

# Good Mourning

*The Beatitudes*

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I wouldn't expect you to notice but all of our hymns this morning were either written by or the music was written by the 19th century hymn writer, Philip Bliss, who perished far too young. He would have easily been the most famous hymn writer in the history of the church had his life not been cut short by a tragic train accident in Ashtabula, Ohio in I believe 1876. I mention that simply to call to your attention that the hymns that we sing transcend our day. We are able to sing those words and identify with them because there is a transcendent truth that we gather around that we learn and that we share in, and the common experience of true believers gives rise to voice to words and to music that transcend the ages and so we can sing words from the 19th century as fresh as if they had been written today, and so we're grateful for the depository of music that God has given to his church that we might be able to learn these hymns from the past and be able to carry them forward today. Those of you that bring your young children to our services, one of the great thrills of my life is that your children are learning these hymns and these are things that will stay with them throughout all of their lives and so your effort to get up in the morning and to bring them here and to sit with them when they're squirmy is all worth it because of the lifelong value of the things that we do here.

Well, let me invite you to turn to Matthew 5 for our text for this morning. Matthew 5 as we return to our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, an extended discourse that Matthew has recorded early in his Gospel. We're finding the things that are fundamental to vibrant true Christianity in what we're studying in the Sermon on the Mount. These are the things that go to the very heartbeat, the very warp and woof, the fiber of what it means to be a true Christian. It's not found in superficial happiness because God has a wonderful plan for your life, that's not it, that's not true Christianity. True Christianity is found in a humble recognition of sin and a conscious voluntary repentance and reliance on Christ for your salvation, recognizing that there is a holy God that reigns over us, that reigns over his creation and one day we'll give an account to him, and the question is: how do we respond to this God? How do we stand before him? How should we think of ourselves and respond to his word in light of those eternal realities?

Well, last time we looked at Matthew 5:3 and I invite you to look there. We're going to through the Beatitudes one by one in the coming weeks. Matthew 5:3, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And what we said

about that was that God pronounces favor upon those who recognize that they are spiritually bankrupt before him; an infinite holy God has no reason to take note of you who is a finite and sinful creature. So we have to realize our position in the universe if we are ever going to get on the right path spiritually. The world and the universe, beloved, does not revolve around you. It does not revolve around me. The purpose of the universe is to ultimately proclaim the glory of God and we need to start with that fundamental premise shaping things so that you would know your place in the universe and how you fit. This is just essential and the secular mindset and the flabby liberal churches that commend you for how important you are are doing you a great disservice because they are setting you up for something that is not true. God is the exalted center of all things. His glory is the only thing that matters and until you bring yourself under that and accept that and accept your role in the universe, only then can you begin to hope to find true spiritual life.

This is essential and so Jesus pronounces those, pronounces blessing on those who are poor in spirit, he says, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In other words, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, the foundational element in the cornerstone of your spiritual existence is to recognize that you are spiritually bankrupt; that there is nothing about you to cause God to receive you into heaven; there is nothing about you in your finite creaturely existence that would cause God to take notice of you. Only when you declare spiritual bankruptcy are you in a position to approach God at all because as we said, the operative principle in the kingdom of heaven is grace, not human merit. That's the starting point and so everyone that says, "I think I'm good enough to go to heaven," is not. They are miserably lost until they abandon that claim of self-righteousness in order to approach God on his terms, on the principle of grace rather than thinking that it was something that you deserved.

Now, with that said, what we're talking about when we talk about this spiritual bankruptcy, as we talk about being poor in spirit, there is a sense in which that is primarily an intellectual recognition. True spiritual life doesn't stop with that recognition but it starts there. It starts with the recognition that you are a vile, lost sinner separated from God, that a holy God could not receive you into his presence unless he does something graciously toward you. It starts there, and so it starts with this mental acknowledgment, this mental recognition, this intellectual understanding of where you fit into the universe. It starts there.

