

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

### **The Only Way to Happiness: Mourn Over Sin**

Scripture: Matthew 5:4

Code: 90-190

Turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5, if you will, in our continuing study of the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 5, we come to that second beatitude in verse 4, "Blessed are those who 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. It's Psalm 55, and he cries out, "O 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 strong stormy wind and tempest." That's the cry of a man who wants to escape the pain and sorrow of life.

And David in that Psalm echoes the desire of fallen humanity, a cry for freedom, for a life on wings, a cry uttered by all who yearn for comfort in a life of pain, for rest in a life of sorrow, disappointment and bitterness. People long to get away, to look away, to run away, to find the place where sorrow doesn't exist, where pain is not present, the place of perfect calm and peace and comfort, a place that is hidden and elusive.

That leads us to the paradox of this statement made by our Lord Jesus. "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." What He is saying here is that the sad become the happy. It is the mourners who enjoy comfort. Happy are the mourners for they shall be comforted.

Now that is contrary to the whole structure of human expectation...in fact, the whole effort of human life. The pleasure madness, the drive for amusement, entertainment, thrills, the mania that seeks the next high, the money, the energy, and enthusiasm expanded in living it up, all of those things are an expression of the world's aim to avoid mourning. And yet Jesus said, "Happy are those that mourn." In fact, in Luke 6:25 Jesus said, "Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."

Now this is really a new approach to life. It condemns the shallow, superficial laughter of life, the frivolous happiness of the world and pronounces true blessing and true happiness and true joy and true comfort and true peace on those who mourn. This is contrary to all expectation, just as the first beatitude, "Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," went across the grain of all of the expectations of the religious Jews of the time, who assumed that the kingdom of heaven belonged to those who had achieved greatness by their own efforts spiritually. Jesus said, "Until you come to the point of your recognition of your utter bankruptcy that you have achieved nothing, you will

never enter the kingdom of heaven." In the same kind of paradox, Jesus here says, "The only people who are truly happy are those who mourn."

And we want to ask a series of questions as we look at this statement in order that we might discern its meaning. First question, what does this mean? What does it mean, happy are those who mourn? What is Jesus saying here?

Well we could all agree that there's a lot of mourning in life, there's a lot of sadness in life, there's a lot of sorrow in life. In fact, that was not only...that is not only true now but it was true in biblical times. There are nine different Greek words used in the New Testament to refer to grief in some way, nine different Greek verbs used to describe sadness.

There need to be a lot of words because sadness is a large part of life. And the whole of man's history is the story of tears, the story of sorrows and sad to say, it isn't going to get any better as history goes on. It's, in fact, going to become worse. In Matthew chapter 24 our Lord says in verses 4 and following, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name saying I am the Christ and will mislead many. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you're not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes, but all these things are merely the beginning of sorrows." The beginning of sorrows or birth pangs. We haven't seen anything yet compared to the sorrow that awaits the ungodly world.

Now what kind of sorrow is it that brings this mourning? What kind of sorrow that brings sadness and therefore blessedness and comfort?

Well Scripture talks about different kinds of mourning, different kinds of sorrow. Let me just give you a little bit of insight into that. First of all, there is a proper sorrow in life. There is an expected sorrow in life, sorrow in relation to earthly life that is reasonable and even helpful. Weeping, sorrowing, mourning, grieving is a part of human life in general. In fact, it is a gift from God. That's right, it is a gift from God. When something tragic occurs...occurs in your life or in your family, when something profoundly painful occurs, God has designed tears and sadness and grief to release that pain and to be part of a healing process. When pain is bottled up and kept inside, it can poison the emotional system and mourning and sorrowing releases that poison. We give vent to that grief and that's a way that God has granted to us to release the otherwise ongoing pain. It's very natural to mourn over certain things.

Abraham justifiably wept when his wife died. In Psalm 42 verses 1 to 3 we hear the psalmist mourning. He says this, "As the hart, h-a-r-t, or deer pants after the waterbrook, so pants my soul after Thee, O God, my soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before Thee, my God? My tears have been my food day and night while they continually say unto me,

Where is your God?" And here is the psalmist in agony and tears because God has not appeared in the midst of his suffering and bitter loneliness. Forsaken by God, it appeared, pursued by his enemies, mocked and scorned and where was God in the moment of his pain? Tears were a very normal response to the sadness and bitterness of his lonely heart.

