

Matthew 5:4

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[0:00] Happy of God's word, which I hope you have with you this morning and turn the gospel of Matthew chapter five. Our text for today will be Matthew chapter five, verse four.

And in case you've been with us for some time and you weren't here with us last week, I have not abandoned the plan to preach about the law and the Christian life, but I've delayed the plan a bit until we get to Matthew.

Matthew five, verses 17 through 20. So if you're scratching your head, it's OK. We're doing just a little bit of a diversion before we get to that place. And my hope is that studying through the Sermon on the Mount will serve you greatly over the coming months.

Last week, we looked at Matthew chapter five, verses one through three, where we noted first in verses one and two who it is that Jesus is teaching in this sermon.

And we can read seeing the crowds. He went up on the mountain. And when he sat down, his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them saying.

[1:14] So Jesus here is teaching his disciples, those who were already following him in his ways. And he's speaking to those who are citizens of his kingdom.

Remember that the Sermon on the Mount is understood to be a declaration of the kingdom of God. In the previous chapter, Matthew four, verse 17.

Matthew records for us from that time, Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom has come because the king has come.

Jesus here is teaching what those who are citizens of his kingdom will look like. And he began teaching them by saying in verse three, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

I spoke to you last week at length about what it means to recognize your spiritual poverty, to see that you have no good thing to offer God and to throw yourself upon his mercy for the salvation of your soul.

[2:32] Summarize this idea so well in the following line from the hymn, Rock of Ages. Nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross.

I cling. It is those who see their spiritual poverty who possess the kingdom of heaven. And therefore, Jesus calls them blessed.

This idea of being blessed, I think, is often misunderstood. The Greek word has a great deal of complexity to it.

It's sometimes translated as happy or joyful. We could say doing well or thriving or the single word I like best, although I feel like all of these English words are lacking in some measure.

But the one I like best is flourishing. Flourishing. Flourishing are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[3:36] Flourishing are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Flourishing. Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven enters into a world turned upside down by sin and seeks to turn it right side up.

So to the carnal mind, everything he teaches here will seem backwards. It is the humble, sad, meek, merciful, peacemaking, persecuted pursuers of righteousness that are well and will do well forever.

So join me as we take a look at the second of Jesus' proclamations of blessing. Before I read to you verse 4, which I've already done, but officially read to you verse 4.

Let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and for our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Matthew 5 verse 4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Now this word, blessed, I'm going to keep trying across the coming weeks to unfold it maybe in further and further degree.

[5:04] Help us better wrap our minds around it. I think it's adequate to simply apply this idea of flourishing as we look through the text. But I want to give you a little brief history of why we arrive at these being called the Beatitudes and why I prefer to call them the Blessed.

In the Vulgate, which is the Latin translation of the New Testament, each of these blessings begins with the word Beate, Blessedness.

So blessed are the poor in spirit would be in Latin, Beate, Paperis, Spiritu. This Latin noun, Beatitudo, was coined by Cicero, who had a great influence on the Latin language, to describe a state of blessedness.

So blessedness as a part of your being, Beatitudo, and was later incorporated within the chapter headings written for Matthew 5 in various printed versions of the Vulgate.

Now this word was Anglicanized, which means put into English, to Beatitudes in the Great Bible, the Great Bible of 1540, which was the version authorized by Henry VIII to be used in the Church of England, spelled with a Y, Beatitudes, and has over time taken on a preferred spelling, more American English spelling, with an I instead.

[6:38] So if you wonder, as your heading probably says in your Bible, the Beatitudes, you can replace that word, the Blessed, right? This proclamation of blessing.

Who is it that is blessed, who is flourishing in this world? So our text today says, it is those who mourn.

What does it mean to mourn? Is Jesus here simply talking about any kind of sadness? Let's say, do you know. And so let's look at this idea of mourning with two points.

Number one, the feeling. What is this mourning that Jesus is referring to? And secondly, the right kind of mourning or the reason for this feeling.

So number one, the feeling. Jesus says, blessed are those who mourn. Now, in the New Testament, there are nine different Greek terms to speak of sorrow.

[7:45] Truly, sadness is woven into the very fabric of our human existence. The word used by Jesus here of those nine carries the very strongest meaning.

This was a word in Greek literature, typically reserved for the sorrow felt for the loss of a loved one. This is the mourning here that Jesus is talking about.

I'll give you an example from the New Testament, Mark 16, verse 10. This is after Mary has seen Jesus resurrected, says she went and told those who have been with him.

They don't know yet of his resurrection. She went and told of the resurrection as they mourned and wept. She goes to the disciples who have found themselves together deeply sad because of the loss of Jesus Christ.

