



BLESSED ARE THE MOURNERS

SERIES: THE BEATITUDES - LIVING RIGHT-SIDE UP IN AN UP-SIDE DOWN WORLD

Matthew 5:4

3rd Message

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I used to think that most people were happy most of the time. You know, apart from the people whose lives were obviously not good: the very poor, the homeless, the addicts, the terminally ill.

At least that's what it looked like to me—especially in church, where everyone was doing great, or so it seemed. Now I know the truth! With some life experience, and having worked at a church, I realize that most people are unhappy most of the time.

There is, after all, plenty to mourn about! From the fact that we have to get up and go to work on a Monday morning, that it takes so darn long to get to work on Monday morning in Bay Area traffic, to far more serious and heavy grief and suffering: loneliness in singleness, loneliness in marriage, being overlooked and overworked in your career, losing a loved one, losing a child, feeling ignored by God, feeling isolated, unloved. Life is filled with difficulty, and it doesn't take long to realize that everything is not as it should be. This world is broken, and we realize this even with the benefits of modern technology and medicine and the comforts they bring. Life in Jesus' day was considerably less comfortable!

Let's begin by reading through the Beatitudes:

**Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**

(Matthew 5:3–10)

Our Beatitude today is “Blessed are the mourners, for they will be comforted.” Yes these words actually came out of Jesus' mouth. Blessed are the mourners, for they will be comforted.

But what kind of mourning is Jesus talking about, and how can we possibly be comforted?!

Shawn has already laid the foundations for these Beatitudes—that they're not commands we must strive for, rather they describe who we now are, as Kingdom people. If you like long words, they're descriptive, not legislative! This is not a command to mourn in order that we may experience comfort. Rather, as kingdom people, we are people who mourn, sustained by the hope of being comforted.

The Greek word, *penthountes* (mourning), is the word for mourning the loss of a loved one, usually accompanied by outward signs of grief. However, it seems pretty clear that Jesus' scope goes wider than personal grief, though it does of course include it. We are helped to see this by the fact that Jesus was talking to not a Greek but a Jewish audience. Though we have the New Testament in Greek, Jesus was talking to a primarily Jewish audience in Aramaic, and mourning was a large part of the Jewish experience.

See, while these Beatitudes are wonderful enduring principles, Jesus is also speaking to the immediate concerns and desires of His audience. The Jewish nation was mourning, mourning the brokenness of the world and the fact that things were not the way they should be! For them, this looked like the Romans occupying the Holy Land, the Land promised to them by God, along with the fact that they never truly came back from Exile. They were mourning the fact that God's kingdom was not happening right now and putting those things right. When would they be comforted?

But throughout the gospels, Jesus comes and says precisely that—the Kingdom of God is here and now! So, He can declare that the mourners will be comforted! The Kingdom of God is here and has come and will come to make everything right. Although, as always, that may not look quite like what we expect.

And we too, 2000 years later, mourn. We mourn our losses, and our pain. Ultimately, we mourn that the world is not as it should be. All of our suffering and grief and pain come back to this one fact.

When we invited sin to enter the world, it broke and corrupted God's good creation, including us. We brought pain, suffering, and loss into this world.

I like this picture of the cracked earth, because it represents just how broken the world is. This is not a blemish on the surface, a small discoloration; rather, sin entering the world was more like a seismic event, breaking and fracturing the earth to the core, as well as breaking us, twisting the image

of God inside each one of us, twisting our desires and our actions.

But as the people of God, we have been recreated. God has taken our hearts of stone and replaced them with hearts of flesh. As these New Creations, what causes the heart of God pain, causes our hearts pain too. And, perhaps more important for us to remember, what causes our hearts pain, also causes God's heart pain! It's important not to forget that, especially in the darkest valleys of personal grief.

The Greeks despised and discouraged *penthountes* (mourning), regarding it as a weakness to be suppressed, and many Greek philosophers wrote about the pointlessness of *penthountes*. But mourning was a very Jewish activity, and I want to say that mourning is also a very Christian activity—albeit not one that I'm particularly good at!

Most of you have probably seen the Pixar movie, *Inside Out*. If so, you'll remember the tension that existed between the characters Joy and Sadness, perhaps most poignantly expressed when Joy takes sadness into a corner, draws a circle around her in chalk, and informs Sadness that her job is to make sure that all sadness stays within that space. My feelings about mourning are pretty similar to Joy's feelings about Sadness. I have a small space in which all sadness, mourning and grief should stay, and I run away at the thought of looking too closely at what is contained in that small space.

I won't spoil the movie for those of you who haven't seen it, but I will say this: later on in the movie, after many adventures, Joy realizes the error of her ways and changes her entire attitude towards Sadness, just as, in fact, God is changing my heart towards mourning.

But still, I would prefer to focus on the good, not watch the news, with all its stories of suffering and pain. I would like to be optimistic and look for the silver lining. But I am learning that seeing and acknowledging how this world is not as it should be, recognizing the wrongness of sin, pain, suffering and loss, knowing deep in my core that they are abhorrent to the heart of God, are vital parts of being truly human.

Whether it be:

- Mourning over my sin
- Mourning over my own pain
- Mourning over the pain of those close to me
- Mourning even over the pain of strangers

I'm learning that mourning is drawing me closer to the heart of our compassionate heavenly Father. In fact, I would go so far as to say that mourning is our hearts 'Amen' to the cry of pain from the very heart of God.

Let me say that again. Mourning is our hearts 'Amen' to the cry of pain from the very heart of God.

As the people of God, then, we are a people who mourn, and mourn deeply. We mourn as part of our journey to become

more like Christ. But unlike the Greek Philosophers, we know that our mourning is not pointless, and it is not unending!

