

*Empty (Part 2): Blessed Are Those Who Mourn*

Matthew 5:4

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We want to wish a Happy Mother's Day to our moms this morning. I know this day is a day of celebration, but it is also a day that can be very difficult. It can be a day of mourning for many in our congregation. There are many mom's here who have felt the pain of motherhood. Some ladies want to be mothers, and the Lord has not given them that yet. Some have the excruciating pain of losing a child through miscarriage. Some moms have felt the excruciating pain of losing a child through death. Some here have lost their moms in the last few years, and that memory is still very tender and painful. So, while we celebrate our moms, we must be reminded that on Mother's Day, that are many who mourn, and this day is mixed with both joy and grief. So, when you think about it, Matthew 5:4 is a very appropriate text for Mother's Day because Mother's Day can be a day when many people mourn.

Last Sunday, we looked at the first link of what the church father, John Chrysostom, called the *Golden Chain of Grace*,

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

This morning we will look at the counterpart of being *poor in spirit*—*blessed are those who mourn*. This simply is a providential text for our little congregation at this time. You do not have to be around here very long to know that there are many people in our church who are mourning right now. Sure, there are people rejoicing, but it seems over the past few months, and perhaps even a year, we have had our share of grief. What we need to be reminded of at this time is Jesus' words found in Matthew 5:4:

*Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.*

Let's unpack this verse and let the comfort of Christ come to us by His Spirit through His word. First, what does the word "*Blessed*" mean? *Blessed* means *happy*, or as I have been saying—it means *approved by God*. The word *Blessed* in the Beatitudes is much like the idea of being blessed by the Lord in Numbers 6:24-26:

<sup>24</sup> *"May the Lord bless you and [keep] you;  
<sup>25</sup> may the Lord make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;  
<sup>26</sup> may the Lord look [upon you with] favor  
and give you peace."*

When we are mourning, what we really need is for God to turn His face toward us and be gracious to us. We need His peace in the middle of pain and suffering.

So, while it might sound counterintuitive to say we are blessed when we are in mourning, the truth is it is in those moments when God turns His face to His children and gives us Himself in Jesus. Those who mourn are blessed because God comes to them with a special kind of grace that comes through His Son, who died on the cross. He knows the kind of grace we need at that moment. This is what *Blessed* means in the Beatitudes.

What does “*those who mourn*” means in v. 4? Remember, v. 4 is the counterpart to v. 3. So, when Jesus said, *blessed are the poor in spirit*, He was talking about recognizing our spiritual condition. Then in v. 4, when Jesus said *blessed are those who mourn*, He drilled deeper into our spiritual condition.

So, to *mourn* over our spiritual condition is an outward expression of the inner condition of being *poor in spirit*. It is the *emotional* counterpart to the *realization* of being *poor in spirit*.

Here’s the deal: *Mourning over sin needs to be understood in two ways*. First, it is mourning over the realization of OUR sin. It is to grieve over the realization of our spiritual poverty. It is also to grieve over how our spiritual poverty has harmed others.

Here’s how this works itself out in our lives. When a person’s spiritual eyes have been opened to his true spiritual condition, the gravity of their situation begins to prick his/her conscience. At the same time, he/she begins to grasp the holiness of God. This realization really should rock our world.

In many ways, we should have an Isaiah 6:5 and Romans 7:24 kind of experience where we confess something like this:

*Woe is me, for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*

Also, at the same time we have this realization, we should also experience grief over the realization that Jesus has taken our place on the cross. In other words, we realize that it was our sin that killed Jesus. We realize that we should have died to pay for our sin against God. The guilt of our sin and the guilt that Christ died in our place and for our sin should cause us grief.

Think about it this way. The guilt of our sin and how it killed the Savior should lead us to a heartfelt confession. This is why we spend time confessing our sin on Sunday morning in our worship services. I don’t know if you have ever noticed, but sometimes we use the pattern of confessing our sins in *thought, word, and deed*.

Romans 3 describes our sinful condition in thought, word, and deed apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Thought: Romans 3:10-12 says, “*There is no one righteous, not even one.* <sup>11</sup> *There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.* <sup>12</sup> *All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.*”
- Word: Romans 3:13-14, “*Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers’ venom is under their lips.* <sup>14</sup> *Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.*”
- Deed: Romans 3:15-17, “*Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, <sup>17</sup>and the path of peace they have not known.* <sup>18</sup> *There is no fear of God before their eyes.*”<sup>1</sup>

But when we are confronted with our condition and our spiritual eyes are opened so that we realize our spiritual bankruptcy, we will begin to mourn over it. That’s when you know the realization that we are sinners who stand condemned before a holy God has broken the heart open, and it is ready for healing.

