

"But I Won't be Weeping Long"

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Preacher: David Parker

[0 : 00] The Beatitudes are those qualities or characteristics which identify, in one way of putting it, as the spiritual DNA of the people of the kingdom.

And if I could just remind you that the Beatitudes are like links in a chain. They're not individual statements addressed to eight different groups of people.

They are eight links of a chain that are addressed to the people of the kingdom. They're a portrait and a profile of kingdom people.

Now, this evening we're looking at this second Beatitude, Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. And we're going to look at three things from this Beatitude.

We're firstly going to ask, who are those mourners? And secondly, why do they mourn? And thirdly, what comfort are they promised?

[1 : 00] But before we plunge into the Beatitude itself, I want to make some preliminary comments on the human tragedy of mourning.

Perhaps like me, you read today that Spain has declared from today, 10 days of mourning for the thousands of people that have died because of the coronavirus.

And you know, a large part of the history of the human race consists of its mourning. Only because of its wars and killing fields, but also because of the conditions under which so many of our fellow human beings live.

Those dictators and tyrants and empire builders, imperialists, the slave trade, the displaced, the refugees, as examples.

All of this has contributed to the mourning of the human race. And we've all heard the saying, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

[2 : 15] And since the end of the Second World War, we talk, don't we, of the peace we've had. But who is this we that have had this peace? What about the wars in Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, to men but a few?

Even Israel in biblical times and since becoming a state in 1948 has had its history of war and killing fields, including women, children, animals, land and infrastructure.

Perhaps Israel's greatest mourning originated at the time of the exile and continued after AD 70 through the dispersion and beyond.

We all know these words in the psalm, by the rivers of Babylon, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. And in the Bible, in these biblical stories of all that slaughter, we read those stories, sometimes I wonder, often with a certain detachment.

They're just words, aren't they? We gloss over them. It's okay, we think, God is absolutely righteous. Yes, he is. But can you imagine the great mourning that such wholesale slaughter brought both to Israel and to other nations?

[3 : 47] Let me throw in perhaps a surprising philosophical conundrum for you to chew over, just to keep our brain cells working. Is X right because God wills it?

Or does he will it because it is right? And of course, in our own time, as I said in my prayer, millions are mourning, not only because of the coronavirus, but for all the reasons that I've just outlined.

Finally, there's the universal specter of death bringing its trail of so much mourning. So my point here is that a great part of our history, our human history, is a history of mourning as individuals, communities, races, nations, and even as is the case right now, the entire world.

No wonder Job said, human beings are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards.

But not only is this mourning a great part of the story of the human race, it's a great part of the story of Christians and Christianity.

[5 : 08] According to Christianity Today, eight Christians are killed in the world every single day.

182 churches are attacked every week. 300 Christians are put in prison every month. Now, of course, it's not only Christians who are persecuted.

There's several other groups that are persecuted of other faiths, of no faith. With these thoughts in mind, we're going to be examining this remarkable statement, which could be translated, happy are they that are sad or mourning or grieving.

Let me, I want you to imagine the scene as Jesus stood there and uttered those beatitudes. Apart from the masses and the disciples, no doubt there were also present the great, the powerful, the rich, the educated, the religious elite, all furtively listening with disdain and content to this self-styled teacher and his ridiculous pronouncements.

Can you hear them muttering? He's already uttered something as mad as blessed of the poor.

What's he going to come out with now?

[6 : 44] Well, they didn't have long to wait. Calmly and with great authority, Jesus declared, blessed are they that mourn.

You can almost hear the gasps, can't you, of the literati. What's he talking about now? Imagine the shock today if any of us went to the centre of Glasgow, to Buchanan Street, and stood beneath the statue of Donald Dewar and declared and shouted out to the crowds moving up and down Buchanan Street, happy are they that are sad, blessed are they that mourn.

I reckon that we would still experience the same kind of shock even in our day. let's try then and see if we can discover what Jesus meant by this remarkable statement, happy are they that are sad or mourning or grieving.

First question is this, who are those happy mourners? They are people who have responded responded to the call of Jesus Christ?

And really, the first question I think all of us need to ask ourselves, have I responded to the call of Jesus Christ?

[8 : 23] Have I heard that call from the great mourner himself? We heard Colin telling us about the experience of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

His whole being was gripped with shock and sorrow. But yes, those who are happy mourners, who are blessed, are those who have responded to the call of Jesus.

And they are also people who live not for any kingdom in this world. That's not where their hope is. But they live for the great kingdom that Jesus brought and ushered in with his own coming. and his own incarnation and his own life and ministry and work. They are people who see in Jesus more than a man.

Not less than a man, but certainly more than a man. And more than a prophet. And more than a teacher. I said a moment ago that Jesus is the great mourner.

[9 : 44] God. And of course, he is the one that embodies perfectly every single chain of those beatitudes. Every link in the chain, I should say.

Remember when he heard about the death of Lazarus. And remember when eventually he arrived. And the shortest verse in the Bible is Jesus wept.

