

# Blessed Sorrow

Matthew 5:4

Of all the counter-intuitive, counter-cultural things Jesus has to say in the Beatitudes, this might be the most: “Blessed are those who mourn.” Blessed are the desolate, the grieving, the sad. It is thoroughly contrary to our cultural convictions. We live in a nation committed to the pursuit and pretense of happiness. If there is anything to be learned from endless Facebook and Instagram posts, it’s that we live by the motto – *Blessed are the happy* – even if they have to fake it.

I read an article this week about a woman who came to the startling conclusion that the person she appeared to be on her Facebook and Instagram posts was simply a fake persona. She used a picture she had posted in the past as an example. In the photo, she’s at the office, smiling, holding some balloons her mother had sent to her for her birthday. The comment she posted with the picture was “Very happy!!” and many smiling emojis. But, she says, the truth was that, at that very moment when the photo was taken, she was deeply depressed and going through one of the most painful periods of her life. But the sadness doesn’t make it to her social media account.

“Instead, you’ll find posts that suggest I’m in an apparently constant state of joy and accomplishment: Photos of fall foliage runs, beach-side bachelorette parties, launching new projects, and making pasta with my mom. Much of this happiness was real. And much of it was totally manufactured.”

Why do people do this? Because we have assumed the American motto: *Blessed are the happy*. Blessed are the emotionally fulfilled, the fit, and the fun. Blessed are the people who find their soulmate, love their work, and are living their dream.

There are no blessings for those who cry alone in the dark, despairing of what they’ve done and who they’ve become. Very rarely will you see a Facebook post that says, “I’m brokenhearted over my sin against God.” And yet, that’s precisely what Jesus esteems and commends in the second beatitude.

Blessed are those who weep. The word Jesus uses is one of the strongest words for grief in the Greek language. It speaks of intense, heart-crushing sorrow. Blessed are you when you sob out loud with large salty tears running down your cheeks. Blessed are you when your heart is broken with deep sorrow. The weeping, groaning, anguished souls are the blessed ones. For they shall be comforted.

## I. The Sorrow

It's important, from the outset, that we define the sorrow Jesus has in mind. What is the grief that pleases the Lord? What is the grief he promises to bless?

### 1. Sorrow for Personal Sin

The primary sorrow Jesus is commending is a sorrow for personal sin.

The second beatitude follows the first for a reason.

First beatitude – blessed are those who confess the truth of spiritual bankruptcy.

Second beatitude – blessed are the contrite – those who feel sorrow because of their spiritual bankruptcy.

There is a difference between acknowledging our sin and grieving our sin. And the difference is important. People in the grip of sin can easily admit that what they are doing is wrong without feeling any remorse over it. They justify it or simply relish in it. Even in the church, we can assume that an intellectual grasp of our sinfulness is sufficient for grace. But it isn't. What pleases the Lord is a heart that grieves the sin – that senses the inexcusable wrong of it, the vile pollution of it, and the rank offense of it before the living God.

The poster child for this grief is the sinful man in the parable of the tax collector who went to the temple to pray.

**Luke 18:13** *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"*

This man is not only telling the truth, he is grieving it! And God delights in it! He rejoices over sinners who **feel** the weight and truth of their sin. He delights in tears of contrition.

**Is. 57:15** *For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
"I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit."*

Every parent understands this joy. When your child does something very wrong, very hurtful to their sister or to you, a mumbled apology brings no joy. What brings joy is a contrition. "I'm so sorry. I don't know why I did it. Will you please forgive me?" That is gold for a gospel parent! That brings joy to your heart because you love your child and you cherish the work of grace revealed in those tears.

It is the very same for our Father in heaven. In some mysterious way, I think we can say that our Father in heaven takes more pleasure in sorrow and repentance than he does in obedience. I know that sounds radical. God LOVES obedience. The Sermon on the Mount

will be all about obedience. But Jesus preaches the sermon in order to bring people to sorrow and repentance. The law is meant to lead us to godly sorrow. Why? Because you can only really see Jesus through tears of contrition.

Simon Peter walked with Jesus for three years, but never really saw him. His pride and self-reliance were blocking his view. And then he sinned grievously, and went out and wept bitterly. And for the first time he really saw Jesus – the Savior of sinners.

One of the things the gospel will do in your life is create within you a deepening sorrow for sin. As you grow in your love for Christ, as you grow in your deep appreciation of the goodness and kindness of God, you will look at your life and have cause for despair.

