

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Much And Play So Poorly

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 5:3 ESV)

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”

(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

October 10th, 2021

Matthew 5:4

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to the Matthew chapter 5, verse 4. We’re taking a long slow walk through the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon begins with a section we know as “the beatitudes”. A beatitude is not a personality trait, rather it is a disposition produced by grace¹. These are attitudes, actions and behaviours that are produced by the internal operations of the Holy Spirit in the life of a true believer. The beatitudes aren’t telling us how to get saved, rather they are telling us how saved people live and where saved people will be blessed.

This week we are looking at the second beatitude: blessed are those who mourn.

Now you may be wondering: “Pastor, is it appropriate for us to be talking about ‘blessed are those who mourn’ on Thanksgiving Sunday. Today is supposed to be about JOY and here you are talking about mourning – is that helpful pastor?”

¹ As per D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 27.

Well, that's a fair question and I considered, for half a second, deferring this topic for a week but actually I think our job as Christians living in a broken world – but having all these marvellous promises – is to figure out what it looks like to live a life that holds these two things in proper tension.

Jesus says: Blesses are those who mourn.

And yet the Bible also says:

“Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4 ESV)

So how does that all go together? We know that it does go together. The Apostle Paul described himself as:

“sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10 ESV)

So this is not a contradiction – but it is complicated. So we'll take our time, we'll work through the text and see if we can't figure this out together. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1 of Matthew 5:

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:1–4 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

What Does It Mean To Mourn?

Alright, let's begin by defining our terms. What does Jesus mean here when he says, “Blessed are those who MOURN”? Is he saying that everyone who is SAD is blessed by God?

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones is helpful here, he says:

“Once more it is clear, that we have here something which is entirely spiritual in its meaning. Our Lord did not say that those who mourn in a natural sense are happy, meaning by ‘mourning’, the sorrow experienced because of the death of someone. No, this is a spiritual mourning.”²

So just like last week we saw that it was not PHYSICAL or MATERIAL poverty that Jesus was promising to bless, so too here we understand Jesus to be speaking about something SPIRITUAL. So what does it mean to be a person who MOURNS in a SPIRITUAL SENSE?

First of all, we would want to say that:

1. It means to lament the state of your own soul

Each of these beatitudes BUILDS on the one that comes before. There is a certain logical sequence here. The first beatitude was:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

We talked last week about how a person who is spiritually poor is someone who is AFFLICTED in their soul. They are aware of their own sin. They are aware that they have been AFFECTED by sin – both the sin done by them and the sin done to them. They are FEELING THAT. And they are feeling desperate and dependent as a result of that. Well then – that REALITY leads very obviously to this RESPONSE.

A person who is POOR IN SPIRIT is going to MOURN. They are going to be like the tax collector in the story Jesus told who stood far off and beat his breast and cried out to heaven:

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13 ESV)

A person who is poor in spirit is by definition MOURNING the state of his own soul. But it’s more than that and here the second beatitude starts to build on this foundation. It says that the

² D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 43.

blessed person is lamenting their own sin but they are also FEELING deeply, the brokenness of the world.

2. It means to feel deeply the brokenness of this world

A true believer does not feel at home in this world. A true believer doesn't get the joke. A true believer can't laugh at what everyone else is laughing at – a true believer can't LOVE what everyone else loves about the world.

A true believer isn't supposed to love what everyone else loves about the world. 1 John 2:15-17 says:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15–17 ESV)

A true believer has her eyes open. She sees the truth behind all the noise and nonsense. She LAMENTS the carnage caused by human sin and selfishness. She hears the lie of the devil and it breaks her heart to see how many lost and hurting people are being led astray.

She sees that, she feels that. She can't not be affected by that. She is like David who said:

“My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.” (Psalm 119:136 ESV)

These are the people that God is going to bless – he is going to resource people who SEE the problem – who FEEL the problem - and who are willing to give absolutely everything they possess in order to be part of the solution.

Thirdly, when Jesus talks about people who mourn, he is talking about people who are concerned about the health and well-being of the church.

