

Mourning yet Happy!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2023

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Tonight we're going to be looking at verse 4, Matthew chapter 5 and at verse 4. We read through from the beginning of the chapter as far as verse 4.

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain. When he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. And so on, Beatitudes as we call them. These verses in Matthew's Gospel as part of, or the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

Verses which I think if you're my age you probably learned them in school. As was the practice at the time. But sadly that's no longer, at least commonly, the practice.

However, the verses are very easy to remember. But there are verses which, as you very well know, are extremely challenging. And at first sight, some of them, such as this one, might even seem self-contradictory.

[1 : 09] Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. How can you speak at the same time of someone or people who are mourning, actively mourning, and at the same time say they are blessed, or even happier, which is part of the meaning of that word blessed.

Not happy in a worldly sense, but happy in a spiritual sense. And it's as you go on through the Beatitudes that you then really realize that what Jesus was speaking about were spiritual qualities or spiritual exercises.

He doesn't just speak about the poor. In verse 3, he says, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And so it's obvious from these few verses themselves, hunger and thirst for righteousness, that he's talking about spiritual things.

He's talking about spiritual appetite. Talking about spiritual movements of our hearts. Our spiritual vision. Our spiritual mourning. Our spiritual regard of those who are in need of our assistance.

All of these things really are very much the practicalities of a Christian life, but they stem from the condition of our heart, the condition of our souls.

[2 : 27] And that inner spirit, that inner condition is really emphasized there throughout these Beatitudes then. And you can take that to this verse, verse 4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

And as we're saying that this is primarily a spiritual thing, it doesn't obviously mean that mourning in the usual sense of it is something that never carries any blessing with it.

That's not what we conclude from it. But this spiritual mourning, which we'll try and bring out in its meaning in a few moments, this spiritual mourning is something that is assured of comfort.

And not just comfort sometime or other after it, but very often and almost always comfort along with it or alongside it. If you actually ask how that is so in the Christian life, well, we'll hopefully see that as we go through it.

And in fact, it is an indicator of a work of grace in your heart or a mark of grace in your heart or in our hearts if we can actually follow these in a spiritual fashion.

[3 : 33] If you can have some experience or insight of what it is to mourn spiritually, then you have an idea as to what it is to hunger and thirst for righteousness and to be a meek who will inherit the earth and so on.

They're all connected with the reality of sin. They are all connected in some way or other with the reality and the workings of sin.

Because in this one, blessed are those who mourn, that reality of sin is behind the spiritual mourning with which we are familiar as Christians.

That the Lord was directing the disciples here to consider their blessedness when they were able to mourn spiritually in every way in which that mourning is appropriate and in which we find a benefit from it.

It's true for the individual, it's true for our society, it's true for our world, it's true for the church at large. That when we come to experience these beatitudes working or worked out through in our lives, then we know the blessings and the features of the blessedness that's actually mentioned along with them.

[4 : 46] So what is this mourning that Jesus spoke of here? Blessed are those who mourn. Well, the first thing to say is that it's the very opposite of worldly thinking.

Worldliness and the ways of the world does not fit mourning into its package of what is necessary, what it is thought important. None of that enters into the thinking or the actions of worldliness. The world and its thinking and the culture around us in its worldliness actually lives for pleasure. It lives for self-satisfaction. It lives for entertainment.

It lives for the workings of sin. It lives all too often in the seeds of debauchery. And it lives in such a way as is opposed willingly to holiness and to the things that God says ought to characterize our lives as human beings.

The world has no place for the doctrine of sin. No place for teaching on the fallenness of man. The world will say, how can you say that I am fallen, that I am degenerate, that I am actually in some need of being put back together and lifted up and set on a platform of righteousness?

[6 : 03] I'm quite happy the way I am. I'm a master of my own life. Why should you seek that I would change from what I want to be and what I want to continue to be? You see, there's not even an evidence there of any desire to think otherwise than in those sinful, worldly, ungodly ways.

So here, this idea of mourning and mourning in respect to sin and mourning over sin is absolutely foreign to the ways of the world.

And I'm sure you and I will have to say, most of us will have to say, it was really something that we didn't want to find true of ourselves. We didn't see where on earth this could fit into any sensible human life or practice, what benefit it could be to us to think that what we were doing in our sinful lifestyle was actually wrong.

