

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

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Introduction.

- A. In Matthew 5:4, Jesus makes yet another surprising statement. We know what it is to mourn. All of us have mourned something at one time or another. However, while we were mourning, I doubt that any of us felt particularly blessed. If anything, that sounds like something one of those goth/emo kids who goes around dressed in black and wearing vampire makeup would say. They're real big on mourning, even if the only tangible thing they have to mourn is that Daddy got them a BMW instead of a Lexus for their birthday.
- B. I, at least, tend to look on folks like that with a certain amount of sarcastic amusement, but if we're honest, we'll admit that Emo Kid has a point. Without Jesus, life on earth is bleak. In a physical sense, all we have to look forward to is aging, illness, loss, and death. In a spiritual sense, if all we've got going for us is our own righteousness, we can be certain that we will be condemned by the righteous wrath of God. When we look at life in such despairing terms, it's almost enough to make us want to put on the vampire makeup too.
- C. Of course, that's not where the story of Scripture ends. The light at the end of the tunnel is not actually a train. Despite the mess that all of us have gotten ourselves into, God still loves us and sympathizes with us. Just as He is willing to help us, so too He is able to help us. Even though we can't solve our problems by ourselves, God can solve them for us. Through His wisdom and His grace, He can and will transform our mourning into praise. We see the story of how He does this as we consider, "Blessed are those who mourn."

I. Mourning and Its Solution.

- A. Scripturally speaking, there are two main groups of reasons **WHY WE MOURN**. The first of these groups includes physical reasons for mourning. We see an example of this in Genesis 23:2. Abraham is one of the great heroes of the Bible, but here we see him engaging in a common practice—mourning his dead spouse. There are many here who have walked that road already, and there are likely many more here who will one day walk it when they lose their husband or their wife. I am richly blessed in my marriage, but I know that just like the other blessings of this life, it isn't going to last forever, and that's a bittersweet realization for me.
- B. Nor, of course, is the death of our spouses the only thing that could lead us to mourn. We also mourn when we lose any loved one, when some cherished business venture fails, when we quarrel with a close friend, and even when we realize that we ourselves are soon to die. As human beings, most of us have a strong attachment to the way things are. We think that if we could go on with things just the way they are, we'd be pretty happy with that. Of course, in this inconstant world, change comes to everything. Sometimes, that's change for the better, but every good earthly thing that happens will one day come to an end, and we are powerless to prevent it. It's the anticipation or realization of that remorseless change that leads us to mourn.
- C. However, mourning can also arise when we get ourselves crossways with God. We see this cause of mourning discussed in Ezekiel 7:27. In context, God is warning Judah about the punishment that is going to come on them because of their iniquity. The judgment of God is going to lead them to lamentation.
- D. This, in fact, is one of the central themes of Scripture. First, God points out that He has told us how we ought to live. Second, He shows us that we aren't following that divinely inspired road map for our lives. Third, He tells us that a time is coming when we're going to be sorry for our disobedience. The inevitable result of that is mourning. As in the case of the leaders of Judah, we might mourn because we have ignored God's warnings until it is too late. On the other hand, though, we might mourn because we want to be righteous but don't have righteous lives. We regret our sin. We regret wronging God. However, it's too late now for us to go back and undo the wicked things we have done, and even if we live perfectly from this time forward, we know that our past sins are enough to condemn us. Worse still, we don't live perfectly from this time forward. Even though we know how hateful sin is, even though we love God and want to serve Him, we continue to sin and rebel against the Almighty. If we continue to live in that way, as the Hebrews writer tells us, all we have to look forward to is the terrifying expectation of judgment. That's enough reason for any of us to mourn.
- E. In a nutshell, that's the problem. The things that we love on this earth change and leave us, and the law of God that condemns us ISN'T going to change. Thankfully, God has provided a two-part **SOLUTION** to the problem. We see the first part described in Isaiah 61:1-2. As we go through the Beatitudes, we need to remember that much of what Jesus says in them tracks this and other Old Testament prophecies. When Jesus tells the people that the mourners are going to be comforted, He's referring back to this prophecy and claiming to be the Messiah. Indeed, it is through Jesus and Him alone that we can find comfort in our mourning. He can help us through our hard times here on earth, until finally we reach a point where the hard times are gone forever. Even more importantly, though, He can help us with our sorrow for sin. Jesus is the solution to the sin problem. We have forgiveness through His blood for all the evil we have ever done, and as we continue to

seek that forgiveness, we are saved from the penalty for all the sins we will commit in the future, too. Through Jesus, what looks like a bleak situation for mankind becomes a very bright one indeed.

