

The Sermon on the Mount

“The Beatitudes”

Part 2

“Blessed Are Those Who Mourn”

Matthew 5:4

Engaging the Audience

When is the last time you mourned? When is the last time you cried so hard that it took your breath away? When is the last time you sobbed in the arms of another person?

The last time I experienced these kinds of emotions was when my best friend died. His name was Mark Barnes. I'll never forget the day. I was at my parent's house recovering from some outpatient surgery when I got a call from Mark's mother. Mark was living in Philadelphia at the time. One January morning, driving in inclement weather, Mark lost control of his car on the interstate, ran off the road, collided with a tree, and died of massive internal injuries. He was barely 30 years old.

Mark and I first met as baseball teammates at Liberty University. We immediately hit it off. Mark was different than I was though. At the time, baseball was my ultimate love. Not Mark. Mark loved Jesus far more than he loved baseball. This love was a magnet that drew me to Mark. Over the years, we became best friends.

Before Mark died and went to heaven, his life's greatest ambition was to preach God's Word. Truth be told, Mark was far more qualified and worthy to preach than I will ever be. Mark's life dream was to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

God had different plans for Mark – plans I will only fully understand when I see my friend again in the glory of Heaven.

The phone call I received from Mark's mother will be forever branded on my mind. The thought of Mark being gone tore my guts out. I hung up the phone and sobbed in my wife's arms.

The next day, while driving from Columbia to Sumter, I wept the whole way home. I cried so hard I could barely see the road in front of me. The thought of never seeing my friend again this side of heaven, never talking with him, never praying with him, never seeing him preach or get married was more than my emotions could handle. I just cried...and cried...and cried for days.

I look back on that now and I realize what was happening to me – I was mourning.

Making the CONNECTION

The odds are, most of you have mourned like this too. Some of you may be mourning like this right now. Some of you are parents who are mourning a wayward child. Some of you are adults who are still mourning the loss of a father who was a mentor, or a mother who was a constant source of strength, hope, and encouragement. Some you are mourning the loss of a spouse – your best friend, soul mate, and lover. Some of you are mourning the loss of a lifelong friendship that has been, in your estimation, irreparably damaged.

The Good News is that we have a great High Priest who sympathizes with our mourning. Jesus stood at the grave of Lazarus and wept over his friend's death. Jesus perfectly knows the grief and sorrow and pain associated with this life we live. He knows the grief associated with death. He knows the grief associated with betrayal. He knows the grief associated with rejection. He knows the grief associated with broken friendship. He knows the grief associated with being separated from a parent.

Jesus sympathizes with us. In the arms of Christ are found comfort, peace, and hope in the midst of life's deepest sorrows. If you are here today and your heart is gushing grief and sorrow, Jesus is your answer. He will not fail you. His Spirit will comfort you. His supernatural peace will guard your heart and mind. Run to Him! Cling to Him! Rest in Him! Stand on Him! You will find everything you need at the foot of Jesus' cross. Make haste; for the great High Priest is waiting for you and longing to comfort you.

Exploring the SCRIPTURE

In Matthew 5:4, Jesus presents us with the second of eight Beatitudes. Jesus says...

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

Is this the mourning we have just described? Is Jesus referring to hearts broken over the death of a friend...a parent...a child...a spouse? I have already stated that, in times of death and sorrow, we are promised supernatural comfort in the arms of Christ. I know this to be true because God says so in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions..."

What good news! Our Father God is the God of comfort and He promises to comfort us in all our sorrows and afflictions.

Yet, the mourning Jesus is talking about here does not have death as its object.

In the 2nd Beatitude, Jesus is definitely talking about gut-wrenching sorrow, broken-hearted grief, and weeping. But the object of such mourning is something far more tragic than death. The object of this mourning is Holy Spirit conviction over personal sin.

D.A. Carson writes...

“Mournfulness can be understood as the emotional counterpart to ‘poverty of spirit.’ This mourning is a personal grief over personal sin. This is the mourning experienced by a man who begins to recognize the blackness of his sin, the more he is exposed to the holiness of God. It is the cry of a man who goes after purity in his own strength and finds he cannot achieve it and cries out [like the Apostle Paul], ‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?’” (Rom. 7:24)

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains Christian mourning more bluntly when he writes...

“We have failed to see that we must be convicted of sin before we can ever experience joy. We do not like the doctrine of sin. We dislike it intensely and we object to its being preached. We want joy apart from the conviction of sin. But that is impossible; it can never be obtained. Those who are going to be converted and who wish to be truly happy and blessed are those who first of all mourn. Conviction is an essential preliminary to true conversion.”

To be “poor in spirit” is to recognize our spiritual bankruptcy and total depravity apart from Jesus Christ. When we are confronted and convicted with such bankruptcy, we quickly see our sin and wretchedness, which produces spiritual mourning.

In the 2nd Beatitude, Jesus teaches us that the approval and favor of God is found when the Christian becomes broken-hearted over personal sin in their life. God is pleased when we weep and mourn over our sinful offenses against His holy nature.