3. It means to be concerned about the health and well-being of the church

This is the one we tend to miss. Jesus is making use of some Old Testament biblical imagery here. In Ezekiel 9 there is a story about a time when God sent out a marking angel just before a season of judgment and chastisement upon the church. The prophet has a vision of the preparations that are being made up in heaven for this great event and he hears a loud voice saying:

“Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.”² And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

³ Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. ⁴ And the LORD said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and **put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.**”⁵ And to the others he said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. ⁶ Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house. (Ezekiel 9:1-6 ESV)

Are you seeing that? In that Old Testament story the only people who were spared the judgment of God were those who SIGHED AND GROANED – THOSE WHO MOURNED OVER the sins being committed by the covenant people. So this is not about sin out there – this is about sin in here. The prophet isn’t worried that there won’t be any citizens left in Rome or Babylon when this is all over – he’s worried about whether there will be anyone left alive in Jerusalem. In verse 8 he says:

“Ah, Lord GOD! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” (Ezekiel 9:8 ESV)

So this is judgment on the people of God – this is judgment on the church - and according to verse 6 - it begins with the elders who were before the house –it begins with the clergy.

My friends – I feel very much as if we are living right now inside this Old Testament story. It feels very much to me as if an angel from heaven has been sent out by God and given the job of shining a flashlight on all the abuses and failures of the church – beginning with the failures of the clergy.

Did you see the article on the front page of the CBC website on Tuesday? The title was:

“French clergy sexually abused over 200,000 children since 1950, probe finds”³

Right below the headline it said:

“Church showed 'deep, total and even cruel indifference for years,' says commission head”

Is it any wonder that no one goes to church in Europe anymore?

The same thing might be said about Australia. In 2014 a Royal Commission was struck in Australia to investigate institutional sexual abuse in that country. The report was released in 2017. It stated that:

“61.8 percent were abused in a Catholic institution; 14.7 percent were abused in an Anglican or Episcopalian institution; 7.3 percent were abused in a Salvation Army institution; and the remainder were abused in various Presbyterian, Uniting, Baptist, Pentecostal, ... and other institutions.”⁴

How does the church in Australia recover from that? And to be clear this is not just a Roman Catholic issue – the report in Australia mentioned Anglican churches, Salvation Army, Presbyterian, Baptist, Pentecostal – in about the proportion that those churches exist in the country.

Closer to home, in 2019 a massive report was released in the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News detailing hundreds of cases of sexual abuse in Southern Baptist Churches - many

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/france-clergy-abuse-1.6199877>

⁴ John Dickson, *Bullies And Saints* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 261.

of which were covered up and unreported and most shocking of all - in many cases - the offenders were still engaged in pastoral ministry in the church!⁵

The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in North America! It is the largest **evangelical** denomination in the world – and it is right now in the middle of a vicious civil war over how this scandal ought to be handled.

God help us!

Brothers and sisters – the church of Jesus Christ IS BLEEDING OUT RIGHT NOW, all over the world – how do you feel about that? If you love Jesus then you ought to be concerned about that. The Apostle Paul said:

“For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:2 ESV)

The church is the BRIDE OF CHRIST – that is her destiny! So, Paul says, I think of every church as like the FIANCE of my best friend. I take your faithfulness and your purity very seriously because I love my friend. I want him to be honoured. I want him to be respected. I want him to be happy.

So a real Christian CAN'T SEE the BRIDE OF CHRIST going through this kind of trauma and remain unaffected. A real Christian is going to see that and he or she is going to mourn that. Now to be clear I am not mourning the DISCOVERY of these sins and abuses – I am MOURNING THEIR EXISTENCE. It is a good thing that these abuses have been EXPOSED – but it is a heart-breaking thing that these abuses ever occurred in the first place.

The church of Jesus Christ is in crisis. And a real Christian is going to see that – and feel that – and mourn that - and according to this verse, Jesus Christ is going to appreciate that. He approves of people who are personally concerned with the health and well-being of his bride.

