

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Happy Are the Sad

Scripture: Matthew 5:4

Code: 2199

Matthew 5:4 says, "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." In one of the great Psalms of David, he recites the depths of pain that the heart knows in the disappointments and sorrows of life. And then - this is Psalm 55 - he cries out and says, "Oh that I had wings like a dove. For then would I fly away and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."

Well, David echoes a cry that has come from the lips of all men at one time or another. When they face sorrow, when they face disappointment, when they face tragedy, when they face discouragement, they say like David, "Oh if I could only escape, if I could only fly away and be at rest." David echoes the cry of fallen humanity, a cry for freedom, a cry for life on wings, to fly away and be removed from the pain and the sorrow, the anguish.

Anybody who has ever been through those kinds of things knows what it is to yearn for comfort in a life of pain, or a life of sorrow, or a disappointment, or bitterness. We all have longed to run away, to look away, to flee from sorrow to the place of comfort that is always so hidden and so elusive. And the deeper the sorrow, and the deeper the disappointment, and the deeper the pain, the more elusive that place of comfort is. And I guess that's the paradox of this beatitude, because here it says, "Happy are the sad." We never thought that was true. Comforted are the mourners. That's contrary to everything we know.

The whole structure of our life, the pleasure madness, the amusement park mentality, the entertainment mania, the constant thrill seeking, the money, and the energy, and the time, and the enthusiasm expended in living it up are expression of the world's desire to avoid the mourning, and to avoid the sorrow, and to avoid the pain. But Jesus said, "Happy are the sad. Happy are those that mourn."

In fact, Jesus also said in Luke 6:25, "Woe unto you that laugh now, for your laughter shall become weeping." Now that's different. "Woe to you that laugh for you shall mourn and weep?" "Happy are you that mourn for you shall be comforted?" Just the opposite of the world's philosophy. A new approach to life. And that's exactly what Jesus is doing, isn't he, in the Sermon on the Mount? he is offering a new approach to life. It condemns the apparent laughter and happiness of the world. It pronounces blessing, it pronounces happiness, it pronounces joy, peace, and comfort on those who mourn.

You say, “Well, John, what in the world does this mean?” Let’s answer that question first of all. And we’ll cover four questions tonight and give you answers to them, hopefully. First of all, what does it mean “blessed or happy, *makarios*, are those that mourn?” In what sense is that true? Let’s talk about it.

There are in the Greek language nine different verbs used in the New Testament that speak of grief. This is the strongest of the nine. This is the most severe. But the very fact that there are nine different verbs in one language to express the concept of grief is a pretty good indication that it is a way of life, that it is part and parcel of just living. And, in fact, the whole of man’s history is the story of tears, and it’s the story of sorrow, and, by the way, we have had a lot of it but we haven’t had anything like what is yet to come.

In Matthew 24:4 “Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Take heed that no man deceive you, for many shall come in my name saying “I am Christ” and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, pestilences, earthquakes in various places.’ ”

Now if you know anything about Matthew 24, you know that Jesus was talking about a time at the end of the age. And he follows it up in the next verse by saying, “All these are only the beginning of sorrows.” You haven’t seen anything yet. The history of man is the history of sorrow. It’s a history of tears. It’s a history of pain and grief. And man has only seen the beginning of it.

Now just what kind of mourning is Jesus talking about? What does he mean when he says, “Blessed are they that mourn?” What kind of blessedness is available for what kind of mourning? Well, the Bible talks about all different kinds of mourning, by the way. There are a lot of different kinds of mourning. Let me just share a couple with you.

First of all, there is what you might call general sorrow, just the sorrow of life, a kind of a proper sorrow, if you will. A kind of a sorrow that is acceptable, that is very normal. Weeping and mourning in this sense is a part of human life. In fact, it’s a gift of God. Did you know that? Did you know that the ability to cry is a gift of God? The pain and the anxiety that you hold in would be poison your entire emotional system if it couldn’t be released in tears, if it couldn’t be released in sorrow.

You see weeping and sorrowing is like the releasing of a pressure valve that lets all of that out of your system so it doesn’t poison your whole emotional character. It’s a gift from God. It releases pain. It permits a healing process. And when pain is kept inside, and when remorse is kept inside, and when sorrow and mourning are kept inside, they poison the emotions. It’s very natural to mourn. It’s very natural to do that. Abraham wept when his wife died. He had every right to do that. That’s how he

dealt with his grief. It came out in tears and mourning.

In Psalm 42:1-3, we hear the Psalmist mourning and this is what he says. "As the hart," H-A-R-T, it's a small deer, "As the deer panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, Oh, God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night while they continually say unto me where is Thy God?"

In other words, the sorrow and the grief over the absence of God was released in the heart of the Psalmist through the tears that came coursing down his cheeks. And you see he was suffering from loneliness, and loneliness is reason enough to cry. It's reason enough to have some tears. And for even a child of God who may, at one point in his life, feel lonely and estranged from God, tears are a very normal way to deal with such sorrow.

In 2 Timothy 1:3-4, Paul said to Timothy, "I thank God whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience that without ceasing, Timothy, I have remembered thee in my prayers night and day." Listen to this. "Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears." Timothy was weeping because of terrible discouragement and defeat. I've shed some tears sometimes of loneliness, sometimes of discouragement and defeat. That's normal.