This is the reason the Apostle Paul concludes Romans 7 with vv. 24-25:

*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*  
<sup>25</sup> *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

We call this kind of realization and confession: *Hitting bottom*. *Hitting Bottom* really is a blessed place to be. This was where King David was after he sinned with Bathsheba. He wrote Psalm 51 as a realization and confession of his sin. Listen to vv. 3-4:

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<sup>1</sup> Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word Series: The Sermon on the Mount*, 27.

<sup>3</sup> *For I am conscious of my rebellion,  
and my sin is always before me.*

<sup>4</sup> *Against you—you alone—I have sinned  
and done this evil in your sight.*

*So you are right when you pass sentence;  
you are blameless when you judge.*

I don't know if you have ever hit bottom, but it is a different kind of experience for all of us. It is a place where we realize we are helpless before a Holy God, and only the grace of Jesus will save and change us.

Bottom line: If you have *hit bottom*, then you are blessed. You are blessed because now you are open to the comforting grace of Jesus. *Blessed are those who mourn over their sin, for they shall be comforted.*

The second way we need to understand mourning over sin is to mourn over how sin has broken our world and our lives. We mourn over the brokenness of the world in which we live.

In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned, our world was broken. Yes, Jesus has come and died on the cross, and He has reversed the curse of sin, but we still live with the effects of the Fall. We still bear the marks of the Fall.

Think about it this way. Many of us are walking down the painful path that leads through the valley of the shadow of death. Then there are some of us who are walking through it with other members of our church family. When we walk this path ourselves or with others, we grieve.

Friends, it is right to grieve when we are walking this path ourselves or with others. Also, mourning with others is a vital part of our calling to shepherd one another.

There are some in our church dealing with long-term suffering and struggle. Some have chronic long-term illnesses or family members with long-term chronic illnesses. Some have cancer or have family members with cancer. Others have literally walked through the valley of the shadow of death because of the death of a loved one. Some are struggling with emotional and mental illness. These are not easily overcome and are often long-term and can take a toll on the person and their loved ones. Some have had sinful and painful things done to them relationally, and these experiences have left them in trauma and with much brokenness in their lives. Some have even been the one who commits the sin, and when they realize what they have done, it is painful and hard to bear. Even when forgiveness is given, sometimes the darkness of memory of sins committed returns to inflict more pain. Sometimes the one who forgives has to forgive, and then they have to forgive the next day and the next day, and it seems that all they ever do is remind themselves that they have forgiven the person because the pain and grief keep coming back.

In Psalm 10, King David was experiencing the brokenness of this world, and he cried out to the Lord in his desperation. He models for us how to *cry* out to our Savior and grieve how sin has broken our world and how to grieve with others.

The Honest Cry: Psalm 10:1, "*Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide in times of trouble?*" Have you ever been there? The pain is so great you just give an honest cry to Jesus that says, "*Where are you, Lord? I need you!*" When we mourn sin's effects in our world, it is good to make an *honest cry* to Jesus.

The Anxious Cry: Psalm 10:2-11: Listen to David's grief of living in a world broken by sin and sinners:

<sup>7</sup> *Cursing, deceit, and violence fill his mouth;  
trouble and malice are under his tongue.*

<sup>8</sup> *He waits in ambush near settlements;  
he kills the innocent in secret places.*

*His eyes are on the lookout for the helpless;*

<sup>9</sup> *he lurks in secret like a lion in a thicket.*

*He lurks in order to seize a victim;*

*he seizes a victim and drags him in his net.  
<sup>10</sup> So he is oppressed and beaten down;  
 helpless people fall because of the wicked one's strength.  
<sup>11</sup> He says to himself, "God has forgotten;  
 he hides his face and will never see."*

You may not have experienced the brokenness exactly as King David did, but he teaches us that even in our anxiety, we can grieve and cry out to God. We don't simply put on a happy face and pretend everything is okay. We take our anxiety to Jesus and cry out to the Lord. We pour out our hearts to Him in our grief, pain, and sorrow.

The Desperate Cry: Psalm 10:12-15. Listen to v. 12, "*Rise up, Lord God! Lift up your hand. Do not forget the oppressed.*" David has gone from "*Where are you, Lord?*" to "*Rise up, O' Lord.*" It is the grief of the desperate cry of one who is worn out. It is an honest, brokenness, desperate lament that leads to confidence and comfort in Christ.

The Confident Cry: Psalm 10:16-18:

*<sup>16</sup> The Lord is King forever and ever;  
 the nations will perish from his land.  
<sup>17</sup> Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble;  
 you will strengthen their hearts.  
 You will listen carefully.<sup>2</sup>*

We don't have a timeline for this Psalm, but it most likely took time for King David to come full circle so that even in the grief of his brokenness, he cried out to the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, it is right to mourn and grieve how sin has broken our world and our lives. It is easy to rejoice with those who rejoice, but it is harder to mourn with those who mourn. Let's not be a church that fears mourning with those who mourn because when we mourn with them, we help them find comfort in Christ.

