

Good Mourning

The Beatitudes

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Matthew 5:4
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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

I invite you to turn to the gospel of Matthew 5 for our text this evening as we return to the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5. For context, I'm going to read verses 3 and 4, but verse 4 is our text for this evening. Jesus said as he opened this great sermon, he said,

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Last time we looked at verse 3, and we saw that Jesus was pronouncing blessing on those who recognized that they are spiritually bankrupt, that they have no spiritual merit of their own before God; they come with empty hands and a pleading heart before a holy God, recognizing that they have nothing in themselves to commend themselves to God. And that is the starting point of understanding salvation by grace alone, is that there is nothing that you can do to contribute to your salvation, that you are thoroughly and completely lost, and there is nothing that a lost sinner can do to improve his status before God or to do anything that would incline God in his favor. If God is going to incline himself to us, it must be by his grace and by his grace alone, as an act of undeserved mercy alone, not through anything that prompts anything from us. And that gives us an indication that if salvation is given to us at all, it's given to us completely at the start, that we are fully justified from the beginning if God saves us and declares us righteous, it is not a conditional declaration of righteousness that is based on faithful performance by you and your own strength going forward. Justification is a declaration of complete perfect righteousness that is based on the righteousness of Christ alone imputed to our account, not on anything that we do. And so if you struggle with assurance and struggle over the fact that you still struggle with sin as a Christian, understand that your standing with God was never premised and is never premised on the course of your own behavior. Your standing with God is premised on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You can see that and you don't need to turn there, I'm just going to allude to this briefly and then move along, but in 1 Corinthians 1:30 it says, "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Our righteousness is Christ, nothing in ourselves, and his was a perfect righteousness and it is on his righteousness that God accepts those who repent and put their faith in Christ.

And so it's the righteousness of Christ that secures our standing, because his righteousness is perfect, we have a perfect standing before God, and therefore it is a standing that can never be taken away and thus we come full circle that never will he leave us, never ever will he ever forsake us, because he came to seek and to save us, and he saved us to the uttermost and that's a great, wonderful comfort for us to rest our souls in. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, here in the Beatitudes, Jesus is gradually unfolding the reality of what a repentant heart looks like. We do not bring a perfect repentance to God, but there are attributes to the repentance that are present in every truly repentant person. These are aspects, you could say it another way, from the God-ward side, these are marks of the new birth. This is what the Spirit of God produces in the hearts of those whom he truly saves. He humbles us. He shows us our true condition, and we embrace that.

Now, looking again at Matthew 5.3, we see, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Beloved, Scripture makes it clear that the only people that are going to go to heaven are those who have forsaken all claim to any righteousness of their own. "I have no righteousness of my own. I have no merit. In me nothing good dwells, that is, in my flesh," the Apostle Paul says in Romans 7. In Isaiah 64:6 it reminds us that all of our righteousness is like a filthy garment before the Lord, like a used cloth that has been used for unclean purposes. Our righteousness is like that and so to become a Christian, to be brought to a point of repentance is to be brought to the end of yourself. It is to accept a posture of complete and utter humility before God, recognizing that we have nothing to contribute to him. He is distinct from us in essence. He's an uncreated, holy God. We are created sinful flesh. He is morally perfect and we are fallen and so there is just nothing that we have to offer to him, and it takes a long time apart, as the Spirit works, I should say, it takes a while for the Spirit to work a good understanding of that in our hearts because we are so prone to pride and self-congratulation. Scripture tells us that the poor in spirit, those who declare spiritual bankruptcy are the ones and only they who are in the kingdom of heaven. The tax collector cried out, "God be merciful to me, the sinner!" That's the sense in which Jesus is speaking there in verse 3.

