

"Blessed Are Those Who Mourn" Matthew 5:4

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you still have your Bibles, would you please take them out and open up to the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5. A couple Sunday evenings ago, I preached here and I said that every time I'm in this pulpit, we're starting a new sermon series.

You've got the I Am Statements and the Life of Jesus and the Cross of Christ. All these different sermon series are swirling through, but we know you guys are capable. And so what we're going to be doing every time I'm here in the pulpit is going through the Beatitudes of this first bit of Matthew, Chapter 5.

It's the first part of the most famous sermon ever preached, what's called Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And the word Beatitude, we said, it comes from the Latin, Beatus.

And what Beatus means is blessed or happy. It's the first word of verses 3 to 11. We argued that a good translation can actually be flourishing.

Flourishing, happy, blessed, the first one we looked at was are the poor in spirit. And the original Greek there, it's this word makarios. And the reason I mention that, it's important, is because there's a difference in the New Testament and the Hebrew equivalent word between blessing.

[1 : 1 6] A lot of times blessing, there's two different aspects to it. You can think, and there's two different words. There's a blessing that you give to somebody. Right? It's an act being done to somebody.

So God's blessing, his favor be upon you. A really good example of this happens every week when you come to worship. At the very end of the service, what does the minister do?

Gives the benediction. The benediction is a prayer of blessing. That God would act according to his promises. That he would bring to bear the life in covenant relationship with him.

So it's something being done to you. Blessed, though, this word that gets used, makarios, in the New Testament and other places, it's not being something done to you. Rather, it is an observation.

It's looking at something and saying, that right there is the good life. That is flourishing. That is actually happiness.

[2 : 1 4] That person is, as the young people say, hashtag blessed. Right? I don't know if they still say that. I guess they used to. And maybe a helpful way of thinking about this idea of blessed that's being put out in the Beatitudes by Jesus is to think of the opposite.

So the opposite of a blessing, something that God gives to people, right, would be a curse. Would be a curse. That's what you see in Deuteronomy. There's blessing and curses in covenant relationship.

Do this and there's blessing. Do this and curse. The opposite of blessed is woe. Woe to you. In fact, in the Gospel of Luke, in his account of the Sermon on the Mountain, Luke 6, do you know what immediately follows the Beatitudes?

Jesus' woes that he gives. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. In the Gospel of Matthew, he kind of separates it out a little bit more, and it doesn't come until chapter 23.

There's these seven woes that Jesus announces upon the scribes and the Pharisees. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

[3 : 31] People are coming who are poor in spirit, and they're being kept out. That is not flourishing. That is not the good life. Woe.

Woe is the opposite of a beatitude, because it describes a way of being in the world that doesn't result in flourishing, but loss, grief, destruction. And so the Beatitudes, then, that they are not, do these things, be extra poor in spirit, or today, blessed are those who mourn.

If you just cry a lot, if you get all up in your feelings, and you weep a bunch, then God, oh, here comes the blessing. If you just do that enough, if you work that up inside you, then you're going to find blessing.

But rather, they're an observation about the way people are who have already found blessing. And so what they do here, then, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, is it's starting by describing this upside-down nature of the king and his kingdom.

There's a Jewish rabbi named David Foreman. I don't know if this thought's original to him, but he talks about this thing called the lullaby effect. The lullaby effect is basically what he's saying is that there are certain stories and songs and phrases that they become so, just kind of common parlance, they become so normal in life, they kind of just become so routine that they lose kind of their initial meaning, their original meaning, their significance, right?

[4 : 58] And so he calls it the lullaby effect because, you know, think of an example. Rock-a-bye baby. In the treetop. When the wind blows, the cradle will rock. When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall. Down will come baby, cradle, and all.

What? Why are we singing this to our children? Who got a ladder and put a baby in a cradle at the top of a tree, right? And then we're, like, singing it like this sweet lullaby, and it loses its, you know, the power of what it is.