Now, today having reviewed that last week, today we're going to see how that works out in the heart of a true disciple, how that influences your affections and the way that you respond to that inside your inner man and that's what Jesus leads us to in verse 4 of Matthew 5. Look at it with me for it's our text for this morning. Jesus said,

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. I can promise you that there is no marketing firm on Fifth Avenue in New York or in Washington, DC or in Hollywood, anyplace that would make this the centerpiece of the way that they would try to promote

their products to you. This gives you a sense, it gives you an intuitive idea that this must be true. This must be from God because it is so contrary to human reason; it's so contrary to human expectation. You and I, people in general, avoid mourning like the plague, mourning, m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g. We do not like to mourn. We do not think it is a good thing. Jesus turns all of that on its head and says God's favor is upon those who are like this, who have this kind of mourning of which he speaks. And so all of a sudden you are immediately confronted with the fact that what Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God is utterly contrary, it is utterly countercultural, it is completely different to the spirit of the age in which you live and there is no other place other than Scripture where you are going to hear anything like this. And this is true, this is what you must embrace, this is what you must find because Jesus says that only those who mourn like this will be comforted; only those who are poor in spirit will be in the kingdom of heaven. So we have to abandon everything that the world has taught us, everything that the world has fed us, everything that the world loves, we have to leave all of that behind and walk, as it were, through a narrow turnstile as you're going through one of those narrow former gates, the turnstiles, only one person can go through at a time. Beloved, what you have to do individually is you have to come to grips with what these Scriptures mean to your own heart and you have to settle in your own mind that you are going to embrace this as the operative definition of spiritual life for you, otherwise you're not going to go to heaven. It's that clear. It's that simple. It's that basic.

As I've often said when I've taught on the Sermon on the Mount, I don't mind repeating myself, you know, I'm getting to that place on the verge of older age where you forget what you say anyway so I can say these things multiple times and I don't even remember, but you're going to remember because I'm going to keep saying it over and over again. You must understand something really important here, beloved, you must understand this: as we study the Sermon on the Mount together over the next several months, Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount is teaching for keeps. He means what he says, and there are eternal consequences that flow out of how you respond to his word here. He is not joking around. This is not a Hollywood production. This is not a TV sitcom. This is not – and praise God that it's not – this is not the stupid frivolity that you see on morning TV shows, if you're going through a hotel, that's the only time I'm ever exposed to it. This is not entertainment. Jesus is laying before you, as it were, the terms and conditions of entering the kingdom of heaven and without this truth, no one will find it.

So this is essential for you to understand and the fact it's important to emphasize that, the fact that he's talking about a spirit of mourning, which we're going to explain in a moment, the fact that he's explaining a spirit of mourning, don't let that cause you to say, "I don't want to go there because I like to be happy and I like to be bubbly," and all of that. Well, you know, happy and bubbly is okay as far as it goes but at some point you have to come to grips with what Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." So what we're going to do today, we're going to look at this verse through three different principles and we're going to understand what Jesus said. And throughout these Beatitudes, beloved, throughout these Beatitudes as you hear them taught, you must understand something very basic: that Jesus Christ is holding up a mirror to your soul and you must see, you must ask yourself whether as you see this teaching, whether you see a

reflection of yourself in what is being said. He is defining the way that a true disciple thinks, the way that a true disciple, what a true Christian, what his affections are. So you should ask yourself: is he describing me? Because only the people who are like this are going to heaven. Everybody else is outside and it doesn't matter, nothing else matters, except that you would be rightly related to Christ and that you would go to heaven in the end. What happens on November 8th is inconsequential for your soul in comparison to the things that we're talking about here today. So forget about the headlines, forget about what's going on tonight and focus on Christ as you hear his word here this morning.

So what is Jesus talking about here? First principle here for today, what is Jesus talking about: he's talking about good mourning. Good mourning, with the "u." Not good morning as it's a new day and I greet you, but he's describing good mourning, the kind of mourning that has productive spiritual results. What is it that is a mark of the privilege of God's favor being upon a person? Well, here we go. Let's get into the text, shall we? Jesus said in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and now in verse 4, he says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The first thing that you need to see, we've talked about this in the past, I'm not going to repeat the textual basis for it here this morning, simply to say this: that Jesus as he talks in verse 3 and verse 4, is he is talking about two aspects of the same person. The person who is poor in spirit naturally will become somebody who has an element of this mourning in his heart. The person who is poor in spirit is in a position of divine favor, so is the person who is mourning, beloved, the two Beatitudes are describing the same person, the same kind of person, and verse 4 is describing the emotional reaction to the truth of verse 3 as we've already said.

