



Good Mourning

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It hardly needs to be proven that we live in a pleasure-mad society. We spend billions upon billions of dollars on entertainment so that we can feel good at least for a period of time.

I don't think it needs to be proven that subconsciously, we carry those expectations into the church as well. I rather suspect that despite your best efforts, you come here even this morning looking for something that will entertain you a little bit or scratch an itch that you have.

Well, my responsibility this morning as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not to make you feel good but with the text that is in front of us today, I need to do something else. That is to confront you with the idea of "good mourning". Turn with me to Matthew 5.

We are in the middle of the study of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount starts with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-10. Let me read those to orient your thinking.

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

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

Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now, it has been several weeks since I started my series on the Sermon on the Mount. I want to reorient your thinking to get you into the flow of things as quickly as possible.

Matthew introduces the ministry of Jesus Christ by recording the ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist cleared the way for Christ. When Jesus had been baptized and began His ministry, Matthew records this opening salvo of what Jesus' ministry would be all about:

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

Then within just a few short verses, Matthew introduces Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. You need to see the connection between the Sermon on the Mount and what Jesus said in Matthew 4:17. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is explaining and expounding upon what it means to repent and what it means for the kingdom of heaven to be at hand.

So as Jesus expounds on the Beatitudes and His message in the Sermon on the Mount, we should always remember that this is what repentance looks like.

The Beatitudes describe the character that flows when a person has been born into the kingdom, when a person has been saved from his sins, when God has regenerated them and brought them to faith in Christ. This is what their life looks like.

If your life doesn't look like something like what the Beatitudes speak about, the conclusion is that you are not a Christian. It's that simple. It's that direct. We can see that by the way the Beatitudes begin and end. Look at Matthew 5:3 again.

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

And then in verse 10:

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Those two bracketing statements—“theirs is the kingdom of heaven”—indicates that everything in the Beatitudes is talking about the same issue, namely, the character of one who belongs to the kingdom. This is what the citizen of the kingdom of heaven is like.

That is very significant for understanding the Beatitudes because you must recognize that you cannot understand them in isolation from one another. The people who are poor in spirit are the same people who should manifest mourning we are talking about today. The people who are poor in spirit and who mourn are the people who belong to the kingdom.

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The emphatic nature of the way Jesus structured His language as He repeatedly says, “Theirs is the kingdom,” “They shall be comforted,” “They shall inherit the earth,” indicates that the kingdom of heaven belongs to these people and these people alone. No other character marks the true citizen of the kingdom of heaven than what is described here.

As we study these Beatitudes together and as we specifically look at verse 4 today, if this message impacts you as it has me over the past several days, you are going to find yourself humbled and asking questions that maybe you haven’t asked for a long period of time.

But, as we do this, we should approach it with a sense of anticipation. Jesus says:

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

The mourning that we are going to talk about is a mourning that God blesses. It is a mourning that receives comfort from God Himself.

But it is a mourning that you can only embrace if you are willing to recognize the entertainment-mad, pleasure-mad society in which we live, set it aside, and say: “That is not what I want in life. I want the kingdom of heaven. I want to glorify Christ. I want to know Him.”

If that’s what you want today, this message is for you.

Last time we looked at Matthew 5:3:

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

We said that Jesus was pronouncing blessing upon people who recognize they have no spiritual merit before God whatsoever. They understand that they are spiritually bankrupt and freely acknowledge it.

They don’t try to minimize their sin. They don’t try to qualify it with psychological adjectives. They don’t try to blame it on someone else or say that it’s really not so bad.

They say, “I am bankrupt before God and I have not merit of my own. My plea is to Christ and Christ alone.”

That’s the sense of being poor in spirit. There is an intellectual understanding of my personal depravity and making no excuses for it.

In some ways, Matthew 5:4 is the emotional reaction that accompanies that intellectual understanding. You can’t say, “I’m spiritually bankrupt,” and then go on with a flippant, happy lifestyle that is unaffected by the fact that you just acknowledged that you are a

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beggar at the table of God. Somehow that has to affect the way you think and feel and interact with your life.

So Jesus says in verse 4:

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

What I want to talk to you about today is two of the good things that Jesus speaks about here and the first one is “good mourning.”

1. Good Mourning

Jesus says: “*Blessed are those who mourn.*”

That statement runs counter to our culture and what almost every one of us pursue in our own pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. We run from mourning. And that’s part of the problem.

Jesus says quite the contrary. “*Blessed are those who mourn.*”

The mourning person is blessed because divine favor rests upon him. I want to show you a couple of things from the surrounding context so that you will understand exactly what Jesus is talking about.

Whatever else verse 4 is addressing, it is addressing some kind of *spiritual* mourning. Look at verse 3 with me again. Jesus starts us out saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

As we said last time, Jesus refers to those who recognize that they are spiritually bankrupt. Then He says:

“Blessed are those who mourn.”