Here's what I want to suggest is that something like the Beatitudes, it comes, and maybe if I read through it, when I read through it earlier, you were listening to it, and it did. It just sounded kind of, like, nice and Christian.

Like, if you've been around church, you're like, yeah, that's stuff Christians say, right? It's kind of cute. It's kind of quaint. It's kind of nice. It sounds spiritual. Jesus' original audience. This is earth-shattering.

This is kingdom-inverting what he's saying here. This morning, Jesus says in our second Beatitude, happy are the sad. Flourishing are those who weep.

[6 : 07] Before we look at it more closely, though, let's pray for the preaching of God's word. Would you pray with me? Father, we ask that your upside-down kingdom would come.

Through the preaching of your word, it would manifest itself in our imaginations and relationships, personal piety, the way we speak, and our heart commitments.

May we encounter the king as we listen into your word. May we learn our role as citizens of the kingdom. We ask this in the name of our king, Jesus.

Amen. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Two questions for us that we're going to use as an outline in order to unpack this short Beatitude.

The first question is, what kind of mourning is Jesus talking about? And then the second question is, what are the promises attached to it? What kind of mourning is Jesus talking about? And then what's the promise that is attached to this kind of mourning?

[7 : 11] So the first question, what kind of mourning is Jesus talking about? Perhaps it's obvious, but maybe we can start by saying what kind of mourning Jesus is not talking about.

He doesn't say, blessed are those with a stiff upper lip. Blessed are those who keep calm and carry on no matter what is happening in life.

Now, don't get me wrong. There is a virtue to being resolute in the face of hardship, right? But also, there are things in this life that we must mourn.

On the other hand, Jesus is also not saying, blessed are the morose. Blessed are the eors of this world. C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Silver Chair*, there's a character named Puddleglum.

And Puddleglum is exactly like his name sounds. He comes from a country where it rains a lot, C.S. Lewis says. And Puddleglum is glum.

[8 : 21] Puddleglum, you could describe him, he would be the person who with every silver lining he could find the cloud within it. That's not what the Beatitude envisions.

It's not blessed are the puddleglums, blessed are the pessimists. Okay, so what is the mourning, the kind of mourning that Jesus is talking about? There's actually three different approaches to this.

There's three different kind of major ways of interpreting this Beatitude. I'm going to tell you all three of them. The first one, you know, some commentators, they take the approach that what Jesus is talking about, blessed are those who mourn, the kind of mourning he's talking about is a sort of general mourning at the sorrows of this world.

There's enough things in life that are going to fill you with weeping. There's poverty, there's sickness, there's oppression, there's death. And they interpret it this way for good reasons, there's a few reasons.

First off, is the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Right before Matthew 5, you know what comes? Matthew 4. It's always good to read before the passage just to look at it to note some context.

[9 : 25] And what's happening at the very end of Matthew 4 before the Sermon on the Mount? All of the hurting and the lame, those in pain, those crippled, those oppressed by demons are being brought to Jesus.

And he's healing them and bringing the comfort of his healing to them. Also, the background for a lot of what the Gospel writer Matthew is going to talk about in the ministry of Jesus and the Beatitudes, you can find it in the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

And so Jesus, he quotes it in chapter 4 to kind of start his ministry. He quotes Isaiah 9. And in the book of Isaiah, there's a servant of the Lord, this messianic figure who the Lord has anointed to do what?

Isaiah 61, bring good news to the poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit, right? To bind up the brokenhearted, to comfort all who mourn, to give the oil of gladness instead of mourning.

Kind of sounds like the second Beatitude, right? And in that context, it's speaking about God's people seem to be oppressed and to be suffering and to living in the miseries of this life.

[10 : 38] And the good news is that a king is on the way. Someone is going to come to undo those things. He's come to restore. He's going to bring restoration to those hurting and waiting.