Now, it is a blessed privilege of mine to be able to explain this to you and to hopefully divest many of you probably from a false understanding of this verse which will be quite evident to you. It's important to clear away misconceptions so that your mind has, as it were, a wide road to receive what the truth of the matter is. It's quite possible that you've heard this verse described to people and used in reference to people who are mourning the death of a loved one and say, "Well, it's okay because blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Beloved, let me tell you something definitively, dogmatically, without any fear of legitimate contradiction: that is not what this verse is talking about at all. It couldn't possibly be what this verse is talking about. This verse is not referring to earthly emotions over the death of a loved one or of any kind of earthly loss. It has nothing to do with that at all. It couldn't have anything to do with that at all.

And let me just give you a little bit to help you see why that must be the case. Isn't it true that unbelievers grieve over the death of their loved ones? Isn't that true? That's obvious. You know, part of human existence whether you're saved or unsaved, Christian or non-Christian, is that we go through life and sooner or later death comes to us and takes somebody that we love. Well, listen, unbelievers experience that but do you know what? That doesn't mean that they're going to heaven. They're not going to heaven simply because they grieve the loss of a loved one. Jesus is talking about his disciples. He's talking about those who belong to his kingdom. And so while unbelievers experience earthly loss and they mourn in one sense of the term, their earthly loss, that's not what

Jesus is talking about here at all because those people aren't in the kingdom of heaven, and if they don't come to Christ before they die, they will never be comforted. They will be eternally miserably lost so it's obvious that that's not what Jesus is talking about. He's talking to his disciples about something different.

Let me say something else, again, just kind of clearing away the underbrush so that we're clear to receive God's word here this morning. Jesus is not describing the depression that some people feel over life. He's not talking about a self-centered sadness. That's not his point here in what he's describing. Many people feel weighed down in life and they are not comforted in the midst of it, they have no hope in the midst of it, and even within the church, speaking broadly, not in the sense of the local church of Truth Community Church, but even within the church, people have this self-preoccupation that weighs them down and they are concerned about the way life is going or the way things have gone wrong for them in the past and they are preoccupied with it. Beloved, that kind of self-centeredness is not what Jesus is talking about here, I'll make that plain for you in a moment, but you just have to realize that this is not a horizontal sense of earthly circumstances that are producing the kind of mourning that Jesus is describing here. That's not it. That has nothing to do with what Jesus is talking about at all.

So, beloved, when we read this Beatitude here this morning, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," if you're here with some of those thoughts in your mind, let me encourage you to put those thoughts of earthly circumstances out of your mind because it will only confuse your ability to understand what Jesus is truly talking about here. Jesus is not addressing your earthly circumstances here. What is he describing? Jesus is describing a spiritual mourning. Oh, yeah, you can all reach for your pens and write this down. He is describing a spiritual mourning in what he says here and you know that from the context. You know that he's talking about something that is otherworldly, that is not earthly, that is not time bound. He's talking about something else. How do you know that? Basic principles of interpretation. Context tells us this. Jesus had just spoken about those who were poor in spirit, he is speaking, the whole context of this is the kingdom of heaven. In verse 6, he goes on to speak about those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. He's talking and so you see that he's talking about someone who has an inward sense of lack when it comes to the kingdom of heaven, an inward absence of righteousness and that is the context of what he is describing here. Jesus is talking about people who see themselves vertically in relationship to God and find that they fall short. That's what he's talking about, but in his pristine, perfect, impeccable holiness, you fall short; that you are a sinner who falls short of the glory of God.

And the question is how does that affect you? How do you respond to that? Well, that's what we're going to see here in a moment but, first of all, let me give you a definition of this mourning of which Jesus speaks. I'm going to give you a definition. I'll repeat it a little later in the message as well. But this mourning, oh, it's so important. Without this kind of mourning, no one goes to heaven. It's that clear and simple and so we have to come to grips with this. Mourning is a humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness. I'll say it again: mourning as Jesus

uses it here in Matthew 5:4, is a humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness. So this mourning has a particular cause and the cause is your own sinfulness that causes you to mourn. It has a cause and it has an effect. I like that. This mourning has a cause, it's a recognition of your sinfulness, it's a recognition of your spiritual bankruptcy described in Matthew 5:3, and it has an effect, it leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness.