The 9th chapter of Jeremiah, the prophet who had been called by God to preach to Israel about a coming judgment, came and preached with tears. This is what he says in Jeremiah 9:1. Just listen. "Oh, that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slaying of the daughter of my people." The psalmist wept because he was lonely. Timothy wept because he was discouraged. Jeremiah wept because he saw the judgment of God about the fall of the people he loved. He was disappointed, disappointed, tragically disappointed, and he had so much of it inside of him that he wished that his whole head were like a river so it would get out of him.

In Acts chapter 20, the apostle Paul met with the Ephesian elders and he talked about his tears in verse 31. "Therefore, watch and remember that for the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." The psalmist had tears of loneliness. Timothy had tears of discouragement. Jeremiah had tears of disappointment. Paul had tears of concern, tears of care, tears of anxiety.

In Mark Chapter 9, a father brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus and the tears were running down the father's cheeks as he said, "If thou canst believe all things are possible to him that believeth, and straightway the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief.' " You say, "What kind of tears were those?" They were the tears of earnest love for a son that wanted to see a son delivered from a demon.

Something, I suppose, like Psalm 126:5. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Earnest love, and in Psalm 126 it's that earnest love for the lost that makes you weep.

In Luke 7:37, a woman came into the Pharisee's house where Jesus was reclining and resting, and she brought an alabaster box of ointment - you remember the story. Luke records for us that the woman stood at his feet weeping, and she wept all over his feet, and then she washed his feet with her own hair. And when the Pharisee questioned, "Why, Jesus, would you ever allow a scarlet sinful woman like this to do that to you?" And Jesus gave them a little lesson on how people who have been forgiven are very grateful. What kind of tears were those? They were the tears of devotion. They were the tears of worship. They were the tears of heartfelt gratitude.

Sometimes people cry when they're thankful. Sometimes they cry out of earnest love. Sometimes they cry out of concern. Sometimes they cry out of disappointment, sometimes out of discouragement, sometimes out of loneliness, and sometimes just out of love. Love makes people cry.

Our Lord wept at the grave of Lazarus because he loved him and he had compassion. He wept over the city of Jerusalem because he loved them and had compassion. Mary Magdalene wept because Jesus was dead and those are the sorrowing tears of death, and that's very normal, and that's a God-given way to release that terrible pain that's in your heart. Nothing wrong with that.

And so there is a sense to mourn in a very normal human way can be a blessing because you release those kinds of things. It's as if tears are a gift from God for the release of pain, and there's a time for that. Ecclesiastes Chapter 3, "A time to be born, a time to die, a time to laugh, a time to cry."

But in addition to that there's another kind of human weeping that is different. It is not proper. It is improper. It is illicit. This is when a man mourns because he can't satisfy his lust. It's when he's got the tears of an unmet evil desire. This is the tear of Ammon. You remember that Ammon in 2 Samuel 13 wept and mourned until he became sick wanting to defile his own sister, Tamar, sexually.

Thus did Ahab mourn. He wanted Naboth's vineyard. He coveted it so much that it says in 1 Kings 21:4, "He laid on his bed, turned away his face, and wouldn't eat any bread." He went into mourning because he wanted what wasn't his. That's an illicit, wrong kind of mourning.

And then also sometimes there is the mourning, the foolish extended mourning of people who can't let somebody go. You see it very often when somebody dies and a person becomes a literal basket case. It happens even in the case of Christians. Recently heard of such an individual who is - in our vernacular - lost his mind because of the loss of a partner who went to be with Jesus Christ. That's pure selfishness. The depressing sorrow of one who is so selfish he cannot rejoice in the exaltation of

the one he loves so deeply.

Now there's another kind of illicit sorrow and that's the sorrow that's overdone because of guilt. You know there are some people who just get super sorry and super mournful as a way of atoning for their own sin. A good Biblical illustration of this is David. Absalom, you remember, had tried to dethrone his father. You can read 2 Samuel chapters 15 through 20 and get the whole story, but I'll just give it to you in a little short vignette here.

Absalom tried to dethrone his father. Absalom was proud. He was egotistical. He particularly liked his hair. And Absalom plotted against David, and he plotted against him to dethrone him, and he drove David right out of the city, drove his own father out of Jerusalem. He took over the palace and he planned a coup that would wipe out David's forces. And so the battle came off. Unfortunately for Absalom his side lost and he was slain.

David had told his soldiers, "Now when the battle starts," David said in 18:5 of 2 Samuel, "deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." Be easy on Absalom. You say, "Easy on a vile, sinful, evil, rebellious man?" "Be easy on him." And when David was told that he was dead he said, "Oh my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son."

Now his love admirable, his idea is stupid. Who wants Absalom to run Israel? The nation needed David, not the sinful proud, egotistical Absalom. Why was David sorrowing like that? Because David was full of guilt because he'd been such a terrible father, and his sorrow was something like a catharsis to wash his own soul from its obvious failures. There's no doubt in my mind that Absalom's death was part of the payment for sin with Bathsheba.

You remember, if you go back in 2 Samuel 12, God said to David, "You will pay four times for this sin. As the Lord liveth," he said, "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die. He shall restore four fold." There were four great tragedies that came to David: The baby died born of Bathsheba, his daughter Tamar was sinfully violated, his son Amnon was slain, and Absalom was slaughtered.

