

MATTHEW 5:4

INTRODUCTION

We have all had times in our lives when we have mourned because something or someone that was dear to us was taken from us. Sometimes it is a tragedy that strikes and health is removed. Sometimes it is that notice that says that our job will end and we grieve the loss of the job and the income. At other times it is an insurmountable problem and we mourn the loss of being able to do anything about it.

Of course the greatest loss that causes us to mourn is not something but someone who we loved dearly whether it is our partner or child or grandchild or some other relative or friend that we were close too.

Have there not been times in our lives when we longed for that comfort that we so desperately needed during our time of loss. Yet to be honest that comfort is so often elusive, it seems that the deeper our sorrow the more elusive that comfort tends to be.

As we pointed out last time all the beatitudes are paradoxical because what they promise in return for what they demand seems to be upside down to the eyes of natural men and women. The paradox of this second beatitude is obvious. What could be more self-contradictory than the idea that those who mourn are those who are blessed (happy)? If you remember the happiness that the beatitudes talk about is the blessedness that is not dependent of outward circumstances or well being but is deep rooted within one's heart?

Jesus message here is that the path to happiness and blessedness is through mourning the way to rejoicing is through sadness. In the routine of ordinary day to day living this idea of mourning seems absurd. For it almost seems a universal principle that the way to happiness is to have things go your way.

In the eyes of the world pleasure brings happiness or money brings it or entertainment or fame or praise brings happiness. On the negative side it is believed that avoiding pain or trouble or disappointment or frustration or hardships and other problems is the path to happiness.

Throughout the history of the world it seems that people believe that favourable things bring happiness and unfavourable things bring unhappiness. The principle is so self evident to our world that most people would not even bother to debate it.

But in this beatitude Jesus says blessed are those who mourn and what Jesus is doing here is turning the world's principles upside down, he is reversing the path to true happiness. But we must endeavour to find out exactly what Jesus means by the word "mourning" before we can know how this sort of mourning leads to blessedness.

1. WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY MOURNING

The mourning, which Jesus is talking about in this beatitude, has nothing to do with the mourning that takes place over the loss of something or someone. Now of course the Lord is deeply concerned for us when we do mourn our loss especially the loss of our loved ones and he promises to console comfort and strengthen us at such times.

But that is not the type of mourning that Jesus has in mind here for Jesus is speaking of godly mourning a spiritual mourning that only those who desire to trust Christ or who have trusted Christ for salvation can experience. No unbeliever knows the type of mourning that Jesus has in mind unless the unbeliever is being awoken by the Spirit of God to his desperate spiritual need.

Paul speaks of this type of mourning in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. It is a mourning that brings spiritual life and spiritual growth it is mourning over sin that ultimately leads to a true repentance. This godly sorrow therefore is a sorrow over sin, which will lead to repentance.

Now let me show you how this mourning about sin is related to the first beatitude for as I said last time there is a progression in all these beatitudes one naturally leads on to the next one. As the first beatitude makes clear entrance into the kingdom of heaven begins with being "poor in spirit" it is recognition of our total spiritual bankruptcy.

The only way any person can come to Jesus Christ is empty handed, totally destitute and pleading for God's mercy and grace? Without a sense of spiritual poverty no one can enter the kingdom and when we enter the kingdom we must never lose that sense of knowing that nothing good dwells in us (Romans 7:18).

Spiritual poverty however leads to godly sorrow; the "poor in spirit" become those who mourn. David expressed his godly sorrow after he sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah in that great Psalm of repentance in Psalm 51. Job who is described as blameless and upright (Job 1:1) through all his experiences learnt the importance of mourning and repenting from sin (Job 42:5-6).

In the same way every Christian person who wants to know God's blessedness must learn from God's dealings with us and from His word how to mourn over our sin and rebellion.

It is interesting to note that within the New Testament there are nine different Greek words that are used to speak of sorrow or mourning. I think this variety teaches us something of the commonness of this experience in the lives of human beings. Sorrow and mourning is woven into the very fabric of human existence on earth we simply cannot escape it.

We all know that everyone of us will have experienced some time or mourning already and we all know that we will have to face many more should the Lord tarry. However of the nine words used for mourning or sorrow in the New Testament the word that is used here by Matthew ("pentheo") is the strongest of the words. The idea behind this word is a deep heart felt grief; it is the type of mourning that takes place when we lose a loved one through death. The word is used concerning the disciples who mourned for Jesus before they knew that he was raised from the dead (Mark 16:10). This is a deep inner agony, which may or may not be expressed in outward weeping.

True happiness however does not come in the mourning itself. Happiness comes from how God responds to it, for mourning because of sin leads to repentance and repentance leads to forgiveness and it's the knowledge that we are forgiven that leads to the state of blessedness.

Mourning you see is not merely a psychological or emotional experience that makes people feel better but this type of mourning that Jesus is calling for is a communion with the living God who responds to our mourning with the reality of forgiveness and freedom from our guilt.

But this mourning will never take place until we are "poor in spirit" and until we come to see something of the gravity of our sin and the extent of our rebellion against our loving and gracious God. It is only when we really mourn over sin and find God's gracious forgiveness that we will know true happiness, the happiness that God brings into the lives of those who are poor in spirit and mourn over their sin before God.