Now, what we're going to do here is I want to take you, I'm going to refer to a couple of different scripture passages. We won't turn there but I want you to have a biblical sense of this word "mourning" so that you'll see that it is a significant term; it is a deep term; there is substance to it; it is not something superficial. That's very important for you to see and to understand. This term for "mourning" has the idea of inner agony. "Oh!" That kind of thing. Mourning has the idea of an inner agony, not simply external weeping.

It is the word used in Luke 6:25. You don't need to turn there, just stay with me. All we're doing here is we're showing you how this word is used in another context so that it will help us understand how it is used here in Matthew 5:4. Jesus said in Luke 6:25, "Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." Notice the significance of the way that term is used there. It is the opposite of laughter, that self-promoting, self-amusing drug of our culture, laughter of the most superficial kind. Jesus says, "Woe to you who live your life that way and never think about deeper spiritual realities." So this is the opposite of frivolous laughter. Jesus says, "for you shall mourn and weep." So whatever this mourning means, it's associated with something that provokes a sad reaction in the human heart and so it's the opposite of frivolity and it's in the realm of agony and weeping and sorrow. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn." Wow. You didn't see that one coming, did you, in the sense that this is not something that you would guess. This is not something that anyone outside of the true church of Christ has ever taught you, that to be in a position of mourning is to be in a place of blessing. Well, that's exactly what Jesus says.

This word is used also in James 4. This is not a seeker sensitive message. It's not a seeker sensitive text and I praise God for that. James 4:9 and 10 says, "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." You see echoes in James of what Jesus is saying here, that those who humble themselves before God are those that he exalts in the end. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." The gateway to God's blessing, beloved, for your soul, the entryway, the door that you enter through to find the comfort of God comes through a narrow, one-person wide door of personal mourning and sorrow over your sin. That's where you find the blessing of God. Outside of that, there is no blessing. So what can we say? This mourning refers to a grief that is often connected with weeping. It is the opposite of laughter and frivolity.

Look at 2 Corinthians 7:9 and 10, and it's our responsibility together to wean ourselves from the drug of superficiality that we're all addicted to and enter into that which Scripture actually teaches us. 2 Corinthians 7:9 and 10, the Apostle Paul had written to

the Corinthians and provoked repentance in their hearts. He said, "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, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 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." Do you see, beloved, that in Scripture part of biblical teaching about the reality of salvation is that there is an element of sorrow attached to true salvation. It is embedded in the nature of spiritual life as Scripture defines it and without that, you don't have the real thing.

So we step back and we repeat the definition for just a moment: mourning is a humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness. This is a starting point and what it says is this, at the very least it says that you realize that sin and God's law is something serious; that these are elements, these are things of weight and importance, and that they are not to be trivialized, dismissed or ignored. It starts with that, you might say. You should ask yourself, "Are these matters of importance to me, the law of God and the way that I fall short of it?" Does that matter to you? If it does, then Jesus is saying, "You are on the right track. This is the way it is for my true disciples. They see themselves falling short of the law of God, of the glory of God, and it matters to them. It's important to them." It's something of weight as opposed to what I used to be like in my younger days beforehand, "Eh, who cares?" There is not a "who cares" attitude towards God's law in a true Christian.

Now, some biblical examples can help us understand what God is looking for here, a couple of biblical illustrations. Turn to Psalm 51 which, by the way, is going to be our text for Tuesday night as well just in the providence of God and the way that all of these things fall out. Psalm 51, a familiar text that will be more familiar Tuesday at 8 o'clock, we hope, we trust. You remember the context of Psalm 51, don't you? David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. He had arranged for the execution of her husband in military battle in order to cover up his sin, in a futile effort to cover up his sin. And the prophet Nathan comes to him and says, "David, you're the man. You are guilty here." And that provokes a response of repentance from David which is recorded for us in Psalm 51 and look at how David expresses his confession in verse 1. He says, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion 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, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge." If you're going to say anything else about David's confession there, it's earnest, it's deep, it's vertically oriented, it's profound. He says, "God, it's against you only that I have sinned." In comparison, remember, he had committed adultery and had a man killed in his name and despite that, David could say in comparison to the human element, "O God, I have sinned against you and you alone." There is a God-ward dimension to his confession and to his sorrow over his sin. It's not that he got caught, it's not that there are human consequences, he is broken in the presence of God. His heart is snapped, as it were. His heart is devoid of pride, of self-justification, of excuses. No excuses. No blame shifting. No concern over the human

