

# Blessed are Those who Mourn

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, this is the second sermon in our series on the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel. Today, looking at Matthew chapter 5 and verse 4, Blessed are those who mourn.

I'd just like to thank Felix for giving me that verse to preach on today. It appears to be quite an attractive, sunny kind of verse to preach on. Something of a, looks a bit glum, seems to be about a glum kind of religious experience, going around mourning all the time and soulful, conscious of our sin.

But far from a bleak and mournful expression of the Christian faith, Jesus, rather, is showing us how to live lives of the most profound joy and fulfillment possible.

He's giving us a path. I'd like to point out to you that the verse contains two parts. Both talk of emotion, the first of mourning or sadness, but the second of comfort, joy.

The first is a place we find ourselves in. The second, we are lifted into by God. You know, one of the things that leads to the greatest frustrations in people's lives is when they try to do things their way, rather than God's way.

[ 1 : 18 ] You try to change your personality traits using all sorts of pseudo-psychological props, watching Dr. Phil every afternoon. I've got a Dr. Phil desk calendar.

I read it every day. Can't make head or tails of the thing. But Jesus says to us, you can't change yourself. Only God can do that.

You try to change your life to get more satisfaction and success, but Jesus says, you can't change your life. Only God can do that.

Or you try to change the people in your life. Your husband, your wife, your children. You may be working on someone right now, trying to change them, enhance them. But Jesus says, you can't change the people in your life.

Only God can do that. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. What Jesus is telling us very simply is that you can't alter your circumstances, your personality, your life in any meaningful way, but He can.

[ 2 : 33 ] And this is how. Blessed are those who mourn. In the Old Testament, mourning takes the meaning of mourning for sin.

This is the meaning Jesus intends for His audience. The prophet Isaiah talks about a day when the Messiah will come, who will comfort all who mourn, and who will provide for all who grieve in Zion. He is talking about those who mourn for the sin of Israel. Those who see the sin of Israel for what it is, who mourn over the rebellion against their God, and who long for the coming of the Messiah, who will bring the comfort of salvation.

Now, one of the things that Jesus is doing in His teaching here is He is demonstrating to His audience the difference between the religion they have and the reality of who God is, the God that Jesus is revealing.

He's telling them, this is the kind of religion you're used to, but this is how God works. Now, the religion they would have been used to was a religion of the book and of the law code, righteousness before God, based upon performing the ritual, observing the law, doing it right, so that I stand on a soapbox of my own creating, of my obedience, my observance.

[ 3 : 59 ] And that means that at the top of the pile are the religious elite, the Pharisees, those who are closest to God because they know the law, they observe it in its detail.

That's the example of the Pharisee from the story of Luke's Gospel. The Pharisee stands up and prays, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. See what that's about? That man is celebrating himself.

That man is proclaiming his righteousness. He is standing before God and celebrating all the things he has done. All the things that make him better than anybody else.

The things that make him more spiritually advanced, which set him apart, which make him worthy to stand and look into the face of God.

[ 5 : 02 ] He celebrates himself. He figures he's done pretty well. He's put himself together. He's improved his life. He's read the seven habits of highly effective people and done them.

He works out three times a week and has a diversified stock portfolio. He's doing well. Thank you. And yet he's understood nothing of who he truly is before God.

unlike that tax collector who could not lift his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

Blessed are you who mourn. For the way that Jesus is putting before us is not a way of self-exaltation, not a way of self-actualization, but a humble heart that recognizes one's own sinfulness in the face of God's almighty righteousness.

Though we do not stand in the strength of what we have done but bow down at the foot of the cross and beg for mercy. It's a place of surrender. It's interesting because Jesus ends that story in Luke's Gospel with a beatitude similar to the one we read today, but in reverse.

[ 6 : 17 ] He says, For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. It's the same idea. The tax collector, seeing himself as he truly is before God, cannot help but weep over his sin and in the weeping finds forgiveness.

Blessed are those who mourn. For there are two fundamentally different forms of religion or spirituality at work here. One is that of the Pharisee, which is a celebration of human worthiness. It says, I can change myself. I can make myself better. I can overcome sin. It is a human-centered religion in which I stand on the soapbox of my own achievement.

My religious activity and zeal. The things I do. The person I am. The inherent goodness I have achieved. I present myself to God and say, Here I am.

It's a celebration of myself. And that form of religion occurs everywhere, all over the world, wherever human beings have gathered. In Jesus' context, it is the Pharisees, those who stand on the soapbox of their righteousness.

[ 7 : 38 ] It occurs wherever people think they can work themselves into righteousness or bliss or nirvana or heaven.

It occurs wherever people think they can win themselves a first-class ticket to heaven on the basis of something they have done or being. But every religious system, every spirituality devised by human beings has at its heart the lie that you can work your way into a higher level or blessing, that you can evolve as a human being, that you can will to be better, that you can ascend to a higher level of enlightenment so that instead of weeping over sin, we work to surpass it, all the while despising those who cannot.

It occurs in churches when people, forgetting that they are sinners saved by Jesus Christ, preach a gospel of all-inclusive love that embraces everyone and calls no one to repent of their sin.

