



Matthew 5:4

The Gift of Mourning

The Beatitudes were written for disciples who are committed to living the Christian life. No one can live up to the standards set before us in this passage. It is only through dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer that we can live this kind of life. The kind of righteousness God demands is far beyond our inadequate self-righteousness. Every person saved through the grace of God through Jesus Christ has been credited with God's kind of righteousness. It is a gift from God that opens up the possibility for our living the Christian life the way God expects us to live. It should provoke us to ask, how then shall we live? How would you identify a disciple of Jesus if you saw one?

Jesus taught us that the "blessed" person is one who lives above the chances, changes and circumstances in life. He is a spiritually prosperous person who has a right relationship with God and everything about him is based on that relationship. There is more to spiritual prosperity than happiness.

In order to be a spiritually prosperous person we must be "poor in spirit" and that means to be convicted of our spiritual poverty. It is impossible to become a Christian without first coming to a sense of conviction of our sin of unbelief. When the Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," it means just that. Every person is guilty before a holy and righteous God. We have failed to be what God wants us to be. We are disobedient to His righteous demands. We got an "F" on our spiritual report card. We have to discover our personal and spiritual emptiness. We are dead in trespasses and sins and spiritually depraved.

But even as Christians we have our "blind spots." We can't see out of the back of our heads spiritually. We have pockets of selfishness and immaturity that we have not yielded to Christ. There are areas in our lives where we need to grow spiritually. We still have a long way to go in order to be conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus. We are slow to recognize and confess our arrogant pride, selfishness, sinful behavior and bad attitudes. These are the things in our spiritual life that keep us from being all that God wants us to be. The growing Christian knows that he needs God. He has a humble spirit knowing that he has no righteousness of his own and must depend totally upon God in His tender mercy. The more we grow in spiritual maturity the more we grow in humility.

Jesus said, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Those who recognize their poverty of spirit and confesses it to God and receives Christ's righteousness in exchange for their depravity have the kingdom of God as their possession (Matthew 5:3). *Basileia* denotes sovereignty, royal power or dominion. It denotes the territory or people over whom a king reigns. Here, of course, it is referring to the kingdom of God and of Christ. The kingdom of heaven is the territory of God's rule. It is the place where at any given time the rule of God in a person's life is acknowledged. Our spiritual poverty is just at this point where we have rebelled against God. We choose to do things our way. We have rebelled against His rule in our lives, or certain areas of our lives. We put up no trespassing signs.

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We cannot see the mystery of His reign with our natural powers of observation. Those who have been born spiritually discern it spiritually. When Jesus Christ returns to rule universally it will be openly manifest for all to see. The main idea is that where the King is and where His rule is acknowledged there will be the kingdom. Jesus told a company of Pharisees "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21).

God did not save us and then turn us loose to live the Christian life alone. His plan is to live His resurrection life in and through us. It is a growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ that is vital in our walk as disciples.

Moreover, the poor in spirit realize that they can bring nothing to God. They recognize they are completely and utterly destitute in the realm of the spirit. They have nowhere else to turn but to God. They realize they have no spiritual assets, no reserves, no merits, and no righteousness in the sight of God. They must cast themselves upon God's grace and mercy. Entrance into the kingdom is through the new birth. A spiritual birth must take place for us to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3; 1:12-13). We are dead in our trespasses and sins. Our proud, arrogant self-confidence must be broken and we must become aware of our poverty in the presence of God. Alexander Maclaren reminds us that it is a "lowly and just estimate of ourselves, our character, our achievements, based upon a clear recognition of our own necessities, weaknesses and sins." Those who are not poor in spirit can never enter into the kingdom of God.

What Jesus is describing is Christian character and conduct. He is not telling us how to be saved, but how the Christian who has come to Christ for justification is to live so as to please God. The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount demonstrate to non-believers that they cannot please God in their own self-righteousness and sends him to Christ to be justified by faith alone. So the question becomes how can I develop this heart-righteousness? I can't. That is just the point. What I cannot do Christ does for and in me.

Jesus Christ is the only individual who has ever lived up to the demands of this inward righteousness. It condemns and humbles us and brings us to our knees before Him. The recognition of our spiritual poverty is to acknowledge and confess that we are sinners.

Every thing that Jesus says here presupposes a conversion experience and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer. It describes the character of born again believers. Here are the blessings of the poor in spirit and this is where everyone must begin. All of the blessings here are a gift of grace, not something that we earn or merit. Spiritual life begins with our acknowledgment of our spiritual poverty and our spiritual bankruptcy before God and believing on Jesus Christ as our Savior. We are guilty sinners before a righteous and holy God. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can deal with our sin problem. We have nothing to offer Him, nothing to plead but His grace. Our salvation is an absolutely free gift that God provides in His grace to everyone who believes on Christ. The depraved sinner realizes that he can offer nothing and achieve nothing in God's holy eyes.