Now look at the immediately close context in verse 6, where Jesus says:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

So whatever else is going on here, Jesus is talking about a *spiritual* mourning. That’s what He was talking about in verse 3 with the poor in spirit and in verse 6 with the spiritual longings for righteousness.

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So we have to understand that Jesus is talking about a mourning that has a spiritual dynamic related to righteousness and the kingdom of heaven, because that's what the entire surrounding context talks about.

What This Mourning Does Not Mean

So with that in mind, let me tell you what this mourning does *not* mean. I need to dismiss a couple of ideas at the start to make sure we stay on the right track.

When Jesus is talking about spiritual mourning, it is obvious that He is not talking about earthly emotions that accompany an earthly loss. This is not addressing the mourning over the death of a loved one.

It is easy enough to prove that. Many unbelievers mourn over the death of their loved ones, but they are not in the kingdom of heaven. While we grieve with them and weep with them, we have to understand for today's purpose that when Jesus talks about mourning, He is not talking about that earthly mourning because it doesn't fit the context.

Let me also say that Jesus is not describing the mourning of depression that some people feel when they are disappointed with their life circumstances. Many people who are saddled with that self-centered sadness do not receive comfort. Many of them are not believers. They do not belong to the kingdom of heaven. So whatever else Jesus is talking about, He is not talking about mere mental depression here in verse 4.

No. He is talking about a mourning that is limited to the people who belong to the kingdom of heaven.

What This Mourning Does Mean

So if it is not earthly grieving or depression, what does Jesus have in mind here? Well, it's obvious that Jesus is speaking about a *spiritual* mourning. Let me give you a definition of mourning as Jesus means it here.

When Jesus uses the term "mourning" here in Matthew 5:4, He is referring to *a humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness*. I'll show you now exactly why that must be the case.

First of all, I want to show you a few other verses in the Bible where this term for mourning is used. We see how it is used in other contexts to improve our understanding here in the Beatitudes.

Turn first to Mark 16:10. After the resurrection of Christ, Mary Magdalene goes out:

And she went and reported about the resurrection to those who had been with Him while they were mourning and weeping.

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At that time, the disciples were mourning the death of Christ. They were weeping over His death. There was grief—deep, profound grief associated with their condition.

We also see this term for mourning used in Luke 6:25. Jesus says:

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.

This mourning—whatever it is—is connected with weeping and is contrasted with earthly laughter and giddiness.

In 1 Corinthians 5:2, Paul is rebuking the Corinthians and says:

You have become arrogant and you have not mourned instead.

Mourning is contrasted with an arrogant attitude toward sin, as found in that context.

And then just one more found in the book of James. James often deals with the same themes you find in the Sermon on the Mount and here is no exception. James 4:9-10 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.

Those verses give you a further sense of this word for mourning. It conveys an idea of intense grief that is often associated with weeping. It is the opposite of laughter and frivolity and is closely connected with spiritual humility.

When Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn,” He is saying divine approval rests upon this one who mourns. It’s the kind of mourning found in 2 Corinthians 7. Remember that Jesus has to be talking about spiritual mourning of some kind. Paul has the same idea in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10:

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, 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.

Paul clearly makes the distinction between the sorrow of the world and a spiritual sorrow that leads to repentance. It is that spiritual sorrow that leads to repentance that we are talking about this morning.

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This spiritual mourning is the mourning you should have over your personal sinfulness. This mourning feels bad about your sin. It includes sorrow. It includes personal grief. But as we see from 2 Corinthians 7, this mourning goes *beyond* sorrow to produce an inward humility and to redirect your desires towards righteousness.

That's why I gave the definition earlier. Mourning in Matthew 5:4 is a *humble grief over your sinfulness that leads you to repentance and the conscious pursuit of righteousness*.

This is a big deal because it is part and parcel of what it means to belong to the kingdom of heaven. Let me give you some biblical illustrations to give you an idea of what this mourning looks like. We don't want to talk about this as an abstract concept without seeing how it is fleshed out in the lives of godly men who went before us. I'll show you three in particular.

First of all, I would remind you of the apostle Peter. You remember how he denied the Lord three times and then a rooster crowed (Luke 22:60). Peter remembered how the Lord told him that he was going to do it before he even did it, and Peter had said, no, no, Lord, I won't do that. But he did, and the rooster crowed and reminded him. He was immediately convicted of his sin.

What did he do? He went out and wept bitterly. He was broken over it and wept over his sin. The genuineness of his repentance is seen in his subsequent life when he became the leader in the early church.

So when it was all said and done, that brokenness led him to a pursuit of righteousness to the point that he was gladly crucified upside down (as tradition tells us) as an expression of his obedience to the Lord. That's spiritual mourning.