Because there's a second part to this Beatitude: For they will be comforted.

As the people of God, we mourn. This is a description, not a command, remember? And as the people of God, we are comforted. This, too, is a description. It is not a reward for a command followed! Just as certainly as we mourn, so we will be comforted.

Even better, the Greek word here for 'comfort' is *paraklethesontai*, which you may recognize as having the same root as *parakleton*, or the *paraklete*, the word used to describe the 'Comforter' or advocate that Jesus promised He would send to His disciples after He Himself departed. It is none other than the Holy Spirit! And we see that Comforter in action in the passage we read for our scripture reading out of John 14.

This is great, but how exactly are we comforted? I mean, our lives may be short in the grand scheme of things, but they can sure feel pretty long to us here on earth, and it isn't often that God steps in and instantaneously fixes our problems!

After some reflection, I see two main ways that the Spirit brings comfort.

Mourning for Sin

As we mourn our sin, we know that God is sanctifying us through His Spirit to make us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. And so while our sin and constant failures cause us to mourn (as well they should), the very fact that we are convicted of our sin shows that the Spirit is at work in our hearts and though the process is often a whole lot slower than we'd like (at least it is in my own life!), we can have confidence that we will not be stuck in sin, trapped in its cycles. For the Spirit really is at work!!

Mourning for our Broken World

Really any and all pain falls under this category. Personal grief, pain caused by others, struggles and setbacks, sorrow for the world—we know this all comes out of that original invitation, when the door was opened to sin. In this too, the Spirit comforts us simply by His presence. Ephesians 1:13–14 says that the Spirit is the "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession"—until the tension between the now and the not yet is gone and we receive our full inheritance and are finally comforted in Full!

The Spirit is our Guarantee. We do not have to blindly trust God's promise without any assurance. He could have asked that of us, but in his graciousness to us frail humans, he did not. After sending his Son to bring us back into his family, He sent his Spirit to keep us that way, to give us assurance that he will come through on his promises, and to comfort us until that great day when all is made right. On that day, comfort

will be completed and we will be made full, right and whole again.

So where does this leave us today? Though the Beatitudes may not be commands, or impossible standards towards which we must strive, I've yet to encounter any words of Jesus that you can just shrug your shoulders at, say, "huh, that's interesting," and walk away from unchanged.

For PBCC this morning, the Lord has laid two things on my heart:

The first is simply this: in our mourning, God does comfort. And we need this reassurance, because PBCC is in mourning today. Many of you know the Jimenez family, and were at the memorial for their daughter, Audrey, yesterday. Even if you don't know the Jimenez family, as the body of Christ, we bear each others' burdens and sorrows, and so we mourn together with them. Such tragedy and pain are a stark reminder that things are seriously wrong in this broken world.

And yet, Jesus says that we will be comforted. Exactly when and how, I don't pretend to know, but somehow, though the pain will not be removed, God will comfort the friends and family of Audrey Jimenez.

What I do know for certain is this: God does not leave us alone and without comfort.

In our mourning, God does indeed provide comfort!

Additionally, the apostle Paul, in Second Corinthians, says that "[God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

The second thing on my heart is that we have the comfort that the world needs.

See, Christians aren't the only ones who are suffering, and they aren't the only ones who recognize that things aren't right. Now, what people do with that information varies greatly. Some pursue pleasure, the good life, to avoid having to face the brokenness of the world. Others, may relegate it to natural selection and a cold scientific process.

But the reality is, the world around us is looking for comfort. Everyone is looking for comfort, and just because they don't phrase it like that doesn't make it any less true! Take for example Heaven and Life after Death. They must be the most commonly 'borrowed' Christian concepts by people who have no interest in the God of the bible. And yet, time and again, they are borrowed by people who are desperately seeking some assurance in the face of brokenness and death. But rather than judging or despising them for this, what if we saw the opportunity we have? The world is CRYING out for comfort, for hope, for some answer to the brokenness of their lives.

PBCC, we have that answer! We have that hope! We have that comfort!!

No one wants a list of rules and regulations to follow—But everyone wants comfort!

Still don't believe me?

Comfort is a bit of a technical term with theological implications hanging off it. What if I replace comfort with 'everything's gonna be okay'? Now, that may feel a little fluffy and non-theological to some of you. I assure you that if I'd been learning Greek for more than a few weeks, I'd be able to give you the Greek word for 'everything's gonna be okay.'

Not really! But the phrase brings us closer to what our non-Christian friends and work colleagues are looking for. Who doesn't want 'everything to be okay'? And theological term or not, the truth is that, for followers of Jesus, everything is ultimately gonna be okay! You might try leading with that in your conversations, instead of the requirements for salvation (important though those are).

We have the comfort that the world is desperate for! So, as we go out into the world, we can go with complete confidence. We're not trying to convince people to join some club, or come to a few meetings. As we look to share Jesus and our faith in Him, we can do so in the confidence that we have the answer—not in an arrogant way of course, but in a gentle and humble, yet confident way. Because we have an advantage. We know what each lost person desperately needs, and we know who can fill that void. We know who can comfort that ache, and we know who can meet that need.

Let's pray that God will give us the courage to share that comfort with the lost and broken people we interact with every single day!

As we well know, the comfort of God, indeed the very sending of the Comforter, only became possible because of the life that Jesus lived, the death that He died, and the Life that He now lives. He has defeated the power of death, and opened a way for all who would follow after Him.

*May the God of all comfort surround you as you go from here
May He comfort you in all your troubles, sorrows and grief
And may He give you the courage to share the comfort you have received with those around you who so desperately need it.
And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.*

Amen