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The resurrected ascended Christ sent a letter to the church at Laodicea and His complaint was, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see'" (Revelation 3:17-18). Like many of us in our day they were self-satisfied and superficial. They were rich, and did not realize they were poor spiritually. What a difference it would have made if they humbled themselves and pleaded God's forgiveness and restoration.

That is the sad state and the tragedy of the day in which we live. We cannot enter into the kingdom, nor live in it, without acknowledging our spiritual poverty. Like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus they went away empty. On the other hand, the poor in spirit are mourners. Let's go ahead and use the surgeon's knife because the Great Physician has never lost a patient.

THE SPIRITUALLY PROSPEROUS ARE GOOD MOURNERS

It is really hard for us to imagine Jesus saying, "Happy are the miserable." But just like He said, "The spiritually rich are extremely poor." He also emphasized those who are comforted are mourners. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). That is the paradox. Mourners are to be envied because they are the recipients of God's blessings of prosperity. They are spiritually prosperous because they are comforted. God will comfort them. He comes along side and gives encouragement. The same word is used in Hebrews 3:13 to "encourage one another day after day." It is the sorrowing of repentance that brings comfort.

People mourn for many reasons. They can be sick physically and mourn the loss of their good health. Most of us have mourned over the loss of a dear friend or family member in death. Tragedy befalls a family and we mourn over our lost fortunes in the economy or natural disaster. Many mourn over wounded pride, the loss of a lover, a coveted position, status or self-esteem. However, in the context before us we are looking at our spiritual bankruptcy and our hungering and thirsting for the righteousness of God.

Jesus uses a word for "mourn" that means to mourn as one mourns for the dead. It is the strongest word in Greek language for mourning. The image is a loud mourning like the lament for the dead. It is a mourning which cannot be hidden. This is a grief which brings heartache and which brings tears to the eyes. It is a grief manifested, that is too deep to be concealed and cannot be hidden. Such mourning can only take place in the sorrow of repentance and is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a convicted sinner.

Let us note carefully that it is one thing to be a guilty convicted sinner and another to grieve and mourn over it. We can have knowledge that yes I am a sinner and flippantly cast it off. Conviction and confession is one thing, repentance is another. Godly sorrow returns the soul to God. Jesus is describing a Godly sorrow that affects change in the whole person.

The context is to mourn over poverty of spirit, the fact of sin. It is to grieve over personal sin.

You cannot read Romans seven without coming to grips with a man who was grieving over his spiritual poverty. Paul groaned over it. Let us not make light of our personal sin. We need to grieve over it as Paul did.

poverty. Paul groaned over it. Let us not make light of our personal sin. We need to grieve over it as Paul did. Then we can shout with the assurance of grace, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Missionary David Brainerd wrote in his journal on October 18, 1740: "In my morning devotions my soul was exceedingly melted, and bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness."

One hardened criminal described his conviction as "I stopped. I was stabbed to the heart, as if pierced with a five-inch nail." It was the sorrow of a broken heart. To sorrow over sin is like the mourning of one who mourns for the dead. It is to be heart broken and grieve.

The believer grieves over his lack of spiritual growth and sin in his life. As we read Romans seven we feel the agony and heart beat of a beloved apostle who recognizes his poverty of spirit, and grieves over it. We can feel that same sensitive pulse beat in Philippians 3:12-14.

In Second Samuel 11-12 we see the tragic events leading up to King David committing adultery and murder to cover up his sins. All of the steps are given in verses 2-5, 15-17. The chapter ends with the tragic consequences of sin. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD (v. 27). The God sent His prophet Nathan to David in chapter 12. How would you have approached the most power man in Israel who had already demonstrated that he had the power of life and death in just a word? It is your job to tell him that he is guilty and that God will punish him. The prophet brings out David's poverty of spirit with a parable and then says to him, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel . . . Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon" (12:9). God woke up David with the sword of His Spirit and brought him to a sense of his guilt and sin. David realized his poverty and cried out, "I have sinned against the LORD" (v. 13).

I think those words were the climax to at least nine months of a man of God mourning on his spiritual condition. Remember, he is the only person in the Bible to whom it is attributed that he was a man after God's own heart. Yes, he was a guilty sinner. He committed murder, adultery and covered it up. But he was also a man who mourned over his sin in the correct way. I think Psalms 32 and 51 have the correct setting in this spiritual crisis David faced. They describe a broken heart, a deep sense of loss and grief stricken condition over sin. In Psalm 51 we have David's great catharsis. He is confessing sin when he says, "my transgressions, "my iniquity, "my sin. Listen to David:

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 (vv. 2-4).

You would think that he just about covers it when he breaks out again with lament:

Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
Hide Your face from my sins

Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
*Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You (vv. 7-13).*

We hear the agony of murder when he says, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness" (v. 14).