And the mourning over Absalom was kind of an atonement. And in 2 Samuel 19 it tells us the soldiers were actually ashamed they won because David was so sad. And Joab says, "I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died it would have pleased you well." You see, there is then an improper kind of mourning.

Some people say, "Well, in general, this beatitude is just true, you know, when you weep you feel a lot better. Sorrow has a way of just sort of building you up and strengthening you and, you know, they even write poems about it." You remember the old poem? "I walked a mile with Pleasure; She chatted all the way; But left me none the wiser for all she had to say. I walked a mile with Sorrow; And ne'er a

word said she; But, oh! The things I learned from her, when Sorrow walked with me.”

It's a very nice poem. The Arabs used to say, “All sunshine makes a desert.” Sorrow does teach us a lot. It's a nice sentiment, but that's not what this is talking about. It is not talking about the sorrow of the world, whether licit or illicit. It is not at all. It is talking about a godly sorrow that is very different.

I want you to look at 2 Corinthians 7 and see the difference. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, the apostle Paul helps us to understand it. He says this. “For godly sorrow - ” now it's not the sorrow of the world “ - godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of. But the sorrow of the world works death.”

Listen, you can cry your eyes out about your problems and you can weep all you want about loneliness, and about discouragement, and about disappointment, and out of earnest love, and you can weep all you want about all those things, and you can cry your head off about your unfulfilled lusts, and when you're said and done, every bit of that worldly sorrow will not bring you life.

There's only one kind of sorrow that brings life, and that is godly sorrow, which leads you to – what? - repentance. Therefore, we conclude that it is sorrow over – what? - sin that is the issue. That's the issue. It is godly sorrow, sorrow over sin. The sorrow of the world is useless. It works death where godly sorrow works repentance, which brings salvation, which brings comfort. That's the whole idea. That's the key. Godly sorrow is linked to repentance, and repentance is linked to sin.

The issue, beloved, go back to it, Matthew 5:4, the issue here is not being sorry because you're lonely, not being sorry because you're discouraged, or disappointed, or because you have such an earnest love, or because somebody died. It's not being sorry because you don't get what you want. It's not being sorry because you feel so guilty. It's being sorry because you're a sinner. That's the issue.

You're not mourning here over circumstances, human circumstances. Over sin is what you're mourning about. Remember verse three, where the beatitudes all began? “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What does it mean to be poor in spirit? I told you. It's a sense of being spiritually bankrupt. It is the thing that says “in my flesh there dwelleth – ” what? “ - no good thing.” That's what it is.

And that's the intellectual part, and verse 4 is the emotional part. Because your mind is convinced that you are spiritually bankrupt, your emotion takes over and you mourn that bankruptcy. Such are kingdom people. Poor in spirit is a recognition that we have nothing, and that we are nothing, and that we can do nothing, and it results in being a crouching, cowering, beggar who has no resource, no capacity to help himself.

And what he is saying - our Lord is saying - in verse 3 is "Happy is the man who is absolutely destitute spiritually, who is nothing but a beggar who has to plead for mercy and grace." Because it's that kind of man who gets the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven.

So what are we saying, people? Listen to it. Entrance into his kingdom begins with an overwhelmingly helpless feeling of spiritual poverty. It begins with a sense of the bankruptcy of the soul. That's where it begins. As long as you live on this earth you will never enter God's kingdom unless you have a sense of spiritual bankruptcy. And if you are a child of the kingdom you'll never lose that sense. But in your flesh continually dwells no good thing. As long as we live, we have the same sense of spiritual poverty. If it wasn't there at the start, you're not a Christian. If it's not there now it's questionable whether you are a Christian, because it's part of kingdom people.

George McDonald refers to this principle in his exposition on the Sermon on the Mount. He says this. "The poor, the beggars in spirit, the humble men of heart, the unambitious, the unselfish, those who never despise men and never seek their praises, the lowly who seek nothing to admire in themselves, therefore, cannot seek to be admired of others, the men who give themselves away, these are the free men of the kingdom. These are the citizens of the new Jerusalem, the men who are aware of their own essential poverty, not the men who are poor in friends, or poor in influence, or poor in requirements, or poor in money, but those who are poor in spirit, who feel themselves poor creatures who know nothing to be pleased with themselves for and desire nothing to make them think well of themselves, who know that they need much to make their life worth living, to make their existence a good thing, to make them fit to live. These humble ones are poor, whom the Lord calls blessed. McDonald says, "When a man says, 'I am low and worthless,' then the gate of the kingdom begins to open to him."

Such poverty in spirit, beloved, in verse 3 will lead to mourning in verse 4, true mourning over sin. Only the beggar can say, "Woe is me for I am undone." Only the beggar can say, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Look at David. After his terrible sin with Bathsheba, after he had managed to make sure that Uriah, her husband, was murdered, he not only saw how poverty stricken he was, he not only saw he was absolutely hopeless, that in sin did his mother conceive him in Psalm 51, but he mourned so deeply that it wrenched his soul to its very depths.

Look at Job. Job had everything. Do you know how rich Job was? Job was so rich that in 29:6 it says he washed his doorstep with butter. That's rich. Also makes your doorstep very slippery. Job had everything. But the man was never really made a man until he comes clear to the 42nd chapter after having God flatten him, until he realized he was nothing. And he says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear. But now mine eye seeth thee." And his response, "I abhor myself and I repent in dust and ashes." Anybody whoever gets a true picture of who he is related to God has that same reaction. That's the only way to the kingdom. You've got to crawl.