Now, with that intellectual, you might say, recognition in place, now we see in verse 4 how that works out in the heart of a true disciple. We just have two simple points for this evening. Good mourning, mourning, m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g, good mourning and then good comfort. Let's look at verse 4 again as we set the stage for what is to follow now.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Beloved, this is all contrary to the natural man and to natural thought. We think the way to blessing, to a condition of well-being, is to be happy, is to have everything to our satisfaction. Jesus says, no, the way to blessedness and the position of divine favor is somehow marked by an attitude of mourning, of grieving. This is completely contrary to everything that we are conditioned to think. In the language of one of the better books that have been written on the Sermon on the Mount by the deceased John Stott, this is countercultural. This is Christian counterculture. This is completely different than what anything in the world would condition you to believe, and what we see here, Jesus in verse 3 said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," now in like manner, we see that those who mourn in whatever way

Jesus is referring to, we'll see in a moment, the person who mourns is also blessed. As we've pointed out in the past, and I won't repeat the exegetical basis for this, these two beatitudes are describing the same person. The person who is poor in spirit is the one who grows in this kind of mourning. They're not two separate people as if they're the poor in spirit in one group over here and then separate and distinct you have people who are mourning but are not poor in spirit. That's not the case at all. These beatitudes are all linked together. They cannot be separated without breaking the entire chain and that's important for us to recognize. These beatitudes are describing the same person. Where you see poverty of spirit in this sense, you will also find mourning, and the necessary link between those two will become obvious as we go along.

As I said, verse 3, you could say, describes an intellectual understanding. "I agree and confess with Scripture that I have no righteousness of my own. I agree and confess with Scripture that salvation is not by my works. It could never be by my works because I'm a broken, ruined, guilty, condemned sinner. There's nothing I could do to change the attitude of the judge when I am guilty of the crimes as charged." That's the intellectual understanding. Now in verse 4, what happens here is that you start to see the simultaneous development of an emotional reaction to the reality of our poverty of spirit. Verse 4 is describing, as I'll show you, an emotional reaction to our poverty of spirit and it's important to clarify exactly what this verse is referring to and what it is not referring to. In the context, it is very, very obvious that Jesus is describing some kind of spiritual mourning, spiritual mourning as shown by the fact that in Matthew 4:17, he was making a call to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. And so everything in the Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of the doctrine of repentance, you could say in one sense, but even there in the more immediate context in the Beatitudes, you see the spiritual emphasis in verse 6, for example, where he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." There's a mourning Jesus is describing that is somehow connected with repentance and is connected with this desire for a righteousness that I do not have and that distinguishes us from the wrong kind of consideration about the kind of mourning that we describe. When we think about mourning just in ordinary conversation, we're usually thinking of somebody who's mourning an earthly loss. A wife has just buried her husband, a parent has lost a child, or a divorced person goes through the mourning reactions to the loss of his or her marriage. Beloved, it's very important to understand that that kind of mourning is not what Jesus is discussing here at all. It could not possibly be what Jesus is discussing if you consider it on the most simple basis for the most simple reasons.

Beloved, think about it, many, many, many, many unbelievers grieve over their departed loved ones, and yet they're obviously not in the kingdom of heaven. By definition, they are not in the kingdom of heaven. By definition, because they're separated from God, they're not receiving true comfort from God because they're still separated from him by their sin. This is not referring to that kind of earthly mourning over an earthly loss that is common to all humanity. If you've spoken to anybody that is apart from Christ, you know the utter despair that can mark them in their loss. They're not experiencing comfort. My only point here, it's not that we are unsympathetic to people in those losses, it's why I wrote one of my books is to try to help people in those desperately sad considerations, the

only point that we're making for tonight is that that's not what Jesus is talking about here. He's talking about a mourning that immediately follows upon a confession of poverty in spirit. He's talking about a mourning that leads into a hunger and thirst for righteousness. That's very critical.

To make the same point in a different way, Jesus is not describing the discouragement or the depression that some people feel over the course of their life. Many people have self-centered sadness but they do not receive comfort from Christ in it. They are not in the kingdom of heaven simply because they have a self-centered depression. Jesus is not describing earthly mourning over a lost loved one. He's not describing mental depression here; to deal with those matters, you have to go to other parts of Scripture. Jesus is talking about something specific that is related to belonging to the kingdom of heaven in this chapter and I just feel the need at the moment to say this, Jesus is entitled to talk about and to teach whatever he wants to. He's under no obligation to speak in a way that addresses all manner of sadness that occurs to all common people throughout all of humanity. He can talk about something more specific if he wishes and that's what he is doing here. He's talking, and further he's talking about his kingdom. Jesus is King and as a result of that he is entitled to lay down the terms of admission to his kingdom. He's entitled to teach his disciples about the nature of the kingdom without having to be under obligation to address everybody else who has no interest in him actually, or that's just preoccupied with their own human condition. Jesus doesn't have to address that if he doesn't want to, and that's not what he's addressing here in Matthew 5.