It makes sense, right? They're grieving because their situation is awful, but there's better days ahead. They long for God's reign to come. And what Jesus says when he says the kingdom of God is at hand is God's reign is here.

That's the first approach. Makes sense, right? The second approach doesn't say that the first one is unbiblical, but it says it narrows the scope of the second Beatitude.

It says that the mourning that Jesus is talking about in this Beatitude is specifically mourning one's own sin. So personally, right? And the reason they say this is because the first Beatitude doesn't just say blessed are the poor in their pockets, but blessed are the poor in spirit, right?

Poverty of heart is what it's talking about. Realizing one's need due to sin. The blessed person, after they've realized that, they now mourn their sin.

[11 : 48] So the first Beatitude is confession. The second Beatitude then is contrition. Not just confessing your need, but also mourning it. And guess where they would go?

They'd go to Isaiah also to make this case. It's a place like Isaiah 6 where the prophet Isaiah, he encounters the holy God and what does he say? Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips.

Right? So they say the mourning that Jesus is talking about, it's personal grief over personal sin. Third interpretation, one I think the best saved the best for last for you.

It's actually a combination of the first two. I'm going to be Switzerland here, right? If you read the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, it is very clear that Jesus wants us to see our need.

Your righteousness, it has to surpass that of the Pharisees. It can't just be outward, it also has to be inward. His big announcement when he inaugurates his ministry in chapter 4 is to do what?

[12 : 49] Repent! The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent! Turn away from this way of living. Turn away from your sin and turn towards God. You have to listen to this news.

So, repentance is key. And part of the comfort envisioned in the prophet Isaiah is for an oppressed hurting people, right? But the reason that they're in exile and they're oppressed originally is because of their personal sin.

So, here's what I want to say. We don't have to actually choose between the two. Again, prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 40, comfort, comfort my people says your God. Oh, comfort. That sounds like this beatitude.

Right? Why? Why comfort your people? Her warfare is ended. Alright? That's suffering in general, right? The sufferings and miseries of this life. But also, comfort because her iniquity is pardoned.

So, I think we could say it this way. Blessed are those who mourn their own sin and all of its effects. Blessed are those who mourn their own sin, mourn sin, personal sin, and all of its effects.

[13 : 59] And mourning our own sin, it is like the tip of the spear. You're not going to be doing the type of mourning that Jesus is talking about if there's not actually a contrition for your own sin, a grief over your own sin, but then it broadens out after that.

This is what happens when we see the effect of sin in our own life. Right? We come and we mourn our own sin and then we're like, oh no, this is like had effect in my family and relationships and my future.

And then we see sin in other people and we grieve that and then we realize that then has spread out and had effects in life and all the miseries of this life, the suffering comes because of sin.

And so we mourn. Maybe one way to ask this, because as you go through the Beatitudes, what we're going to connect them to is the life of Jesus. Matthew wants you to see what Jesus is saying here is going to come true in his life.

Right? These Beatitudes. He is the one who is poor in spirit. He empties himself of all but love and bleeds for Adam's helpless race.

[15 : 03] So we can come and we can ask, what does Jesus mourn then in the Gospels? A couple examples. The first one, right after he pronounces the woes on the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 that I was talking about earlier, he goes and he overlooks the city of Jerusalem and what happens?

He weeps over it. He weeps for it. He's seeing Jerusalem as a part of the whole of the people of Israel. They're walking away. They're not receiving the king and he mourns that.

It's like the psalmist says, streams of tears flow from my eyes for your law is not obeyed. We live in a city. I keep reading different reports of how big Glasgow is.

I guess it's how big you draw the boundaries. Is it 1.4 million? Is it 2 million? I don't know. But there's been some studies done recently and it's I think less than 1.5% of the population attend a Bible-believing church on a Sunday morning.

We long for Glasgow to flourish and we mourn that this is the case. That it's not returning to its king and his kingdom. God will be and we're poor in spirit too.

