

Happy Mourners

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[0 : 0 0] Our text today is Matthew chapter 5, verse 4, wherein Jesus announces the second of his eight Beatitudes. Since each of the Beatitudes is related to and interpreted by the others, whenever we read one, we should read them all.

And so today we're going to read Matthew chapter 5, verses 3 through 12. Here's how I would like to do it. I would like the women to read the phrase that begins blessed, and the men to read the phrase that begins for.

Now, there's a little complication. Down at the end of verse 11, women, you get the first part of verse 12, rejoice and be glad. And then the men will get those two for clauses.

All right? Let us stand, if we are able, for the reading of the word of Jesus, the good newsizer. 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 meek. For they shall inherit the earth.

[1 : 1 2] 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 the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the people of heaven. Blessed are you when people cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me.

Rejoice and be glad. For your reward in heaven is great. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You may be seated.

Spirit of the living God. We've heard these words many times.

[2 : 1 6] Not only in the last weeks. But throughout our lives. I pray today. That in your mercy and grace. You will make these words come alive in us as never before.

For we pray it in Jesus name. Amen. Blessed are those who mourn. For they shall be comforted.

More exactly. Blessed are those who are mourning. The verb is in the participial form. Even more exactly.

Blessed are those who are in a state of mourning. William Barclay is surely right when he says. Of all the paradoxes of the Beatitudes.

Surely this is the most violent. Happy. Approved. Fortunate. Fortunate. Fortunate. Are those who mourn.

[3 : 2 0] Congratulations. To those who are in a state of mourning. As J. Barry Shepherd prays. Lord you might as well say. Full are the hungry.

Healthy. Are the sick. Alive. Are the dead. what heightens the paradox of this second beatitude is that the word translated mourn is one of the strongest words for grief in the Greek language it is the word used for those who grieve the loss of loved ones shedding those tears which well up from deep within a broken heart it describes the piercing sorrow which issues in lamentation Rudolf Bultmann writes pen fine does not have to be open lamentation yet neither is it quiet sorrow of heart what is meant is passionate grief which leads to corresponding action passionate grief which leads to corresponding action amazing blessed right on right side up are those who so mourn for they and only they shall be comforted you lucky bums really now as I've been stressing the past few weeks the qualities

Jesus blesses in his beatitudes are not natural human qualities rather they are the result of having been gospelized they are the result of having been grabbed by Jesus and his good news about the nearness of the kingdom of heaven Jesus did not go into Galilee and Judea looking for beatitude people whom he could then call into his kingdom no he first went through the towns and called people to himself and as a result of contact with himself the beatitudes began to emerge in their lives he did not go around the villages of Palestine looking for the poor in spirit looking for the merciful looking for the pure in heart whom he then gave the kingdom no he went about the villages of Palestine calling people to himself giving them the kingdom resulting in people becoming poor in spirit and merciful and pure in heart the picture the second beatitude suggests is not that of Jesus coming into our town spotting those who are mourning and then reaching out to them with comfort he does do that don't get me wrong he does do that he went into the city of Nain and he saw the widow who was following behind the procession carrying her son's corpse to the cemetery

Jesus reached out to bring her comfort but that is not the primary picture suggested by this beatitude rather the picture is that of Jesus coming into our town reaching out calling people to himself who then began to mourn yes they rejoice big time but also began to mourn deeply why why is piercing sorrow the mark of the gospelized why does Jesus identify passionate grief as a quality of those upon whom the kingdom of God has come before trying to answer that question let me make a few other observations about this second beatitude first this beatitude gives us the freedom to grieve this beatitude gives us the freedom to grieve we in North America and in parts of the world under western influence need to hear this because we are not free to grieve even in many

Christian circles we are not free to grieve a wife breaks down in the middle the memorial service for her husband and from one of the back pews is heard too bad I really thought she would be strong Jesus would never say that never he himself was overcome by and expressed passionate grief when he stood at the grave of Lazarus his good friend he wept when he approached the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday he wept spontaneously and uncontrollably big boys don't cry says who not Jesus a man's man he gives us the freedom and the space to grieve he does more second observation I think he is saying in this beatitude that we will not know comfort unless we let ourselves grieve I think he is saying comfort is found when you allow yourself to feel and express grief