consequences. Simply alone in the bright light of the presence of God looking to God and saying, "God, I have sinned against you and whatever you do with me, you would be justified to do it. It would be right for you to deal with me in any way that you see fit." There is an utter brokenness over it. David acknowledged his sin without qualification and he took responsibility for it and the grief that was in his heart over it is evident.

Notice, beloved, there are so many things and I should just leave this all for Tuesday. There are just so many things about this that oriented in this appeal, see how this fits with what Jesus is saying. Jesus spoke of a spirit of bankruptcy. We said that the principle of the kingdom of heaven is grace, undeserved favor. Well, notice that that's exactly what David is doing here in Psalm 51. He opens up, "God, be gracious to me." He is appealing to God to deal with him according not to his personal merit of which he had none, he said, "God, deal with me according to a principle of grace in my life because I don't deserve it. God, I want to be right with you. I want to be cleansed from my sin but I don't deserve this. I can't demand this. I can't request it based on my own merit. I just ask you to deal with me according to completely undeserved favor because there is nothing else, there is no other ground upon which I can approach you." He acknowledged his sin and he took responsibility for it and he approached God on a position of grace.

Look over for another example in Romans 7. The Apostle Paul, Romans 7. We're just illustrating what this mourning looks like so that we can have some pictures of great men of God expressing their sins and we can model our hearts and aim our hearts after something similar in our own lives. This is where your heart needs to be aimed after, beloved. It's a sober thing, isn't it? But what we're saying is that you have to take your sin seriously and deal with it earnestly before God and not simply brush it off, not cover it under the rug or anything like that. You come to God and lay your heart out before him and say, "God, this is what I'm like."

So in Romans 7, the Apostle Paul says in verse 18, we'll just pick it up midstream, verse 18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." Verse 19, "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good." My friend, do you have some kind of sense that recognizes, that understands that there is something evil in you that spurs you to wickedness? Do you understand that there is something about you that is like that, that helps you declare spiritual bankruptcy and that you wish wasn't there but is? Do you know something about that? I'm not saying you have to be bursting in tears 24/7, I'm simply asking whether you recognize, as the Bible says, that there is something evil and wicked in your heart that prompts and motivates you to evil. Without that, you're not a Christian because this is the reality, the true reality of every man who has ever been born. This is why we mourn. There is something bad, there is something wrong, there is something twisted and distorted in me that I can't blame on anybody else and that I don't even want to blame on anybody else. It's just there and I don't like it. Something there. Look at what Paul says in verse 24 and, again, recognize how much the Bible blasts a bazooka against the spirit of our age. Who speaks this way? It's not a born



again Christian. Verse 24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

So, beloved, with those illustrations, let's kind of sum this up and move forward in the text. Spiritual mourning means that you have a sense of guilt and shame as God's word exposes the blackness of your sin. You hate your sin. You mourn over it. It grieves you. It is not okay to you that your life does not conform perfectly to the character and the law of God. You say, "That's not okay. I can't just dismiss that with a wave of my hand." And beloved, let's get really really personal, direct, and get right into your kitchen right now. What Jesus is talking about here when he talks about spiritual mourning, a couple of things I want to say about this. This is not talking about simply a theoretical theological understanding of sin as an abstract principle that is somewhere out there. That's not it. It's not simply a concept in your mind. You recognize that there is somehow an active principle in your heart that leads you and prompts you and tempts you away from God. You recognize that inside.