Beloved, let me just remind you and to just really nail this down for you. Go back to Matthew 3:1 and 2 and I just want to set this stage for you, remind you of this. We're talking about the kingdom of heaven, not things that pertain to common humanity on earth. Chapter 3 verse 1, "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" That frames what follows. Jesus builds on it as I pointed out in chapter 4, verse 17, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And then in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Verse 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Verse 20, "I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." And in Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." All I'm saying here, beloved, is that Jesus is talking about a realm over which he presides. He is speaking about the subjects of his kingdom, those who are under his Lordship, under his Kingship. That's who he's talking about. He's not talking about the world, broadly speaking. He wants to address his disciples, which is utterly his prerogative to do, and because his kingdom is not of this world, but it belongs to a different realm, he's talking about a spiritual kingdom and therefore, when we come to verse 4, we understand that Jesus is describing a spiritual mourning. A mourning that is true of everyone who is truly converted in one degree or another. A mourning which alone will receive comfort from him.

What is the spiritual mourning of which he speaks? Let me give you a definition if you're taking notes. I'll say this a couple of times over the course of the message. The mourning

Jesus is speaking of here is this, this mourning is a humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness. In some ways it might be better to state it in the third person, mourning is a humble grief over one's sinfulness that leads him or her to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness. This is a grief that responds to the moral law of God with a recognition that, "I do not measure up to its perfect standard. I have fallen short in motive, attitude, word, and deed." This is a mourning that looks at the great commandment, the greatest commandment, Jesus said, which is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all of your mind, that looks at that lofty and right standard and says, "I haven't met that. I've broken every one of the 10 Commandments in spirit, if not in physical act. I have not loved God with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind as shown by my sinful choices and my sinful attitudes and my sinful leanings in my heart." You recognize that and there's a response, there's an internal response to that in the heart of a true believer. It's grief. It's sorrow that looks at God, looks at God the Father and says, "You're worthy of my complete absolute devotion and I haven't given it to you." It looks at the law of God and says, "That righteousness is good and desirable and right and I've violated it." And all of a sudden, through the work of the law of God in your heart, you are face to face with the fact that you literally actually fall short of the glory of God. You have missed the mark. You have trespassed against him. You have strayed from the path and all of those other wonderful terms that Scripture uses to give us metaphors by which we are to understand the way that we have strayed.

And beloved, that spiritual lack, that spiritual shortcoming is not a matter of cold indifference, "Well, you know what? Everybody's got their problems." It's not something that you wrongly say, "Well, God will forgive me because God is loving and God forgives everybody, doesn't he?" Well, no, he doesn't, and that doesn't say anything about your response to your own sin. There's not a reaction in the true disciple that says, "Well, yes, I'm not all that I could be, but the good outweighs the bad." That's not spiritual mourning. It's not someone that looks and compares himself to someone else and says, "Well, at least I'm better than him." That's not spiritual mourning. And all of that is completely, utterly irrelevant anyway. If you've broken the law of God, if you've defied with your life a holy God, how could it possibly matter how you compare to someone else? You're alone in the courtroom before the august judgment seat of God and he looks at you and says, "Guilty." What difference does it make if someone else is also guilty? You're guilty. You're alone before God here. That's a bad place to be. But what Jesus is describing is not only someone who doesn't try to justify himself in light of the verdict of the word of God on his soul, it's someone who receives that verdict and says, "Yes, that's right, and I hate it that that's true. I hate that it's true about me."

You see, the word "mourning," let's look at the word "mourning" in a little closer detail now. I'm just going to allude to a couple of passages where it's used without turning your pages of the Bible to them. Mourning has the idea of an inner agony. There's a deep pain that one feels. It's not simply an external weeping, there's an inner dimension to it that goes to the feelings of the heart, that goes to matters of attitude, not simply outward display. In Luke 6:25, we read this, and I'm simply giving you a sense for how this word "to mourn" is used in other places. In Luke 6:25, Jesus says, "Woe to you who are full

now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." The mourning, this word mourning is contrasted with laughter. This word mourning is used in conjunction with weeping of that kind of emotional reaction of sorrow that comes out. Mourning and weeping gives us a taste for it.