And so this feeling here that Jesus is talking about is to experience a deep sense of inner agony. Many of us have felt this way.

[8:57] If you've not, I feel happy for you this morning that you've not felt this kind of inner agony. That your life could just end and you'd be fine because you have such a sense of sadness.

There is no light sadness that Jesus here refers to. And he calls people that are that kind of inwardly sorrowful, agonizing blessing.

So what is the proper and right reason for such a feeling to be had? Well, but our feelings can be so very fickle.

We can feel deeply. And those feelings, although deep, can be very misdirected. So we must consider if Jesus here is speaking of a particular morning.

Does he mean to say that anyone who is sad will one day be comforted? I think not. I'm suggesting to you this morning that it is a particular sorrow that will be comforted.

[10:10] Paul makes a sorrow distinction in 2 Corinthians 7, verse 10, where he says this. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

So there's this kind of sorrow, godly grief, and it produces repentance. Whereas worldly grief produces death.

Leads us not to the cross of Christ, but rather away from it. So we can see there is a distinction made in the scripture between types of sorrow.

So we want to find ourselves in today's text with godly mourning. We want to look at this text. We want to see 5, verse 4, and say, yes, I am one of those who mourn.

I understand what this word means, and I feel this feeling, and it is placed on the proper reason. So what is it that produces this godly mourning?

[11:19] It follows from verse 3 that Jesus means that citizens of his kingdom will feel a deep sadness over their spiritual poverty.

They recognized how impoverished they are. Nothing good to offer to my God apart from Christ. This certainly follows.

It is true that this is part of this godly mourning. And we're going to talk a bit more about this. But I am of the opinion that it is too simplistic to pair verse 4 with verse 3 and leave it alone at that point. Verse 3 is not merely the condition and verse 4 the resulting feeling. These two certainly interconnect. They definitely do.

But they also stand alone. Can we read verse 4 and understand verse 4? Not completely comprehending and wrapping our minds around verse 3.

[12:22] I believe that we can. Verse 4 has a depth that goes beyond verse 3. In order to see this, we have to have a greater understanding of Matthew's gospel account as a whole.

Matthew sets in his gospel record as a backdrop the Old Testament book of prophecy, Isaiah. He cites it often and he records Jesus' citation of it.

Now likely Jesus cited from all kinds of texts. Matthew makes a particular point to cite Jesus' recitation of the book of Isaiah.

Let me show you what I mean. You can flip with me if you want or you can just listen carefully. I'm going to give you two examples and I'm going to tell you every place else that he references Isaiah. So Matthew chapter 1, this is verse 22 and 23.

After Matthew's summary of the birth of Jesus, and here he's citing Isaiah 7, 14. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, Isaiah.

[13:35] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. Another example, Matthew chapter 3, verse 3.

This is after Matthew's summary of John the Baptist's ministry. Here he cites Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. For this is he who was spoken by the prophet Isaiah when he said, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Okay, so there's two examples read to you. Let me give you some others very quickly. Matthew chapter 4, verses 14 and 15 is a reference to Isaiah 9, 1.

Matthew 8, 17. Isaiah 53, 4. Matthew 12, 17 through 21. This is Isaiah 42, 1 and verse 4.

Matthew 13, verses 14 and 15. This is Isaiah 6, 9. Matthew 15, verses 7 through 9. Isaiah 29, 13.

[14:42] Matthew 21, verse 13. Isaiah 56, verse 7. I'm sorry to you note takers. There's a lot there. The point being, there's this backdrop placed here.

So not only would Matthew's original readers been familiar with the language of Isaiah, picking up his book, they would have already had Isaiah rolling around in their minds, but Matthew also clearly makes reference to what God spoke through the prophet.

So he himself is loading this kind of thinking as people are picking up and reading this book. So, with that in mind, turn with me to Isaiah chapter 61.

As you're getting there, let me just give you an aside. There's a hermeneutic danger in going to the computer and typing in words like mourn and just looking for all of the places that it exists in the scripture and making direct connections between them.

I would encourage you not to do such a thing. Our English words do not always relate to each other directly, nor do they in their original language. My hope is that I've showed you what Matthew's intention likely was here, right?

[16:04] As he sets up this backdrop, as he's putting up a stage to say, listen to Isaiah. Reference Isaiah. I'm drawing your minds to the things that Isaiah prophesied.

And then he tells us about this sermon that Jesus preaches, who would have also been very, very familiar with the book of Isaiah. So I hope you catch the connection that I'm making there. So Isaiah 61, and I'll read verses 1 through 4. I want you to pay careful attention to the word mourn. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

They shall build up the ancient ruins. They shall raise up the former devastations. They shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

[17:32] Now, note the phrases in verses 2 and 3. There's three of them. End of verse 2, to comfort all who mourn. You see the direct connection here.