Let me say something else. I love being able to say things like this. It is a privilege from God to be able to say this. This is completely different also – some of you need to hear this, I don't know how many – this is not talking about you grieving over the sins that are in society and saying, "Boy, we live in a wicked world. And boy, I hate that abortion is legal in America and homosexual marriage is now legal. And boy, isn't judgment coming on our country?" Those are good things to dislike, it's good to not go along with the spirit of the age but, beloved, this is not talking about you disliking the sins of society. This is not it and organizations that prompt you to get all worked up about what's happening in society may be doing you a disservice if they are conditioning you to think about sin as something that is out there that other people do. It's not about you grieving over the sins of other people that Jesus talks about here. You are to mourn over your own sin. This is mourning over your sin, not someone else's, and until a person comes to realize, "I am personally a sinner. I am personally guilty. There is personally a black principle that runs through my heart," you've not gotten to the reality of it. You see, all of the so-called Christian pastors that have and in the past have had people worked up over moral issues in society and offering political solutions to it, they made us think all wrong about it because it was sin out there and it was what someone else was doing while we could stay in our little self-righteous cocoon, in our little bubble, self-satisfied as we looked down on the sins of society around us. Beloved, that's not what Jesus was calling you to do. You're to mourn over your sin. You are to be sad that you yourself fall short of the glory of God.

And friends, I can say this: if you have never ever had a sense of grief over your own sin, if you have never mourned at some level, in some way said, "Oh, I wish that wasn't true about me," if you've never had anything at all like that, what can I say? You're not a Christian because the whole point of being a Christian is that someone comes to Christ for salvation from sin. Their own sin. You don't go to Christ to be saved from someone else's sin. You don't go to Christ because the legislature has passed bad laws or that a presidential candidate has proven once again to be, you know, a wicked man. That's not it. Forget everybody else and see yourself in the vertical presence of God. That's what

Christ is addressing here and someone who has never mourned his own sin is not destined to receive the comfort that Christ gives to those who come to him for salvation from sin. It's mutually exclusive. Yeah, I'm belaboring the point. It's really important, that's why I do.

Now, let me point one other thing out to you here. Those of you that are Christians and, by the way, let me just say one more time, I want to be really clear on this: I'm not trying to quantify the mourning. You can't do that. We're not trying to say, "Well, unless you're just really really crying a lot over it, then it's not real." That's not the point. The question is: is there something in your heart that manifests, "I don't want that there but it's there and I don't like it." Is there something there? But let me address those of you who are here who are Christians. I've talked about those who don't mourn at all but let me address those of you here that Christians. You were broken over your sin at your conversion. You did truly come to Christ in order to be freed from the penalty and the power of sin and along with that, your life has manifested an ongoing change that is consistent with being born-again and having a new nature. Praise God for that. Praise God that we are gathered together in a group of believers that are like that. Praise God for that. That's awesome. That's the way it's supposed to be. There is something I want to point out to you in this verse, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall receive comfort." There is something I want to point out to you about this mourning to you as well. The verb form for "mourning, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," the verb form, in the present tense, indicating that this is somehow an ongoing pattern, a habitual mark, something repeated that is in the life of a true believer. Somehow, beloved, somehow this attitude of which we've been speaking, somehow it is a part of your ongoing life; that there is this embedded somewhere in your heart; that sin is still something distasteful to you and that you turn from and that you reject and that you resist and that you do not want to accommodate in your life. Somehow that's a part of every true Christian.

So with that said, let me ask you this, let me ask you this. I'm going from the kitchen right to the stove, to the burner here today. When, and we say, we're saying, okay we are talking to each other as believers now, we're accepting that, we're not questioning that, but in that context, let me ask you this: when was the last time that you confessed any sin at all? When was the last time that you confessed a sin? How long did you spend confessing it? Did it take you five seconds? Sixty seconds if you were feeling really really bad about it? Beloved, let's be honest with each other. What kind of mourning is it that doesn't make you weep? What kind of repentance is it that doesn't trouble your conscience? If this is to be somehow an ongoing part of life, how is it that you can sin in your life and it doesn't even give you a momentary pause about the direction of your spiritual life and the way that you are growing in Christ? How can that be? One writer said and I quote, "There are such things as Christian tears and too few of us ever weep them." "Blessed are those who mourn." We have a sense of what this mourning is about and what it is like and how it is to be present in our hearts as believers.

Now, that could all sound really depressing. It's all very searching. These are true things from Scripture but go back to Matthew 5:4 and notice something, beloved. Even as you deal with these realities of spiritual mourning of which Christ has spoken and of which

Scripture speaks, notice verse 4. This is great. God's word is so perfect. Christ says, "Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who mourn." You see, Jesus brings these things to our attention not to crush us and leave us in the dust, he brings this to our attention in order to lift our eyes to the reality of divine favor. We go through this mourning, we deal with our sin, we address these issues not to simply put a black cloud over our head and to walk in a perpetual state of discouragement. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are like that. They are the privileged recipient of divine favor."