The last question is: What is the comfort of Christ like? Christ's comfort comes to us in at least two ways. Certainly, there are more, but for Matthew 5:4, we need to apply it to THE two ways we understand what it means to mourn sin.

First, Christ's comfort comes to us in our salvation. Our deliverance from sin's penalty and promise of eternal life. Those who come to Jesus and confess their sin by repenting of it in grief and mourning find comfort in Christ because they now understand what God has done to save them through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection from the dead.

The Heidelberg Catechism opens with this question: *What is my only comfort in life and in death?*

*That I am not my own but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

Salvation brings comfort to our lives. We have the comfort and assurance of the forgiveness of our sin. We have been given the Holy Spirit, who Jesus says is our Comforter. It is by the Holy Spirit that we experience Isaiah 40:1, where the Lord says,

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<sup>2</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes*, 95-102.

*Comfort, comfort, My people, says your God.*

We have the assurance of our salvation, and this is our comfort, and it also causes us to rejoice. In other words, we experience the blessedness Jesus says those who have.

In Luke 15:18-23, Jesus tells the story of the Prodigal Son. This parable helps us understand how to follow our mourning over sin to the comfort of Christ [Give the background to the son's return]:

*I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. <sup>19</sup>I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers." <sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup>"But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, <sup>24</sup>because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.*

The question is, are you in mourning over your sin? Do you understand there is nothing that will commend you to God? Do you ache with guilt over your sin before the Holy God? If you do, then let your mourning lead you into the arms of Jesus. Cry out to Jesus, and let Him restore you to fellowship with God by His sinless life, His death on the cross, which was in your place and for your sin, and His resurrection from the dead.

Finally, how does Christ comfort His children while we live in a world broken by sin? Jesus gives us comfort in the form of hope. Hope is not a *crossing of the fingers and wishing things were different* but *confidence* in Jesus' faithful love, grace, and presence in our suffering.

The English word comfort comes from two Latin words, which mean "*with strength*." This is a wonderful way to think about comfort. Those who *mourn their spiritual weakness will be strengthened by Jesus*.

This past year we studied Revelation as a church. One of the resources we used was Nancy Guthrie's book, *Blessed*. While her book was wonderful, Nancy Guthrie is not only known for her writing but for the suffering she has endured in life.

Her story is one of incredible loss. Nancy and her husband have lost two children to a rare genetic disorder. Nancy says that holding onto hope in those times has not been a vague sentimental experience. She says it has been an ongoing choice to believe God's word. She says that she and her husband have sought to understand God's perspective on suffering. She says that she and her husband grabbed hold of God's promises by seeking His purpose and meaning. She says they grabbed hold of His sovereignty, knowing that while their experience was painful, they continued to believe God meant it for good. She says they've rested in His presence and provision of joy and strength that they have found in the darkest of times. She says that God comforted them as they "*grew inwardly*" because of the pain in this broken world.

Nancy says that occasionally someone will say, "*You must be a very strong person.*" She says that the fact is she is not strong. Listen to what she says, and I quote her here:

*But I know the truth—that I am not strong. However, I am tethered to Someone who is strong. I am not holding on to hope in terms of a positive perspective about the future or an innate sense of optimism, but rather holding on to the living*

*person of Jesus Christ. I am grabbing hold of the promises of God, his purposes, and his provision, and refusing to let go.*<sup>3</sup>

Friends, Christ-centered comfort is the only true comfort. Any comfort we receive or comfort we give others that lie outside of the hope in the person and work of Christ is temporary at best and deceptive at the worst.

Friends, if we merely utter platitudes and offer earthly comfort to those who are mourning the brokenness they experience in this world and fail to point them to the only True Source of comfort in Jesus Christ.

If we do not comfort them with Christ, then we may easily deceive them into believing God is on their side when in fact, He may not be. In other words, if a person is an unbeliever, then he/she is still an enemy of God, and so we have offered them comfort in Christ, then we have offered them no lasting comfort. We must point people to the Man of Sorrows is acquainted with grief.<sup>4</sup>

I don't know where you are in your grief/mourning. Perhaps you have realized you are a sinner and have begun to mourn your sin because you know you need Jesus to save you. I would love to talk to you about how you can know Jesus' comfort today.

Perhaps you are in the middle of one of life's storms, and your suffering is very great, and you need prayer and counsel this morning. Pastor Eric and our elders will be available at the end of the service to talk and pray with you.

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<sup>3</sup> Nancy Guthrie, *Be Still, My Soul*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tautges, *Comfort the Grieving*, 15-16.