In 2 Timothy chapter 1 verses 3 and 4, Paul said to Timothy, "I thank God whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience that without ceasing I have remembered you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears that I may be filled with joy." The psalmist was experiencing the tears of loneliness and here Paul was talking about Timothy weeping because of the tears of defeat and discouragement. Sometimes life's defeats, battles lost become the source of great sorrow and great tears.

In Jeremiah chapter 9 the prophet had been called by God to preach to Israel and to tell Israel that judgment was coming. And the very message from God just caused the prophet to burst forth in tears. And in Jeremiah 9:1 the prophet Jeremiah says, "O that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." There was so much grief in him that he couldn't weep enough to get it out. He would have wished that his whole head would have been a fountain of waters so that there would have been a full releasing.

The psalmist was grieved over loneliness. Timothy was grieved over discouragement. And Jeremiah was grieved over the anticipated judgment of God on the people that he loved.

In Mark chapter 9 tears ran down the face of a father who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus. You remember what it says in Mark 9:23 and 24, the man said, "Can you do something about my son?" And Jesus said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to the one who believes. Straightway the father of the child cried out and said, 'With tears, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.'" These were tears of earnest love shared from the heart of a father to his beloved son.

In Luke chapter 7 a woman came to the Pharisee's house where Jesus was reclining. And she brought an alabaster box of ointment, you remember, she stood at His feet and began to wash His feet with the tears that came out of her own eyes and wiped them with her hair. The Pharisees questioned why Jesus would allow this woman to do that because she was a known sinner. He said that it was because she had been forgiven much that she loved much, and those were tears of worship. Those were tears of devotion.

All of these kinds of tears, whether they're tears of loneliness or discouragement, or tears of love over one who is about to be judged by God or tears of anxiety and concern or care, or tears of earnest love from a father to a son, tears of worship, tears of devotion, they're all a gift from God to release the sorrow of the heart. Jesus Himself, you remember, wept over the city of Jerusalem. Jesus Himself shed tears when He came to the grave of Lazarus and saw the agonizing effect of death on

the people that He loved. Those were tears of compassion, tears of love. Mary Magdalene, you remember, when Jesus was crucified, wept. Those were tears of loss, tears over death.

And we identify with all of those categories. Tears are a part of human life. Sorrow is a part of human life and sorrow is a gift from God to release the pain of inward grief so that it doesn't poison us. Ecclesiastes 3 says, "To everything there is a season, a time to every purpose under heaven, a time to be born, a time to die, a time to weep."

But, there is also an improper or illicit kind of sorrow. It is possible for humans to sorrow a foolish kind of sorrow. When a man mourns that he cannot satisfy his impure lust, thus did, you remember, Amnon, 2 Samuel 13, mourn and become sick until he could express his lust toward his sister Tamar. A sick and perverted sorrow.

Ahab, the same, Scripture says he mourned because he lusted for Naboth's vineyard. It says in 1 Kings 21:4 that he just went to his bed and he just lay down on his bed, turned away his face in mourning and wouldn't even eat. That's selfish mourning, mourning over the unfulfillment of your own lustful desires. Sorrow based on overwhelming selfishness, that's the depressing sorrow of one who has become the center of his whole world.

This can show up in a lot of ways. I've seen it even show up in the loss of a mate where a normal sorrow over the loss of a mate becomes an abnormal preoccupation with what one is having to endure in that loss till it becomes so self-centered it becomes a kind of paranoia. Sometimes improper sorrow is a result not only of lust and desire unfulfilled, but of guilt. Some people sorrow in an abnormal way as a sort of an atoning for sin. Sometimes when I see this in a relationship, someone in a relationship dies and someone's sorrow goes on and on and on and on in an abnormal way, I wonder if that is not some...some sort of almost monastic self-effort at making atonement, some act of penance because of guilt over serious mistreatment of that person when they were still here.