[8 : 49] I've walked through the valley of the shadow of death with many people and I have observed that those who go through the valley most redemptively are those who do not try to stuff the grief a study was made a few years ago at UCLA comparing the way Americans handle death and the way Middle Easterners handle death most Americans are counseled if not verbally at least non-verbally to be brave meaning do not let the grief out Middle Easterners on the other hand are counseled mostly by example to openly wail you've seen that on television you've seen that in the memorial services recently held in Glendale among the Armenian community what are the consequences of these two very diverse practices Americans tend to suffer depression longer than Middle Easterners up to four times longer grief will not kill us but trying to stuff the grief just might

Jesus is saying comfort is not found in insulating your heart comfort is found in opening your heart third observation Jesus is saying that the Christian life kingdomized life is not all unbroken happiness we know that some fight it some fear it some fake it yes there is great joy the time is fulfilled rejoice the kingdom of God has come near rejoice the lover of our souls is in our midst rejoice our God reigns rejoice the Holy Spirit is with us rejoice yet yet Jesus never deceives us there is also this side of his coming again sorrow heart piercing sorrow John R.W.

Stott writes some Christians seem to imagine especially if they are filled with the Holy Spirit that they must wear a perpetual grin on their face and be continually boisterous and bubbly how unbiblical can one become no in Luke's version of the sermon Jesus added to this beatitude a solemn warning woe to those who laugh now the truth is there are such things as Christian tears tears and too few of us ever weep them the question then is Christian tears over what which brings us back to the question I posed earlier why is mourning a mark of the gospelized why is passionate grief a sign that Jesus good news of the kingdom has grabbed hold of us I offer three reasons I would imagine there are many more but these are three that make sense to me right now first when we meet

Jesus the gospelizer we are forced to face the sin in our lives not that he walks up to us and tells us that we are sinners not at all nowhere in the gospels are we given a picture of Jesus walking up to someone putting his finger in their face and saying sinner in fact I read the gospels he never called anyone sinner it's just that in his presence we cannot but realize our sinful condition isn't that part of the reason why we run from intimacy with Jesus Christ we cannot handle his radiant goodness his light automatically exposing the dark places of our lives this is what we were trying to get at last week when we asked why poverty of spirit is a mark of the gospelized when we meet Jesus as he is no longer boxed in by our distorted images of him we become painfully aware of who we are without him in him we see what humanity was originally created to be and then we grieve over what humanity has become because of the power of sin what was the apostle Paul's response even after many years of walking with the

Lord of grace Romans 7 21 oh wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death Paul there is not suffering from poor self-image he's wrestling with the fact that even though he knows what is good to do and even though he wills the good to do he ends up doing the evil he does not want to do do you know what he means I do at times I'm appalled at the depth of my capacity to go against what I know to be the will of God it's awful in the presence of Jesus we see and rejoice and we mourn is the Anglican prayer book overreaching when it puts into the mouths of worshippers the words we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness now here

[14 : 32] I am not advocating a worm theology a worm theology says that in order to know God I first of all must feel like a worm and I must squirm and wriggle in the mud for a little while God does not think of us as worms Jesus never called anyone a worm he did call some Pharisees snakes but he didn't call them worms I'm not advocating here a put yourself down kind of theology I'm simply telling it like it is in the presence of Jesus Christ the Holy One we cannot but grieve over our unholiness Isaiah is given a vision of the Lord on the throne what a privilege and how devastating woe is me he says because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips the wonder of the gospel is that the Holy One chooses to move in and live amongst us unholy ones the wonder of the gospel is that he does not wait for us to become holy before he comes he comes in all of his holiness into the midst of our unholiness and automatically exposes it and we grieve blessed blessed are those who so grieve right on right side up congratulations to those who feel sorrow over their sin it means that the