In the book of James 4:9 to 10, we read this. Listen for the word "mourn" here. It says, "Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." Wretched, mourn, weep, contrast to laughing and joy. Mourning, gloom. You get the idea. There's this inward dimension to it that we must understand if we are going to enter into what Jesus is saying here.

So this mourning of which Jesus speaks elsewhere in Scripture refers to a grief that is connected with weeping, with sorrow and sobs. It is the opposite of laughter and frivolity. You can turn to 2 Corinthians 7 as we continue to develop our understanding and the definition of this term. 2 Corinthians 7, and this idea of grief. In verse 8, Paul says, "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. 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." Notice that there's a contrast between worldly grief and godly grief, and what godly grief produces is a genuine, heartfelt repentance toward God to turn away from sin and toward the holy God whom we have sinned against.

Now when you put all of this together, brothers and sisters, here's what you come up with: Jesus is talking about mourning that is over sin and a mourning that leads to repentance. It is a sorrow over your personal sin that leads you to personal repentance, and what Jesus is saying is that is the kind of mourning that God comforts.

Now let me repeat the definition for you and then I'm going to give you some biblical illustrations of this to see exactly what we're talking about. We're letting Scripture interpret Scripture this evening. So let me repeat the definition for you in case you didn't get it all down the first time. The mourning of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 5, that mourning is a humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness. A humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness. In other words, this is a mourning that's associated with the new birth. This is associated with conversion. This is a mourning that is associated with a turning away and a turning toward, not simply regretting your past but declaring and judging yourself and saying, "My sins are wrong. I reject them. I repudiate them. I repudiate myself and I turn to you, O Christ, in order to follow you, to receive you, and to pursue righteousness by your power and in your name." Turning away from sin, turning toward righteousness. Turning away from self, turning toward Christ. You need to see both the negative and the positive sides of these things.

Jesus, you'll remember in Mark 8, for example, said, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself," and passing over some of the other things that he said, "and come follow me." We deny ourselves, we come and follow Christ. Deny ourselves in the sense that I deny that I am righteous. I deny, I repudiate my self-will. I yield my will to Christ. I yield my will to the God who calls me. I reject pride. I reject self-congratulations. And there's a sense of grieving over your prior sinfulness that is woven into that.

Now some biblical examples will help you understand what God requires, what Jesus is describing. Turn to the well-known Psalm 51. Psalm 51 where we read in the first four verses, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." David here, of course, is repenting after he was convicted by the prophet Nathan of his sin with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah. David is now confessing those profound sins before God and notice the language that he uses, notice the repeated use of the first person singular. "Have mercy on me. Blot out my transgressions. Wash me. My iniquity. Cleanse me. My sin. My transgressions. My sin. I sinned. I've done what is evil in your sight." This is a deep, profound recognition and confession and acknowledgment of guilt before God. "I am guilty and there is no excuse for me, and so I appeal not to the fact that I'm actually a pretty good bloke after all. No, this is an appeal that is utterly to divine mercy. I can't appeal to anything else. I just ask you to be gracious and merciful to me." That's the kind of spiritual mourning, the spiritual repentance that Christ is describing. David, listen, David acknowledged his sin, he took responsibility for it, he turned from it, and he turned to God pleading for mercy based on the character of God alone, not anything within himself. That's the kind of mourning that Jesus is describing.

Now there's an equally good biblical illustration of this to be found in the book of Romans 7. Romans 7, where the Apostle Paul is confessing his own struggle with sin even as a mature believer. He's not denying that. He's taking responsibility for it. He's pleading for mercy. In Romans 7:18, we see the apostle saying this, "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." He says, "I'm not righteous in this way. My practical righteousness is falling short of what God requires. There is the good, but I don't do it. There is the evil, and I do that." And this is not simply a matter of theological badminton that he's playing here. This isn't an abstract theological discussion that he's having. He's talking about the inner turmoil that he feels over his own lack of righteousness.

Verse 20, he said, "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me." He says, "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand." And what does he say about himself? How does he judge himself after he goes through this self-examination? Look at verse 24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" "I'm wretched," Paul says. "I'm wretched. There's this evil in me and I hate it, but it clings to me. It's not me, but it's inherent to

me." And so, beloved, spiritual mourning refers to that sense of guilt and shame that comes on us as God's word convicts us of sin, and the attitude, the response to that is that you hate your sin. You mourn over it. It grieves you that you are like that, that this thing clings to you.

