

The Comfort of Mourning

Matthew 5:4

MacArthur says that the story of history is the story of tears. Mourning is something we have all experienced and will continue to experience. The first funeral I remember attending didn't happen until I was in High school when my Great-grandmother passed away. I well remember sitting there during the service looking out the window as cars passed by wondering if anyone thought about what was happening inside or if anyone cared about the grief I was experiencing at that moment, or were they too busy in their own little world driving to their next appointment or trying to remember what to pick up at the grocery store or wishing the car ahead would drive a little faster to be concerned about something that really had no immediate impact on them?

Wikipedia defines mourning this way: the expression of an experience that is the consequence of an event in life involving loss, causing grief, occurring because of someone's death, specifically someone who was loved although loss from death is not exclusively the cause of all experience of grief.

Taking that into consideration, we can mourn over the loss of a job, the loss of health from some incurable disease, the loss of independence, or the dissolution of a marriage through divorce and so on.

Different cultures express mourning through a variety of behaviors that show others they are going through a time of grief. In some cultures, people will wear black. There may be a period of time to allow for mourning. When Jacob died in Egypt, they mourned 70 days. In some cultures, individuals will observe a period of withdrawal from social events. There may also be religious traditions that are observed.

Today as we look at the second beatitude in our series, what did Jesus have in mind when He said **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”**

It seems paradoxical that a person mourning is

somehow blessed. So what kind of comfort do they receive?

Is the comfort the same as what Paul had in mind in II Corinthians 1:3-4 when he said that the comfort we get from God is the same kind of comfort we pass on to others who are going through similar kinds of life experiences?

We will discover that what Jesus has in mind is something entirely different when we consider what He says we should be mourning about. By all means mourn or grieve for those things we briefly mentioned because Solomon in Ecclesiastes says there is an appropriate time to mourn. John **So what does Jesus mean in this beatitude? How are we blessed when we mourn?**

Let's start with a simple definition. To mourn means to experience deep grief. Let me also say that Jesus is speaking about mourning for something that is spiritual in nature. In the context of what Jesus is writing about, He is pointing to grief over sin. Now, hold that thought because we'll come back to it. The first thing I would like to address are some of the barriers to mourning, and again, keep in mind that we are talking about mourning over sin.

I. THE BARRIERS TO MOURNING

A. A Hard Heart

During my uncle's time in the service, he was in Viet Nam and was exposed to agent orange, which over time was the determinant cause of his death. As I understand it, he began to experience health effects from that exposure. One of the things he suffered was the hardening of his arteries.

What does it mean to have a spiritually hard heart?

When the Bible speaks of someone's heart, it is referring to the heart as the center of human personality – things we attribute to the mind – like grief, joy, desires, understanding, thoughts and reasoning, even faith and belief. These are all parts of our heart. Jesus says the heart is the source of good and evil and says that what comes out of the mouth begins in the heart (**Luke 6:43-45**). A hard

heart is a barrier to mourning. Sin just doesn't bother us. We become calloused to it. Another barrier is a lack of spiritual understanding.

B. Lack of Spiritual Understanding

Having a spiritually dull heart means that our ability to see and understanding right and wrong are skewed. For example, Jesus rebuked His disciples for their lack of understanding in **Mark 8:17-19** and even said it was from a hard heart when they were concerned about not having enough physical bread just after Jesus fed the four thousand. Jesus talked about character traits that reveal if someone has a lack of spiritual understanding from a hard heart. They lack the inability to see, hear, understand and remember spiritual things. Maybe we can call it spiritual amnesia. That's when someone forgets how God has blessed them, what He has done for them.

This leads to a third barrier to mourning which is a lack of faith.

C. Lack of Faith

The Israelites are a good example. When they were wandering in the dessert, how many times do we see them facing a crisis and instead of remembering how God had delivered them, they immediately respond with fear and complaining. Instead of remembering that God is faithful who promised and will do what He says, they had short memories. No matter how many times God had showed His power and presence, they didn't trust Him. They lacked faith because they doubted God.

D. Sin

Sin is a barrier to mourning. When we continue in sin and remain unrepentant, our hearts can grow calloused and hard. It no longer bothers us. We are no longer convicted by it or grieve over it. When we don't confess our sins, our conscience can become desensitized so that sin is no longer any big deal. When we love it and hold on to it, we grow cold to conviction. It becomes difficult to distinguish between right and wrong.