[16 : 13] We're not coming at this and going, oh, those poor people, I feel so sad for them. No, we're poor in spirit. We realize it's not in our own effort but because we have received grace and we long for other people to encounter that grace also.

That changes your approach to evangelism, right? If that is, if we start with mourning sin and its effects in the world, evangelism doesn't start with trying to win an argument.

It starts with tears. That this person is outside of the kingdom and they don't know the king. And we think that's the biggest tragedy in the world.

What else does Jesus mourn? There's another example. The shortest verse in the English translation of your Bible is John 11 35. You know what it says? Jesus wept.

He's at the tomb of his friend Lazarus and you know what he's about to do? He's about the big resurrection. Hey, check this out. Lazarus, come forth from the tomb. Why has he got time for tears?

[17 : 19] There's awesome things about to happen but Jesus, he mourns and he weeps over death. You see him mourning over the sins of a people and its effects in the world.

You see him mourning over death. We too need to mourn death. You never make peace with death. For sure we have hope in the face of it but it is not natural.

It is not the way things are supposed to be and we know this and so we mourn. Before moving to our second question though, let me apply this by asking a question.

Wouldn't we all agree that it would be very weird and kind of idiosyncratic for a group of people to come into a church building and to sing psalms of lament on a Sunday and then never in the rest of their week actually lament anything?

That would be a little odd, right? And so what do we need to do then as we go throughout this week? We need to fight so that we do not become desensitized to sin in our own lives and in the world.

[18 : 34] We can't treat the cancer of sin like it's a common cold. There's a Puritan named Thomas Watson and he wrote till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.

You kind of have three options when it comes to seeing the reality of sin in this world. The first one is you can totally ignore it. You can pretend it's not there.

You can pretend it's not bad. You can kind of try to sanitize it, turn your face away from it, try to just ignore it in all its forms, make excuses for it. This is why people do drugs.

This is why people go to alcohol. This is why people buy a bunch of stuff trying to make it feel like things are okay. They get plastic surgery, we get callous to suffering. Why? Because we just want to ignore sin because we don't really want to lament, we don't really want to mourn.

The second option is you can look at it and you can be totally overwhelmed and be sent into a tailspin of despair. Because it is awful. And when you see it, when you really see it, I mean your own sin, for the offense that it is to a holy God, when you see the effects of that sin in this world, I have walked through the slums of Ethiopia, it stinks.

[19 : 52] It is awful. When you really see that, it overwhelms you. It can throw you. It's probably happened to many of us.

The third option is you can lament it to God and seek the comfort of Christ in repentance and prayer and community. So, to be the one who mourns is to be a person who is grieved by their sin and the effects of sin in this world.

You know, seeing how things are not the way that they're supposed to be. In here first, in the heart, and then out there in the world. If you're only seeing it out there, start over.

Start over. Start back at the Beatitudes, right? Second question, then, what's the promise attached to this Beatitude? Become a Christian.

You're going to be sadder than you've ever been. Yay! Right? What's the promise that makes this Beatitude actually good? Blessed are those who mourn. Happy are the same.

[20 : 54] How is that good? How is that the good life? How is that flourishing? It's simply this. The one who mourns will be comforted in a way beyond what they could possibly ever dare to hope.

The reason that we're blessed and flourishing isn't because we're masochistic, but because we are prepared to receive the very life of the kingdom. When we mourn in this way, the very comfort of the king, that comes to us.

That is the promise. Not less than that, the comfort of King Jesus. J.R. Tolkien in his books, The Lord of the Rings, there's this great line when it's describing the king.

It says, The hands of the king are hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known. The hands of the king are healing hands.

The hands of the king are healing hands. Hands that bless children in the gospels. Hands that beckon people to come to him. Hands that touch lepers who are unclean, and he cleanses them.

[22 : 03] Hands that grab the tiny hand of a little girl who is sleeping the sleep of death, and says to her, wake up, get up. Those are the hands that are promised to comfort you.