Now beloved, remember we're talking about good mourning and then we're going to see good comfort in just a moment, but I want to, we need to say something really important, especially important in a church that tries to be a teaching church. It is not enough for any of us to have a merely theoretical understanding of sin. This is not simply something where we read Charles Hodge or we read Anthony Hoekema or we read others on sin and we grapple with an intellectual understanding of it and then leave it there, content to have the theological discussion without applying it to our own hearts. That's not enough. It's not enough to have a theoretical understanding of sin in general or to make just a general acknowledgment of, "Yeah, I'm a sinner." To put it in another way, as I think I may have said last week, this mourning over sin that Jesus is describing, this is not mourning over cultural sins. This is not mourning because a bunch of people commit abortion out there without any kind of self-reflection. It's not a mourning over other cultural sins of a moral kind and say, "I hate the fact that society is like that." That's not the kind of mourning that Jesus is describing here. It's personal. Beloved, that's what you must understand. This is personal to the true believer and so I say this gently, what I'm about to say, I wish that this could be heard by all, beloved, if you have never mourned over your own sin, you're not a Christian who's destined to receive comfort. You can be on the right side of cultural issues, on the morality of the day and the world around us, you can be on the right side of that and be thoroughly unrepentant of your own sin. Jesus is not calling you to repent of the sexual immorality that others commit. He's not calling on you to repent of the sins that other people have done, or people that you know, or people within your family. Jesus is calling you to repent of your sin in his presence.

Have you done that? Have you mourned over your own sin without regard to what society is like? Have you been broken? Do you know something of the grief of the tax collector in Luke 18 that says, "Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner!" Pounding his chest, seeking physical relief from the inner tension that he felt in his own heart. Something of that? Something that says, "I'm the man. I'm the guilty one, and I don't like it like that." Something in that heart of yours that's like that? Because it's easy to play games and sit on the periphery of Christianity, content with a general sense of truth, a general sense of morality that's never broken you. True Christians, in one way or another, have been broken over their own sin, individually, personally, regardless of how others may have sinned against you.

But now let me address those of you here who are genuine born-again Christians and to speak and to help you with what Jesus is saying here. Let's go back to Matthew 5:4 again. Matthew 5:4. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Now speaking to my brothers and sisters in Christ that are in the room here tonight, you were, in one way or another, you were broken over your sin at your conversion. You realized that you were a guilty rebel before God and it frightened you in the fear of God. You were sorrowful over it. You realized that you were the one, that you were the guilty

one in the presence of God. And you were broken over sin at your conversion, your life at that time where you professed Christ, where you received Christ, God worked in your heart to open your heart, and your life demonstrated a change since that time. There was an orientation away from sin and righteousness in your life. Praise God for that. Every true Christian knows something about those things. If you know nothing about that, you're not a Christian. And so I'm presupposing that you've known something of that brokenness of sin, that you know something about a change in life following the time when you understand that you turned to Christ. That's all great and that's as it should be, but as we look at this verse, let me point something out to you that's equally important to that. When Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn," he's using a verb tense that describes an ongoing pattern of mourning. This mourning is somehow supposed to be part of your life on an ongoing basis, if it's real. In other words, we don't repent in a moment, feel grief over our sin, cry out to Christ, and then go back to our old way of living. That's not what Jesus is describing. This mourning is present tense, and what that means is that there's an ongoing element to it in life. There's a pattern of this mourning. Somehow this attitude is a part of your life, not a one-time thing that, you know, you tried for a while and then went off of like it was some cheap seven-day diet. "You know, I think I'll try Jesus for seven days and see if that makes things better and then I'll go back to the way I was." No, look, Jesus in the parable of the sower warned us against people who make temporary confessions of faith but that they don't last; a response that springs up quickly but before long is gone and you're back to living the same way. That's not the mark of true conversion. That's not the mark of true conversion at all and we see that from the language that he uses. He's describing something that refers to an ongoing pattern of mourning. It's not that you're constantly in a dead cloud, black cloud of gloom, but there's this ongoing recognition of sin and wanting to turn away from it as it comes up in your life.