How was it wrong? Why should it be wrong? Who was going to tell me that it was wrong? Well, here is the Lord. And remember, it's disciples that he's speaking to. He's not speaking here to the world. He's speaking to his disciples. And so when you take all of these Beatitudes together and you realize that it really, in a sense, summarizes most of the most important features of a Christian, of a believing life, that's when you begin to see how important they are, how foundational they are, but also how difficult, how impossible they are without the grace of God.

[7 : 33] And as the grace of God works in our lives, so we find that these things actually come to the fore in what we want ourselves to be. You don't want to go around anymore thinking that mourning over sin has no place in your life.

You don't want to go along with the idea that because you're now a Christian, mourning over sin is no longer relevant, as if sin had suddenly disappeared, even though it is now forgiven sin.

Nowhere do you find in the Bible, in Paul's teachings, for example, nowhere do you find him saying for a moment that being forgiven your sin means you no longer have to wrestle or fight with sin.

You know, if he had said that, or if the Bible said that, or if we thought that the Bible meant that, we would actually be despairing because we find in our lives that sin is very much a feature, even though it's forgiven, it's still a powerful force.

And that's why you come daily to God to seek his help in overcoming it and doing what Romans says, mortifying, put to death the deeds of the body.

[8 : 40] And it reminds us that even as the people of the church, as the people of God, it's very easy to lose sight of those features of the Christian life that are the most difficult to talk about, the most difficult to preach on, the most difficult to accept for ourselves, such as, blessed are those who mourn.

A recent survey in America apparently found that 65% of people who call themselves evangelicals in the USA did not believe in the doctrine of original sin.

65% of people who say they're evangelical Christians, they don't believe in the doctrine of original sin. In other words, they don't believe that we're born sinners. Now, we actually come into the world already in our hearts twisted against God.

And, of course, the Bible tells us otherwise, that we are conceived in iniquity and in sin and come into the world already as sinners in need of forgiveness and cleansing and acceptance with God. We need a doctrine of sin that fits with the teaching of the Bible. We need a doctrine of ourselves as human beings into which we can find and place the doctrine of sin as the Bible does.

[9 : 58] Aren't you glad tonight that God has shown you what you're like? That God has shown you the workings of sin so that you will come to Christ for cleansing?

That you will believe that Christ alone is able to deal with such a person as you are with your own inward and my own inward corruption? We need this doctrine of mourning over sin, the doctrine of sin over which we mourn, in order that our life, as we'll see, will develop properly.

Because otherwise, if you leave this out of your life, if you leave this as if it were no longer relevant for a Christian to mourn in the spiritual sense, you're going to have a very lopsided view of life.

You're going to have a very lopsided way of living the Christian life. And there will be some very obvious omissions in your progress as a Christian.

Think of the example of Jesus himself. Of course, Jesus had no sin of his own. And it's all the more remarkable that you find him mourning over sin. That you find him coming at times to be described in the Gospels as deeply moved in his spirit and even weeping in circumstances in which he himself found himself faced with the sinfulness, with the rejection of the world of his offer, of his preaching, of his person.

[11 : 24] Think, for example, of John chapter 11 and at verse 33 and verse 38. We've referred to this at other times in other contexts, but you remember that's when Jesus came to the grave, the sepulcher of Lazarus in John chapter 11.

And you see there at verse 33 where Jesus came, having spoken with his sister and given that wonderful confession of himself as the resurrection and the life.

And now when Mary came to where he was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how he loved him. Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

What is all that indicating? It's indicating far more than that Jesus was with these two sisters, sharing in that grief. He was. He was with them.

[12 : 39] He was beside them. He spoke to one of them. He stood alongside of Mary. No question of whether or not he was sympathetic, whether he was filled with a sense of their need and was there to support them.

That is absolutely true. But the main thing in these verses that we've read is that he was moved and deeply agitated in his spirit over the fact that there was a human being in that sepulcher who was dead.

He was mourning over the wages of sin, as he saw it in that grave that was holding the body of Lazarus, which was returning to corruption. He was mourning over the fact that the human beings that he had created in the beginning, let's remember Jesus, the Son of God, was very much involved in the creation and in the creation of human beings as well.

