

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Last week’s look at the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,” taught us that we must always be fully aware of our poverty of spirit apart from Christ. Blessed is the one who understands that he/she can do nothing of eternal value apart from being fully connected to the life-giver, Jesus. The one who knows this and lives it, is blessed with possessing the kingdom of heaven, now and forever. This is the one who is not self-dependent, not self-reliant, but fully God-reliant for strength in every area of life.

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING

Today we examine the second Beatitude, as recorded in Matthew 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Luke’s parallel version has it as a pronouncement of woe, rather than a pronouncement of blessing: “Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” Like with the first Beatitude, we note that this is totally opposite to the way the world pursues happiness or blessedness. Would they ever think to become truly blessed through the path of mourning? No way.

And also like the first Beatitude, we note that this must be a spiritual mourning that Jesus is speaking of. He can’t be taking about mourning over someone who has died, or over various tragedies. Rather, He is speaking entirely in spiritual terms, of a mourning over sin and its devastating effects of death, dying and corruption. **Therefore: “Blessed are those who mourn over the devastation of sin, for they are those who will receive ultimate spiritual comfort.”**

DEEP CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH

I echo Lloyd-Jones’ deep concern for the superficiality of the “big C” Church – the universal Church of Christ. There is such a distaste and moving away from the doctrine of sin and mention of blood in so many churches. And there is such focus on making church more “attractive” and “seeker friendly” by being “up” and “positive” all the time. A hot worship band and charismatic speaker is an essential for many of today’s churches. And with it there is often a de-emphasis on the doctrine of sin and soberness of thought about the devastating power of sin in our lives. Church can become more of a “self-help” center than a hospital for sinners, if we are not careful.

A spirit of mourning over sin should bring a more serious and sober worship. That is not to say that there is no joy or celebration over our marvelous God and Savior! But if a church is trying to teach and discover spiritual joy, it is found by beginning with conviction of sin and a sense of helplessness apart from the continual intervention of God. The defective lack of emphasis on the doctrine of sin and its consequences and shallow portrayal of superficial joy and energy produces a superficial person and church.

Also, evangelism is diffused and confused in an atmosphere of “joy” only and lack of mourning over personal sin. People are truly drawn to the gospel over the reality of sin and its power in their life, for they then realize their need for a Savior. When the primary emphasis is “power of positive thinking” and “grab the wonder of God” without a corresponding soberness about our fallen state, there is less appeal of a merciful Savior dying on a cross to save.

I believe it is the church’s role to provide an atmosphere for the Holy Spirit to effectively do His divine job of convicting of the awfulness of sin, the possibility of righteousness and the reality of coming judgment. (John 16:8)

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

We know that Isaiah prophesied the Messiah as “a man of sorrows acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3) and one who wept over the city of Jerusalem and at the tomb of Lazarus, over the devastation of sin. He threw the money changers out of the temple on two occasions, again because of the sin he saw in their motives. We have no record of his laughter or joviality. An argument from absence of it not being recorded is not a strong one. But surely we do know his ministry to be a serious and sober one of pointing people away from sin and to the way of righteousness.

THE TEACHING OF PAUL

Turn to Romans, Chapter 7, and see a mature Christian Paul teach on struggling with the frustration of his sin. It is a good lesson on “mourning” over sin. In verse 15 he says he is not practicing the spiritual disciplines he would like to be doing, but rather doing the very thing he hates. In verse 18 he bemoans that nothing good dwells in me” and that “the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.” He goes on in verse 19 to say that “I practice the very evil that I do not want.” In verse 23 he sees “a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin.” Christian, do you not relate to this war of original sin against the Holy Spirit within? We should!

Then in verse 24 Paul cries out, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? There are times that sin seemed to be winning the battle, and he felt helpless. Yet in verse 25 he gives the answer to his (and our) dilemma – “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” And in 8:1: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” He acknowledges that the battle still goes on. But he has victory through total dependence upon Jesus and what He has accomplished on the cross and through His resurrection to secure our ultimate victory.

Lesson: Through mourning over his sin, Paul won the blessed comfort of Christ’s victory.

MOURNING OVER SIN

A Christian must continually ask: “What is it in me that makes me sometimes behave so badly?” “Why am I not able to control myself?” Why do I harbor those unkind, jealous and impure thoughts?” If I bemoan these things, then I am truly mourning over my sin, and I am on the path to blessed comfort. And the answer to these questions is that the PRESENCE of sin is still with me. The comfort comes from knowing that the POWER of sin has been conquered by my Savior.