How can that be? How could that possibly be true? Why doesn't this kind of mourning lead to utter despair? I'll tell you why: remember what we said last time, Jesus is teaching us that the kingdom of heaven operates on a principle of grace. It is only when you are mourning that you are in a position to understand that, that you are in a position to look for grace, that you are willing to deny yourself and your self-righteousness. When you're mourning, you're not boasting. When you are grieving over your sin, you're not congratulating yourself on your merit and so you have left all of that behind and now you come with empty pockets and empty hands to the throne of grace and say, "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner." And suddenly you are in the realm of divine blessing. You are in the realm of divine favor and that's why it's a blessed position to be. You see, this mourning doesn't lead us to despair, this kind of mourning leads us to Christ and that's a blessed place to be.

It brings us to our second point this morning: good comfort. Good comfort. We've seen good mourning and now we're going to see good comfort. What is the blessing that Jesus has for those who mourn? Look at verse 4 with me. You see, you can't have one without the other. The truth of Christianity in this realm are two sides of the same coin. There is the mourning over sin and we are united to Christ and by faith in Christ we receive comfort from him in our sorrow over our sin. Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." What is the blessing? Beloved, beloved, once you have gotten over yourself and your self-righteousness, once you have abandoned that, then you are free to go to Christ and to find the hope of a place like 1 Peter 3:18 says, "Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." You're in a position where you can say, "Oh, yes, I remember afresh now. Christ died for my sins. Christ has covered it all. He has paid for it with his blood. He has redeemed us with something imperishable and not by my merit or my deserving but by the perfect grace and mercy and righteousness and shed blood of Christ, I have been reconciled to a holy God through a sheer act of grace and mercy by the Lord Jesus Christ." And you find in that the place where your heart can rest and you say, "Yes, that was true of me. Yes, I still have evil within me. But praise God, the Lord Jesus Christ has covered that. He has made provision for me so that I am now perfectly reconciled to God by his initiative, by his grace, on the merit of Christ, and I have received a gift of which I was not deserving, but it is a gift that is perfect for all time and I have a Savior," in the words of the lovely special music that Lori did for us, "I have a Savior who will hold me fast despite my sin." And in that you find the greatest comfort of all.

You see, your mourning points you to Christ and we can say this, that the biblical mourning of which Jesus is speaking isn't complete. It hasn't reached its goal until your

mourning has led you to Christ and you rest in him and then you find comfort with the knowledge testified by the Spirit to your own heart and understanding, "Yes, Christ has covered it all. My sin has been forgiven. My sin has been washed away. My sin has been separated from me as far as the west is from the east and God will never hold it against me anymore. He loves me. He bought me. He will keep me. I will be with him forever." And that's comfort and in that you say, "Hallelujah." The provision of Christ is what gives you comfort.

Do you remember Paul from Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am"? Notice how the comfort plays out. His testimony about Christian life didn't stop there. He went on to say in Romans 8:1, "there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Yes, I am a wretched man but Christ has saved me and therefore there is no condemnation. My heart is comforted. My heart is at peace. My heart is at rest. You remember David's grief? He didn't stop there either, did he? Psalm 51:12, "O God, restore to me the joy of Your salvation." Forgiveness and joy are there in Christ and do you know what? We say this all the time, we'll keep saying it as long as the Lord gives us breath. There is the present comfort, forgiveness and joy, brothers and sisters in Christ, we have something even better, we have a future comfort that we're waiting for, a future comfort when we see our Lord face-to-face, 1 John 3:2, and we are made like him because we're going to see him as he is and Christ removes sin forever. Do you realize the comfort in that? They will be comforted, future tense. The best part of your comfort as a Christian is still ahead. Don't look for it in a change in your earthly circumstances, rest your hope completely on the grace that is still to be revealed to you. When you are with Christ, you are secured from Satan, removed from sin and secure in his presence forever, then the comfort will be final. It will be complete. It will be perfect. It will be the most magnificent bliss that human minds cannot begin to anticipate or explain right now. That's what's coming. That kind of comfort awaits you as a believer in Christ and that's awesome. That is an act of sheer grace from God.