It is in a church that believes, Genesis chapter 1, that all that God has made is good and the way that we find ourselves is the way that God has made us. I am good as I am and I present myself to God as good and repent of nothing, forgetting all along Genesis chapter 3 and the catastrophe of the fall.

Instead of mourning for sin, we bless it and call it good. It is the spirituality of our age in which men and women live their lives in a profound indifference to God and in rebellion against Him, yet consider that by the general goodness of their lives and healthiness of their living, they will, when they are at last presented before God if He exists, be admitted into the presence of heaven.

[ 9 : 32 ] This is the religion of Vancouver where we live in a beautiful city, we live good lives and hurt no one, we are a tolerant people, we are comfortable within ourselves and peaceable, we enjoy the blessings of this beautiful part of the world and if we think about God at all when we are skiing down the piste or jogging around the seawall or playing at Spanish banks, we believe that God, if there is a God, will embrace us and accept us as we are for we are good people.

We are a people who stand before God and we raise ourselves up on the strength of our own goodness and we look God in the face and say, I am worthy. But Jesus says, blessed are those

who mourn.

That's the spirituality of the tax collector. It is the acknowledgement that before God who is holy and almighty, I am powerless to deal with the sin in my life.

I am powerless to change my circumstances. It is the person who faced with the reality of who God is revealed to us by Jesus and faced with the reality of who you are, weeps over the sin, the rebellion, the alienation.

It is the person who sees their sin for what it is and weeps and mourns over the ugliness of it all. Blessed are they who mourn.

[ 11 : 14 ] For they shall be comforted. For we don't end with mourning, we go on to comfort. But notice while we mourn, that's something we do, that's a place we have to come to, we shall be comforted.

The language is passive. There is something here that is being done for us. It is what God does for us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And this is very important for it means that religion or salvation or spirituality is not something that I do before God. It is not about me standing before God with my head held high and saying, here I am.

It is about what God does for me. It's about what God does in me. It's about what God does through Jesus Christ. In Romans, the Apostle Paul writes, therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's the work of the Messiah. The work of the Messiah is to bring comfort and salvation to his people. It means that as we bow down before God in recognition of who he is, it is Christ who lifts us up.

[ 12 : 33 ] It is as if we have our faces down in the dust at the foot of the cross and we are begging for forgiveness and Christ reaches down and lifts us up.

Christ dusts us off. Christ makes us clean. Christ saves us. For God does not leave us in mourning. God did not leave Israel in mourning but sent his Messiah. He does not leave us dead in our sins but makes us alive in Jesus Christ. And that is the difference between a religion created by human beings and that which is revealed to us by Jesus Christ.

In the religion of the Pharisee the only comfort I have is that which I create on my own. If you are a Pharisee you must obey the law code.

If you are a Buddhist you must work your way along stages of enlightenment hoping to reach the end. And if you are from Vancouver you must be a nice person. But what God offers to us is a joy and a comfort unlike anything we could earn on our own.

[ 13 : 46 ] Because it will take us from this life. It reaches out to us where we are and will carry us into everlasting life. It is a comfort that comes from knowing ourselves to be sinners saved by Jesus Christ.

It comes from God and is given to us when we throw ourselves at his mercy and beg him to make us clean. It is the gift of God to the human race who announces his Messiah with these words, comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

The glory of the Lord will be revealed. The God who says, as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you. It's what God does for us.

It is our salvation. For there is a comfort that comes from God and is given by him through his Messiah, Jesus Christ, which is a salvation that is sure and a forgiveness that is genuine.

Never again do we need to live our lives addicted to sin and condemned to death, for it is in God's salvation that we are made alive in him. Our comfort comes from the Messiah who holds us in his arms, but it is a passive place, that place where we surrender.

[ 15 : 08 ] The place where I surrender my life to Jesus Christ. The place where I surrender my struggle with anger to God. The place where I surrender my struggle with God.

The place where I surrender my anguish over my broken life. Where I surrender my husband, my wife, or my child to God. the place where I surrender and rest in the comfort of Jesus Christ.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. It is about the greatest joy and the most profound comfort we can know, because this is where true faith begins.

Yes, at a place of mourning over our sin, but giving way to a glorious comfort given to us by God through Jesus Christ. Christ. And Jesus means for us never to live in the vanity and frustration of making ourselves worthy to stand in the presence of God.

Consider your life. For there is no greater frustration than doing things your way and finding they do not work out.

[ 16 : 22 ] There is no greater emptiness than reaching after high personal goals and upon attaining them finding they do not satisfy. Try, if you will, changing the circumstances of your life, you find yourself to be powerless.

Many people live their lives with the anguish of believing that they are not worthy, that they have lived lives that are so distorted and messed up, they are beyond redemption.

But Jesus says, that's the way it is for every human being, not just you. That's the state of everyone before him. That is a condition that he alone can rectify.

He alone can change you. Jesus can heal that which is broken. God can redeem that which is lost. Through Jesus Christ, God can take the disastrous decisions, the abusive childhood, the intractable problem, the broken health, the big mistakes you've made, and turn them around, and redeem you, and comfort you.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. For this is how God works. It is not the way of unlimited potential, but the way of humility.

[ 17 : 46 ] It is not the glow of human praise, but the true joy of being a sinner, saved by Jesus Christ. It is the cry of the heart that cries out, just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me.

Amen.