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/religion-tennessee-sexual-abuse-by-clergy-sexual-abuse-baptist-31aebc40e7aa0d5fe01dd0f8bb2f36a3>

The other night at prayer meeting we were going around the circle giving prayer requests and John Betsworth piped up and he said: “I was speaking to Shauna Lee on Sunday and I was asking her about her health and I was concerned to hear about some of what she was having to deal with and I would like us to spend some considerable time tonight in prayer for her.”

Man, that meant a lot to me.

I went home and told Shauna Lee that – and it meant a lot to both of us.

A husband appreciates it when his friends take an interest in the health and well-being of his wife.

That’s what Jesus is saying here. He’s asking you to care about the health and well-being of his bride.

Now it’s tricky here – because we live in Fortress Orillia. We don’t live in Europe or Australia or the US. We live here. And by the grace of God our church is doing really well. I’m so thankful for that! But just because we’ve got one relatively healthy little left pinky finger over here - does not mean that we should stick our heads in the sand and sing Kumbaya until the Rapture. The wife of our best friend is bleeding out on the table. Yes, that little pinky finger is doing ok – but the WOMAN HERSELF appears to be in mortal danger. We need to care about that. We need to know about that. And we need to pray about that.

Blessed are those who mourn.

For they will be comforted.

How Will They Be Comforted?

Now what does that mean? How will these mourning people be comforted? Well the first thing the Bible seems to say is that:

1. They will receive Gospel comfort in this life

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,⁴ 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. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4 ESV)

So according to this passage, God doesn't comfort us by lifting us OUT of this broken world – rather he comforts us IN THIS BROKEN WORLD so that we can comfort others with the comfort that we receive through Christ.

Life in this messed up, fallen world is going to open up some wounds and some cracks in the heart of the Christian. And that's ok – because it is into those cracks that God is going to work and apply Gospel comfort. You see, that's how the Gospel works – it soaks into the CRACKS – it actually REQUIRES CRACKS in order to be properly received and fully appreciated.

So mourning, sorrow, upheaval – that's all part of the process. That's where we GET the Gospel, that's where we GROW in the Gospel and that's also generally where we find our best opportunities to GIVE the Gospel. So blessed are those who mourn – for they shall be comforted. They will be comforted NOW and they will be comforted later.

2. They will get to see the glory and the good in the next life

On the last day – everything we've been through – all the trauma that we've had to deal with – all the surgeries and interventions that have been Providentially applied – everything we've been through is going to produce the effect for which it was ordained. And seeing that will bring us comfort.

The Apostle John was given an advance preview of that. He had a vision of the throne room of God and an angel came and spoke to him saying:

“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem

coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” (Revelation 21:9–11 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

Brothers and sisters, the Bride of Jesus Christ does not die on the table!

She lives!

She recovers – she must! Because there she is on her Big Day. Her wedding day – and she is beautiful. She is glorious! She’s radiant. And you’re going to see that. You’ll be there – if you are in Christ, and on that day, all the cuts, all the bruises, all the surgeries, all the therapies and all the rehab – will be worth it.

Blessed are those who mourn – for they shall be comforted.

Can Mourning And Rejoicing Go Together?

So back to the question of the hour: can mourning and rejoicing go together?

I think they can. I think we can mourn in the moment and then zoom out and rejoice in the final outcome. I think that is what the Apostle James is telling us to do in James chapter 1 when he says:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4 ESV)

James says, all this suffering, all this trauma – this whole refiners fire thing called human life – yes it hurts – but in the end it does its job. It makes us the people we were created and intended to be - so you can rejoice in that. You can be glad in that. You can be so thankful for what has been accomplished and you can be so grateful for all that lies ahead – even as you mourn and

suffer in the moment. That's not really all that weird – it's normal, approved, Christian life. Jesus said:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4 ESV)

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” (Luke 6:21 ESV)

Mourning and joy do go together it just requires an extended perspective.