Now just briefly, you see the mourning is good because it's true and the mourning is good and it is blessed because it's designed to lead you to Christ and remind you to rest in him and reminds you what he has done for you, and you are comforted by the overwhelming grace of the King of the kingdom having lay down his life for you. That's awesome. That's where your comfort lies. That answers the mourning. I want to give you as a third and final thing here, just a couple of little thoughts about cultivating that kind of good mourning in your life.

How can you cultivate this mourning that – watch it – that leads to blessing? How can you develop this way spiritually? This is all, "Thus saith Don," at this point not, "Thus saith the Lord," but I think these things help. Very practical things. How can you cultivate this kind of self-reflection that leads you to take seriously your sin and also the promises of Christ? Let me give you a few things. First of all, turn off your television and turn off your radio when you drive. Introduce some quiet into your life and make time for some self-examination in light of the Scriptures. Get rid of the background noise of this world. Literally, turn it off so that there is a quiet in your environment that lends itself to

some thinking, some self-examination. For some of you, I know that's uncomfortable right there. Good. Learn to be comfortable with it.

And when you're in that place of quiet, ask yourself some questions like this: why did I think such terrible thoughts about that? Why was my mind so black in that moment of time? Why is it that I react poorly when I don't get what I want? Why is it that I go on the attack when people disagree with me, when I don't like what someone has done? Why is my first impulse retaliation rather than forgiveness? Ask yourself questions like this: why am I jealous when other people prosper as I suffer? Why do I pursue lust instead of turning away from it?

Ask yourself questions like that and as you do with an open Bible in front of you, here's what happens, beloved. I'm on your side as I tell you these things. This is all for your spiritual good. This is like a doctor saying you have cancer and here's how we're going to treat it. Those kinds of questions in the quiet of your environment do something. When you ask questions like that, when you reflect on yourself, they expose your spiritual bankruptcy and your sin in a way that your heart won't deny. They produce a mourning over your spiritual poverty because you realize, "I'm not the man or woman that I thought I was. I thought I was this lofty person but when I just take a brief look at my life and the interactions of my heart and the way I attack people when I feel threatened, I attack them. Wow, maybe I'm not all that I thought I was spiritually." When that happens, you become conscious that you have harbored thoughts and motives, ideas and feelings which are quite unworthy of a holy God, which are quite unworthy of the gracious Christ who spilled his blood at Calvary to save your soul. You realize, "Wow, I really do fall short. I'm not the spiritual hotshot that I thought I was when I stop and think about it." And beloved, here's the wonderful thing about that: when that happens, when you do that, then you are in a position to cry out to Christ afresh and say, "Oh, wretched man that I am! But Lord Jesus, it doesn't end with my wretchedness, it ends with your righteousness. It ends with your shed blood. You have received me. You have saved me. You have welcomed me into your family by grace through faith and I have a deeper appreciation for you now than I did beforehand because I see more clearly what you have washed me free from, that the blood of Jesus has washed me free and washed me from sin, even that dark sin that my brief self-examination has exposed." And you come back and you say, "Oh, blessed be the name of Christ." You rest your faith in Christ anew and as that wave of holy grief first comes over you, you look to Christ with a renewed confidence, a renewed understanding of what he did, the price he paid on your behalf at Calvary. And when you come there, then Christ will again renew that multicolored comfort of which he speaks in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Let's pray together.

*Dear Lord, we humble ourselves before you. Collectively no doubt there is a spirit of conviction in the room as we realize the ways that we have fallen short, and not just fallen short, Father, responded to our sin superficially, casually, with little in the way of true repentance. We confess that before you now. Father, we pray that you might continue the work that this verse has started in our heart. Teach us to hate sin and to*

*love righteousness, to think less of ourselves and more of our great Christ. Dear Lord, we acknowledge that our only hope of heaven was your incarnation, your righteous life, your shed blood on the cross, your resurrection and ascension. In that we rest, in that we have hope, in that we have true and abiding comfort. Thank you for blessing us though we did not deserve it. Teach us to love righteousness and to love Christ more and more in the day to come. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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