Matthew's original reader's minds would have gone right to this place. Is he talking about the year of favor of the Lord? He certainly is. To grant to those who mourn headdresses instead of headdresses of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of this mourning.

Now, Isaiah is writing for the sake of an exiled Israel. So why are they mourning, right? Isaiah 61. Why is Israel mourning?

They're mourning the loss of their kingdom. And this prophecy is meant to cast their gaze forward to a time when the kingdom will be restored.

This is the mourning that Jesus is referring to in today's text. The blessed mourners are those who see their sin and the effect of sin in the world and long for the coming kingdom of heaven.

[18:47] So it's not just their sin. It's sin. Includes their sin. Includes their own spiritual poverty. But it includes the spiritual poverty of the place in which we live.

Beloved, if we rightly understand the world, we will mourn the brokenness of it. We, like exiled Israel, will long to see restoration and to go home.

Do you see how this mourning goes even deeper? It broadens beyond just our spiritual poverty to all of the spiritual poverty of the world.

Jesus had no sin of his own to mourn over, but he did mourn. John records the resurrection of Lazarus at the hands of Jesus, but before Jesus raised him from the dead, John records in John chapter 11, verse 33 and following, When Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. And then verse 35 records for us, Jesus wept.

[20:09] Here is Jesus. He's about to raise Lazarus from the dead. Clearly he loved this man. Why is it that he was weeping when he had the very power to raise him from the dead?

Wouldn't all of us just go, Well, that's cool. That's fine. I can just raise him from the dead. It's not a problem at all. Because Jesus had the right perspective of the world, didn't he?

He saw the brokenness of it. These people shattered because of death brought about by sin. Generally, sin in the world brought about this thing called death and the brokenheartedness of people and the destruction of sin in the world.

And so Jesus joins with them as he's moved to also mourn. So Jesus wept over death and over the sorrow that death brings.

Luke accounts for us Jesus' approach to Jerusalem in Luke chapter 19, verse 41 and following. This is another example for you. It says, When Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace.

[21:30] But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children with you.

And they will not leave one stone upon another in you because you did not know the time of your visitation. So he knows of the coming judgment placed on Israel and the city of Jerusalem when Rome would overthrow.

And he weeps over it. Ah, the effect of sin. That you would just believe and turn from it.

And this causes a great mourning on his behalf. Martin Lloyd-Jones in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount wrote this, It is the very antithesis of the spirit and mind and outlook of the world, which, as our Lord puts it, laughs now.

Look at the world outside, even in a time of war. It still tries to go on not looking at the true situation, ignoring it and being happy. Let us eat, drink, and be merry is its motto.

[22:42] It laughs and says, Don't dwell too much upon these things. To mourn is the exact opposite. The Christian's attitude is essentially different.

So, questions for you today. Do you mourn over this sin, broken world? Do you mourn first over your own sin?

Being part of that very system. And when I ask that question, I don't mean to ask, Do you beat yourself up and punish yourself in an effort to try to pay for your sins?

I'm not asking, Do you do penance for your sins? If you think this is the way that you pay for your sins, that's self-righteous pride. You can do nothing to atone for your sins.

So, I don't mean that. Don't forget Jesus' very first lesson in this sermon. You're meant to be poor in spirit. We're meant to recognize our spiritual poverty.

[23:45] But does that spiritual poverty make us sad? Does it grieve you to see the blasphemous front to a holy God that your sin is?

Does it grieve you to see your sin bring about the opposite of wholeness and flourishing in your life and in your relationships? When you see brokenness, that's not a direct result of your sin.

Do you lament your part in the rebellion that brought it about? We live in a system that's infected by sin.

What about the sin of others? What is your immediate reaction to the sin of another committed against you or otherwise?

Is it to stand your ground and your rights? Or do you feel a sense of loss? Oh, the sadness when others sin against us.

[24:51] Many of you don't know this, and that's okay. I'm going to inform you in brief. But do you know that I get criticized as a pastor? And I get criticized by outsiders as a pastor?

Did you know that from time to time, I get emails that are so fun to read, criticizing things I've said or things that I've done. Do those things puff me up?

Stand my ground. How dare someone speak to me like this? Or do they make me sad? They ought to make me sad. They don't always. They ought to make me sad. Oh, this poor soul.

Who thinks they know better. Who thinks they're walking in the truth. Who thinks they have a leg to stand on in criticism of me, fine, but of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So what is your immediate reaction to these types of things? What's your immediate reaction to tragic news? Take, for example, the most recent school shooting in Florida. Do you immediately begin to engage in fruitless debates?