And when he wept and mark you, it was public weeping. And it's not without interest that here we have the man Jesus, the male Jesus, the one who upturned the moneylenders' tables in the temple. But here he is publicly weeping. And those people who witnessed that made this observation. Look how he loves.

And that surely reminds us that mourning, which is part of the human story and part of the story of the disciples of Jesus, is something that is elicited elicited by genuine love.

[11 : 03] Where there is love, there is pain, and there is sorrow, and there is mourning. And of course Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Yes, who then are these happy mourners?

They are people whose spiritual DNA includes mourning. May I ask you again, are you one of those mourners?

Have you responded to the call of Jesus? Do you live for the kingdom of God? Do you see in Jesus something more than a prophet or a teacher or a man?

Can you see in that one that uttered this statement, here is God in the flesh? But secondly, it brings me to my second point, why do they mourn?

And let me just say that the language that is used in translating this word mourn for us in our English Bibles, the language indicates that this is something that is ongoing.

[12 : 17] It's not just something that happens out of the blue or out of the orderly, it's actually part of the ordinary DNA of the people of God.

Why are they grieving so much? Why are they mourning? They mourn firstly because they're poor in spirit and they mourn because of the poverty of their affection and their commitment and their dedication to their Lord and Saviour.

They take the words of that hymn in their minds, Lord, it is my chief complaint that my love is weak and faint, yet I love thee and adore O for grace to love thee more.

But they not only grieve and weep for their own spiritual poverty, they grieve and weep for the world's pain and evil.

And we're often, we think of that verse in the New Testament that says we don't sorrow as others. And our normal response to it probably is well that's good, so we have help in our sorrow and we're strengthened and even blessed in our sorrow.

[13 : 52] But don't forget what that verse says. Others then have a hopeless sorrow, a hopeless mourning, a hopeless weeping, if there's one thing I wonder if this virus has done, it has perhaps helped people to see more clearly what we might call the unity of the human race.

And this great statement found in the Bible, am I my brother's keeper? The answer is yes. peace. And there's something wrong in my mind with Christians who do not or cannot or will not mourn for the world's pain and evil.

So they mourn for their own poverty, they mourn for the world's pain and evil, and they mourn for their own fellow believers. Paul tells us, does he not, to weep with those that weep?

And for all those that don't yet know that man of sorrows, our families, our neighbours, our friends, our community of Glaswegians, our community in Scotland, our communities up and down the land. And so this mourning is normative. Now, it might seem a very gloomy message, this, but here is the interesting thing.

[15 : 32] That mourning does not cancel or eradicate the deep and wonderful joy that every believer has. That joy cannot be taken from us.

It's the joy of the Lord. It is safe in his hands. I heard someone today in the news, I think it was the UK government, it could have been Boris Johnson, and he was saying, we're going to wrap our arms around the workers to help them.

And it made me think of those everlasting arms that wrap themselves around every single believer, every single spiritual mourning one.

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As Paul put it in another place, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Which brings me to my final point. What comfort is promised here?

[16 : 42] And before I just mention that, I want you to just pick up the mood of these words that Jesus uses.

The mood is absolute certainty. You could almost put it like this, they and they alone will be comforted.

there is this ring, isn't there? There is this air and atmosphere of absolute authority from those statements of Jesus.

They and they alone will be comforted. You see, there is going to be a great reversal and they're comforted now, but they're not fully comforted.

But there is one day going to be a great reversal, as Luke puts it. And all those that laugh now, and all those that live for the moment, and all those that live for just shots of pleasure, there's going to be a great reversal.

[18 : 00] The language is certain, they and they alone. Now, the word itself conveys the idea of someone drawing alongside us and coming beside us.

There is a very interesting statement in the book of Job. book. And it says that when his friends first came to him, it says this, they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights.

No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was. God, the Holy Spirit, is going to draw near to his people and sit down with them, so to speak, and minister to them.

He's done that, as you know, at the incarnation, and he's done that on the cross, and he's done that in sending the Holy Spirit. It is the weight of glory, this comfort, that awaits us, that Paul talks about when he says that our light affliction is not worthy of being compared with that great weight of glory

that will be revealed in us.

It is the coming again, is it not, of our Savior that comforts us. It is the nearness of the whole God, is it not, Father, Son, and Spirit.

[19 : 57] And this comfort is offered to us now because Jesus said, I am with you. As I conclude, what are the lessons that we can take away from this great beatitude, blessed are they that mourn?

I think one is that authentic, real, biblical Christianity is cruciform, it's Christ-shaped, it has mourning in its spiritual DNA.

And I think another lesson is that the only blessed mourners, ultimately, are those who have responded to the call of Jesus.

And I also think that in mourning, which has to be part of the life of the people of God, is evidence of our love for God and our love for our neighbor.

And let us never forget that we never mourn alone, because the great mourning one is never away from us.

[21 : 20] This promise of comfort is as certain as God is himself. are you a blessed mourner?

One day all our mourning will be wiped away by God. Are you mourning right now? Can I ask you to bring that mourning to the God of all comfort?

Amen.