unbelievers. This includes their pursuit of entertainment and their choices of amusements, and I am not talking about going to amusement parks. There is a tendency among Christians to draw an arbitrary line about sin and think we are okay as long as we do not cross that line. However, that sin is participated in vicariously if not actually when we laugh at the crude and immoral amusements the world laughs at.

Here are some questions for serious consideration. How do you respond to ungodly talk and jokes at work or school? Does the perversity of those around you cause you grief or do you think you are good because you refrain from laughing out-loud or joining in the gossip? Or perhaps you are not even that successful. Are you entertained by the perversity in our society? What is your reaction to modern soap-operas and the talk shows which feature every kind of depraved subject imaginable? To joke about marriage problems and divorce, to make light of cruelty and to be intrigued by sexual perversity is to rejoice when we should be mourning, to be laughing when we should be crying, to be happy when we should be grieving. Proverbs 2:14 says that to, *"delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of evil"* are ways of the foolish from which wisdom, understanding and discretion will protect you. 2 Thessalonians 2:12 speaks of the judgement that God will bring on those who *"took pleasure in wickedness."*

Mourning Over Sin

There are three areas in which we should mourn over sin. The first is our own sin. The Holy Spirit

has been sent to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:9). He brings to us the awareness of the Holiness of God and our utter depravity. That is the starting point of becoming poor in spirit and mourning over sin. We see ourselves for what we really are apart from God. We repent from that, ask for God's forgiveness, and on the basis of His mercy and grace alone, He wonderfully saves us from sin through faith in Jesus Christ and changes us so that we are born again to a new life. However, that is not the end of mourning over our own sin.

The verb "mourn" in Matthew 5:4 is a present tense participle denoting a continuing action. The Holy Spirit begins His work of sanctification within us at salvation, but He will continue to convict us of sin afterward as part of the on going work of sanctification. We are in a struggle with sin as described by Paul in Romans 7. As you grow in Christ there will be areas of sin that are conquered while new ones are revealed because your understanding of righteousness is greater. 1 John 1:9 is written to Christians that we might walk in intimate fellowship with Him by confessing our sins. We long for the day that this body of sin will be put away and we will be with Jesus in holiness for eternity, but until then, we will mourn over sin and fight against it knowing that it grieves the Lord. How can you claim to love Jesus and not mourn over your sin?

If you do not see your own sins as serious, if it does not bother you and cause you the deep anguish of mourning described here, then you have a serious problem. Sin should prick your conscience and cause you to flee it and to seek the Lord. If that is not true in your life, then perhaps you had better consider Paul's challenge in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to "*examine yourselves and see if you are in the faith!*" Don't allow yourself to be self-deceived on such an important matter as the destiny of your eternal soul.

True mourning over your own sin should lead to God's comfort because the grief of Godly sorrow leads to repentance which results in forgiveness and cleansing by Jesus. David described his sin in Psalm 38:4 as a "*heavy burden*" that weighed too much for him. That burden is lifted and taken away by Jesus' forgiveness and cleansing. That is why the person who mourns over their sin can be blessed and joyful for they have been comforted by God's mercy and grace.

The second area of mourning is over the sin of others. We see this in Jesus when He laments over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.*" Jesus mourns over the hard heartedness of the people. Their sinfulness was leading to their own destruction. Is that the way you view the sinful people around you? If not, you need to seriously ask yourself why not? Living in a society such as ours can easily desensitize you to sin because it becomes overwhelming. It can also happen because suffering the consequences of the sin of others tends to reduce our compassion for them, yet we are to even love our enemies and pray for those that persecute us (Matthew 5:44). We must remember that sin and Satan are our enemies and not people. Those entrapped in sin are our mission field.