David is an illustration of this kind of abnormal sorrow. Absalom, you remember, tried to dethrone his father. Absalom was a wicked son. He was a son who tried literally to lead a coup to take his father's throne. Absalom was proud. Absalom was selfish. Absalom hated his father. He was egotistical with regard to his looks. He was enamored with his hair, according to 2 Samuel 14, he was in love with his hair. He plotted against David, drove him from Jerusalem, took over the palace and planned to wipe out his father's friends and forces. But instead, David won. The coup didn't work. David won and Absalom, you remember, was flying through the woods and got his hair caught in a tree and was slain. David had told his soldiers before the battle, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom."

When David heard that he was dead, David began to cry and mourn, "O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would, God, I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son." Come on, the best thing that ever happened to you was the death of Absalom. This is ridiculous. I appreciate the sentiment, but the idea is pretty stupid. The nation needs you, David, not Absalom. What do you mean...Would, God, I had died...you want Absalom to be their king? You want a sinful, wicked, proud rebel to rule? What was he doing? I think in part he had this inordinate kind of sorrow that comes about when a man knows he has failed miserably to be what he ought to have been in the life of his son, and this is some kind of attempted catharsis by which he could atone for the guilt of the failures that he had experienced as a father. It's no doubt that Absalom's death was part of the payment for sin with Bathsheba, that adulterous relationship that David had. God had told David he would pay fourfold for his sin. "As the Lord lives, the man that has done this thing shall surely die and he shall restore the land...the lamb fourfold." He did, fourfold. The baby of that union died. His daughter Tamar was violated incestuously. His son Amnon was slain and Absalom was killed.

Why is he mourning then over this worthless son? Well I think it was a kind of an expression of David's deep guilt. Second Samuel 19 tells us the soldiers were actually ashamed of their victory because it brought such sorrow to the king. The soldiers were ashamed that they had defeated the rebellion. Joab, who was the general of the army, said, "I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all we had died this day, it had pleased thee well." He said that to David. You'd have been happier if Absalom was alive and all of us were dead, 2 Samuel 19:6. That is an inordinate, foolish sorrow, sorrow of guilt, the sorrow of a father who failed.

Well, those are some illustrations of a normal kind of mourning, categories in which mourning and grief and sorrow is normal as it releases that emotion, and some that are improper, the inordinate, unnatural, prolonged sorrow of those who have trouble getting rid of their guilt.

Now some people have come to this beatitude and thought that that's what it's talking about. It's just talking about general sorrow. "Blessed are you if you just are sorrowful." And anybody who's sorrowful is going to get comforted. Poets have camped on that idea. "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 nary a word said she, but oh the things I learned from here when Sorrow walked with me." Well that's nice. I'm glad for you. And there's an old Arab proverb that says, "All sunshine makes a desert." And if we don't get some mourning, we can't get some comfort.

Well, there's certainly more here than that. Sorrow does teach us, it does enrich us, it's a nice sentiment. It's a lot nicer to sentimentalize it than it is to be in it. But there's far more here than just some generic kind of mourning and sorrow for which we can enjoy some comfort from somewhere. We're talking about another kind of sorrow here. We're talking about the kind of sorrow that Paul was referring to in that wonderful book that we're currently studying, 2 Corinthians in chapter 7, which he called godly sorrow, 2 Corinthians 7:10 to 13, godly sorrow.

Now what is godly sorrow? What is this mourning here, listen carefully, it is not the sorrow of the world. Second Corinthians 7 says, "The sorrow of the world works death." Godly sorrow, according to 2 Corinthians 7, produces something different than death. It produces repentance. Listen to what he says in verse 9. "I know rejoice," 2 Corinthians 7:9, "not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance." Verse 10, the sorrow of the world produces death, but this is godly sorrow, he says, and it produces repentance. And repentance brings blessing and comfort, that's the key. We're talking here not about just generic sorrow in life, but about godly sorrow that is linked to repentance. The issue here is not mourning over human circumstances. It is mourning over sin.

