

April 26, 2020
The Sermon on the Mount (3)
The Gladness of Sadness
Matthew 5:4
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In Matthew 5:4 Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* This is a hard verse to understand because mourning is not a virtue in our culture. We like to have joy and happiness instead of mourning and sorrow. From time to time, we say, “Don't worry: be happy!” Do you remember the words from Disney's *The Lion King*? “No worries for the rest of your days. It's the problem-free philosophy – *Hakuna Matata.*” These songs reflect the mindset of our culture. These days people seek entertainment and pursue pleasure at all costs. Most of us believe, “Blessed are those who laugh their way through life.”

We want our children to avoid difficulty and hardship as much as possible and we want them to be happy. Parents have responded, “Do whatever makes you happy!” In the *Declaration of Independence*, we can find this philosophy and culture: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” We pursue happiness as a chief goal in life. We tend to avoid problems, run from difficulties, and despise troubles. We don't want to deal with things that make us unhappy. We don't like to mourn. But it is not a virtue!

But this morning Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who mourn deeply and visibly, for they will be comforted.”* (5:4) Mourning or grief could be good for us. Grief that leads us to cry is therapeutic. Doctors and psychologists say that weeping releases a healing process in a person's life that enables him/her to accept the pain, work his/her way through it, and adjust to life again. They say that when we don't mourn, when we hold pain and anxiety in, we poison our system. Therefore, mourning is physically and emotionally therapeutic.

Mourning is also a great teacher. We can learn things we would not learn otherwise. Ironically sorrow increases our appreciation of joy. An Arabian proverb says, “All sunshine makes a desert.” The land on which the sun always shines will soon become an arid place in which no fruit will grow. It is true. There are certain things which only rain will produce. Likewise, there are certain experiences which only sorrow and mourning can generate.

When we go through sorrowful times, we can learn how kind people can be. The mourning times in life could be wonderful good times for us. I mean mourning makes us truly grateful for the blessings of life. When things go well, it's possible for us to live on the surface of things. But when sorrow comes, we begin to understand what are the more important things, more precious things, and deeper things in life. Pain teaches us principles that we could never learn from pleasure. One poet put it this way:

“I walked a mile with Pleasure; She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser for all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow, and not a word said she,
But, oh, the things I learned, when Sorrow walked with me.”

We can learn priorities in life when we experience sorrow.

Then, what kind of mourning was Jesus referring to? He was referring to at least three things, three kinds of mourning we should not avoid, no matter what our culture says, three values we should embrace. First, we should mourn for all the losses in life. In other words, we should grieve and mourn over things like illness and

job loss and death. Jesus says that this kind of mourning is a blessed thing, a good thing. Many of us have lost family members or friends to death or fear we will do so in the near future. We know what it is to cry and mourn and lament over the inevitable losses of life. Psalm 6:6 says, *"I am worn out from groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears."* Jesus says that this kind of mourning is a good thing. God made us able to weep.

The best benefit of the sorrows of life is that it pushes us closer to God. God draws close to us in the tough times of life. When our hearts are breaking over something, we can almost feel the arm of our Heavenly God around our shoulders. Psalm 34:18 says, *"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* God cares about our sorrows! God draws close in our times of mourning. God comforts us in these times. So, when we feel like crying, we need to go on our knees and let the tears fall. Run to God and cry out to God because God understands, He cares, and he will provide us with His comfort and that is indeed a blessed experience. So, mourning can be a blessing because it pushes us closer to God. And in fact, sometimes it motivates us to decide to follow Jesus in the first place. Mourning over the losses in life can indeed be a blessed thing that enables us to experience the comfort of God.

Second, we should cry over the condition of others. Jesus was saying that mourning for the suffering of other people is a good thing - a blessed thing. As God comforts us in times of our mourning, He wants us to comfort and show compassion to others. Have you ever wept for the suffering people of our world? When you watch the news, have you experienced that tears stream down your face? Have your hearts been broken for the hungry millions on this planet, people who eat less food than your pets do? Jesus says that we need to be sensitive to the sorrowful condition of others. In Matthew 23:37 Jesus looked out over the city, and I think with tears flowing down His face, He said, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."*

Do you mourn deeply over the lost in this world? Do you cry in your bed at night over your lost friends, neighbors or co-workers? We live in a world that is lost. But somehow we have forgotten that people are lost without Jesus. Jesus was saying we should lament the losses of life and cry over the physical and spiritual condition of others.

Third, we should be sorrowful for our sins. In fact, this is indeed the main emphasis of this beatitude. Mourning over our sin should not stop once we become Christians, because even though we are forgiven, we don't stop sinning. We should continue to grieve and mourn whenever we disobey God. We can't be comforted with a close relationship with our Holy God unless we mourn over those times we yield to temptation!

After improving his health from COVID-19, a 93-year-old man who was in a hospital in Italy was asked to pay for the cost of the ventilator for a day, and then the old man began to cry. The doctor advised him not to cry over the bill. The old man said, *"I do not cry for the money I have to pay, because I can afford all this. I cry because I've been breathing God's air for 93 years, but I never paid for it. It takes 500 euros to use the respirator in the hospital for a day. Do you know how much I owe God? I have never thanked God for this before."* The words of this man deserve our reflection. When we breathe freely without pain and disease, no one takes the air seriously. Only when we get to a hospital, we can know that even breathing oxygen with an artificial respirator costs money! We may cry for God's grace and blessing and for the time we've spent all our lives because we can breathe freely! We may cry for our God's grace, protection and provision, as well as our sins.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (5:4) Notice the promise to those who mourn: they shall be comforted. As we mourn our sins, we have the greatest of all comfort, especially the forgiveness of sins in Jesus. Where there is sorrow over sin, there is the first fruit of joy and comfort. In our mourning over sin, we run to Jesus and to His forgiveness. His forgiveness is full and free. Our mourning drives us to the Lord and there He is our comfort. That's why they are blessed, they are declared to be blessed by Jesus. When you mourn to God over some sorrow, we can be assured that at once God's consolation is there. He cheers us and sustains us with the assurance of His grace, presence and help. His comfort comes in different ways and varies from time to time and person to person. But it is always the right comfort we need. How blessed we are: Jesus says, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* (5:4)