We see pictures of spiritual mourning throughout the Scripture.

In Ezra 10, we find Ezra...

“praying and making confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God...mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.” (Ezra 10:1, 6)

In Nehemiah 1, when Nehemiah learned that the holy city of Jerusalem had been pillaged and burned to the ground, the Bible says...

"[Nehemiah] sat down and wept and mourned for days, continuing to fast and pray before the God of heaven. And he prayed, 'O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant...confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept your commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded..."

In Psalm 51, we find David, a man after God's own heart, mourning and confessing before God his sin of adultery and murder.

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight..."

In Daniel 9, we find Daniel mourning, just like Nehemiah, over the sin of God's people.

"O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. To us O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you."

In Matthew 23, we find Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and He ponders the Jews rejection and subsequent sin as they reject Him as their Messiah.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"

In Romans 7, we find the Apostle Paul mourning over his wretchedness.

"I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Ezra, Nehemiah, David, Paul, and even Christ the Lord, wept and mourned over sin – personal sin, corporate sin, and national sin.

If we are to know and enjoy the approval and favor of the holy God, we are commanded to weep and mourn over our sin, sin among believers, and the sin infecting our country.

We must ask ourselves some hard and discomfoting questions if we are going to enjoy the approval and favor of the holy God.

- ⇒ When was the last time I wept with a heart broken over my sin and rebellion against God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit?
- ⇒ When was the last time the sin of another Christian broke my heart and put me on my knees before God the Father?
- ⇒ When was the last time I fell before God with a mournful heart as the result of being confronted with the blatant, defiant sin of our nation?

The odds are, few of us will like the honest answers we find.

Our insatiable appetite for happiness apart from God drives everything about our world –entertainment, technology, etc. –. We crave happiness. We'll do virtually anything to get happiness and keep happiness.

Yet, the paradox of Christ's words is this – true, unchanging happiness comes when we mourn over sin and confess it before the holy God.

Why, you might ask, does spiritual mourning lead to God's approval, favor, and happiness?

It's simple. Christian mourning over sin leads us straight to the cross of Christ, where we find grace, mercy, forgiveness, salvation, and hope. Christian mourning exposes our utter dependence upon the mercy and grace of God thru Christ Jesus. And when that happens, God, not man, is glorified.

Listen to how Paul finishes Romans 7.

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

When Paul faced his sin and mourned over it, it led him straight to Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* Our comfort and happiness comes when, thru mourning and confession of sin, we find ourselves in the merciful, gracious, forgiving arms of the resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ.

I love the way D.A. Carson highlights this truth. Listen carefully...

"The mourner grieves over his sin because he sees how great is the offense before God; but he learns to trust Jesus as the one who has paid sin's ransom. He luxuriates in deep joy as he discovers in his own experience that Jesus came to save His people from their sins."

Just as sweet are the words of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones...

“For it is when a man sees himself in the unutterable hopelessness that the Holy Spirit reveals unto him the Lord Jesus Christ as his perfect satisfaction. Through the Spirit he sees that Christ has died for his sins and is standing as his advocate in the presence of God. He sees in [Christ] the perfect provision that God has made and immediately is comforted. That is the astounding thing about the Christian life. Our great sorrow lead to joy, and without the sorrow there is no joy.”

Not only do we have this glorious promise of present comfort thru Christ, we also have the promise of a future eternal comfort. Right now, our bodies are groaning because of the effects of sin. Our bodies, as well as this earth, long for the return of Jesus Christ and the perfection we are promised He will bring. One day, the glorious trumpet will sound, Christ will come for His Bride, and we will no longer fight and succumb to the law of sin in our lives. We will be perfected. We will be glorified. We will finally possess the state God originally, in the Garden of Eden, meant for us to be and eternally live in.

When we mourn and weep over our sin, not only are we presently comforted by the grace of Christ and His wonderful advocacy before the Father, we are also encouraged by the promise of His future return. In the face of all forms of sin and wretchedness, we have the hope of comfort now as well as for all eternity.

That’s the Good News of the Gospel. Do you believe?

Closing Thoughts

The words of Jesus are clear. True happiness, peaceful comfort, and godly approval and favor are found in the heart that mourns and weeps over sin.

Don’t hate the doctrine of sin. Don’t resist the preaching against sin. It is when the Christian experiences Holy Spirit conviction and corresponding mournfulness that he or she enjoys the supernatural comfort of the Father God.

A great exercise for each us this week would be to examine our lives and determine whether or not personal sin, corporate sin, and national sin produces genuine spiritual mourning in our lives.

For me personally, I will continue to ask myself these questions...

- ⇒ When is the last time I wept over personal sin the way I wept over my friend’s sudden death?
- ⇒ When is the last time I fasted and wept like Nehemiah over the sins of God’s people?

⇒ When is the last time I lamented like Jesus over America's increasing rejection of and rebellion against Him?

I know this, when I begin to mourn and grieve over these things, I will experience the favor, approval, and supernatural comfort of Jesus Christ the Lord.