It's really connected, it's linked to the first statement in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," that means the spiritually bankrupt who look at their life and can find nothing of value, nothing of worth, nothing to commend themselves to God, nothing by which they should claim righteousness or be acceptable to God. They are bankrupt. They are poverty stricken. They look at themselves and they find absolutely nothing, a recognition they have nothing, they are nothing, they have achieved nothing. They are nothing but crouching, cowering, shamed beggars who have no resource or no capacity to help themselves. They are absolutely destitute spiritually and they can only beg for grace and beg for mercy. Those are the people He's talking about and those people in that condition mourn over that condition. And it is a mourning over their sinful situation.

Those are the only people who enter the kingdom, who enjoy the comfort of the kingdom. Entrance to the kingdom begins with an overwhelmingly helpless feeling of spiritual poverty and bankruptcy of soul. And, friends, that never changes. You never get passed that. In fact, the longer you are a Christian, the more deeply you feel that way. As a person who has been a Christian a long time, I don't look at my life now and say, "Well, when I became a Christian, boy, I really had nothing to offer the Lord, I had nothing to commend myself but in the intervening years I have certainly achieved a great deal." Not so. In the intervening years I have achieved nothing by which to save myself. And I have a better understanding now of my spiritual bankruptcy and my inability in the flesh to please God than I even did when I was converted.

As long as we live on this earth as kingdom people we will have an overwhelming sense of spiritual poverty and we will say with Paul, "In my flesh dwells...what?...no good thing." Or with Isaiah, "All my righteousness is filthy rags." It was there at the start and it's still there. And if it wasn't there at the start, for you, and it isn't there now, then there's good reason to ask whether you're really a Christian. Such poverty of spirit leads to mourning over sin. True mourning over sin springs out of this bankruptcy. The beggarly say, "Woe is me, I am undone."

Look again at David. After his sin with Bathsheba he not only saw how bankrupt he was, how poverty stricken he was, but he was brokenhearted and he was moved so deeply and his soul was so

wrenched over his sin to the very depths that he wrote two Psalms, Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, in which he poured out his penitent heart.

Look at Job. He had everything. He was so rich he washed his doorstep with butter. But in the end, after he truly seen God, he said, "I hate myself, I repent in dust and ashes," Job 42:6.

Now the word "mourning" is the strongest of those nine Greek verbs. It is reserved for mourning for the dead, the most final of all causes for human grief. It is that passionate lament over the loss, the permanent loss of one deeply loved. In the Septuagint, that's the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it is the word used of Jacob's grief when he believed Joseph his son was dead. You'll find it in Mark 16:10, Revelation 18, it's used three times, verse 11, verse 15 and verse 19, it has to do with sorrow over death which is the ultimate source of human suffering. And that's the choice of words that the Lord Jesus used here. When He inspired Matthew to write this, Matthew write this word that means sorrow over death...a deep, lasting, inner mourning, not just some outer wailing as other words reflect, but a deep sadness on the inside.

It was that very sadness that came out of the heart of David when in Psalm 32, just a couple of verses, he says in verse 3, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long." In other words, he was in deep agony until he confessed his sin. His body was failing. "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me, my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer." Vitality is literally in the Hebrew "life juices." Saliva, the fluid that works in the nervous system, his blood, all the flow of the life juices was constricted by the fact that he wouldn't repent of his sin and the consequent guilt was literally drying him up and his body was wasting away. Until, verse 5, "I acknowledged my sin to Thee, my iniquity I did not hide, I said I'll confess my transgression to the Lord and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin."

David had to release that deep grief, that deep sadness over his sin. And when he did he enjoyed the freedom of forgiveness that comes from God. In Psalm 51 you have the very same thing. He says, "According to the greatness of Thy compassion, blot out my transgression, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin for I know my transgression and my sin is ever before me against Thee, Thee only I have sin and done what is evil in Thy sight." In other words, he couldn't get rid of it. It's ever before him. He couldn't get it out of his mind. It was in his conscious mind all of the time and causing him such deep sorrow until he unloaded it in the confession and the repentance that is expressed there. And David then said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man under whom the Lord imputes not iniquity."