The word “mourning” here in this verse is the strongest of all the Greek words. It is reserved for mourning for the dead. The passionate lament for one loved deeply and lost. In the Septuagint, it is used of Jacob’s grief when he believed Joseph, his son, was dead, Genesis 37. It’s used in the gospels, in Mark, for example, in 16:10, “And she went - ” and this is, of course, after the death of Christ, “ - and told those who had been with Him as they mourned and wept.” It’s the same word. It’s the strongest word that you use when someone is bewailing the death of one greatly beloved. You find it in Revelation 18, as the evil system bewails the death of its commerce in the great Babylon’s destruction in the time of the tribulation.

Now let me say another word about this concept of this word itself. The word conveys the idea of a deep inner agony, not just an external wailing. There’s another Greek word that has to do with just shouting out a wailing. This is a deep inner pain. We see it with David if you go back to Psalm 32. Let me just read you a few verses.

Psalm 32:3, “When I kept silence my bones became old through my roaring all the day long.” You know when David wouldn’t confess his sin to God, it just tore him up. It just ate him up inside. “Day and night thy hand was upon me, my moisture - ” or my life juices, the blood and the lymphatic juices and all of those things, saliva and everything else in the body, “ - was turned into the drought of summer.” His whole person was just wrenched. And then he says, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, my iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”

In Psalm 51, reflecting on the same sin with Bathsheba he said, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity; cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.” I can't get it out of my vision. I can't get it out of my mind.

Verse 10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.” Listen. When he mourned his sin and he confessed his sin, he was cleaned out. It was a whole different attitude.

And you know what he said in Psalm 32 when he got it all out? He said, “Blessed, happy. Happy is the man who mourns, because happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy is the man unto whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.” You know why mourners are happy? Because mourners over sin who are the only ones who are – what? - forgiven. The rest of the world has to live with that guilt endlessly with no relief.

Beloved, let me say this. The happiness doesn't come in the mourning. It comes in what God does in response to it. You just try as a Christian to keep sin in your life and bottle it up and you just see how ruinous it becomes. You confess it and see the freedom and the joy that comes in forgiveness.

Listen. David had experienced the tears of loneliness. David had experienced the tears of rejection. He had experienced the tears of frustration, the tears of discouragement and disappointment. He had experienced the tears of defeat. He had even experienced the illicit tears of his own guilt where he tried to atone for his own sin, but nothing ever broke the heart of David to tears like his own sin. And then God comforted him, and he said, "Happy is the man whose transgression is forgiven."

Happy are the sad. You know what the world says? "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile." And the Bible says, "Mourn, mourn, mourn."

Look at James Chapter 4. There's not enough of this, people, in our lives not enough. James 4:8 says this. And I want you to hear it. "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners. Purify your hearts, ye double minded." Now listen to verse 9. "Be afflicted and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he shall lift you up."

Listen. There's no greater word that I can think of to Christianity of our day than to start crying instead of laughing. It grieves my heart to see the frivolity and the foolishness and the silliness that goes on in the name of Christianity. I have a word for those people. My word for those people is this. "Be afflicted and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness."

Listen. Nobody ever came into the kingdom of God who didn't mourn over his own sinfulness. And you can't verify to me that you're a true Christians or to anyone else unless throughout your life there is the same sense of grief over the sin in your own life.

Now I don't mind being happy because I'm forgiven, but I can't enjoy that happiness until I have dealt with sin. A child of God is one constantly broken over sinfulness. You know it's hard for me to be happy much any more. It really is. I used to be a lot happier than I am now. I know too much to be happy.

Ezekiel said this - Ezekiel 21. "A sword, a sword is sharpened and also furbished. Should we then make mirth?" He said, "Are we supposed to be laughing and joking? A sword is sharpened and furbished." In other words, God is ready to strike an eternal judgment. What are we laughing about? It isn't a joke.

In Isaiah 22:12, we see a further word along the same line. "And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth." He was giving a picture of judgment coming on Jerusalem. He says you ought to be weeping. And verse 13, "Behold - " what did he see? " - joy, gladness, slaying oxen, killing sheep." In other words, having a big party and a feast, drinking wine. " 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.' And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts, surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die."

Why? Because as long as you're laughing about it you'll never know its cleansing. See? You laugh when you see evil? Do you laugh when evil is portrayed on your television set? Do you laugh when you hear something about somebody doing an evil thing? Do you laugh at jokes that talk about ungodliness? Are those things laughable things?

Proverbs 2:14 says that some "delight in the perverseness of evil." 2 Thessalonians 2:12 uses the little phrase "rejoice in iniquity." Do you do that? You know, I really believe, people, that the church today has a defective sense of sin. It has a defective doctrine of sin. We think - so many people think - the Christian life is a joke, that the church is something you make fun of, that you laugh about it.

And there are people who have set themselves up as sort of critics of the church who do satire on the church as if it was a joke, as if it was something to laugh at. They spend all their time thinking of funny ways to comment on Christianity. We put on Christian frivolity. I'm not against having fun, you know that. I think the Old Testament is pretty clear when it says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." But, you know, we're so out of balance that we've lost all of this sense haven't we?