And he was seeing that that wonderful creation and that creature, that human being that he had created, is now lying in the throes and in the grip of death. Why? Because he became a sinner.

And a sinner who needs to face and pay the wages of sin, which is death. That's why Jesus wept.

[13 : 50] That's why he was sorrowful. Because he saw, as nobody else can see, how awful a thing sin is. What a tragedy it is for a human being who's become a sinner, having created wholly by God.

And you find the same thing, or similarly in Luke chapter 19, and verses 41 to 44, where you find Jesus coming to Jerusalem, and as he beheld the city, he wept over it.

Why did he weep over the city? Because he was clearly aware and seeing and experiencing their sin of rejecting him. Their sin of casting him out, as it were.

And refusing to acknowledge him as in any way relevant to their needs as human beings. The rejection of him as their saviour. He was mourning over the nature of sin.

He was mourning over the effects of sin. And that's where this text takes you and me as well. That we too have to mourn as we become familiar with the nature of sin, the kind of thing that sin is, the kind of thing that sin has done and is doing to human lives, the kind of thing that sees the effects of

sin, even in that world out there, in this community that we live in.

[15:16] The effects of sin and the workings of sin are all too obvious. When you open your eyes, I know we can't go beyond our own hearts. It's there. That's where we begin. That's where we start the process of thinking seriously about what sin is and what sin has done.

But then as you work out from that and see the world in which we live, what does it actually do for us? What effect does it have on us? Are we becoming immune to it? Are we so used to it that we no longer hear the noise of sinfulness?

It's possible. It can become used to even such things as God regards us debauched and sinful and twisted and wrong. Just in these very days, you'll find celebrities accused of serious wrongdoings. I'm not going to go into details as they're very obvious already in the media reports. But you look at the number of followers such people have on social media, eight million followers of somebody who lives that debauched sort of life.

What is that saying about our world? It's saying certainly that our world is in its nature sinful, but it's saying here is something to weep over. Here is something to build into our prayers and into our weepings as Jesus did with his.

[16:43] It's not become so familiar with the world out there that we fail really to give it the notice that we require to give it. Because if we do, then we ourselves will to some extent cease to mourn over our own sins as well as those of the world.

In other words, what we're saying is it's actually a mark of godliness to mourn over sin in the way in which we're describing and which the Bible means mourning in this context, mourning over sin and in respect and relation to sin.

It's a mark of godliness. It's not a mark of somehow or other being so constrained by something that you just see as a very negative view of the world.

It's a mark of godliness. Think of how Jeremiah, for example, who is known, of course, in many ways as the weeping prophet. Well, when Jeremiah was speaking or thinking of the sinfulness of his own age, you see how he began chapter 9, for example, what you have in chapter 9, my joy is, chapter 80, he's saying, my joy is gone.

Grief is upon me. My heart is sick within me. Behold the cry of the daughter of my people. That's his people. From the length and breadth of the land. Is the Lord not in Zion?

[18:10] Is her king not in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their carved images, with their foreign idols? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded. I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?

Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored? Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.

There's a prayer for you. There's a man who is mourning over the state of things in his own day. He's not holding back and saying, well, they're doing that, that they're going to pay for that someday.

No, he's taking it to himself, and he says, these are my people. These are the people that I belong to, and I must mourn for them if they don't mourn for themselves. Go back along to chapter 13.

[19:13] You'll find a similar emphasis there, verses 16 and 17 in chapter 13, where you find him addressing the people this way, hear and give ear.

Be not proud, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings darkness, before your feet stumble on the twilight mountains.

And while you look for light, he turns it into gloom and makes it deep darkness. But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride.

My eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears because the Lord's flock has been taken captive. I can't say that I've myself been in that state of mind recently where I found profound thinking on my part of the state of the world, of the needs of the world, of the sinfulness of those around us, or even looking into my own heart so that like Jeremiah, I could say, Lord, my eyes are shedding tears when I see the state of things.

Blessed are those who mourn, who mourn as part of their godly. And of course, when you go into the likes of the book of Psalms, you'll find it all over the book of Psalms, these references to the psalmist's own weeping, to his sorrow, to his Psalm 102, for example.

[20 : 43] You think he's beginning there talking about how deeply moved he is, how bitter he is in his soul, the wrenchings of his soul, and you think he's talking there about his own sinfulness, surely, or something like that.