If you want to know what happens when we do not confess our sins to God and mourn over them David tells us in Psalm 32:3-4. "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah."

The Spirit of God was pressing deeply upon his soul bring true guilt, making him aware of his poverty of spirit. He brought David to the point of acknowledging his sin to God. "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord ;' And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah" (v. 5).

To mourn means to grieve over our sins and be convicted enough to make us quit. Jesus said, "Blessed is the man who mourns over his sin like one mourning for the dead." That is what David was doing.

THE SPIRITUALLY PROSPEROUS SHALL BE COMFORTED

Only when a person mourns over his own sinfulness will he be comforted by the only Comforter who can relieve his spiritual anguish. To those who mourn God grants pardon, forgiveness, deliverance, strength and reassurance. Jesus Christ with His own precious blood has fully satisfied the payment against all our sins, and delivered us from all the power of evil.

"They shall be comforted, is Jesus promise.

Let's go back to the life of King David and listen in on how God comforted his heart. If you were comforting him what would you have said? Remember how David asked God to restore the joy of salvation, put a song in his heart, and give him a song of praise in Psalm 51? When we look at Psalm 32 the song is restored.

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!
How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit! (vv. 1-2)

The opening words literally are like this, "How blessed many times over. "Oh, how blessed many times over, or How blessed many times over, blessing upon blessing, upon blessing, or Deeply happy, satisfied, marvelously blessed over and over again. That is the song of a soul set free.

You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;

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You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;
You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah (v. 7).

Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
But he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.
Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones;
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart (vv. 10-11).

Those who mourn now God will comfort. *Parakaleo* is future passive emphasizing the certainty of those blessings. It means to be comforted, receive comfort through words, or a favorable change in the situation. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who comes along side and gives encouragement and strength. It is the comfort of full forgiveness, the consolation of God with a sense of pardon. He stands by our side and gives us comfort. Only God can pardon sin.

Only God can give us a sense of comfort in a situation in which we cannot cope with ourselves. When the circumstances are quite beyond us the Spirit gives us wisdom and strength.

The Holy Spirit makes us stand on our own two feet and face life under the most difficult situations. When we have failed miserably and we are faint hearted He comes along side and encourages us. He enables us to pass the breaking point and not break.

Have you experienced that in your life? Have you been flat on your face before God mourning over your sins and failures and found Him to come and place His hand on your shoulder and deep within your soul you know His peace that passes all understanding? If you are carrying a deep burden of sin and you sense that grief even to the point that it is beyond you to carry, drop it at the feet of Jesus and receive His pardon and grace. He speaks to the soul with pardon and release and assurance that all your sins are under His blood. These words of the apostle John are sweet words to our soul:

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:6-10).

There is no more precious promise than that. There is no reason anyone reading this today cannot have a sense of God's forgiveness. Take these promises of the Word of God seriously and you too can find peace with God.

Mourning over the sins of others

There is another aspect of mourning in the heart of Christians that must not be overlooked in this Beatitude. After we have been comforted by the Comforter of our own personal grief our hearts will be sensitive to the righteousness of God and we will grieve over the sins of others. Remember Paul's brokenness over the sinful condition of the church at Corinth. With brokenness he wrote to a church that was tolerating gross immorality within its membership. He wrote to them, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Things like that in a church ought to cause us to weep before God. We don't understand why revival doesn't come to our churches. This is where it has to

weep before God. We don't understand why revival doesn't come to our churches. This is where it has to begin. It is heart breaking for the believer when he sees people dishonor God, or curse the name of Jesus. James 4:6-10 gives us an excellent example.

There is a mourning that is man-centered rather than God-centered. It is futile. It will not issue in the blessings of God. However there are many promises for us to claim with the assurance that if we will mourn He will comfort us (Cf. Isa. 61:2; Jn. 16:16-20; Isa. 40:1; Rom. 8:1; Matt. 11:28-30; Jn. 14:26-27).

God is not hostile toward us. He is all for us. He wants to give us encouragement, help and comfort. But it must be according to His principles. The Holy Spirit is the encouraging one. He gives comfort if we grieve over our spiritual poverty.

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. During our time together in God's Word the Holy Spirit has had an opportunity to probe our hearts with his scalpel. Where is your area of spiritual poverty? Where is the Holy Spirit pointing His finger? Where do you hurt spiritually? Only you and God know, but He has probably put His finger on it on other occasions. When we are willing to acknowledge and confess it to Him He is willing to cleanse and forgive.
2. Are you willing to mourn over this area of need? When we are willing to grieve like one mourning over the dead He comes to our aid and comforts our broken hearts with His grace.
3. When we take time to grieve now, we will enjoy the blessings of eternity. One day there will be no more mourning (Cf. Revelation 7:17; 21:4). God's ultimate comfort will come in the day of triumph at the return of Christ.

The condition for help hasn't changed. It is still the same. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

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