People say, "Oh this charismatic movement is the greatest revival I've ever seen." Listen. I never saw so much frivolity and silliness in my life, and that's a far cry from mourning. Conviction of sin must precede conversion and it must follow it. That's the path of blessedness.

You know, it's amazing. Some Christians will spend all of their life trying to find happiness and they'll go to get some counseling and they'll read a book on it, *The Christian Secret of a Happy Life*, and they'll try to find all of this stuff. And what they really need to do is mourn because that's the road to happiness.

Now when you're spiritually bankrupt and when you're a sinner you can respond several ways. First, you can deny it like the Pharisees did and just put on a phony front and live a whole life of deception and make everybody think you're really perfect. Or, when you face your spiritual bankruptcy, you can admit it and then you can try to change it yourself by saying, "Boy, am I going to get this one on. I'm going to roll up my sleeves and make myself a better person." Moral rearmament. Or, you can admit it and then despair so much that you go out and hang yourself like Judas. You just can't hack it. You're a sinner and you know it and you just can't handle it.

A young man in our church, been here ever since I came here, two days ago - no yesterday - took a gun and killed himself, found his body. He knew he was a sinner, sure, couldn't handle it. Despair was so deep he took his life. So you could deny it, put on a phony front, you could admit it and try to change it yourself, you can admit it and sink into despair, or you could admit it and turn to God for grace and mercy. And the last choice is the right choice.

What did the prodigal son do, way out there eating the pig slop? Did he deny his circumstance? I'm all right. This is really not bad stuff. I'm going to make it. Or did he admit it and say, "Well, I'm going to work my way up on the farm? I'm going to show them I can perform." Or, did he admit it and despair and just fall down and drown in it? No. He did the right thing. He admitted it and then went back to the father where the source of grace and mercy was to be found. He mourned.

Salvation comes by repentance, comes by mourning, and God demands it. I really feel, people, that there are an awful lot of folks in this world who think they're Christians but they didn't come to Christ with a bankrupt spirit mourning over sin and that's the only way in. And if it isn't true in your life right now, I question whether it ever was true that you were saved.

You know, it's amazing when somebody says to somebody in Christian circles for the most part, "Are you a Christian?" They will say, "Yes." "Well how do you know?" And most times they will say, "Well, I remember when I went forward." Or, "I remember when I gave my -" in other words, the whole basis of the assurance that they're a Christian is based on the past. No. The New Testament never deals with that.

The New Testament never talks about a decision. The New Testament never talks about walking an aisle, never talks about signing a card, never talks about having a counselor tell you, you were a Christian. All it talks about is you are a Christian if there's present evidence, see. That's always the issue.

And in 2 Corinthians 12:21, "And lest when I come again my God shall humble me among you that I should bewail many who have sinned already and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness, which they have committed." Dear Paul says, "If you're not going to cry about it, then all that's left is for me to cry about it."

God demands repentance. He demands realization of sin. I'm not talking about wallowing in self-pity. I'm talking about genuine repentance and if you don't know the difference you've got a problem.

By the way, in 2 Corinthians 2:7 it says that we shouldn't let somebody be swallowed up with over much sorrow. There's too much of this. And also it tends sometimes to lead to a sense of spiritual superiority, holier than thou. You know, like the little girl who saw the jackass with the long face and

said he must be a very spiritual Christian. Happiness comes in true mourning. "A broken and a contrite heart thy wilt not despise, O God," Psalm 51.

Can I go further? I believe this. That we have mourned in spiritual poverty over our sin when we came into the kingdom and we continue to do it all our life long. Romans Chapter 7 - and I hinted at it this morning and I want you to see it - Romans 7. People think that this was a thing that happened to Paul in his life and once he got to Romans 8 he never had a problem with it any more. That isn't true.

In Romans 7:15 he says, "The things I want to do I don't do and things I hate I do," and he says in verse 17, "It's sin that dwells in me," and he goes on to talk about it. "In my flesh dwells no good thing for to will is with me," verse 18, and "How to perform that which is good I find not." And he goes down to verse 20, "Sin that dwells in me," and he says, "I find a law when I would do good evil is present. I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members."

In other words, righteousness and sin are fighting. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" In other words, this is a way of life with him. This isn't a one-time deal that he knocked off. Well, it says in verse 25, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And people say, "There it is, the victory," but they don't read the rest of the verse. "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." Just because he knew where the victory was didn't mean it was once for all. He fought it every day of his life until he met Jesus face to face. It's a way of life to deal with sin. It never changes.

Listen. Look at 8:23. He says, "And not only they, not only creation groans, but look, ourselves also who even have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we groan waiting for the adoption that is the redemption of our body." Listen. It isn't just creation groaning. I'm sick of this fight myself. I'm sick of this sin. I want relief.

No wonder he said, "far better to depart and be with Christ." No wonder he said in 2 Corinthians 5, "For in this we groan earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven." Listen beloved, you get saved by being bankrupt in your spirit and mourning over your sin and that's the way it ought to be the rest of your life. You ought to really be upset about your sin.

You know John, in 1 John, gives the evidences of a Christian and one of them is this. "If we are confessing our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." And what that really means in context is this. If we are the ones continually confessing our sins, we give evidence of being the ones who are being forgiven. In other words, the forgiven ones, the subjects of the kingdom, the children of the king, the sons of God, are characterized by constant confession of sin.