Well, he's not leaving that out of it, but as the psalm goes on, you begin to realize he's talking about Zion and the state of Zion. And even though the light of day and of promise breaks in upon his soul, and he says, you will yet have mercy upon Zion.

You will come to hear the prayers of the afflicted. You will rebuild Zion. That's preceded by his mourning, by his discomfort, by his coming to remember his people as he mourns with them.

And the chapter we read in 2 Corinthians, what's that about? Well, it's about a report that came to the Apostle Paul as a report came back by Titus.

And Titus brought a report about the Corinthians that really gladdened the Apostle's heart. You see, the Apostle had written a letter to them in very, very strong terms. We don't have that letter.

[21 : 51] Some think it was 1 Corinthians, but I think it was another letter which doesn't belong in the Scriptures. but he says, this is how I was comforted in you, by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoice still more.

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret it. For I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice not because you are grieved, but because you are grieved into repenting.

For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. And then there's this wonderful text. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

See, there's the difference between the Christian, between the believer and the person who has absolutely no sense of purpose in grief of any kind. blessed are those who mourn, those who actually come to mourn either over their own sins or the sins of the society they belong to, such as Jeremiah was, such as the apostle was with that letter.

He was concerned for a time after he sent that letter, before Titus returned with a report on how the Corinthians had received that letter, he was concerned somehow perhaps maybe that that letter had been counterproductive.

[23 : 23] Maybe he had gone too far, maybe he had used words that were too strong, too critical. Then when Titus came back, he realized, no, that's not the case.

Yes, I made you weep, I made you grieve, I said some very harsh things, some very hard things you needed to know, but I rejoice that that led to your repentance.

And that's what godly sorrow always does. Godly sorrow always leads leads to something positive, something to do with life.

Whereas, as Paul put it, the sorrow of the world worketh death. There is no purpose, no life about it, no meaningfulness.

It's just sorrow. It's just a prelude to death forever. So be thankful tonight that God has shown you something of the spiritual mourning that's so important in our lives.

[24 : 26] And that he says, for your assurance, blessed are those who mourn. And when you come to be before God, and when you pray to God, and when you lament before God, Lord, why am I still so conscious of these sins that I confessed to you previously?

Why am I still so aware of the fact they are still with me? And they're still grievous to me. Why can't I get rid of them? And the Lord turns to you and say, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who, with a sense of their own sinfulness, bring things to me so that I can comfort them. And that's the second thing in the text, that's the other half of it.

We have to keep it balanced, of course. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. And here's the strange thing. Strange, but not strange to the Christian. Strange to the person who doesn't know the Lord or has not been converted and hasn't come to experience what it is to live by faith in Christ.

This is a strange thing, isn't it? That you find a person who is mourning in this sense is actually really happy. I don't mean happiness with the glibness or the frivolity of the world's happiness.

[25 : 41] But the happiness that comes from the contentment of heart that knows in Christ for you everything is well. It is well, it is well with my soul, as one N. Wright had put it, even though he had lost most of his family in a tragedy at sea.

It is well with my soul. And the path to happiness and the actual experience of happiness, and again, it's a thing which even we ourselves as Christians can't fully understand at this point, but it's because you know of this mourning that you appreciate the happiness that a Christian life contains. If you didn't have this mourning over sin, your happiness would be a different kind. It would be a worldly happiness. But because this is a proper spiritual mourning, the word blessed is attached to it.

Jesus is saying, you're in a very happy place. You're in a very, in a very, a comforting position when you can say that the mourning with which you mourn over sin seriously is something that God calls blessed.

The path to happiness begins at the point of mourning. In other words, put it in other words, you cannot experience the happiness, the blessedness of which this verse speaks, or the blessedness in any way in which the Bible speaks it, if you simply leave aside the mourning as no longer relevant.

[27 : 22] It just doesn't fit together, does it? But here, this mourning, this is promised, this comfort, they shall be comforted. And we don't actually need to think about comfort in when this world is over, when you get to heaven, when you're on the other side, when you're with the Lord.

Of course that's comfort. And of course there is no sorrow then at all. There is no mourning whatsoever. But the blessedness and the comfort doesn't begin then, it begins here.