Application:

Now in the few minutes we have left, I want to get you started on the matter of practical application. The beatitudes are a description of where we want to be living as the people of God. These are God approved attitudes, actions and behaviours. This is the loading dock. This is where heaven comes down and grace and help are given. So stand here and good things are going to happen – and therefore application, is really about making sure you're not lured away. So towards that end I have a couple of suggestions. The first one is this:

1. Guard your heart

Be careful what you watch, what you listen to and what you are entertained by because slowly but surely that stuff will change your heart. The world wants to condition you to accept certain things as normal – it wants to teach you what is good, what is bad, what things are worthy of praise and what things should be mocked and scorned. Just be aware of that lest you find yourself laughing at the wrong thing at the wrong time.

There is a podcast right now that is WILDLY popular both inside and outside of the church. It is called The Rise And Fall Of Mars Hill. It mimics the format of a true crime drama and it investigates in painstaking detail the rise and fall of the one of the largest and most influential churches in North America. The story is being told because this one particular church seems to represent so much of what is wrong with the evangelical church as a whole. And it is probably a good thing that the program was made. It tells the truth – it SHINES THAT FLASHLIGHT AGAIN – on some real problems that we need to deal with. The problem of leadership, the

problem of celebrity, the problem of hyper masculinity, the problem of sexual immorality, the problem of “the ends justifies the means” pragmatism. We need to learn about this stuff – so this program could be used by God as a sort of autopsy report – telling us what went wrong and what we can do about it in the future.

But autopsy reports have to be handled with a certain dignity and reserve.

Imagine that your wife died in a car accident and she had signed one of those cards to donate her body to science and you came into the morgue and you found a bunch of medical students gathered around her body and they were pointing and laughing and making jokes and being disrespectful toward your loved one. Would you want to bless those people? Or would you want to destroy those people?

Listen, brothers and sisters - Jesus LOVES the church. He is not amused or entertained by her injuries and so neither should we be. So let's be careful – let's be very, very, very careful about being amused and entertained by things that ought to make us weep.

So guard your heart and secondly:

2. Check your treasure

Are you living your best life now – are you giving yourself every earthly pleasure? Are you serving yourself and steering clear of all the hurt, blood and confusion out there in the world – and right here in the church? If so, then you're the rich man in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Do you remember that one? Jesus said:

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores” (Luke 16:19–20 ESV)

The Rich Man thought he was blessed because he was rich and he thought he was wise for avoiding all the poverty and brokenness and ugliness outside his front door.

But do you remember how that story ends?

Lazarus dies and receives eternal comfort and blessing in Paradise. But do you remember what words the rich man heard when he died and went to Hades? They were not words of comfort. Instead he was told:

“remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now **he is comforted here**, and **you are in anguish**.” (Luke 16:25 ESV)

Here’s the deal brothers and sisters: you can have your comfort here or you can have your comfort there – but you can’t have both. So choose wisely.

Guard your heart, check your treasure, and watch and pray.

3. Watch and pray

I spoke earlier of the difficulty of living in Fortress Orillia. We’re up here – kind of above it all. We see the crazy going on down there in America and Australia and Europe – but that doesn’t affect us up here.

But it does. It should. It must. We’re all part of the same body we all have one Lord, one husband, who is Christ.

So I want to end today by encouraging you to watch and pray.

Don’t shut the curtains on the world. Don’t retreat behind your pile of canned goods in Fortress Orillia. See the church. See the world. See yourself. Because the brokenness is not just out there – more and more – through the wonder of the internet and the magic of radio and television – it’s in here too. It’s in us.

So I want you to see that. And I want you to pray.

Pray for the world. Pray for the church. Pray for us.

Open those curtains and LOOK OUT. But also LOOK UP. See Jesus Christ SEATED at the right hand of the throne of God. See that he is large and in charge. I want you to see that he is lifting some up and casting others down. I want you to see that he is stirring the pot and lighting the fires of this present affliction. He is sending out the angels. He is shining the spotlight. He is doing what needs to be done. For his glory and for our everlasting good.

See that. Rest in that. Rejoice in that. Because you know how this story ends.

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:40–43 ESV)

Forever.

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.