Remember a guy said to me one time, "Boy have I been liberated." UCLA student, have I been liberated. "Somebody just reinterpreted 1 John 1:9, and I know now that I don't have to confess my sin. Been great." I said, "When did you find that out?" "Oh, a few months ago." "Great." I said, "I want to ask you a question. Do you confess your sin?" He said, "I just told you - I don't have to."

I said, "I know you did. Do you confess your sin?" He said, "Yes. And that's what bothers me." I said, "It's a good thing." I said, "Whatever that little thing is you learned, you're overruled by your own new nature, which is characteristic of any believer: He will confess his sin."

By the way, going back to Matthew chapter 5, the verb here is a present tense, *penthountes*, continuous action, "the ones who are continually mourning are the ones continually being comforted." Luther in his 95 Theses said that our entire life is a continuous act of repentance and contrition. David cried it out, Psalm 38, "For my iniquities are gone over my head. Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." It was a way of life. He just faced his sin as a reality all through his life.

You know something? In all of the New Testament we find so much about Jesus, but one thing we never see Jesus do in the whole New Testament account is laugh. He never laughed. Oh, I don't know if he did laugh or not, but it isn't recorded. Hard for me to imagine that he had much to laugh about. He was hungry. He was angry. He was thirsty, but it never says he laughed, and that's such a part of human emotion. But it does say he wept. He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

I think we've left that. We have been sucked into an entertainment, thrill seeking, pleasure mad, silly world of fools and jesters and comedians, some of them even trying to ply their trade in the church. Do you know that it was man introduced the other night on Christian television program as the leading Christian comedian? Who needs that? That's what it means. You understand now don't you what it means to mourn over your sin?

What's the result of it? Second question. These will be shorter. And I didn't say all I wanted to say, either, about that. You realize that you just get the tip of the iceberg week after week. Living with that frustration is very difficult. What is the result of mourning? You say, "So what's it going to get me? I mourn around, mope around, sorry for my sin, what do I get?" Comfort, comfort. By the way, as I said before, mourners are not blessed because they mourn, mourners are blessed because they comfort. You don't mourn, you don't get comforted. You just try to hide your guilt and it eats away. There's no happiness in the sorrow of the world because it can't be comforted.

And by the way, they use the emphatic pronoun *autoi* here, which means "blessed are they who continue to mourn for they alone shall be comforted." It is only the mourners who know the comfort of God. It is only those who mourn for sin who know what it is to have their tears dried by the loving hand of Jesus Christ. They shall be comforted, *parakale* from which we get *paraclete*, the one called alongside to help, the one that Jesus referred to, the comforter.

By the way, the Bible tells us God is a comforter, Psalm 30:5, Psalm 50:15, Isaiah 55:6-7, Micah 7:18-20, and on and on and on talks about the comfort that God gives us. He helps us, he succors us, he hears our cry, he meets our need, he's always there beseeching, and admonishing, and consoling, and sympathizing, and encouraging, and strengthening, and forgiving, and restoring, and that adds up to comfort.

As our mourning rises to the throne of God, His unsurpassed and matchless comfort descends from Him by Christ to us. "God is a God of all comfort," the Bible says. And did you know who the comforter was? The first comforter was Jesus because he said, "When I go away, I'll send another - " what? " - comforter." He was the first one. God, the God of all comfort, Christ, the first Paraclete, called alongside to help, and the Holy Spirit followed up on the work. God is a God of comfort. Christ is a Christ of comfort. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of comfort.

And, beloved, I don't believe that this is a future tense thing completely. I don't believe in just saying, "Well, gut it out folks, because in the kingdom you'll get comfort." I don't think that's what he said. When I think of the connection here - and you can do some study in the verse itself in detail in the Greek and the implication here - is that comfort runs alongside of mourning. As long as you will continue to mourn, you will continue to be comforted. It is the now concept.

Oh there's a final aspect. Sure, there's a final aspect when we all go into the eternal kingdom in Revelation 21:4 says, "And God shall wipe away - " what? " - all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow, no more crying, neither shall there be any more pain for former things are passed away." But that's future.

But there's a present tense. The Spirit is the comforter. When Christ was on the earth he was the comforter. By the way, the word of God is a comforter. Did you know that? The Bible is a comforter. It says that in Romans 15:4. "Whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we through patience - " and listen to this phrase " - and comfort of the Scriptures." Why was it written? To comfort us. Because it tells us about God's love and it tells us about his forgiveness, and it tells us about his help, and it tells us about his encouragement and his presence and all of those things.

So we would say that the subjective work of the Holy Spirit comforts us and the scripture comforts us. And I'll tell you something else we comfort each other, don't we? I love to hear the apostle Paul when he says, "I was comforted in the coming of so and so." As we deal with our sin, God comforts us by the inside work of the Spirit, by the work of the Word, by the ministry of other believers.

And when we are comforted then we are happy. Happiness comes to sad people, not because they're sad, but because their sadness leads to comfort. I love what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28,

“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I’ll give you rest.” You know something? You’re not going to come looking for rest unless you know you’ve got a load, right? Unless you’re heavy laden, unless you feel your sin, unless it’s bending your back and weighing you down, and then you come and you find rest. He takes away your heavy load and gives you his yoke, which is easy, and his burden, which is light.