- F. However, it's not enough for Jesus to seek us. If we want the comfort of the Lord, we have to seek Him too. That's the point that James makes in James 4:8-10. There is hope for us despite our sins, but only if we acknowledge them and come before God begging forgiveness. By contrast, of course, there was no hope for the wicked king of Judah and his wicked followers. They were going to mourn, sure enough, but that was only going to happen when God's punishment came upon them. Until then, they were going to be just as happy as they could be with their sin. Comfort in mourning is only available if we turn our hearts to God.
- G. This is even true in a physical sense. When tragedy strikes our earthly lives, there are two ways we can deal with it. On the one hand, we can lean on the Lord. On the other hand, we can trust in ourselves and in our own ability to get through the rough patch. Brethren, when we trust in ourselves, we're doomed to failure, because we CAN'T stand up to what life has to throw at us. We're like boxers who aren't allowed to strike back. All we can do is stand there and take punch after punch, until finally we get knocked down and knocked out. Without God, that's what will happen. Without God, there is no ultimate comfort in any of our mourning.

II. Sources of Our Comfort.

- A. Naturally, the Bible doesn't just say, "Yeah; everything's going to be all right" and fail to provide details. Instead, Scripture describes several sources of our comfort. The first of these is the action of God Himself. This is apparent in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. In context, this appears not to be God working through anything or anyone else, but bringing comfort to Paul's life directly. From this, we can confidently expect that God will also comfort us directly. I don't begin to claim to know how God does or might do this. His understanding of our lives and the way our minds work is far beyond our own. However, I know that He does comfort us, and I've seen this both in my life and in the lives of other Christians. We have a special guarantee from God that He is always going to be there for us, and that He's always going to do what He needs to to get us through.
- B. Just as we gain comfort from the intervention of God in our lives, we can also gain comfort from the promises of His word. Consider the way Paul puts this in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. The Thessalonians were among the first Christians to have to struggle with the reality of the death of their brethren and what it meant for God's promise of eternal life. Paul tells them not to worry about it. All Christians are going to get to live forever with God, and until that day comes, we can live in hope. For instance, if things proceed as they normally do, I will have to deal with the deaths of both of my parents. That won't be a happy occasion for me, but if and when it happens, I won't have to despair. Instead, because I know that both of them are faithful Christians, I can look forward to spending eternity with them in heaven. God's word will comfort me in my mourning. Nor is that the only promise contained in Scripture. Life may throw punch after punch at us, but we always have something better to look forward to, and if we just hold on to our faith, we are certain to see it.
- C. Third, we can be comforted in our mourning by other Christians. Look at the way Paul finishes the quotation from 2 Corinthians that we looked at earlier, in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. Once we receive our comfort from God in our mourning and affliction, the process isn't supposed to end there. Instead, we're supposed to turn around and use His comfort to comfort other Christians. One of the things about life, brethren, is that we're very rarely blazing a new trail. In just a small- to mid-sized congregation like this one, it is probably true that every trial we see is a trial that a brother or sister here has seen before us, and because that brother or sister is still here, we know that they made it through that trial. They received from God what they needed to carry on. If that's us, if we're the ones who have been through the trial before, we still carry with us the gift of that comfort from God. It's our responsibility to pay attention to what our brethren are going through, and if they're walking the same dark road we walked, to help them through like God helped us through. To me, that's one of God's most beautiful purposes for the church, and it's one we need to live up to.
- D. Finally, we will receive comfort for our mourning in heaven. We see this in Revelation 21:3-4. What a promise this is, brethren! We know that life is hard. We know that life is full of tears. In just this small group of believers, there are all kinds of people with all kinds of struggles and challenges. We have work troubles, health troubles, family troubles, and histories that are full of every kind of disaster imaginable. Some of us are so badly broken, so badly scarred, that we may never be whole in this life again, that our grief may pursue us until the end of our days. I know these things, and my heart breaks for you sometimes, but I also know this: I know that even if you can't fix it, and I can't fix it, God can fix it. In heaven if not before, He will take the most broken Christian and make them whole again. All the scars, from bad marriages and life tragedies and mental and physical illness, all those scars, He's going to remove. Even if we go through life crushed by the weight of our sorrow, He's going to lift that sorrow from our shoulders and take it so far away from us that we'll never see it again. He's going to wipe every tear from our eyes. We might ask how that can be. How can it be possible that we are going to be perfectly happy, perfectly at peace, despite the anguish that we have endured below? To tell you the truth, I don't know. I don't see how it's possible. I do know, though, that God is going to do it. He will end our mourning for all time by comforting us finally and forever.

Conclusion. If you want the eternal comfort of God, become one of His children this evening.