Secondly, look in Psalm 51. I tried to pick some texts that are familiar. You remember the context of this prayer. David is expressing his confession and repentance after his sin with Bathsheba and after he had murdered her husband, Uriah, via a proxy. The prophet Nathan had come to him and said, "You are the man. You are the guilty one."

In response, David breaks down in this great, great confession. Let's look at verse 2 where David says:

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

He is profoundly convicted over this and can't get it off his mind. And he goes on and says:

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 (Psalm 51:4).

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“No defense here, Almighty God. I am guilty and you are the one that I sinned against.” A confession of spiritual poverty, a confession of sin that is without qualification and without blame shifting. He says, “I am the man. I am the guilty one.”

Finally, Paul had the same experience after the resurrection of Christ. Look at Romans 7 from the perspective we’ve been addressing here. Notice Paul’s expression of spiritual mourning in this familiar chapter. He says in verse 15:

What I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

Verse 18:

I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

Paul has confessed his spiritual bankruptcy here. He is poor in spirit.

The willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 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 (Romans 7:18-21).

What is his self-assessment after he wrestles through all of this and bears his apostolic soul for all the world to see?

Verse 24:

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Paul saw the blackness that still remained within him and he mourned it.

So when we look at all of these biblical examples (we’ll come back to Paul in a little bit), and countless others that are just like them in the Bible, you recognize that spiritual mourning involves a sense of guilt and shame that comes over you as the blackness of your sin is exposed in the light of the holiness of God.

You can’t get rid of that shame on your own. You hate it. You hate the fact that you rebelled against God in that way. You hate the fact that your character is like that. And you say, “This is utterly unacceptable,” and mourn over it. You wish it were different, but it is not.

The Holy Spirit has convicted you. In true spiritual mourning, you take the hit. You say, “I deserve the hit.” You don’t try to evade it or run from it.

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Now, let me say a word here to people who are not Christians. Beloved, I want you to know I am speaking with utter tenderness and compassion in my heart as I say what I am about to say. If you do not know *anything* about that sense of personal mourning and conviction of sin, there is a simple conclusion. You are not a Christian. Plain and simple.

Jesus said:

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

In context, He's talking about the people who are the citizens of the kingdom. If you have never been convicted of sin to the degree that it breaks you, you are not a Christian. I say that not to condemn you, but to call you to look for Christ as your Savior. You may have the greatest and most accurate theology, but if it has been head knowledge that has never broken your heart, if you can debate total depravity without being broken over your own sin—that's a major, major spiritual crisis.

One writer said, "Nobody came into the kingdom of God who did not mourn over his own sinfulness."

So if you are seeing your sin for the first time this morning, let me give you a word of hope. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried and He was raised again on the third day so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish under the weight of their sin but have everlasting life.

So I ask you, unbeliever, unrepentant one: Will you repent and believe in Christ?

Let me address those of you who are Christians. You were broken over your sin at your conversion and your life has demonstrated a change and an orientation to righteousness. Praise God for that.

But let me point something out to you. This mourning that Jesus is talking about in Matthew 5:4 is supposed to be a part of *your* life as well. The verb tense He uses here speaks to an ongoing pattern of mourning. It is the same idea expressed in 1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins.

Even there, the confession is an ongoing pattern of life. When Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn," we could just as easily translate that with the sense, "Blessed are those who are mourning," because He is talking about a lifestyle pattern, not a one-time event.

So with that in mind, if you are a Christian, let me ask you this. When did you last confess *any* sin in your life? How long did you spend in prayer over it? Five seconds? Maybe 60 if you were really feeling guilty?

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Let me ask you the questions that have been breaking my heart for several days now.

What kind of spiritual mourning is it that you have that doesn't make you weep? What kind of spiritual mourning is it that doesn't trouble your conscience? What kind of spiritual mourning is it that doesn't cause you to take even momentary pause and reflect on the direction of your spiritual life?

John Stott says, "There are such things as Christian tears and too few of us ever weep them." He is exactly right.

If you want to hear from Spurgeon, Spurgeon said this: "A Christian must never quit repenting, for I fear that he never quits sinning."

So, if your theology teaches you that you are still one that sins after your conversion and you believe that, you should search your heart and say, "Where is the role of this kind of confession in my life? Where is the sense that sin really troubles me and I haven't just made a comfortable truce with it? When did you last shed tears of remorse over your sin? And how often did you confess and repent of that sin only to return to that very same sin a short time later?"

Beloved, if the truth be told, even your repentance is inadequate. You need to repent of your own repentance. Because if we interact with these questions honestly, you have to say, "You know what? I don't take this nearly as seriously as I should."

I hope you are feeling convicted. I do. It has only been 30 minutes for you. It has been days of this for me. I want somebody to feel it, too.