Holy One has grabbed hold of you it means that you're alive the fact of the matter is that such mourning actually intensifies as we grow in the life of grace thanks a lot Daryl it intensifies many Bible students call our attention to the progression in the life of the apostle Paul's spiritual journey they call attention to how Paul progressed in his spiritual life listen to these testimonies from various places in his letters AD 55 some 20 years after that initial encounter with Jesus Christ first letter to the Corinthians I am the least of the apostles I am not fit to be an apostle eight years later AD 63 his letter to the Ephesians unto me the very least of all the saints grace was given to me to preach the unfathomable riches of

Christ three years after that AD 66 he's approaching the end first letter to Timothy Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I am foremost of all note the progression least of the apostles very least of the saints chief among sinners blessed are you Paul blessed right up are those who mourn not those who mope but those who mourn over over what they are apart from the grace of God second reason why mourning is a mark of the gospel eyes in Jesus we see what the kingdom of God is all about in Jesus we see what God's new world order is all about and then we see what our kingdoms and what our world orders are about we see how profoundly broken they are how they live under the reign of darkness and death in Jesus we see what it was supposed to be and what it can be when the kingdom comes in all its fullness and then we grieve over what it is

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says the disciples of Jesus see that for all the jollity on board the ship is beginning to sink oh the disciples begin to see signs of the kingdom breaking in and in those signs they rejoice yet the more of what we see can be the more we grieve over what is and we find ourselves crying out it doesn't have to be this way it doesn't it doesn't it doesn't have to be this way you see the poor do not have to go on being poor there is enough money in southern California to take care of all the people here it's just that the system is so unjust but the system doesn't have to be the way it is it can change if we want it to change which is more grievous the unjust system or our lack of desire to change it the world need not spend as it did last year 1.5 million dollars a minute on weapons that's 3,000 times the total spent on health education and welfare worldwide it doesn't have to be that way domestic quarrels do not need to end in violence there are many more steps to be taken before somebody grabs a gun racial tensions do not have to increase there are many creative steps that can be taken to overcome our innate prejudice if we want to overcome which causes the greater grief in our time racism or our lack of desire to overcome it is sin so great in the human soul that we do not will to overcome it doesn't the human capacity for ethnic cleansing as seen in the

Holocaust and as seen in Bosnia grieve you it doesn't have to be that way the environment does not have to go on being abused we can change our driving habits if we want to we can change the way we package goods if we want to industries can change the way they deal with toxic chemicals if they want to doesn't our lack of common resolve to take care of the earth grieve you doesn't the flagrant violation in our time of God's design for human sexuality grieve you night after night on television screens across the land promiscuity and adultery are celebrated played to beautiful music intended to lull our conscience doesn't that grieve you a man and a woman not married to each other become romantically involved and they approach the bed the music changes and the intent is that we are now supposed to experience this as a wonderful act it is not a wonderful act it's a tragedy with horrific soul consequences it's a violation of our humanity and the image of God and we sit there lulled by the music does not that grieve you which grieves you more the fact that it's on the screen or that we sit there doesn't it grieve you that a 12 year old boy rapes his 5 year old sister and then says the reason he did it was because he was flipping the dial of the television and he saw a sex scene and thought it would be nice to try 4.6 sex scenes an hour on CBS 7.5 an hour on NBC and 7.7 an hour on ABC and we wonder why our culture is where it is doesn't that grieve you doesn't that grieve you doesn't that grieve you if the kingdom is breaking into your life it does all of this of course is symptomatic of the greater spiritual crisis of our time the lack of knowledge of God billions of people on this planet go about their lives in quiet desperation without any knowledge of

[23 : 05] Jesus and his kingdom they go about their lives lost doesn't that grieve you tens of thousands of people in this city have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ the field is ripe and to harvest the workers are so few though so few doesn't that grieve you now many people would label such mourning as as bleeding heart liberalism or as teary eyed fundamentalism Jesus labels it makarios blessed right on right side up the mourning means that the kingdom is alive in you there's a third reason why mourning is the mark of the gospel eyes as we get closer to Jesus the Lord of the universe we get closer to his heart and we discover that his heart is broken oh yes