Now let me ask you this in light of that, those of you that have professed Christ in the past, saw some change in your life, but now time has passed and let me ask you this: as you sit here tonight, do you still hate your sin or have you gone back and made a comfortable relationship with it again? When you're conscious of sin, do you repent of it? Do you confess it before God and ask him to forgive you as Jesus taught us to do in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, "Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors"? Do you still hate your sin or have you come back to it? Did you let it go away like a dog that ran away from home for a while and then you called it back, "Hey, come back, come back. We can still be together." Do you repent? Does sin grieve you today in some way like it did back then or do you comfortably coexist with it with your heart getting increasingly hardened toward the sin, increasingly, and one of the ways that you can recognize that is that you're increasingly disinterested in the word of God. You can put it away for a day, two days, a week, two weeks and you really don't miss it. Beloved, this is not the mark of someone mourning over sin that can live in that way. What kind of mourning is that? One writer said this, commenting on this verse, he said, "There are such things as Christian tears and too few of us ever weep them." We're not sorry. We're not sorrowful. We don't hate sin enough to turn away from it. We just justify it and push away those who confront us about it. That's what Jesus is saying, "Blessed are those who are mourning." That's what he's describing, a humble grief over sin, personal sin,

personal repentance, turning to righteousness that somehow marks your life going forward.

Now, beloved, that's all very searching, it would sound perhaps even depressing, except that that's not the end of the verse. In fact, Jesus opens up again with a completely countercultural, he introduces this in a completely countercultural way, he says, "Blessed are those who mourn like this." These are people who are in a state of having God's favor upon them. How can that be? Why doesn't this mourning lead to despair? Well, beloved, it's because the kingdom of heaven operates on a principle of grace, not of merit. It's because it's when we recognize that we are undeserving that we are in a position to appeal to Christ for grace. Jesus said, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," Luke 5:32. You say you feel sin? Welcome to the club, number 1, and secondly, welcome to the call of Christ. He says, "I see the sorrow of your heart. I know the struggle that you have. I came to help people just like you." And of course you're blessed then to have the Lord himself favorably disposed to you because you have a disfavorable attitude toward your own righteousness.

That brings us to the second part of the verse: good comfort. Good comfort. Now we get to the encouraging part, in one sense, the good part of this. And beloved, remember that in 2 Timothy 2:24 to 26, it describes repentance as a gift from God. This is something that God has to work in our hearts to do. This isn't something that we work up in our self-effort. We need the help of the Holy Spirit even to repent like God calls us to repent and we see that when God works that into our hearts, that he has blessing, our ultimate blessing in mind, what is the blessing that Jesus has for those who mourn? Look at verse 4 with me again. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." There's a future tense dimension to it, "they shall be comforted."

Why is it a blessing to mourn over sin? Why is it a blessing to be truly repentant in the sense that Christ describes it here? Well, beloved, stay with me here. Truly repentant people turn to Christ for grace. They turn away from self and they turn to this Christ who has the power to forgive them, the desire to forgive them, and has done the work that is necessary to forgive them. Spiritual mourners can have hope in 1 Peter 3:18 which says, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God." When Christ offered his life as a blood atonement for sinners like you and like me, his intention was to bring us to a holy God, to reconcile us, to free us from the divine verdict of guilt and replace that with a divine verdict of declared righteousness, justified in the sight of God, sins pardoned, accepted as righteous for the sake of Christ. That's what it means to be justified.

That's comforting, beloved, to know that all of my sins, and they are many, to know that all of my sins were laid on Christ and they were punished in full by God in such a way that his justice against me was satisfied in Christ, that as my sins were counted against Christ, now his righteousness is counted in my favor and God accepts me not based on my promise to change, but on the basis of a perfect righteousness found only in Christ. God accepts me completely and, beloved, if you are in Christ, you have every right to

move boldly into the presence of God on the same basis that Christ himself does because the righteousness of Christ is the basis of our access and it's a perfect righteousness, therefore it's a perfect access. Ephesians 3:12, we have bold and confident access in him.

Now, to the extent that you might say, "Well, I don't know. I mean, I'm not worthy of that so I'm not sure that I can really approach God on that basis." To the extent that you withdraw from that is a measure of the extent to which you don't understand the fullness of what Christ has done on your behalf. We don't go in anything pertaining to ourselves, we go to God in his righteousness. And so, yes, we mourn over our sins, but we don't stop there. We turn to Christ who freely gives us the righteousness we need to approach a holy God, and on that provision, we have great comfort. We're secure. We're forgiven. We're accepted in the presence of the Shekinah glory. It's really a marvelous thought, wonderfully comforting to those who stumble and those of you who know what it's like to deal with besetting sins, to realize that God is not dealing with you on the basis of your besetting sin and your imperfect conformity to his law; he accepts you on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. That provision gives you comfort. It's great comfort indeed.

