

# BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

Matthew 5:4

Let's pray as we look to the Word of God.

**Matthew 5:4 (ESV) – 4** “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

## WHAT ARE THE BEATITUDES?

We are continuing in our study of the Beatitudes, which describe the new nature and lives of those who have been born again in Christ, as long as they are on earth. Let me remind you that the Beatitudes are not descriptions of super-Christians, but are true of every Christian. Neither are they natural traits or tendencies, but are the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

Let's remember a couple of things as we begin. First, the Beatitudes describe Jesus as He was in His life on earth. For instance, while in His deity Jesus was God Himself, in His humanity He was and is a created being, and He knew the poverty of spirit that is part of “creatureliness,” even though He was without sin.

Second, everything that Jesus did was for the sake of our justification. Justification means that God credits us with the perfect righteousness of Jesus, even though we ourselves remain far from righteous. This means, then, that when Jesus was poor in spirit, He was poor in spirit for us; that when Jesus perfectly mourned over the condition of the world, we receive credit for His perfect mourning.

Finally, let's remember that the Beatitudes are a description of our lives on earth. Each Beatitude has a condition and a blessing. **Blessed are the poor in spirit** – that's the CONDITION – **for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven** – that's the BLESSING. **Blessed are those who mourn** – that's the CONDITION – **for they shall be comforted** – that's the BLESSING. With just one exception, these conditions can only exist on earth, in this life. That exception is, of course, the 6<sup>th</sup> Beatitude: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The condition of purity will continue for all eternity. But we will not be spiritually bankrupt, or mourn over sin, or lack righteousness, for all eternity.

**TRANSITION.** Let's give our attention to the first Beatitude, found in Matthew 5:3.

# BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

**Matthew 5:4 (ESV) – 4 Blessed are those who mourn ...**

The Beatitudes proceed in a specific sequence. Those who are poor in spirit – who recognize their own sinfulness, and the state of this world, which is full of sin and the effects of sin – are those who then mourn those realities.

## THE WORLD AND MOURNING

From the fall onward the primary aim of mankind has been to get away from the reality of mourning. If you think about it, we are at the end of human history. Human history has not gone farther than today. In that sense, today is the last day of mankind. Will we receive another day? As God wills, and if He so wills, TOMORROW will be the last day of mankind. So, what has been the result of the past 6,000 years of human history? Escaping discomfort, mourning, sadness, grief, difficulty, trouble, trials, tribulations.

## COVID-19 AS AN EXAMPLE

People have died of COVID-19, without question. But in spite of the fact that coronavirus will not kill as many Americans this year as heart disease or cancer, it seems that to many it is the only cause of death, and if we can just stop COVID, no one will die any more. On May 21 – ten days ago – the New England Journal of Medicine released a study that showed that wearing masks to prevent coronavirus is largely a symbolic act; it only makes a difference for those in hospital and clinic situations, and even then only under certain circumstances. But, we can't have any deaths – there can't be any mourning at all, it must be stopped.

But clearly, people have died since Adam sinned and death entered the world. Even the act of trying to save lives will cost lives – something like 100,000 people die every year BECAUSE of being hospitalized.

We can understand this, can't we? Those who are worldly minded have no reason to hope for anything apart from this life. Anything that makes this life sad or uncomfortable is an enemy, and must be avoided at all costs. It's really no wonder that the entire world is in an uproar; our present world is devoted to pleasure and happiness.

## THE PROBLEM WITH THE WORLD'S APPROACH

**The truth is that life cannot be reduced to a single experience. Listen to what Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (ESV) — 1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: 2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Human existence is not just about life; it's also about death. It's not just about planting; it's also about harvesting. We don't just weep; we also laugh. You might lose something precious today, but you will gain something precious tomorrow. Over the course of our lives we experience it all. You know, the theme of Ecclesiastes is Solomon explaining that he tried to have all the good without any of the bad, and failed every time.

This life on earth is not only living; it is also dying. It is not just planting; it is also harvesting. You don't just weep; you also laugh. You don't just gain; you also lose. Over the course of our lives, we experience it all. Solomon's goal was to just have the good parts without the bad, but he discovered that they can't be separated.

## WE OUGHT TO EMBRACE MOURNING

Jesus tells us that a certain kind of mourning is nothing to fear or try to avoid. Within the context of the Beatitudes and the Gospels, Jesus is speaking about mourning over sin and its effects on our world. The truth is that sin is in us and in our world. That sin produces death in a huge variety of forms, not just physical death, but pain and suffering, lawlessness, chaos, hatred, broken lives and broken relationships. Adam's sin introduced death to creation. Our sin keeps that death fresh and alive. Death eventually prevails over us all and everything in creation. It's like this sign:



Life is going to kill you, and it's going to hurt the whole time. As I stand speaking to you today I am wearing eyeglasses. It is not a sin to wear glasses, but there is only one reason I need them: Adam sinned, death entered the world, and therefore my eyes are not as God created eyes to be. Death has been at work in my eyes since I was born. Glasses don't fix my eyes, they just allow me to mostly ignore what sin has done to them. So I mourn the reality of sin that has damaged my body in untold ways. Far more to the point, I mourn my own sin, which remains strong in my flesh, and will be there until the Lord frees me from this body of death. I mourn the sins of others, as well, and the devastation it brings about in their lives. We should mourn the chaos and disorder of this world that causes one man to kill another, and thousands to violently riot in response.