One writer puts it this way, he says, mourning does something wonderful to you. The sad realities that cause you to mourn also cause you to cry out for the help, rescue, forgiveness, and deliverance of a redeemer.

Jesus said that if you mourn, you will be comforted. He's not talking about the comfort of elevated feelings, he's talking about the comfort of the presence and grace of a redeeming king, who meets you in your mourning, hears your cries for help, comes to you in saving mercy, and wraps arms of eternal love around you.

It's the comfort of knowing that you are forgiven, you are being restored, now living in a reconciled relationship with the one who made you and now living with your destiny secure.

My encouragement to you is if you're here this morning and this morning, you don't know these hands, the healing and comfort of these hands, my encouragement to you is to admit your poverty of spirit and to mourn your sin and the promise is that comfort will come.

[23 : 29] You will not be overlooked, you will not be skipped over, that you will receive the very comfort and forgiveness and love of the king. Are you sorrowful over sin this morning?

Run to him in repentance. receive the comfort of forgiveness. Are you overwhelmed by the heartache of what is going on in the world in your own life, in the life of your children and your spouse and your family and this world and in the church?

Go to him in prayer. This is an invitation in this beatitude to bring your worries, to bring your laments, to bring your mourning to him and to receive comfort.

I don't know about you, but I need help in this because sometimes I want to desensitize myself to mourning and other times I look at it and I am overwhelmed by the sin in my life and this world.

But when the promise of comfort is not just subject to the lullaby effect, where it merely sounds like a spiritual nicety that you're going to cross-stitch on a throw pillow, when instead it actually grips your heart.

[24 : 39] You can't just be normal and hang out anymore. There's something different that changes. So what could you do? I don't know. Maybe join a city group and come and bring your life, the good and the bad, and bear the suffering and mournings of one another.

Enter into it like Jesus does. Come to a prayer meeting and do that. 2.30, 7.30, this Wednesday. You need others to minister to us with the comfort of Christ in community.

We press into this because we actually believe that comfort is available, that there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. That, as we read earlier in 2 Corinthians 1, said, God is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Did you hear that? Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 1, we share in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

That's the key to the Beatitudes, that you have a king who's not just a king but a high priest, who is able to sympathize with you in your weakness and your suffering. He went through this life.

[26 : 03] He was poor in spirit. He is the suffering servant from Isaiah, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. As we said, he weeps over death.

He weeps over a city of people who are lost. Do you remember though I said what's like the tip of the spear of this mourning about sin? It's mourning over our own personal sin.

Can Jesus do that? Well, no, hold on. This is what we confess, right? He was fully man and so he is like us in every way in that he experiences the miseries of this life.

He suffered like we do even to the point of death on a cross. But also we confess that he's fully God. So he's unable to sin. Jesus isn't coming and he isn't mourning his own personal sin.

But see, there's another time that he's sorrowful that I didn't mention earlier. It's in the Garden of Gethsemane towards the end of Matthew 26.

[27 : 06] It's the night he's betrayed. The next day he's going to die. And you know what he says? My soul is sorrowful even to death. And he drops to his knees face in the dirt and weeps to his father.

There's a story I heard in a sermon a little while ago. I don't know if it's true or not. I looked it up because it was an amazing story. And some people said, yes, this actually happened. And others said, oh, we can't actually be sure.

Like, I think maybe they got it from here. I don't know. So basically what I'm saying, I don't know if it's made up or real, but the point is still there. It's this. There's this eight-year-old boy and he has a younger sister who's six and the family finds out that the daughter has leukemia and she's dying from it and the doctors say she needs a blood transfusion in order to be okay.

And so the parents come to this eight-year-old boy and they say, what we need you to do, we found out that your blood is a match for your sister. So would you give your blood so that your sister can be better?