[25:53] Is this where your mind goes? Do you feel any sorrow for the wretchedness of this world? Sorrow for both victim and perpetrator?

Exiles in this strange land should be longing for the restoration of all things. We hear news like this. It should break our hearts.

When you're sitting in traffic, do you feel oh so very inconvenienced because your schedule is extremely important or are you concerned for what may have happened at the head of that traffic?

When you roll by the accident, are you more interested in seeing what went on or are you concerned for the people who may have been hurt? Do you care about the very souls that may have been lost in that tragic accident?

So many of us aim so much at ourselves. What about the sin of the cross? The goodness of God to us and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross paid the debt of our sins.

[27:02] Yours and mine. When you think of the cross, you ought to mourn. There ought to be a part of you that mourns because you put him there. He bore the wrath of God for you.

Isaac Watts, the great hymnist, wrote the following, Alas, and did my Savior bleed and did my Sovereign die? Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes I have done he groaned upon the tree? Thus might I hide my blushing faith while his dear cross appears? Dissolve my heart in thankfulness and melt mine eyes to tears.

There is altogether a lack of mourning, seriousness in the American church. We are caught up in so much frivolity and silliness.

John MacArthur wrote, There is a great need in the church today to cry instead of laugh. The frivolity, silliness, and foolishness that go in the name of Christianity should themselves make us mourn.

[28:20] God's counsel to the frivolous happy, the self-satisfied happy, the indulgent happy is, this is from James 4, verse 8 and following.

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 or miserable 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. This is what it means to mourn.

This is what Jesus is here talking about. And he calls these mourners blessed. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

Why are mourners blessed? Because. You can replace the word because in the place of four in the text. Because they will be comforted.

[29:29] This promise refers to both present and future comfort. So it is a long view, end of all things, comfort, to be sure, but it also refers to comfort now.

Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 2 and let me show you this. Paul writes here a bit of a benediction at the end of the chapter, verses 16 and 17.

He says, Now may our Lord, Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through gates, comfort your hearts and establish them in every work and word.

So we see verse 16. Jesus Christ himself, God our Father, loved us and gave us eternal comfort, long view, final comfort.

And then Paul prays, verse 17, that he would also comfort their hearts now, future and present comfort.

[30:40] And we see that God is the source of all present and future comfort. Paul states elsewhere, 2 Corinthians 1, verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

And he has promised everlasting comfort at the setting of all things right side up. John writes in Revelation chapter 21, and verse 4, 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 so Jesus says, Blessed are those who mourn!

For they shall be comforted. Now I said to you at the very beginning of this sermon that the word blessed is a complex word. And we've said flourishing, but it also can mean happy or joyful.

So if we insert the English word there, joyful are those who mourn. It can be a bit of a head-scratcher. Christians, beloved, ought to be altogether at the same time the most sad and the most happy people on earth because of these promises to us.

[32:06] 2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Corinthians 1-3, Revelation 21-4, Matthew 5, and verse 4, Isaiah chapter 61.

Because of the sure promises that we have in Christ. Mourning over the sin of this world and even our own sin, but yet having been delivered from the bondage of it.

Sorrow mixed with joy. Grieved over the things we see happening in the world, but knowing that one day God will set it all straight. Sorrow mixed with joy.

Sad that we see so much vileness poured out, but knowing that one day God will judge both the living and the dead. Sorrow mixed with joy.

The Christian is an odd person. being altogether sad and altogether happy at the same time.

[33:12] I want to close by reading the lyrics to you from a song we sing fairly often. I think we're singing it this morning, called On Jordan's Stormy Banks.

The author of this song uses metaphorically Israel's crossing into the promised land to speak of our present morning in this world and a longing for the kingdom to come.

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand and cast a wishful eye to Canaan's fair and happy land where my possessions lie.

All o'er those wide extended plains shines one eternal day. Their God the sun forever reigns and scatters night away. No chilling winds nor poisonous breath can reach that healthful shore.

Sickness, sorrow, pain, and death are felt and feared no more. When shall I reach that happy place and be forever blessed?

[34:19] When shall I see my father's faith and in his bosom rest? I hope that you can rejoice with me in singing the chorus of this song I am bound I am bound I am bound for the promised land.

Jesus wants you to rejoice with us. He lived a perfect life that by faith you may be found righteous in him. He died a sinner's death your death that by faith the dead of your sin would be forgiven.

He is now seated at the right hand of the father and has given to us the comforter great spirit that we have that by faith our hearts would be comforted and one day he will return and make all things new so that all of us who believe in him will live with him and be comforted by him forever.

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Please join me in prayer.