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The Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1-12 - The Character of the Kingdom
Part Three: Blessed are Those Who Mourn - Matthew 5:4

By Tal Davis

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Weddings, baptisms, preaching, teaching, writing, visitation. If you ask most pastors what aspects of the ministry they enjoy the most, chances are they will mention one or more of the above activities. Ask what are the least favorite parts and they may mention business meetings, money raising, hiring and firing staff, etc. Perhaps the single most challenging dimension of pastoral ministry is at times of death and funerals.

This is especially true in the case of the death of a child or young person. It is also tough when they are asked to perform a funeral for someone they do not know personally. Often they do not know what the deceased's eternal spiritual condition was at death. Obviously if they know the person was a true believer in Christ, they can confidently offer words of assurance that the loved one is home with Jesus. If not, they can only rely on the testimony of those who knew him or her. In many cases, they don't know either. So trying to provide positive encouragement in those instances is hard.

In this installment of our study of the Beatitudes we examine the second of Jesus' statements about being blessed. He address this one to "those who mourn." He says "they shall be comforted." So we need to ask, just who does Jesus mean by "those who mourn?" The word "mourn" is the Greek *pentheo* and can also be translated as "grieve" or "lament." "They shall be comforted"

is one word in Greek: *paraklethesontai*. It is from the root *parakaleo* meaning "to comfort," "encourage," or "console." It is related to the noun *paracletos* ("the Comforter," or "Helper," or "Advocate") as in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 6:7 wherein Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit. The Lord's clear indication is that those who mourn will be comforted. We might presume by God Himself in the Holy Spirit.

That being said, just exactly what does Jesus mean by "those who mourn?" As in our last installment we will begin our analysis by explaining what "mourning" is not.

First, mourning is not a suppression of joy and happiness. Some people have the mistaken idea that to be a good Christian you cannot really enjoy life. They think having fun or doing exciting things is beneath a Christian's dignity. Quite the contrary. The happiest and most fun loving people I have ever known were committed believers in Christ. The Christians I know love to have a good time, tell jokes, and do fun things. That being said, of course, we need to understand that the things some worldly people think are fun are inappropriate for Christ followers. Getting drunk, using drugs, sexual immorality, and other biblically proscribed behaviors should be avoided. But there is nothing in Scripture that says Christians should not have joy or happiness.

Second, mourning is not a feeling of mental depression, sadness, or guilt. Again, some people think believers should always have gloomy looks on their faces. Such emotional states as depression, melancholy, or constant remorse should not characterize a

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Christian's personality. Depression, actually, is a state of mind that may be symptomatic of a psychological disorder. Anyone, even a Christian, who constantly feels depressed or sad should consult a mental health professional for treatment. I have known some people who have wrestled all their lives with such feelings only to find that counseling or medication can have positive life-changing effects on their outlooks.

Likewise, a Christian who struggles with feelings of moral guilt may need spiritual, not psychological, help. First, he or she may need to understand the assurance of forgiveness and salvation we have in Jesus Christ. Even some Christians think that God can never really forgive their sins, or that committing certain sins will invalidate their salvation. Unfortunately, many sects and cults teach that kind legalistic approach to faith. Some go so far as to prescribe certain kinds of clothing and hair styles to maintain one's right relationship with God and to stay in their fellowships. Obviously Christians should take sin seriously (see below). Nonetheless, we need not constantly burden ourselves with feelings of guilt and shame. Jesus paid the price for us to have those feelings alleviated.

So, then, if mourning is not a rejection of feeling good or is not feeling sad or depressed, then what is it?

Basically, "mourning," as addressed in this beatitude, has three aspects. The first is the natural feeling of pain a person experiences at the loss of a loved one in death or for other reason. Death is a universal part of human life. When one's mother, father, spouse, sibling, child, friend, or even a pet dies, he or she will feel pain deep in her heart. Even Jesus felt a sense of loss for His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). The pain may be softened a

bit if we are confident of the loved-one's spiritual condition (i.e.: saved), but just the separation is often difficult to endure. Jesus says in those times He will supernaturally give us comfort and peace through His Holy Spirit.

The second aspect of mourning is taking seriously the gravity of our sin against God. It is our own grieving over our sin. As we said, we need not unnecessarily weigh ourselves down with feelings of guilt. However, we must take sin seriously. Though it cannot invalidate our salvation, sin does disrupt our relationship with God and hampers our walk with Him. Normally, God's Spirit will convict us when we disobey Him (John 16:8). Therefore, when necessary (which is usually more often than we will admit), we should confess our sins to God and acknowledge His forgiveness.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9 NASB)

So, in this case, mourning is simply the humbling of ourselves before the Lord in contrition for our disobedience. When we do, we are forgiven of our guilt and relieved of its anguish.

The third application of mourning is when we agonize over the spiritual condition of others. As Christians, we should feel in our hearts a strong desire to see lost people come to salvation in Christ. This is basically feeling the same kind of love God has for the unsaved. Often it is manifest in a sense of grieving for their spiritual state. This is especially true in our families. It is much like what Jesus expressed as He grieved for Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her

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wings, and you were unwilling." (Matthew 23:37 NASB)

In these instances we should pray to the Holy Spirit to break down whatever barriers exist to prevent them from coming to Christ.

So, truly blessed are those who mourn. And truly God will give them His comfort. When we grieve for lost loved ones, He will ease the pain. When we grieve over our sins, He will hear our humble confession and restore us to right relationship with Him. Here are a few passages from the Psalms that sustain this principle of mourning and comfort as in this beatitude.

*Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones,
And give thanks to His holy name.
For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for a lifetime;
Weeping may last for the night,
But a shout of joy comes in the morning. (Psalm 30:4-5 NASB)*

*How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!
How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!
When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.
And my iniquity I did not hide;*

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD";

*And You forgave the guilt of my sin.
Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;*

Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.

You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;

You surround me with songs of deliverance. (Psalm 32)

*I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me and heard my cry.*

*He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay,
And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.*

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;

Many will see and fear

And will trust in the LORD. (Psalm 40:1-3 NASB)

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