The third area of mourning is over the general sin that has affected the world. We see this in Jesus in John 11 when He goes up to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus knew what He was going to do and even proclaimed to Martha in verse 25, "*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die,*" yet He weeps after talking with Martha (vs. 35). This was not due to the loss of friend because He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. I believe Jesus wept over the general sin that is in the world that causes men to die. Notice in verse 33 that Jesus is moved by Mary and the others weeping. In verse 38 Jesus is again deeply moved when He arrives at the tomb. Jesus is seeing the effect that death is having on these friends of His and He mourns over the pain that it causes. Jesus then raised Lazarus from the dead (verses 43-44). Romans 8:21 & 23 speak of Creation itself and we who believe "groaning" as we await the redemption of the physical world from the corruption of sin.

Comfort for Those that Mourn

The righteous mourn over their own sin, that of others, and the general sin that has our world in bondage. Yet in each area God gives comfort. The Lord forgives our sins through Christ Jesus. He has given us the gospel, a message of hope to others. God has also given us the sure promise of the future redemption of all things. There will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). God gives us comfort in Himself for He is the *“God of all comfort”* (2 Corinthians 1:3), and His promises bring the comfort of hope (Romans 5). He has also given us the Holy Spirit who is even called the “comforter” in John 14. God’s comfort is the blessing He bestows upon the righteous when they mourn. There can be no greater or deeper joy than God’s blessing of Himself and His promises.

The tragedy is that so many people do not receive this blessing. I want to close by briefly examining four major reasons that keep people mourning and receiving God's comfort.

1) The love of sin is the primary obstruction. Holding on to sin will freeze and harden any heart. The Scriptures state that David was a man after God’s own heart, but this even happened to him for a while. You will not mourn until you see the reality and wretchedness of your sin along with its cost to yourself, to those around you, and its offense to God.

2) Falling into despair rather than mourning. Despair comes when hope is given up. It moves us outside of God's grace with His mercy hidden behind a self-made cloud of doubt. The person feels God has abandoned them, so they abandon God. Despair excuses sin because it believes there is not a choice. Despair is only overcome by believing what God has said and trusting Him in spite of any feelings. *“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in You. (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV).*

3) A false view of sin believing that the sins committed are not that serious so there is no need for repentance or confession. This is a cheap faith believing in cheap grace. Isaiah 55:7 says, *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.”* No pardon is offered to the unrepentant, presumptuous person who refuses to forsake his sin. Such a gospel would have a distorted view of Christ, the cross and the nature of sin. The unrepentant and presumptuous are neither *“poor in spirit”* nor do they mourn, consequently, they do not receive the blessings of being in God’s kingdom or receiving His comfort.

4) Procrastination is the final hindrance to mourning over sin that I want to mention today. Procrastination simply puts it off, but this is dangerous because you do not know the future and you do not know A) the damage being done by the procrastination, and B) when your life will end and it will be too late.

What will prompt you to mourn over sin and draw near to God? 1) Get to know God. Examine His character and attributes and especially His holiness. 2) Study the Scriptures and find out how ugly sin is to God and how destructive and damning it is to humans. 3) Give serious consideration to the price God paid in Jesus Christ to redeem man from sin. 4) While going through each of the first three steps, pray that God will not only search your heart and reveal any sin that is there, but that He will also convict you of it so that you will have a broken and contrite heart before Him for only then can you actually draw near to God.

You will know that you are mourning in the sense of this beatitude when your sensitivity to sin increases and when you have a corresponding sense of God's forgiveness. Blessedness belongs to those who mourn because it brings the comfort of God. You are cleansed, you are forgiven, you are given hope for the present and eternity.

