

In the Beatitudes Jesus is describing the distinguishing features of those who are His true followers. In these 8 characteristics you can see the true Christian. There are hypocrites who say they love Jesus but do not have these graces living in them. And then there are genuine Christians whose hearts and lives have really been taken over by a new Master, King Jesus. God has taken out of you the old mind and spirit and planted in you a new mind and spirit – the heart and spirit of *Christ*.

So we come to the 2nd beatitude: **Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.** (Matthew 5:4) It follows: **Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** (Matthew 5:3). We will see that these two blessings are closely related but they are not the same thing. *Spiritual poverty* and *spiritual mourning* are related yet distinct gifts of God.

The word blessed means *happy, full, satisfied*. Here Jesus is saying that the ones whom God will make truly blessed and happy are those who mourn. To belong to the kingdom of Jesus is to be a happy mourner.

We want to look at two things in this text: 1) the Meaning of Mourning, and 2) the Blessing of Mourning.

1) the Meaning of Mourning

Notice again that the qualities of character that Jesus valued are completely opposite of what the world values.

-**Blessed are the poor in spirit:** The **poor in spirit** are those who have become aware that they have nothing to offer God to make themselves worthy of Him; instead, seeing they are bankrupt they run to Christ and seek from him everything they need to become and remain worthy of God! But the world despises this kind of poverty. It says: *You should think highly of yourself, value yourself, then you'll be somebody! How else can you get ahead in life?*

-**Blessed are those who mourn** means **Happy are those who mourn**. That sounds so wrong! No, you should always be positive and joyful and exuberant and make sure you have a good time, do lots of laughing. That's what a healthy, happy person is like. But *mourning*? No way! The kingdom of God measures good character in a way that is totally different from the world. It is other-worldly. Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom not of this world. (John 18:36) What Jesus considers weak the world considers strong. What Jesus considers strong the world considers weak. That's what it means to be saved: Jesus takes you out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Jesus gives you a life that is set apart from this world.

That's what makes Christians salt of the earth kind of people, the light of the world, a city on a hill. We're so different! *Jesus* makes us so different. When we believe in Him he fills us with a way of thinking and behaving that is so out of this world. This is why we are called aliens and strangers in this world. (I Peter 2:11) **Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. What is this mourning? Let's first see what it is not:

-This does not refer to the sorrow we experience when someone dies. It does not refer to our mourning at losing a friend or a job, or sadness at losing our ability to walk or hear. These are definitely matters of sadness, but this is not what Jesus talks about here. It follows right after being **poor in spirit** so it must refer to a mourning about our inner state.

-Nor is it to be equated with grumpiness and complaining. Jesus is not saying: Blessed are those who complain continually about their aches and pains, and about other people, and about gas prices and weather, and our government and a long, long list of things. You can have a long list of grievances which upset you and yet never know *true mourning* the way Jesus means it here. Being grumpy doesn't make you salt and light; it makes you sour and dark.

-Nor should it be seen as a being a person who is into mourning as a custom and ritual – who walk around with gloomy faces, heavy eyes, heavy walk, heavy talk – a “put-on” mourning like the Pharisees who made a great show of mourning to show they were repenting! They put on old clothes and disfigured their faces – but it was mourning that was put on superficially, not real mourning. One writer put it this way: *Legalistic remorse says, “I broke God's rules,” while real repentance says, “I broke God's heart.”*

No, these 8 qualities of a follower of Christ found in the beatitudes all belong together as one cluster. It is *spiritual* mourning, mourning that fits in line with spiritual poverty. Being *poor in spirit* means that you see you have nothing to give to God, and

everything to receive from Him. Mourning means that you grieve over the sin and weakness that make you so poor and needy. It is a deep and profound regret at the ways in which you have disappointed the Lord.

Jesus is talking about true spiritual mourning from the heart, a deep sense of the ways in which you have hurt and aggravated your God and not given him the honor and glory and service of which He is forever worthy. Mourning comes from realizing how much of your life you have wasted in frivolous, silly talking and living. It's the true spiritual mourning of the soul and mind that is sensitive to the ways you've made life difficult for your spouse, hurt your children, taken advantage of your neighbor. It's the mourning of that great saint, Paul the apostle, who would get so aggravated by his evil thoughts and desires and talk and behaviors that he would just shout out, **O wretched man that I am!** (Romans 7:24)

Some believe that this kind of experience of mourning is sub-Christian, not worthy of a Christian. You might do that at the time you are first becoming a Christian, but you should get past this mourning and get onto better, happier, victorious living! They will even say that mourning over your sin is a matter of unbelief. It is like admitting *defeat*, when Christ has made you a *winner*. You are supposed to wake up every morning, look in the mirror and say, "I am good! I am powerful! I am positive! I am amazing." These are the kinds of things you will hear from false teachers like Joel Osteen who teach a false gospel of self-love.

But when Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn, he was describing the Christian life of His followers in the present tense. He is not talking about a one-time occurrence in a Christian's life when you are becoming a Christian. He is speaking about mourning as an ongoing way of life for his disciples, as something we never get past in this life. It's a life of constantly seeing your sin, hating it, and *repenting* of sin. This is a crucial aspect of Christian character and Christian living. It is to live like Paul who said: **This is a trustworthy saying deserving full acceptance, Jesus Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.** (1 Timothy 1:15). He was not talking about who he was, but who he is right now.