And he says, I'll have to think about it. And he turns and he walks away and he goes to his room for the night. And the parents are kind of looking at each other like, what? Okay. I don't want these eight or whatever. And he comes out the next morning and he comes to his parents and he says, okay, I'll do it.

[28 : 27] And so they, you know, make schedule appointments and they go to the hospital and they lay him, the eight-year-old and his six-year-old sister on twin gurneys. And, you know, the nurse comes and starts an IV to take his blood and then be able to give it to his sister.

And at one point, the doctor walks in and he comes up to this boy and he asks him, he checks in on him and he asks him how he's doing. And the boy asks, how soon until I die?

See, the reason he had to take a night to think about it was because what he thought was his parents were asking by giving his blood, they were asking him to die so that his sister might live. And he comes out the next morning and says, yeah, I'll do it.

And the doctor, he gets to minister the comfort and this good news to this little boy. Let's go back to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. You know, in tears, he asks the father, how long until I die?

And the answer is tomorrow. Tomorrow. And he says, not my will, but yours be done. There's no word of consolation. There's silence.

[29 : 42] And he goes to the cross and there's no hug. Just agony and nakedness. And what we see is that this is what we deserve.

On the cross, he who never sinned knew the sorrow of our sin in a way that we never will.

But in doing this, he undoes the power of what we mourn. Sin no longer has dominion. Death has an expiration date.

The nail-marked hands of the king are healing hands indeed. And after his resurrection, what we were talking about at Pentecost, right? Jesus ascends to the throne, the right hand of his father.

And who does he send? The Holy Spirit, who he calls another comforter. The Holy Spirit is poured out into our hearts and he ministers the very comfort of Christ to us so that this beatitude is true.

[30 : 48] That your life is secure. Lord, that there is a promise that the king will return. He will not let your tears have the last word. Your sin doesn't get to have the last word.

Death doesn't get to have the last word. He promises instead that he is going to make all things new. And the promise is, how is he going to do that? What is he going to do? He himself is going to come and wipe away every tear from our eyes.

What are we going to be crying over? That he's going to come and wipe away the tears? More than ever in our life, at that day, we will grieve our sin.

And we will grieve death. And those hands, those nail-marked hands of the king will wipe away our tears of mourning.

They're going to be changed to tears of joy and flood the new creation. What is broken will be mended. What is cracked will be filled. What is bent will be straightened. Every valley will be lifted up.

[31 : 55] Every mountain laid low. The uneven ground shall become level. And the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And all flesh shall see it. And the result for God's people will be comfort.

Do you know this promise? Come to the king. His hands, his hands will heal you. They will forgive you.

They will comfort and bless you. And then when in church Christians say things, you know, these like pithy little spiritual statements like, we are the hands and feet of Christ.

You know what's going to come into our mind? It's not just any hands and feet, but nail-marked hands and feet. And we will embrace the call to enter into the mourning of this world with the comfort of Christ.

And it starts right here in a community. If we refuse to do this, to comfort one another in our affliction, then woe to us.

[32 : 57] For we know nothing of the sufferings of Christ and we know nothing of the comfort of Christ. But if we do, and we will, then blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Thanks be to God. Let's pray. Lord, you know our sin. You know our selfishness, our greed, our pride, our apathy.

Father, we grieve this before you. We mourn it. Father, we mourn that that coffins are too small. That coffins exist at all.

We mourn that people have to suffer in this life. That the effects of sin, that it touches everything, that it clings to your good creation like a virus. Lord Jesus, come quickly.

We long for the healing hands of the King to return. And in the meantime, Holy Spirit, would you bring the comfort of our King to us? Would you help us to minister that comfort as we are filled with the Spirit?

[34 : 04] That it would overflow in us entering in, not trying away. Entering in and weeping with one another and rejoicing with one another. Because in this, we will fulfill the law of Christ.

Convince us, Lord, that flourishing is going to be when we mourn. Mourn sin in all its forms. Because then we can actually receive the comfort that you give. We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen.