

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Beatitudes		Pastor/Teacher
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BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN

Happy are those who mourn! Isn't that like saying "healthy are the sick?" What an obvious contradiction! "If the first beatitude cuts sharply across the ways of the world," writes James Houston, "then this second saying follows hard on its heels. No one would ever naturally connect mourning with happiness."¹ The word trans. *mourn* is *penthein*. It is one of the strongest words in the Greek language for mourning. Trench tells us that the word means "to grieve with a grief which so takes possession of the whole being that it cannot be hid."² Likewise, Barclay writes: "It is the sorrow which pierces the heart; it is no gentle, sentimental, twilight sadness, in which a man can languish and luxuriate, it is sorrow which is poignant, piercing and intense."³ The participial form of the verb heightens the *state* of the experience. It is not those who have mourned, but it is those who (now) mourn, and even more specifically (participally), it is those who are mourning.⁴ Whereas the first Beatitude (poor in spirit) has more of a reference to something we *know* or recognize (thus more directly addressing our minds), the second Beatitude is concerned with our *emotions*. Furthermore, this attitude is one that is *essential* to those who are "poor in spirit." We can only understand **this mourning** in **that** light.

- I. **THE NATURE OF THIS MOURNING.** Not all mourning is encompassed in this beatitude (cf. 2 Cor. 7:9-11; Hosea 7:14). There is a *natural* mourning resulting from loss. There is an *envious* mourning when people mourn because of the good of others. There is a *selfish* mourning when people either mourn for attention or because of self pity. There is a *devilish* mourning when people mourn because they cannot satisfy their lusts. Finally, there is a *desperate* mourning when people mourn in despair. All people suffer grief at some point, but not all are blessed because they mourn.
 - A. **Its Source.** It stems from being poor in spirit. It cannot be severed from the first beatitude. "Because you know you are spiritually bankrupt, your emotion takes over, and you mourn that bankruptcy."⁵ Bishop Ryle declared: "The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who *mourn*. He means those who sorrow for sin, and grieve daily over their own short-comings. These are they who trouble themselves more about sin than about anything on earth. The remembrance of it is grievous to them. The burden of it is intolerable. Blessed are all such! *The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit*. One day they shall weep no more. *They shall be comforted.*"⁶
 - B. **Its Substance.** This mourning has a certain character and is suffered in a certain way. This mourning is needful and profitable. It is a sorrow never to be repented of. "When a man hath wept and blubbered," wrote Richard Sibbes, "and spent a great deal of time in passionate tears, in cursed tears, in froward tears, in revengeful stomachful tears, he must blot out these tears with new tears; he must unweep this

weeping, and undo his mourning because he hath thus mourned; he hath reason to repent for His sorrow.”⁷

NOTE: This mourning is not ostentatious (cf. Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:16). Luther wrote, “So also a man is said to *mourn and be sorrowful* – not if his head is always drooping and his face is always sour and never smiling; but if he does not depend on having a good time and living it up, the way the world does, which yearns for nothing but having sheer joy and fun here, revels in it, and neither thinks nor cares about the state of God or men.”⁸ He then says, “Such people know something of what it means to mourn and be sorrowful, although they do not at once show it, but eat and drink with others, and sometimes with laughing and jesting, to conceal their sorrow. For you must not think that mourning means only weeping and lamenting, or wailing, like children and women; this is not yet the real deep grief, if it has found its way to the heart and pours itself out through the eyes; but that is it, when the real hard blows come that strike and crush the heart, so that one cannot weep or dare complain to anyone. Therefore mourning is not a rare plant among Christians, although it makes no outward show, even if they would gladly be cheerful in Christ, and also outwardly as much as they can. For when they look at the world they must daily see and be painfully conscious of so much malice, arrogance, contempt for and blasphemy of God and his word, and besides so much misery and misfortune that the devil occasions, both in church and state, that they cannot have many cheerful thoughts, and their spiritual joy is very weak. And if they were to look at such things all the while, and did not sometimes turn their eyes away, they could never be cheerful at all; it is enough that this really happens oftener than they would wish, so that they need not so far to find it.”⁹

C. *Its Cause.* What are the objects of this mourning? It is directly linked with sin (cf. Psalms 32 and 51, where sin is mourned). Spiritual poverty is the result of sin. This sorrow is not only over personal sin but also “over the unhindered workings of the godless power of this world, whether one experiences this bodily or merely sees it raging about him. Those who truly hold to God’s Kingdom and His righteousness cannot behold this without grief.”¹⁰ Jesus’ blessing therefore embraces all mourners, even in earthly sorrow, who hope in God.¹¹

II. ***THE PROMISE TO THESE MOURNERS.*** “They shall be comforted.” The word trans. *comforted* is *parakalein* (in the passive). The noun form is used of the Holy Spirit in John 14:15 (the Comforter). In addition to comfort, the word also includes the thought *to exhort* or *to encourage* as well as *to counsel*.¹² Note the future aspect – “they *shall be* comforted.” Does not the Gospel promise forgiveness to believing sinners? Yes, it does! There is the promise and comfort in knowing deliverance from the *penalty* of sin. There is also the promise of deliverance from the *power* of sin (Romans 6:11-14). But *all* Christians await their deliverance from the *presence* of sin (Romans 8:23). This is how the late James Boice put it: “The promise of the second beatitude is *comfort*, comfort to those who sense their sin and mourn for it. In the first place there is comfort in a deliverance from sin’s penalty. The sensitive soul will grieve for his sins and see them as the great offense to God that they are. But he may also experience the comfort that God has provided through Christ’s cross. The Bible tells us that we were dead in trespasses and sins, that we merited nothing from God but alienation and eternal death. But Jesus Christ came to step between the wrath of God against sin on the one hand and all who trust in Jesus Christ on the other. He took the blow of God’s wrath upon himself, paying the full penalty for our sin, and God has placed the full righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ to our account, so that we are seen as being perfectly acceptable before God in him. The Bible tells us that we have been made *accepted in the Beloved* (Eph. 1:6 NSB). There is unspeakable joy in this experience. This is the joy that was foretold by the angels on the evening of Christ’s birth, for they said, *Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior*

has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11). Then, too, the deliverance of Jesus Christ also means a deliverance from present sin and from its power. If you are a Christian, Christ lives in you through his Holy Spirit. You are united to him. And you are united to him in order to make a victorious, triumphant life possible.”¹³

CONCLUSION: Those who mourn their poverty of spirit do **not** become rich as a result.¹⁴ “There is emphasized in this attitude the believer’s continued sinfulness in fact and in act; and his **continued** sense of his sinfulness. And this carries with it recognition of the necessity of unbroken penitence throughout life. . . . The attitude of the *miserable sinner* is not only not one of despair; it is not even one of depression; and not even one of hesitation or doubt; hope is too weak a word to apply to it. It is an attitude of exultant joy. Only this joy has its ground not in ourselves but in our Savior. We are sinners and we know ourselves to be sinners, lost and helpless in ourselves. But we are saved sinners; and it is our salvation which gives the tone to our life, a tone of joy which swells in exact proportion to the sense we have of our ill-desert; for it is he to whom much is forgiven who loves much, and who loving, rejoices much.”¹⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ James Houston, *In Search of Happiness* (Lion, 1990), p. 222.

² R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 238.

³ W. Barclay, *The Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer for Everyman* (Harper & Row, 1964), p. 29.

⁴ F. D. Bruner, *The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary I* (Word, 1987), p. 138.

⁵ J. MacArthur, Jr., *Kingdom Living Here and Now* (Moody, 1980), p. 60.

⁶ *Ryle’s Expository Thoughts on The Gospels I* (rpt. Baker, 1977), p. 32.

⁷ *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. A. B. Grosart VI (rpt. James Nichol, 1863), p. 270.

⁸ M. Luther, *Commentary on The Sermon on the Mount* (Lutheran Publication Society, 1892), p. 35.

⁹ *The Place of Trust: Martin Luther on the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. M. E. Marty (Harper & Row, 1983), p. 53.

¹⁰ H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew: The Bible Student’s Commentary* (rpt. Zondervan, 1987), p. 89.

¹¹ J. A. Bengel, *New Testament Word Studies*, trans. C. T. Lewis and M. R. Vincent, I (rpt. Kregel, 1971), p. 103.

¹² Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you **another** Counselor (NIV), implying that they had one already, even Himself (cf. also 1 John 2:10.) *Comforter* in Hebrew (*MeNaHem*) is the name of the Messiah, and *to see consolation* (*NeHaMaH*) is a frequent expression in Rabbinical writings. Cf. A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (MacMillian, 1949), pp. 50-51.

¹³ J. M. Boice, *The Sermon on The Mount: An Expositional Commentary* (Baker, 2002), p. 29.

¹⁴ “The mourning for sin that drives the soul to Christ, that is the blessing mourning; but when any man or woman satisfies themselves in their mourning, and thinks that because they mourn for sin God will accept them without having their hearts carried unto Christ, this mourning will vanish and come to nothing.” Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints’ Happiness, Delivered In Divers Lectures On The Beatitudes* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1986), p. 49.

¹⁵ B. B. Warfield, “Miserable-Sinner Christianity in the Hands of the Rationalists,” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, VII (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 114. I would encourage you to read this masterful article by one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Church.