It will help us to understand the meaning of mourning if we look at the opposite. In Luke 6, Jesus describes the opposite of mourning in this way: **Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.** (Luke 6:21, 25) The opposite of a life of mourning is a life of laughter. By laughing Jesus means you don't take life seriously, you don't take sin seriously, life is a sit-com, or a comedy in which you make light of everything that happens, you make light of life, you make light of God, you make light of worship, you make light of prayer. You can't live deeply because your heart doesn't go deep with God, therefore you can't truly see your sin and mourn, and you can't truly see God's grace and rejoice.

In the book of James, James is deeply concerned about those who profess to be Christians but they are living lives that are in love with this world, not of love toward God. They are living in pride and arrogance thinking that not Christ but the wealth and possessions of this world can truly make them rich. To them James says: **You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God...Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.** (James 4:4,8-10)

What about you, dear congregation and friends? Are you living a life of "Christianity light" where you are numb to the reality of sin and of the joy of God's grace, where sin has little or no impact on you? In the Christian community today in North America, people want joy without repentance. They want happiness without mourning. It is often said by Christians from other places that Christianity in North America is a mile wide but only an inch deep. Much of it is happy-clappy Christianity which is a far cry from the real thing Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount. But Jesus said it is impossible to have true happiness without a life of mourning: **Happy are the *mourners*.**

Or do you know the true happiness of realizing you are wicked in yourself, and, in sorrow, you run to Christ for righteousness?

2. There we see the blessing of mourning

If you really want to be a happy person you must come before God as a mourner, grieving over your wretchedness before God.

They shall be comforted. *Comfort* is the blessing that is known to the one who mourns. He is blessed with comfort. Your sin grieves you constantly, yet God's grace also comforts you constantly. And that's the way it is with the Christian – because you know your sin you know soul-depths. And because you know God's grace in Christ you know soul-heights too. These two belong together and

create a state of genuine happiness. This kind of mourning does not kill joy but increases it. *The child of the kingdom knows deeper sorrows and higher joys, more sensitive mourning and more profound comfort, now that He is the Lord's.* (Ferguson)

That is why I would describe the Pharisee in Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector as the happy unhappy man. He seems happy enough on the outside. He's thankful. He stands in the temple and prays and gives a long list of things for which he's thankful. But he doesn't know grace. He doesn't know what it is to be a sinner and he doesn't know what it is to be in a true relationship with God – these things always go together. Therefore he really is a deeply unhappy man. He goes home *unjustified*. He does not know the favour and blessing of God. He does not live deep. He lives shallow and superficially. He goes home full of himself, a prisoner. He is not free.

But the tax collector I would call the unhappy happy man. He is so distraught about his sin. He is so deeply disturbed about how his life does not measure up to God's holiness. He is so convinced of his lostness apart from God's mercy. So he cries out to God for mercy. And he goes home *justified*. He lives his whole life with the knowledge and inward sense of God's favour and blessing. He is truly and deeply a happy man even though he is a mourning man. He is truly free. He is free *in Christ*. He knows the happiness of Christian comfort, as we confess together: ***My only comfort is that I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.*** (Heidelberg Catechism, QA1)

a) You are blessed to rejoice in the comfort of pardon (Psalm 32): ***How blest is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is forgiven. How blest is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against Him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept guilty silence my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long....then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said I will confess my transgressions to the LORD – then you forgave the guilt of my sin. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance....Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*** You are not condemned when you mourn in faith; you are freely pardoned, and forever!

b) You are blessed to rejoice in the comfort of God's lifting up. Remember how James calls us to grieve and mourn, but also announces the sure blessing of God's covenant to those who do so: ***Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*** (James 4:8-10)

c) You who mourn are also blessed to know true joy and laughter. The Bible is filled with promises that those who repent and weep shall know times of refreshing and joy from the Lord.

-***You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness.*** (Psalm 30:11)

-***Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!*** (Psalm 126:5)

-Solomon says in Ecclesiastes: Ecc 7:2-4 ***It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.***

When sorrow for sin is dulled by self-righteousness, it produces a dull joy at best. A real sense of sin is required in order to have a real joy of salvation. Many people are looking hard for real joy, for Christian joy, but they can't find it. Why not? Because they are not looking in the right place. It starts in the house of mourning. I know this is not where you would expect to find it, but that's where laughter is to be found! ***By sadness of face the heart is made glad.***

The comfort is not found in the mourning itself – you can't be saved by your tears, as the hymn writer said so well: *not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load* (Psalter Hymnal 389) – but mourning drives you away from yourself to the true comfort God has provided for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus died under the curse of sin so that whoever believes in Him might be blessed. Jesus, the Righteous One, died for our unrighteousness, so that through faith in Him we might become His righteousness! ***For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.*** (1 Peter 3:18)

This is where the apostle Paul constantly found comfort in his struggle against sin: ***I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** (Romans 7:23-25)

d) You who mourn will also be blessed one day with the comfort of heaven and the new creation, a comfort that knows no end and no bounds, and where sin is no longer present to aggravate and grieve us. What a day that will be! This is the ultimate happiness of the mourner.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:2-5)

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17)

Then the days of our mourning will be ended and we will enter into the full experience of the joy which Christ won for us when he entered our sin and misery. Isaiah prophesied of this great day:

-And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:10)

Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. (Isaiah 60:20)