Our world tells us to "pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile." We are told by our own sinful nature to hide our problems and pretend to be happy, and sadly that same type of thinking is applied to sin. Hide it, put a brave face on it and try to forget it. But Jesus instruction about sin is very different.

We are to face up to its reality and mourn over it and then confess it and experience the liberty of forgiveness and the removal of guilt. It is no wonder that Jesus promises happiness to those who are serious about sin and mourn over it and seek God's forgiveness through Jesus. Sin and true happiness are totally incompatible where sin exists then happiness cannot but where happiness exists then sin cannot abide.

Until sin is mourned and confessed then sadly the experience of God's blessing is lacking, but once we deal with sin in God's way then forgiveness is experienced which results in a freedom and a joy that cannot be experienced in any other way. This is exactly what James teaches in his letter (James 4:8-10), Drawing near to God is only possible through a purity and cleansing of heart that can only take place when we mourn and weep over our sin and then seek forgiveness for our sin by humbling ourselves before God and confession. Then we are told God will lift us up.

I want to suggest that there is a great need in the church and in our own lives to weep and mourn over our sin. There is far too much laughing instead of mourning in modern Christianity. We need to be broken before God; we need a fresh understanding of sin and of its consequences and in particular how offensive our sin is to God.

We need a seriousness over sin that seems to be lacking in the church and in our modern age. It is never wrong to ask God daily to reveal our sin to us, to reveal something of our own hearts so that we can see just how rotten we actually are. We need to see how corrupt our motives and intentions are. How evil we really are and such an experience will be good for us all.

For the result will be that we will mourn over our sinfulness and we will confess our sin to God and will experience the joy of cleansing that follows because of Christ's death on our behalf. However we will also begin to see something of the immense love of God for sinners. We will begin to understand something of the depth of Christ work of atonement on the cross and we will begin to see how deep God's grace and mercy to sinners really goes.

There is a thinking within Christian circles that suggests that although we need to think about sin before we are saved; however after conversion we must focus of the victory that Jesus brings. Because all our sins are forgiven in Christ we need no longer to dwell upon it but instead we need to focus on our forgiveness and joy that comes to us through Christ.

But although it is true that all our sin is dealt with at the cross we need daily to confess that sin if we are going to experience the reality of forgiveness and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. All the godly saints of past generations that I have read about indicate that the more they grew in grace then the more aware of their sin they became.

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Now it is so easy to make light of sin even as Christian people, the temptation to do so is all around us. It's easy to laugh at the world's crude and immoral jokes even though we would never retell them. It's easy to be entertained by sin even though we would not indulge in it. We might smile at ungodly talk even though we do not approve of it or repeat the words.

It's easy to allow the world's attitudes towards sin to pervade our minds so that we become frivolous with sin in general and careless with our own sin in particular. It's easy to laugh at the sin of others but if we do it will not be long before we are laughing at our own sin and once that happens we begin to rejoice over sin instead of mourning.

As a result we will be robbed of the blessedness that God promises to those who mourn and we will fail to know the comfort that only God can bring to mourning sinners. Now that brings me to the second point.

2. THE RESULT OF MOURNING OVER SIN

We are told that the result of godly mourning is comfort. This is why mourners are blessed because they know the comfort that comes from God. Now it is only those who mourn that are comforted, those who laugh at sin and are causal with sin know nothing of the comfort that God brings. We know that God is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3); He is always ready to meet our needs by rebuking and correcting us or by encouraging and strengthening us. Now this comfort comes to us as we mourn we do not experience it unless and until we mourn over sin. But what is this comfort that is being spoken about here? I think primarily it's the comfort of knowing that our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

What a comfort this is to a mourning believer. Let's say God reveals to us something of our sinful hearts, which we find repulsive. We mourn that such sin could be found in our hearts and we cry out for forgiveness. What a joy and comfort it is to be assured from God's word and through the comfort of the Holy Spirit that we are forgiven because of Jesus death and resurrection.

We will not face the due penalty because Christ has faced it for us. Does that not bring true comfort, a comfort that results from something being done about the sin that is so abhorrent to us?

But there is also tremendous comfort in the knowledge that one day God will remove sin and all its effects from us forever. What a comfort to know that we will dwell in heaven in perfection and for the first time be able to live without sin and without its effects upon us. On that day all the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection will be fully applied and realised by each one of God's dear people. Then there will be no more pride or hate within us. Then we will not have to suffer or face sickness or even experience death.

That future hope surely brings great comfort to those who are mourning because of the sin that so often blights and spoils our relationship with our God here on earth.

But that ultimate comfort lies in the future for each one of God's people but in the meantime we must mourn and the Greek word is in the continuous tense so we must continually mourn over our sin. Then we will know and experience God's comfort of forgiveness here and now and the assurance that one day sin will be totally dealt with because of the death and resurrection of our Saviour.

So as we continually mourn over our sin we will continually know God's comfort and the result will be that we will be truly happy and blessed people.

Amen