I Timothy 4:1-2 “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”

Paul writes in **Romans 1:18-24** that when a person continually engages in sin, God will give them over to a depraved mind to let them have their way. Paul warns that in God's wrath of abandonment He allows them to continue in that sin because they have suppressed the truth by their hardened heart due to unconfessed sin.

E. Pride

Obadiah 3-4 “The pride of your heart has deceived you . . . you who say to yourself, ‘who can bring me down to the ground’ . . . I will bring you down declares the LORD.”

Pride hardened Pharaoh's heart and was a barrier. **Daniel 5:20-21** tells us that Nebuchadnezzar's heart was hardened by pride, which was a barrier for him as well.

Pride keeps us from facing the proof of God's power and sovereignty. It makes us think we don't need God. It refuses to seek God and refuses to see what God has done. Pride takes the person down a path that seems right, but really only leads to death (**Proverbs 16:25**).

Pride is another barrier to mourning for sin and keeps the person from repenting. Pride kept the Pharisees from acknowledging sin. Pride kept the rich young ruler from seeing his sin. Until his Damascus Road encounter, pride had kept Paul from seeing his sin.

Don't let pride be a barrier from mourning over sin.

F. Presumption

Presumption is the next-door neighbor of pride. In **Isaiah 55:7**, the Lord exhorts people to forsake their wicked ways and evil thoughts and He would forgive them. Since God is forgiving, what's the big

deal if I sin? While **I John 1:9** is absolutely true because God will forgive sin, presumption forgets **Romans 6:1** that says just because we have grace, doesn't mean we should continue in sin. **"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"** True repentance isn't continuing to sin knowing I will be forgiven. True repentance admits the sin and confesses it with a desire to turn from it. Yes, God forgives us when we confess our sin, but confession also means that we forsake the sin and not continue in it any longer.

These are just some of the barriers that keep us from having the proper attitude of mourning over sin.

So what then, is the behavior of mourning?

II. THE BEHAVIOR OF MOURNING

First off, let's look at its definition.

A. Its Definition

We said earlier that mourning simply means deep grief and in this case Jesus uses it in reference to deep grief over sin. Having this kind of response to sin is clearly lacking in someone who continues to sin, lacks spiritual understanding, lacks faith, has a hardened heart filled with pride and presumes on God's grace so he can justify his sin.

There are nine different words in the New Testament for grief or sadness conveying the complexity of this emotion and rightly so because sadness and grief are a big part of life. We express sadness and grief in different ways and for different reasons.

Returning back to the definition from Wikipedia, in a way, we can say that sin is a life event that results in a loss. The loss being a severing of our relationship with God. The question is, **how will that loss affect us? Will we let it become a barrier or will our mourning result in drawing us back into a right relationship with God?** We can either respond to sin with a soft heart or a hard heart. It can either become a barrier or as Jesus says, we can receive a blessing and comfort from our mourning. **So which is it?**

William Hendriksen defines mourning as **"a sorrow that begins in the heart, takes possession of the entire person, and is outwardly manifested."** In other words, it begins inside us and is evident in our outward demeanor and demonstration of a changing life. Mourning is never just an external demonstration alone as we see coming from the paid mourners in Jesus' day. It always begins in the heart of the person.

From Jesus' perspective, this deep grief has to do with admission of sin resulting in a desire to do something about it. I think David's prayer of confession in **Psalm 51** is born out of this kind of deep mourning over his sin. It's not just a flippant attempt to brush aside sin or gloss over it as if there were no consequences, but a grief of recognizing that he had wronged God and needed to make it right. It's an agony of the soul, that languishes over his sin and takes action because of the grief. Let me also add that mourning is not lingering over our sin, but languishing over it. It's being sorrowful for it which leads to true repentance. At one point David said that when he kept sin in his heart, his bones withered from the guilt. As we see in **Psalm 51**, this kind of sorrow provides the proper path to spiritual healing and a desire to draw closer to God.