It begins in the heart that knows what it is to mourn, but also knows what it is to rejoice at the same time in Christ. As you mourn over your sins, you give thanks to God that he has forgiven these sins. And that his word assures you when he has forgiven your sins, they are covered. They will never again condemn you. There's something to be happy and something to say that it belongs to your blessedness even though you're still conscious of the workings of sin that you need to confess to God every day.

So what it's saying is we can only appreciate our joy because it's connected with this godly mourning, this godly sorrow. And whatever modern theology might tell you, never actually give place to the thought that says, mourning over sin, that's puritanish, that belongs to an age that's past.

[28 : 49] That's no relevance now today as we understand things. We've come such a long way in understanding human psychology, come such a long way some theologians will tell you in understanding the Bible, what lies behind the letters and the books of the Bible.

If they had known the things that we know today, you wouldn't have a verse like that, blessed are those who mourn. Well, don't give even the slightest place to that thought in your heart.

This is Jesus. This is 100% accurate of the words of Jesus as he spoke them. And they will last for his people right through to the end of the world in their meaningfulness.

Blessed are those who mourn. and of course, to finish with, we can say that they shall be comforted most of all in heaven.

It's a wonderful thought. It's something I can't quite make the connection in my mind with, but there is a connection. And it's that the songs of heaven would be much less sweet if they weren't preceded by the songs of mourning in this life.

[30 : 09] Again, it's the principle, you see, as you know mourning over sin, as you know sorrow as a Christian in your life, as you look forward to the place where there is no sorrow, where there is no death, where there are no partings, where there is nothing at all to cause our tears to fall and weep in sorrow and in mourning, that wonderful experience of heaven is made all the more possible and real by the fact that you've known mourning in this life.

And it is those who have given place to this particular doctrine and to this great truth about the Christian life that are more, or are better positioned, if you like, to look forward to the wonderful comfort that heaven brings to us.

They shall be comforted. The Bible is full of that as well. Romans again, chapter 8, where Paul says that you are saved in hope, hope towards what is to come.

Revelation 21, verses 1 to 4, speaks about the wonders of that blessedness of heaven where there is no sorrow, where there are no tears, but they're all preceded by a life of mourning and tears and sorrow before that.

And perhaps the psalm that we sang together, as much as any, really brings into our view the prospect and the reality of that wonderful final comforting of God, where the psalm, as you remember, speaks about, even though weeping may last for a night, joy comes with the mourning.

[32 : 03] You may find your whole life is blighted by darkness. You may find that the whole of your life from beginning to end will need to be described as a time of mourning, a time of tears.

I'm not suggesting that it will be so all the time. but God is assuring you mourning is coming. And when mourning comes and the daylight of eternity and blessedness dawns and scatters the darkness, then we will come to appreciate this text more than we can ever appreciate it in this life, when the comfort of heaven is a reality to us.

Blessed are those who mourn. Whatever it is today or tonight that's causing your own heart pain, bring it into line with what Jesus is saying here.

It may not be sorrow primarily over your own sin, though I'm sure that's part of your experience as it is mine. It may not be sorrow over the state of the world, though there may be some of that in it. Maybe it's sorrow over something that's happening at your work or something that's ongoing in your life, wherever it is you work from day to day. Maybe it's a sorrow over family. Maybe it's a sorrow over your concern for those related to you, for friends, for neighbours, for immediate family.

[33 : 30] It doesn't really matter because it's all encapsulated and summarised in this wonderful text. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall.

be comforted. Let's pray. Oh Lord, our God, our hearts need your comfort. Our lives in this world need that comfort that you alone are able to give.

Lord, we thank you for the reality of that comfort which you bring us to taste off in this life. We thank you that there are many anticipations of heaven, just as there are many anticipations of hell in this life.

But we thank you especially for that anticipation of the comforts of heaven that you have already caused to begin in the experience in the hearts of your people.

And help us, Lord, we pray, as we come to mourn over our own sin, over the state of our world. Help us to draw our comfort from your great assurance that we will be comforted and that your comfort is like no other.

[34 : 40] So bless to us your word, we pray again this evening. Help us to go forth from here with a greater resolve to be contented, happy, vibrant Christians.

And enable us to communicate and convey to the world that ours is a life that they ought to envy and a life for which we are glad. blessed and we pray these words to us for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to conclude now.