But a Christians also mourns for the sin of others. We are not merely disgusted at the sin all around us - we mourn for it – angry that sin continues to hold so many captive. In this presidential season, our mourning over sin should be at high alert. Both candidates are deeply flawed, and there is plenty of sin over which to mourn. It is not a time for pointing the finger, or laughing at the spectacle of it all. For the Christian it is a time to mourn.

In a similar way, our Lord wept over the sin of Jerusalem as He rode into it on a donkey. And He also wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus over the death brought about by sin. Just as the Holy Spirit is deeply grieved by sin (Ephesians 4:30), so we as citizens of the Kingdom of heaven are grieved by the sin that plagues a person or a nation. And it sobers us to identify the true enemy – Satan himself.

THE PROMISE OF BLESSED COMFORT

Let us now look at the blessed promise for those who mourn. It is comfort. “He shall be comforted who mourns over sin.” And who does the Bible teach is the blessed Comforter? – none other than the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer. He and He alone is the only source of true and lasting comfort.

For the first time believer, this comfort is what follows an acknowledgment of need (“blessed are the poor in spirit”) and a subsequent realization of sin within (“blessed are those who mourn”). At the

sincere cry for help to God and His Son, Jesus the Christ, the blessed Holy Spirit enters the life, bringing both new life and comfort.

For the Christian, this comfort comes time and time again as abiding sin is acknowledged (confessed) with sincere contrition (mourning).

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our comfort comes in the form of forgiveness and restoration to a right relationship with God. We had never lost our salvation, but we had lost our healthy relationship with God by losing our way of righteousness.

Once we say, in effect, “O wretched man that I am” (Romans 7:24) for this particular sin, then the Holy Spirit brings restoration and we can say “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:25). Great sorrow leads to joy, and it is the only true path to it. That is the message of the second Beatitude.

THE CYCLE OF SIN – MOURNING - COMFORT

“Truly happy (blessed) are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Unless we know that, we are not Christian. If we are Christian we do know it and must live out the mourn-confess-comfort cycle continually, as regularly and ultimately involuntarily as natural breathing.

This cycle is reminiscent of the cycle revealed in the time and book of Judges. In those days “everyone did what was right in his/her own eyes.” – not so unlike today. There was a cycle of rebellion (sin), a falling away from God, the intervention of a mediator/judge, and restoration of the nation. Then sin came again and the cycle repeated again and again.

Christians understand that our mediator/judge has come in Jesus Christ. The cycle of sin continues for Christians (the presence of sin) but the power of sin has been broken as the payment for sin has been given. A Christian must continue to mourn over the PRESENCE of sin in his/her life but can rejoice that the POWER of sin has been broken as forgiveness and righteousness is restored through confession and recommitment. Mourning brings comfort.

LLOYD-JONES’ PORTRAIT OF A MOURNING CHRISTIAN

Lloyd Jones closes his chapter on the second Beatitude (“Studies in the Sermon on the Mount”) by describing the blessed, mourning Christian.

- ✓ He is sorrowful, but not deep in anguish
- ✓ He is serious, but still showing joy for life
- ✓ He is sober-minded, but not sullen and downcast in personality
- ✓ He is grave - not cold or pushing other away, but warm and attractive
- ✓ He lives out joy in serious conviction, not “putting it on” for people to see
- ✓ He contemplates sin and its ravaging effects, but embraces the comfort of the Spirit
- ✓ He is transparent in his solemn, holy joy – not superficial
- ✓ He is like the Lord Himself – groaning and weeping for sin, yet rejoicing in righteousness for the joy set before Him
- ✓ He has a deep understanding of the doctrine of sin, and rejoices in the blood of Jesus it took to eradicate its power
- ✓ He has a deep inner comfort from the abiding Holy Spirit

This gives a deeper meaning to the truth spoken in Philippians, as we consider sin.

Philippians 4:6-7 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Translation for today: When it comes to the sorrow of sin, we must not become anxious or distraught. For we have the avenue of prayer with God to confess our sins and pray for the sins of others and for our nation. And when we do, we receive the blessed comfort of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who will guard our heart from despair and our mind from doubt because of who Jesus Christ is, and what He has done on our behalf.

Praise Him, and Amen!