Happy is the man who confesses his sin. Happy is the man who repents. That's the comfort he's talking about. It's the comfort, listen, that comes in forgiveness. When the sinner comes to the place of recognizing spiritual bankruptcy, when the sinner comes to the place of grief, deep grief, deep sorrow over sin, and comes before God in penitence and asks for mercy and grace, he receives the

comfort of forgiveness...the comfort of forgiveness.

In life there are tears of loneliness. In life there are tears of rejection and frustration and unfulfillment and defeat. But nothing breaks the heart like sin. And David's heart was literally broken. And Jesus says that's where we need to come, to the place where we mourn over our sin.

Sometimes people will come, hear the gospel, make a profession of faith and then they disappear. And people will ask me, "What do you think was the cause of that?" And inevitably if I'm answering like I would choose to answer, my answer is, "Well, apparently there wasn't a true sadness and sorrow over their sin." Anything short of that can make the experience shallow and no fruit comes out of that shallow ground. Happy are the sad who are sad over their sin.

There is then...there is then sort of an ongoing sadness in the Christian life, isn't there? And the longer you're a Christian, the sadder you are over your sin. And what makes you sadder than you used to be is you keep assuming that you ought to grow out of this. There's a place in life for fun and there's a place in life for joy. And the Lord wants us to rejoice, all of that. But there's always that nagging reality in the life of a true Christian, that deep-felt grief and sorrow over sin until it is repentant of.

James in just very straightforward words says, "Draw near to God," James 4:8, "and He'll draw near to you, cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you doubleminded. Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom." Wow! Time to stop laughing, time to turn off the frivolity and foolishness and stupid silliness of the world and take a serious look.

There's a certain ongoing brokenness in the life of a Christian. Ezekiel said in Ezekiel 21:9 and 10, "A sword...a sword is sharpened and also furbished," brandished, pulled out of the case, "should we then make mirth?" I mean, do you understand the seriousness of the times? God has taken His sword out and He's about to come against Judah in judgment. Is this a time for laughing? Do we understand the nature of things? Do we understand the impending judgment of God in our own society? Do we understand the instruction? Isaiah 22:12, "Therefore in that day the Lord God of hosts called you to weeping, to wailing, to shaving the head, to wearing sackcloth. Instead there is gaiety and gladness, killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep and eating of meat, and drinking of wine. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die. But the Lord of host revealed Himself to me. Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord God of hosts." God says I'm not going to forgive you for being frivolous in a time of judgment.

There are people according to Proverbs 2:14 who delight in the perverseness of evil. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:12 there are those who rejoice in iniquity. And I'm afraid that even in the church today and among many Christian people there's a defective...defective understanding of sin and a



frivolity and triviality that isn't consistent with the Word of God.

We can become very warped by the world around us. We're talking here about the kind of sorrow that comes, first of all, over our own sin. This is the path to blessedness. It's how you get into the kingdom, and I believe it's how you maintain true happiness in the kingdom. Let me tell you this. It's so simple. When you no longer mourn over your sin, you'll no longer repent. When you no longer repent, you'll no longer confess. And when you don't confess, you will have barriers between you and God and you will forfeit His blessing, right? If you want to be happy, repent. And the answer to true happiness is mourning over sin. That washes the soul and that sets the blessedness loose.

Now when you face your spiritual bankruptcy you could respond in several ways. The Pharisees they would deny it and put on a phony front and live a life of deception. Some people do that. We hear testimonies about that all the time. They just come to church and go along with the crowd and do what everybody expects them to do for their parents' approval or affirmation from their friends. They live a life of deception. That's what the Pharisees did. Or, when you come to your realization of spiritual bankruptcy you can...and the reality of sin, you can admit it and just make resolutions to try to fix your life, just sort of stiffen your back and grit your teeth and fix yourself. Or, and I'm sure there were people like that probably during the time of Jesus who heard His teaching and thought, "You know, I've got to go home and fix myself." Or you could be like Judas. You could see the sin in your life and become so despairing about it that your despair leads you to suicide. That's the sorrow of the world that leads to death.