### MORBID THINKING?

Some will say that's just morbid thinking, that the world is full of goodness and light, and it's not that bad. See, we are so determined to not mourn, to avoid pain and sorrow, that we will lie to our own reflection in a mirror, and search for the silver lining in a cloud of gray. It's not that everything in this world is bad; it's that the good of this world will not outlast the bad. If you have faced the death of a loved one, you know exactly what I mean.

TRANSITION: We need to be honest about ourselves and our world, and Jesus promises that if we are, we will receive an indescribable blessing.

## SHALL BE COMFORTED

**Matthew 5:4 (ESV) — 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

What does "shall be comforted" mean? Well, it doesn't mean someone patting you on the back in tough times and saying something like, "There, there, it's ok, it's all for the best, everything works out." It means actually receiving and experiencing comfort and consolation. It means that the mourning is replaced by peace and hope. While we are on this earth, our circumstances will not change; sin is going to continue to work death in us and around us. Comfort doesn't mean a change in our circumstances, but rather a change in the impact on us. Let me give you a couple of biblical examples of this.

What does “they shall be comforted” mean? Jesus does not mean that in our sadness and grief someone will pat us on the shoulder and say, “There, there, it’ll be ok.” He means that we will actually receive and experience comfort. We will be consoled and encouraged. While we are on this earth, our circumstances will not change; sin will continue work death in and around us. But the impact upon us will be changed, nullified, reversed.

## COMFORT WITHOUT CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

Can we actually have comfort and peace without our circumstances being changed?

**In First Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul writes to Christians who are worried that their born again loved ones will miss out on the coming of the Lord.**

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (ESV) – 13** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep [that is, who have died], that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. **14** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. **15** For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. **18 Therefore encourage/comfort one another with these words.**

It’s clear that those who have died in Christ receive the same blessings and benefits as those who remain alive, and that this truth is a source of deep comfort and peace and hope. But have the circumstances actually changed? No, those loved ones will remain asleep until the Lord returns. And of course, Christians have continued to die since then. The comfort that is promised in Matthew 5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted – is not a change of circumstances, but the gift of comfort and hope and peace in the midst of those circumstances, in spite of those circumstances.

## THE WORLD AND COMFORT

Here’s the thing. As far as the world is concerned, comfort that doesn’t change the circumstances isn’t worth anything. For the world, comfort IS changing the circumstances. If the situation can’t be changed, there can’t be any comfort.

## CHRISTIANS AND COMFORT

But those who are in Christ know what true hope is, and how powerfully it comforts us, even while our circumstances remain the same.

### LET'S BRING THIS HOME

**Those who mourn over their sin will be comforted**, even while sin continues to cause them suffering and anguish. Sin continues to war within us, but we have the promise of forgiveness of sin today, and complete freedom from the power and presence of sin in eternity. We have a measure of comfort and peace today, and we will have utter comfort and peace throughout the eternal state.

**Those who mourn over the sins of others, and the effect of that sin on the world, will be comforted.** Sin continues to rage in the world, in people and in governments. It can't be stopped by any human means, whether by kindness and love, or by justice and retribution. And the effects of sin continue to rage; the headlines today are proof enough of that. But we have the promise that Jesus Christ is building His church and establishing His Kingdom, and that He will bring all things to an end. Sin and death are on borrowed time, and will be destroyed in the lake of fire, so that we will never see them again throughout eternity.

**Those who mourn the loss of loved ones will be comforted.** If those loved ones did not know the Lord, then in eternity we will understand and celebrate the wisdom and purposes of God. We will not spend eternity mourning our family and friends who were condemned. That probably sounds harsh, but it is true. If we spent even an hour in heaven in grief over those who have been condemned to hell, then Satan will have won. He will have changed the very nature of heaven and the presence of God from utter joy to misery and despair.

**But Revelation 21:4 says,**

**Revelation 21:4 (ESV) – 4** God 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.

But for our loved ones who knew the Lord and died, we are greatly comforted! They are now in the presence of the Lord. Their suffering is over. Their battles with sin are over. They behold the face of the Savior in a clarity and perfection that we cannot possibly imagine.

The comfort that we receive now is sufficient for our lives now. It is by no means complete. What comfort you receive on earth – in fact, the best possible comfort you receive on earth – is just a tiny portion of the comfort that you will receive in the presence of Christ. That comfort will infinitely overshadow the mourning of this life.

So, I hope you mourn. Why? Because, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. I hope you mourn your sin, and the sins of others, and the impact of sin and death on our world. I hope you mourn the corruption and injustice of human government, and the ugly perversions within our culture. I hope that the realities of this world break your heart, that you feel them like physical blows.

I hope this because that sort of mourning is answered by the Lord with deep, abiding, precious comfort. Not just the there-there-pat-on-the-back kind of comfort the world gives, but actual comfort, actual peace, actual rest in the promises of God.

Only those who are in Jesus can know that comfort. It is only for His people. So I pray that you know Him today, and trust Him today, and love Him today. I pray that if you know Him, He will keep you strong and faithful. I pray that if you don't know Him, He will have mercy on you and grant you faith in the Gospel and new life through His death and resurrection.