Let me say this before moving on that the word mourn is a present participle, meaning that it is a continuous action. You just can't pray and ask the Lord to forgive you for all the sins you'll commit in the future, even though you haven't done them yet, and then think you're covered. And neither does mourning mean that we continue to wallow in grief over sins we committed in the past. Paul tells us in **Romans 8:1** that there is no condemnation or guilt for those who are in Christ. I don't have to continue to feel the guilt of that sin. It's forgiven and as the psalmist says it's buried in the deepest sea, removed as far as the east is from the west. What Jesus is saying is that when we sin, there ought to be a heart of remorse that moves us to grieve over our sin and confess it knowing that I don't have to keep bringing it up or keep dwelling on it.

One of the points Martin Luther made in his 95

These was that the Christian's life was a continuous act of contrition, meaning that we should be remorseful and penitent for sin. And that leads us to consider its demonstration.

B. Its Demonstration – Psalm 139:1-5, 23-24

How do we mourn for sin?

Puritan pastor and author John Owen wrote: **“I do not understand how a man can be a true believer in whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble.”**

To mourn for sin is to first see sin the way God sees it which causes us to feel great remorse for it. We want to gloss it over and think it's not as big a deal as the Bible or God makes it out to be. God hates sin and that should be our attitude about sin as well. We should hate the sin in ourselves and hate the sin of others.

Psalm 119:136 “Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for Your law is not obeyed.”

In other words, we need to be broken hearted over sin. See sin as God sees it and seek to treat it as God does. It is an insult to Him. It grieves Him. Because sin is an affront to God and His holiness, we should grieve over our sin and agree with God's view of what we have done so we can confess it.

Psalm 51:4 “Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are proved right when you speak and justified when You judge.”

II Corinthians 7:10 “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

Godly sorrow is when God works through the aches and hurts of our sin to draw us back to Himself. Godly sorrow is an acute awareness of grief from our sin. Godly sorrow brings repentance like when Peter denied Jesus and then went out and wept bitterly for what he had done.

James writes of godly sorrow when he states:

“wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and

wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom” (James 4:8-9).

That's the deep kind of sorrow we should have over our sin. That's the kind of mourning the Old Testament prophets encouraged when they spoke to the people about their need to repent of their sin by sitting in sackcloth and ashes and returning to the Lord. That's the kind of response we see when Jonah preached to the Ninevites to repent and they mourned over their sin and confessed it.

It's the same kind of mourning Paul had over his sin when he wrote **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24)**

Godly sorrow comes from a conviction of the heart that we have offended God by our sin. That conviction produces godly sorrow leading to admission of our wrongdoing and then repentance.

It was again really put into perspective when something I read hit me right between the eyes. If I want to understand the gravity of my sin, remember that it was for my sin Jesus came to earth. It was my sin that put Jesus on the cross. That ought to make me grieve all the more, that the sinful one sent the sinless one to die a death He didn't deserve.

Mourning for sin should create in me a desire to follow the admonition of **Isaiah 1:16 “cease to do evil, and learn to do good.”**

John MacArthur states that **“Godly sorrow is linked to repentance and repentance is linked to sin. Spiritual poverty leads to godly sorrow – the poor in spirit (which we looked at last week) becomes those who mourn.”**

True mourning doesn't focus on self, nor does it really focus on the sin, but rather on God because He is the remedy for our sin. God was the focus of the tax collector who asked for mercy.

The person who is maturing in Christ has a growing awareness of sin. **I John 1:8-9** says that believer acknowledges his sin and then seeks to confess it.

Listen to this moving poem titled “Good Friday” by

Christina Rossetti and see if Christ's death for your sin doesn't move you to mourn over sin. If looking at Christ on that cross doesn't thaw your heart or move you to mourn over your sin, then your heart may be beyond melting and breaking.

Am I a stone and not a sheep,
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,
To number drop by drop Thy Blood's slow loss
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved.

Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their faces in a starless sky.
A horror of great darkness at broad noon –
I, only I.

How many stood that day around the cross and remained unmoved by His death? Would I have been among the crowd not caring that His shed blood was meant to atone for my sin, the very sin that put Him on that cross?

Do I remain too hard hearted to mourn and repent?

How can a person remain unmoved by His atoning sacrifice for my sin?

Do I need to ask God to regularly remind me of the reality of my sin and its consequences not only to me but others as well?

Does God need to remind me of the cost of my sin?