Listen. Carrying on my back the standards of God and the commandments of Christ is an easy burden compared to carrying the weight of my sinfulness. Comfort. Comfort for as long as we mourn, for as long as we confess sin. Beloved, it comes down to that. Listen now. As you confess your sin day after day, day after day before the Lord, he gives you comfort, he gives you comfort. And in that comfort comes the happiness and then you can smile, and then you can laugh, and then you can rejoice.

You say, “Well I now know what it is, it’s to mourn over sin. I know the result. I’ll be comforted and in the comfort comes happiness.” Let me ask you a third question. How can I become a mourner? How can you become a mourner? Now this is our closing two questions, and I want you to think about them. How can you become a mourner? First eliminate the hindrances. Eliminate the hindrances.

You say, “John, what do you mean?” I mean that most of us have hindrances to really realizing sin. You say, “Well, these are the things that make our hard heart. These are the things that make us past feeling. These are the things that make us resist Spirit, that make us insensible. A stony heart just doesn’t mourn. It’s void of grace. The plow of God can’t break it up. It just treasures up wrath against the day of wrath.” Get rid of the hindrances. You got to get rid of that stony part. You say, “Well, what are those things that make a heart stony?” Let me give you a list real quick.

Here are the hindrances to mourning. These are the things that make the heart stony. One: Love of sin. Listen. If you love your sin, you will freeze your heart into impenitence. You will petrify your heart if you love sin. Second: Despair, despair. You know what despair says? God can’t forgive this. It undervalues God’s power. It minimizes the blood of Christ. It devalues God’s grace. It is drawing God down from the reality of who he is.

Jeremiah 18:12, “They said there is no hope and so we will walk after our own devices and we will everyone to the imagination of his heart.” In other words, God can’t do anything about us, anyway. We’re beyond hope so let’s go at it. That is the language of despair and despair hides mercy behind ignorance. It hides grace behind doubt. Listen. I don’t care how bad it is. I don’t care how evil you are. God’s grace is able to reach you, change you. One of the hindrances to mourning is love of sin, and the other is despair that wants to hide God’s mercy behind the cloud of death.

Third: Conceit. Another hindrance to mourning is conceit. And that says, “Well, I’m not that bad. You don’t know me if you think I should get sad about what I am. I’m all right. In fact, I’m pretty good.” This

is a foolish doctor treating a deadly disease as if it was a cold. Listen. If Jesus Christ had to shed his blood and die on a cross for your sin, you're bad, you're real bad. So am I.

And by the way, if you think you're not bad, you're worse than everybody else because that's the worst sin of all. So love of sin, despair, and conceit are hindrances. So is presumption, number four. You know what presumption is? That's cheap grace.

Well, you know, I one time said I wanted Jesus in my heart and I went through the deal and went down the aisle and I got baptized. What do I need to worry about? I'm just going to do whatever I want and I'll be all right. I don't need to confess my sin. I get upset about the thing and like the guy I told you about this morning said the other day, he said, "They don't have to change anything in your life just take Jesus and you're all right." He'll clean it up.

Isaiah 55:7 says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and return to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and he will abundantly pardon. And if the wicked does not forsake his way there is reason to believe that he hasn't got any pardoning." Don't you ever presume. There's no such thing as cheap grace. No license. So love of sin, despair, conceit, presumption.

Number five: Another thing that hinders being a mourner is procrastination. Well, I'm going to have to get around to doing that. One of these days I'm going to have to get a good look at my sin and really get my act together. You want to know something? It might be too late. James 4:14 says, "Don't you know that your life is a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away?"

And before you start talking about tomorrow, you'd better realize there won't be a tomorrow. Don't be a fool. Listen. The sooner the disease is dealt with, the sooner the comfort comes, and with it the blessedness. And if you never deal with it in time you'll spend an eternity without God. Don't put it off.

Well, what are the hindrances? Love of sin, despair, conceit, presumption, procrastination. I'll add one more: laughter, laughter. You say, "What do you mean by that?" I mean there are some people who just don't want to deal realistically with life. They just want to laugh all the time. It's just one big party and as long as they can keep the party going, they'll never have to face the issue.

Listen to this. Amos 6:5. He talks about these unrighteous people, he says - it's really a woe - "Woe to them that chant to the sound of the harp and invent to themselves instruments of music like David, that drink wine in bowls - " in other words, a cup isn't enough. They've got to have a bowl of it " - and they anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. They shall go captive with the first that go captive." Fools that laugh when there's no cause for laughter. There's no place for laughter, no reason for it. They should be in sorrow.

In Job 30:31, again, this hindrance is indicated. "My harp is turned to mourning and my flute into the voice of them that weep." In other words, you know, our world is mad about parties and music. You know, one of the first things God's going to do when the whole thing comes down and the tribulation is shut off all music. Did you know that in Revelation 18, all music is just going to just stop? People are going to have to stand around facing reality. Turn off the radio once in a while. Help you to realize what's really going on inside of you.

Well, love of sin, despair, conceit, presumption, procrastination, laughter. These are hindrances. You say, "Well John, how do you get rid of the hindrance?" Well, one way is to look at the cross. If you're playing with all these ditties and you don't understand the significance of the cross, you don't understand what Christ did. You see Christ dying for you, if that doesn't break your stony heart, I don't know what will.