"The good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not – that I do. O wretched man that I am!" (See Rom. 7.)

But kingdom sorrow isn't just about your own sin.

## 2. Sorrow for the Sins of the Church

If you love the Lord, you long for him to be loved, obeyed, and worshiped by others – particularly by his people! A great part of the sorrow of Jesus was the sorrow of coming to his own – and they received him not. These were the descendants of Abraham, the recipients of the Law and the prophets. No nation had ever experienced the blessings and favor of God as Israel had. And precisely because Jesus loved his Father and was zealous for his glory, he grieved the unbelief and wickedness all around him. He wept over Jerusalem as he thought of the coming judgment of God upon them.

A mark of godliness is a sorrow over the sins and failures of the church.

**Ezek. 9:4** *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."*

It is one thing for the world to be worldly – that's understandable. It is another thing entirely when those who profess to know and love the Lord are worldly.

**1 Cor. 5:2** *Ought you not rather mourn?*

## 3. Sorrow for a Lost World.

Paul wept for the lost, unbelieving world.

**Phil. 3:18-19** *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*

Paul looked around the pagan world of his day. These were men and women made in the image of God, created for the glory of God. But though God had clearly revealed himself to them in the things that have been made, they refused to honor God as God or give thanks to him. They sold their lives so cheaply – their god was their belly. They prostituted their eternal soul for physical pleasures and gloried in their shame. Paul wept as he wrote of it.

We have been talking about the rapid disintegration and decline in our own day. We can easily feel righteous indignation – but shouldn't we also weep? Shouldn't the bondage of our neighbors break our heart? Isn't it the saddest thing in all the world to see people dying without Christ in the shadow of the church?

## II. The Blessing Promised

*"They shall be comforted."*

What a precious promise! Don't you hate how prone you are to sin? Don't you grieve how easily you sin against Jesus your Lord, in spite of all his goodness and kindness to you? One day, we will be done with sin. One day we will find our heart consumed with one holy, undiluted, undying passion for Jesus Christ. Every inclination of our heart will be only to enjoy him and to bless him. We shall be comforted.

If you love the church of Jesus Christ and grieve all her weakness and failures, won't it be a joy to see her on that last day, a spotless, pure, and holy bride, washed perfectly clean and made perfectly whole, robed in radiance and given to Christ?

Do you mourn the effects of sin in this world? Are you weary of all the murdering words and deeds, all the hateful, lying, God-denying, soul-destroying effects of the fall? One day, it will be done. All things will be made new. The knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. No more night. No more pain. No more crying or parting. In fact, God himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And God himself will dwell with them and will be their God and they will be his people.

The certainty of future comfort is a comfort for today. Terry Johnson explains with this illustration:

Imagine two men working in exactly the same conditions. Circumstances for both are miserable. Both are grossly underpaid. But one has been promised a \$10 million dollar bonus at the end of the year. The other is promised nothing. How do their future hopes affect their respective experiences of present circumstances? The one man, the man with no promised bonus, will be saying, "This job is intolerable." The other man will say, "Yes, it is hard, but I can put up with anything for a bonus like that!" The promise of future blessing brings comfort out of eternity and into the present. (52)

Yes, circumstances are often hard. Mourning for sin and groaning for heaven will be a constant part of our journey. But the reality of future blessing makes the current trials “light and momentary!” As Paul says, we can be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (see 2 Cor. 6:10).

The key to comfort now is being utterly convinced of the glory coming then. So how can we be certain of this comfort? Because the man who spoke this promise went to the cross to secure it. When Jesus promised the blessing of comfort for sinners, he knew this promise would be purchased with his blood. This is why he came – to comfort those who mourn by atoning for all the evil things they have done in **their** life and granting them the righteous reward of **his** life.

This is what the prophets promised:

*Is. 40:1–2 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

*<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.*

Double what? Double grace! Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more! Our sins are forgiven, the debt is canceled, the guilt is gone, the shame is removed, the penalty is paid, the power is broken – and in its place we receive all the grace and love and honor and freedom of the children of God. That is the great comfort of the kingdom of heaven.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—

My sin, not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

The grace of God for you in Jesus Christ will produce a mourning and a rejoicing! As you grasp his amazing love for you in spite of all your sin it will dissolve your heart in thankfulness and melt your eyes to tears. Blessed are those who so mourn.