Blessed are Those Who Mourn - *December 29, 2013*
Matthew 5:4

Introduction

The Christian life is full of _____ - apparent contradictions that are true

Matthew 5:4 - the paradox: A Christian cannot be happy until first he is _____

Review

Jesus' ministry has resulted in multitudes of followers wondering if He is the _____

This Sermon is a presentation of Jesus' _____ program - and the righteousness needed to enter it

The Beatitudes are statements describing the _____ of the righteous person & the blessings they receive

Poor in spirit refers to those who recognize their spiritual _____ and must beg God for mercy & grace

The Comfort of the World

Comforted (παράκαλέω / parakaleo): "*cause to be encouraged or _____*"

Comfort (Oxford): 1 *a state of ease and freedom from pain or constraint* 2) _____ *for grief or anxiety*

_____ problems: "*Don't worry, be Happy!*" Escape into drugs or alcohol

_____ sadness with happiness by changing circumstances or focusing on something you enjoy

Marketing culture: purchase something that will make you _____

_____ through Entertainment & amusement (*divert attention of so as to deceive / pass time pleasantly*)

Ecclesiastes: pursuit of pleasure was ultimately _____. Cf. Luke 6:25

1) Laughter turned to sorrow in present life when _____ of sinful pursuits catch up

2) Laughter turned to sorrow in eternity when God _____ sin and pronounces condemnation

Ecclesiastes 7:2-5

Mourning which Shall be Comforted

Mourning (πένθος / penthos): strong sorrow / _____ of the heart usually expressed in weeping & laments

Genesis 37:34 _____ . Mark 16:10 _____. Revelation 18:11,15 - _____

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 - Godly sorrow that results in _____ and salvation

Psalms 51:3-4 _____ Job _____

Being poor in spirit results in _____ the kingdom and mourning over sin brings God's comfort

_____ is a missing element in the lives of too many Christians - who live the same way as unbelievers

Do the things you laugh at reflect _____ or worldliness?

Mourning Over Sin

Mourn over your _____ as the Holy Spirit convicts you (John 16:9)

The believer continues to mourn as Holy Spirit _____ of new areas of sin - 1 John 1:9 is for Christians

If you do not see your own sins as _____ - there is a problem. You may need to consider 2 Cor. 13:5

Mourning over personal sin leads to _____ - and to greater intimacy with God

Mourn over the _____ - Matthew 23:37

A sinful society can _____ you to sin, and compassion for those that cause problems is easily lost

To be like Jesus, we are to _____ our enemies and pray for those that persecute us - they are the mission field

Mourn over _____ and its consequences - John 11

Romans 8:21-23, creation and we who believe will _____ as we await our final redemption

Comfort for Those that Mourn

The Lord _____ our sins through Christ Jesus.

He has given us the gospel, a message of _____ to others.

God has also given us the sure _____ of the future redemption of all things (2 Peter 3:13)

God gives us comfort in _____ (2 Cor. 1:3), in His promises (Romans 5), through His Spirit (John 14)

People do not mourn and receive God's comfort because:

- 1) The love of _____
- 2) Falling into _____ rather than mourning
- 3) Believing sin is _____ that serious so there is no need for repentance or confession
- 4) _____

What will prompt you to mourn over sin and draw near to God?

- 1) Get to _____. Examine His character and attributes and especially His holiness
- 2) Study the _____ which reveal how ugly sin is to God and how destructive & damning it is to humans
- 3) Seriously _____ the price God paid in Jesus Christ to redeem man from sin
- 4) In each step above, pray that God will search your heart to reveal and _____ you of your sin

Evidence of mourning will be an increased awareness of your sin and God's blessed comfort of _____

KIDS CORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch.

Older Children - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up. 2) Count how many times the words for mourn or grief are said. Talk with your parents about what it means to mourn over sin and God's comfort for those that do.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. What are some of the paradoxes of the Christian life that are most meaningful to you? What are some of the methods the world uses to comfort? Why do they all ultimately fail in both this life and in eternity? What is mourning in Matthew 5:4? What is the sorrow that brings God's comfort? What is the relationship between being poor in spirit and mourning? Why and how should the Christian mourn over their own sin, the sin of others and the curse of sin on the world? What comfort does God provide for each of these areas? What are some of the things that hinder people from mourning over sin and receiving God's comfort? What are some of the ways that will prompt a person to mourn over their sin and draw near to God? Do you mourn as described in this beatitude? What demonstrates it?