Christina Rossetti wrote this. "Am I a stone and not a sheep That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy Cross, To number drop by drop Thy Blood's slow loss, And yet not weep? Not so those women loved Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee; Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly; Not so the thief was moved; Not so the Sun and Moon Which hid their faces in a starless sky, A horror of great darkness at broad noon - I, only I. Yet give not o'er, But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock; Greater than Moses, turn and look once more And smite a rock."

Listen. If you've got hindrances in the way, take a look at the cross, a good look, and see how much you need Jesus Christ, how much you need to face your sin. Look what it cost him. So first remove the hindrances. Second, study sin in the scripture. Study it. David said, "My sin is ever before me." Study David. Study Isaiah who said, "O woe is me, for I am an unclean man. I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips." Study Jeremiah, who wept over sin. Study Peter who said, "Depart from me I'm a sinful man." Study Paul who said, "I'm a chief of sinners." And listen to them talk about their sinfulness. And then when you've compared yourself with the greatest of men who ever lived, try to convince yourself you're not a sinner.

Sin tramples on God's laws. Sin slights his love. It grieves His spirit. It spurns His blessedness. Sin affects us drastically. It makes us naked. It makes us impure. It robs our robe and our crown. It spoils our glory. It leaves us in filthy rags and filthy garments. Made in God's image, we become like beasts that perish. Eliminate the hindrance and study sin.

Third, pray for a contrite heart. After all, only God can do that and he'll not turn down one who really asks. So, what does it mean? It means to mourn for sin. What are the results? Comfort and happiness. How can I be a mourner? Remove the hindrances, study the Scripture, and pray.

In conclusion, how can I know if I'm a mourner? How can I know when I get there? Very simple. Are you ready? Ask yourself if you're sensitive to sin. Are you? How do you react to sin? Do you laugh at

it? Do you let it pass by? Do you take pleasure in it? Some of you are doing it. Some of you are living in it, all kinds of sin, and you never deal with it. Maybe it's the sin in an immoral area. Maybe it's a sin in your business. Maybe it's dishonesty. Maybe it's a failure to pray. Maybe it's a failure to think good thoughts, a failure to be loving. Maybe it's - who knows what? How do you react to it?

Do you mourn over your sin? Let me go further. I believe if you're a true mourner, you'll not only mourn over your sin, but you'll mourn over the sins of the world. You know I see Jeremiah, Jeremiah cried and he said, "Oh, that my head were a fountain of waters that I could weep and weep." You say, "Jeremiah, what do you want to cry about?" "I want to cry about these people. These people are sinful people and they're damned. These people are going to be judged." Do you feel that way about other people's sin?

Jesus sits at the top of the mountain and looks down on Jerusalem and says he wept. And he said, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft I would have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her brood, but you would not." He wasn't weeping over himself, he was weeping over them. You see Ezekiel, and you must see Ezekiel weeping in Chapter 9, the whole of 9 and 10, you can look at, but in 9:4, "The Lord said unto him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst of it.'" You go find the mourners. You go find the people that cry for their brothers and sisters.

In Psalm that great 119, that long Psalm in verse 136, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law," says the Psalmist. Do you weep like that? Is your heart literally broken when God's heart is broken? Do you say with David in Psalm 69, "Zeal for thine house is eaten me up; the reproaches that fall on you are fallen on me." I cry when you cry.

Lamentations 1:16. Jeremiah says, "For these things I weep. Mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water when I see the people of God turning from Him." I mean, do you really weep over your sin and the sins of the things around you? If you're a mourner, you do. And I'm not talking about some outward disfiguring of your face like the phony Pharisees in Matthew 6 that fixed up the outside and didn't mourn on the inside.

I'm not talking about the phony mourning of Saul in 1 Samuel 15, who says, "I have sinned," and then he whispers to Samuel, "but honor me before the people so I don't mess up my reputation." I'm not talking about that.

Are you sensitive to sin? And the second way to know if you're a mourner is do you have a sense of God's forgiveness? Do you know joy in your life? Do you know real peace, real happiness, real comfort that comes to a forgiven, cleansed, purified life? I hope you're a mourner because I want you to be comforted, because I want you to be happy. So does God. Let's pray.

Father, we just thank you so much for a great time in Your Word tonight. How rich, how deep, fulfilling these great truths. Bless every life here. Lord, help me to be a mourner. I want to be the kind of person you want me to be. I want to hurt when you hurt. I want to be sensitive to my own sin. And oh God, I want to have your heart for the sin that's around the world, sins among the brethren, sins of those who don't name your name, even. May I ever be grieved with sin.

Never let me get cold. Never let me get calloused so that I'm not sensitive any more. Help me to fight for your honor with great zeal to defend your righteous standard. And when I break it or anyone else breaks it, may my heart be in anguish, for then and then alone will I know the great comfort and happiness you want to give.

And Lord, if there's someone here tonight who has never been broken over their sin, who has never come to the bankruptcy of spirit that issues in mourning, we pray that tonight might be that night, and in so mourning come to the only one who can comfort, the Lord Jesus Christ who died paying the penalty for their sin.

And for those of us who are Christians, Father, who maybe have forgotten how we ought to be towards sin, we've gotten a little calloused and the world has sucked us in to its own patterns and we've forgotten how evil it really is, and we don't hurt any more over sin, God, renew a righteous spirit in us, so that we can sense what You sense.

Meet every need, Father, wherever we might be. That whatever place in a relationship to you, bring us to that place where you want us to be. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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