Now, I gave you a couple of old biblical illustrations about the mourning, let me show you the comfort that is alongside those examples as we wrap things up here for this evening. What is the comfort that we have in Christ? What is it that he has freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved? What does it mean that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness? That we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he himself is the propitiation for our sins? That God so loved us that he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins? All of this is wonderful theological truth meant to comfort your heart. What are some aspects of it? Well, number 1, one aspect of the good comfort that we have is forgiveness. Is forgiveness.

Go back to Romans 7. Remember how Paul said, "Wretched man that I am"? I didn't complete reading the passage there, did I? Paul didn't stop there with an acknowledgment of his wretchedness. He went on and gave glory to God for the forgiveness that was his despite the fact that he was not yet glorified. In verse 25 he says, "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." Now there's no chapter break in the original text, he just keeps right on going and he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Yes, I'm a wretched man. Yes, I still fall short of the glory of God. But because of the substitutionary work of Christ, because of imputed righteousness, because of his shed blood, I am forgiven and God does not condemn me any longer. That's great comfort.

Christian, true, born again, saved by faith alone Christian, God does not condemn you. He condemned Christ in your place, and now you are forgiven which is why Scripture can say, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us," Psalm 103:12. In other places Scripture compares it to God having cast our sins into the depth of the sea. God does not hold your sin against you any longer. He held Christ responsible for your sin, he poured out the wrath and judgment on Christ, and Christ

lovingly for your soul bore that punishment so that you could be free in this forgiveness. Every unworthy thought, every unworthy deed washed away in his shed blood and your acceptance with God not conditioned on a bunch of legalistic rules, the extra-biblical rules that some teacher tries to lay down on you. You're free from all of that. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Now secondly, not only forgiveness is an aspect of this good comfort, but positive joy. Joy. A gladness of heart in the presence of God. God restores joy to the repentant heart. You remember David's grief in Psalm 51? "God, have mercy on me. Blot out my transgressions." Well go back to Psalm 51. Go back to Psalm 51 and look at this prayer that God answers for the repentant. David asks for this because God gives this in the face of true repentance, in the face of true spiritual mourning. Verse 9, he says, "Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me." Here it is, verse 12, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." Verse 17, good comfort, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." My friends, when you go to God with a broken heart over your sin and you're tempted to want to draw back, to shrink back away because of the holiness of God, understand that God accepts that contrite heart, God accepts the contrition that comes to him through faith in Christ and receives you, and welcomes you, and blesses you, and will restore joy, and will restore a sense of forgiveness, and will keep you. That's good comfort. Do you see why Jesus could say, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"? Why are you blessed? Because this is a position of great favor of God to be on the receiving end of his forgiveness and his joy.

Let me give you one final one and we'll close with this. You don't need to turn there. I've quoted this verse so many times, you should know it by heart now, but there is also a future comfort, a future comfort that comes to those who mourn over their sin. In that great and final day when Christ comes back and we see him, we're going to see him face to face. It says in 1 John 3:2, "when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." We are going to look full into the face of the glorified incarnate Son of God and he is going to look on us with love and acceptance, and then in that great moment, we will be transformed into his likeness, the body of this present death will be conformed into conformity with the body of his glory and we will see him for who he is. We will be glorified like he is and we will know the fullness of the acceptance and the fullness of the grace that he shed upon us when he brought us into his kingdom. And then our comfort will be perfect. Then our comfort will never be diminished. Then we will know the fullness of what God has saved us for is to deliver us into that kind of glory, that kind of comfort, secure in his presence, never to be disturbed again by temptation, sin, or foes, fully at rest, fully at peace, every tear wiped from our cheek, sin never to be mentioned again, and the fullness of union and fellowship with a holy God, only beginning for an entire eternity of ages to come. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we look to Christ with renewed confidence this evening in light of your promises. We pray, Father, that you would give to each one of us the fullness of the comfort of which Christ spoke in this blessed beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Comfort us, Father, according to the fullness of the blessing that our covenant head secured for us, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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