Jesus is a man of joy so much so that the religious people accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard but he is as the prophet Isaiah says a man of sorrows acquainted with grief yes he is the eternally happy creator who out of his infinite happiness created us to enjoy that infinite happiness the psalmist is right in your presence is the fullness of joy in your right hand our pleasures forever but there is also because of the destructive power of human sin great sorrow over the world and over the church how many times throughout scripture do we hear the phrase and it grieved the holy one Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the multitudes who were bringing their sick to him he had compassion on them literally it is his guts got ripped up inside him that's the wonder of the gospel the living God chooses to enter into the human pain and make that pain his own

John tells us that Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus and the word that John uses means to be so overcome that one's chest heaves Jesus stands outside the grave of Lazarus and he is so overcome that his chest begins to heave why?

because of the pain he could sense in the heart of Mary and Martha Lazarus sisters but also because of the pain in his own heart the heaving of his chest is the creator now in our flesh crying out it doesn't have to be this way it ought not be this way and get close to that heart and we cannot but be moved with the same sorrow Luke tells us that as Jesus was coming into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as he came around the turn and could see the city that he began to weep why?

Jesus is the king he's the sovereign king why would he weep? after regaining his composure Jesus says because you do not know the things that make for peace oh Jerusalem Jerusalem Jerusalem how often I wanted to gather you to myself as a hen gathers her chicks but you were not willing get close to that heart and feel what it feels for the cities of this world and you cannot help but mourn congratulations right on right side up right side up are those who mourn with the man of sorrows it means that you have allowed God to break your heart with the things that break his heart it means that you are alive blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted comforted when in the end when the kingdom comes in all of its fullness when as the voice says from the throne to the apostle John

[27 : 14] God shall wipe away all the tears from their eyes there shall no longer be any death there shall no longer be any mourning or crying or pain anymore even so Lord come but we shall be comforted before the end how the word translated comfort here is the Greek word parakaleo it's a wonderful word it's a rich word it does mean to console but that's its rarest meaning of all its primary meaning is to exhort to encourage to embolden it's used of soldiers cheering one another on as they go into battle this is actually the original meaning of the English word comfort comfort comes from com fortis com with fortis strength strengthened by being with parakaleo is also used of exciting a person and of fomenting a fire that flames into a great fire Jesus is saying that as we dare to open ourselves up to the grief in our souls and the grief around us our hearts are strangely warmed and strangely strengthened how why well from the verb parakaleo comes the noun paraklete ring a bell does it ring a bell paraklete is the word

Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit with whom and in whom he baptizes his disciples before the end when God will wipe away all tears the paraklete who is the personal embodiment of the kingdom of God comes alongside those who are mourning when we become aware of the depth of our sin the paraklete comes and speaks the word of comfort my child Jesus paid it all your sin is forgiven your iniquity is covered by the blood of the lamb when we become aware of just how broken the world is the paraklete speaks the word of comfort reminding us that the father and the son are at work even now that creation is groaning only because it is in childbirth that the turmoil in the world is due to the invading kingdom of God being resisted when we feel despair over not reaching the kingdom's goal the paraklete comes and speaks the word of comfort the kingdom has come the kingdom will come and nothing will stand in its way as you know those of you who know me well

I have great vision of what can be which means that I live with great sorrow I live most of my life in sorrow sometimes the pain that I feel around me threatens to crush me and sometimes I want to say God just take away the vision I don't want to be able to see as clearly anymore and then I sense the paraklete come and I sense him whisper to my soul the vision is true it doesn't have to be this way it won't be this way do not carry the weight of making it come to be hang in there trust Jesus trust the father and then I hear the spirit speak the word he spoke to the prophet Habakkuk the vision pants toward the goal it will not fail though it tarries wait for it for it certainly will come it will not delay and when we feel the broken heart of God the paraklete comes alongside us and reminds us that it is the heart of God of God and that therefore what God says to us weeping may last for the night but joy comes in the morning is true for God too

God will have his way everlasting joy will be the everlasting state of being for you and me and for God if the first beatitude blesses those who are poor before God and who own their utter helplessness the second beatitude blesses those who are vulnerable before the pain of the world and who dare to feel it surprise surprise surprise it is they who are going to experience the comfort of the embrace of the living God it is they who in any circumstance will be able to sing when peace like a river attendeth my soul my way when sorrow like sea billows roll whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say it is well it is well with my soul blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted too pray but hey that so in can dé