Beloved, don't resist this conviction. I'm only giving you the words of the Christ who loves you. The Christ who designed your good. The Christ who came and gave His life for you. He is the one who said, "Blessed are those who mourn." He is the one who calls you to the spiritual depth of character that realizes that all of life isn't a joke.

So the Christian life is about "good mourning." But praise God, there is more to it than that. Second point for this morning. It is also about:

2. Good Comfort

Perfect comfort. When Jesus says "they will be comforted," Jesus is again using an emphatic construction in the original language that means "They, and *they alone*, will be comforted."

If you never mourned, you would never know Christ, because He came to seek and save that which had been lost. He didn't come to call those who protest their own righteousness.

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Jesus is at His tender best (if I can put it that way), when a trembling, mourning sinner is in front of Him, confessing his sins without qualification. It is then that He proves Himself to be a high priest. It is then that He shows the compassion that comes from having lived in the flesh Himself. It is then that all of the fullness of the blessings of the atonement is showered upon the one who repents.

Is that good? You better believe it. That's good comfort. That's perfect comfort. That's why Christ came to earth. The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many.

So this mourning we insist upon isn't designed to be a cosmic killjoy exercise. It is designed to drive you to Christ where you need to be, because when you are truly mourning over your sin, then you find the real comfort found in words like 1 Peter 3:18:

Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.

That's right. Your sins separate you from God, but as you recognize the blackness and the vileness of your sin, you turn to Christ and say, "Of course. This is why He came—to bring me to God."

And when you turn to that crucified and risen Christ, you find the righteousness that you need. His righteousness supplies your need and therein lies your comfort. Look back at Matthew 5:4. He says, "for they shall be comforted." It doesn't say so explicitly in the text, but it is clear that He means that God Himself does the comforting.

The line from "Amazing Grace" that we all love and treasure reflects this truth.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear

That is, grace brought me to that point of spiritual mourning.

And grace my fears relieved.

That is, grace brought me comfort in the midst of my mourning.

Beloved, it is the most truly repentant who receive the deepest comfort. If you are convicted of sin and you are here as a believer, take comfort in words like those found in 1 John 1:7:

The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

And so, that mourning drives you to Christ, and you find comfort because in Him you find forgiveness.

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Remember Paul in Romans 7, “Wretched man that I am?” He knew spiritual mourning, but his testimony about Christian life didn’t stop at Roman 7:24. Praise God for that. He went on in Romans 8:1 after reflecting on the grandeur of Christ to say:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

He mourned and he didn’t run from the mourning. But in the midst of the mourning, he found the glorious “not guilty” verdict that God had declared upon him. No condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more (Hebrews 10:17).

And it is not just His present comfort we enjoy, but it is the future comfort that will be perfected when we see Christ face to face. When we see him as He is, we will be like Him. And all of the true and correct reasons for our mourning will be banished forever in a future comfort that will be absolutely perfect.

God knows how to give comfort. He has provided the means for forgiveness for the sin. He gives you power to triumph over sin now and a future comfort to come. As Revelation says, the day will come when all who mourned over sin will be comforted and every tear wiped away.

Beloved, let me close with a couple of thoughts on how to cultivate this good mourning. We have to go back to the things that have gotten dusty on the Christian shelves over the decades and come back to the process of self-examination.

Start by turning off your television or turning off the radio when you drive. Just take some time to think. Introduce some quiet into your life for some self-examination in light of the Scriptures.

Ask yourself questions like this. Why did I think that horrible thought? Why do I react poorly when I don’t get what I want? Why do I react in anger when someone provokes me? Why am I jealous when others prosper? Why did I pursue that lust instead of turning away from it?

Put yourself on the stand and cross-examine yourself. Deal with it honestly, because those kinds of questions will expose sin to your conscience and cause you to groan and mourn because you do not share the holiness of God.

Then, as you respond to those questions and realize that you have no excuse, you will know experientially what it is to cry out, “Wretched man that I am! It is not just that I sin, but I don’t even respond to sin like I should. My repentance is so shallow.”

And as that wave of holy grief comes over your soul, beloved, look to Christ with confidence that He will provide the comfort that He promises in His blessed Beatitudes—

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the comfort that comes from knowing that as deep as your uncleanness is, these words still hold true: The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Seek that this week. Let's pray.

*Father, we would be mourners before you in the sense that we have discussed here. We are not what we should be. We are not all that we could be, Father, and we mourn over that. We come to you for mercy. We come to you for grace, knowing that that is the very reason that Christ came and in Christ we find our only righteousness. In Christ we find our hope. In Christ we find our comfort. Father, may you lead us to true mourning and then lead us to true comfort that is worthy of this most blessed Beatitude found in the Sermon on the Mount.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.

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