While David said that his sin was against God alone it affected others. His sin affected Uriah whom he had murdered. His sin affected Bathsheba who lost her husband and the child born to she and David in their adultery. His sin affected some of his other children. And while David confessed his sin, there were still consequences he had to bear for his sin. Let's remember that the closer we draw near to the Lord, the more we will hate sin. The more we are in God's Word, it will cleanse and keep us from sin.

Psalm 119:9-11 "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word. I

seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You."

Proverbs 8:13 "The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil."

Psalm 97:10 "O, you who love the Lord, hate evil!"

Romans 12:9 "Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good."

A love for God and for and His Word will produce a heart that breaks and mourns over sin. But keep in mind that there are two responses when we consider God's holiness and my sinfulness and need of repentance.

On the one hand, I can think about my awful sinful state and become discouraged because I am so far from God's standard and think it's not worth the work and remain discouraged.

On the other hand, I can look back at where I was when I began this journey of faith in Christ and see how far I have come, how far God's grace has brought me and be hopeful, all the while knowing I still have a long way to go, but realizing that it is God's Spirit that is helping me become more like Christ as I acknowledge my sin and seek to allow Him to help me overcome that sin in my life. As I am fond of saying "I'm not what I was, and neither am I yet what I'm going to be." (**I Jn 3:2-3**)

In His letter to the church in Laodicea, Jesus exhorted them to **"be zealous and repent"** (**Revelation 3:19**) Remember from last week that Jesus' message from the beginning was to **"repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near"** (**Matt. 4:17**)

Here's how D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sums it up: **"Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in**

every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ.”

That is the kind of mourning Jesus is talking about, a mourning over sin as we understand it and its consequences without repentance. But there is good news for that person who so mourns over his sin. Jesus speaks about the benefits of mourning.

III. THE BENEFITS OF MOURNING

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Puritan pastor Richard Baxter warned about the emotional toll for carrying unconfessed sin and its ensuing guilt when he wrote: “That sorrow, even for sin, may be overmuch. That overmuch sorrow swallows one up.” What he is saying is that when we don’t confess sin, when we don’t have the proper attitude about it, we can be plunged into deep sorrow over our guilt. Guilt swallows us up.

When we do confess there are benefits. Jesus says the person who mourns over sin is blessed.

Isaiah 66:2 “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at My word.”

God looks with favor, blesses those who mourn over their sin. That kind of mourning leads to blessing and our spirit is relieved because we have been forgiven. The psalmist expresses it well:

Psalm 30:4-5 “Sing to the Lord, you saints of His; praise His holy name. For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Forgiveness is a blessing.

GotQuestions sums it up well when they answer the question of what it means that those who mourn are blessed when they write: **“Those who learn to mourn over their own sin find the heart of God. An intimate fellowship with God is the very foundation of true happiness.”**

In our mourning over sin, we find comfort. That

comfort begins when we experience the forgiveness of sins through our regeneration by the Holy Spirit who makes us a new person in Christ. Comfort then ensues knowing that God forgives our sin when we have the right attitude in confession. The blessing isn’t in our mourning over sin, the blessing comes from what God does in response to our mourning.

John MacArthur says **“Godly forgiveness brings Godly happiness or blessing... Only mourners over sin are happy, because only mourners over sin have their sins forgiven.”**

Jesus promises comfort to those who mourn over sin. The word comfort is the same one used by Jesus when He said another Comforter would come referring to the Holy Spirit.

We receive comfort knowing that sins are forgiven. We receive comfort knowing that we don’t have to carry around guilt for our confessed sin.

We receive comfort knowing that God will receive us when we mourn over our sin.

We receive comfort knowing that mourning over sin leads to growing in Christlikeness.

John Stott writes **“Only in the final state of glory will Christ’s comfort be complete, for only then will sin be no more and ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’” (Revelation 7:17)**

When we reach our destination of heaven, there will be no more need to mourn. We will finally be free of the presence of sin. The penalty of sin has been paid for. The power of sin has been broken. And the presence of sin will be forever removed. Be comforted in that.

Mourn over sin as Paul did: **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24)** But find the same comfort he found: **“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.”** Yes, mourn for sin, but find comfort that **“there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free.” (Romans 7:25)**