But the right response is not to admit it and cover it up, not to admit it and try to change it yourself, not to admit it and despair to the point where you die, but to admit it and come to God for grace and mercy...which He promises to give. The prodigal son in Luke 15, he did it right, didn't he? He got out there, spent everything he had, wasted all of his spiritual opportunity, ended up working as a feeder of pigs and since he had no food he ate what the pigs eat. And there he was, he was the son of a preeminent and wealthy father, eating pig slop, having lived a dissolute life of iniquity. But he did the right thing. He admitted it. He went home. He said to his father, "I have sinned against you and I am not even worthy to be called a son." He came back in bankruptcy in spirit. He came back in spiritual poverty. He came back penitent. And the father embraced him, took him in and blessed him.

We're not talking about wallowing in self-pity. There's no place for that. That is selfish, egocentric stuff. People wallow in self-pity because they want attention from other people, because they want everybody focusing on them. We're not talking about that. We're talking about godly sorrow where you see your sin, you face your sin, you give your sin to the Lord, you ask Him to give you the strength to turn from it and you receive the full forgiveness and joy that God graciously gives. Psalm 51:17, David said it in that very Psalm, "A broken and a contrite heart you will not despise, O God." God never rejects the person who comes like that. That's how you come into the kingdom when you're ready to mourn over your sin and reach out to God and receive the forgiveness He offers.

And then you live your Christian life that way. Paul is mourning in Romans 7. I already referred to Romans 7, but you might look at it for just a moment. All the way through Romans 7 Paul is mourning. Verse 14, "We know the law is spiritual but I

am of flesh, sold in bondage to sin. That which I'm doing I don't understand, I'm not practicing what I would like to do. I'm doing the very thing I hate." Verse 18, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh." Verse 19, "The good that I wish, I do not do. I practice the very evil I do not wish." He goes on saying those things until verse 24, "Wretched man that I am." That's a form of mourning. I am wretched, he says.

Now this isn't a momentary phase in Paul's life, this is a way of life. He was wearied by this incessant battle. That's why in chapter 8 of Romans verse 23 he said he's waiting for the adoption, the redemption of his body. He was tired of the battle. For us this really becomes a way of life. You come into the kingdom mourning over your sin and for the rest of the time you're in you're mourning. In 2 Corinthians 5:2 he says, "In this house we groan...we groan." If you're not mourning over your sin, if you're not continually forsaking your sin, there's reason to ask whether you're a kingdom citizen at all. You may be deceived.

The verb here is pentheo. We've commented on that this morning. It was used also by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. It characterizes the deep grief, the deep inner grieving that here is in the present tense, continuous. And I think if you're a true believer you understand the weariness of that grief. I think more than anything else that's what makes heaven inviting to me. I get weary over the inner grieving over the constant failures. Luther in his Ninety-Five Thesis, which in many ways launched the Reformation, said that our entire life is to be a continuous repentance and contrition. And he was right. And we could echo the words of David in Psalm 38 verse 4 who said, "My iniquities are gone over my head, they're a burden too heavy for me to bear." I just...I can't stand it, it's too much.

And even Jesus having to cope with all this sin around Him, though He Himself was sinless, was called a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. And there is no record anywhere in the New Testament of Jesus laughing. He was angry, hungry, thirsty, but nowhere does it ever say he laughed, but he did weep. And it must have been a rather constant sorrow in His case. The Jews said to Him in John 8:57, "You're not yet fifty years old and have You seen Abraham?" Why would they say that? He was young at the time. He was in His early thirties, why would they say "not yet fifty"? Well, maybe His sorrow aged Him.

What is the result of this kind of sorrow, this kind of mourning? That's the second question. What does it produce? Well let's go back to our text and see. Jesus said, "If you mourn in this manner, you will be comforted." Mourners are not happy because they mourn, they're happy because they're mourning is comforted. There's no happiness in the sorrow of the world, follow this carefully. They

mourn, they mourn, they mourn, they mourn but there's never any real comfort because the comfort we're talking about here, beloved, is forgiveness...forgiveness.

That is the most comforting to me, isn't it to you? To come out of the presence of the Lord having confessed your sin and to know there is full and complete forgiveness. And I might add for your instruction in verse 4 that the Greek text would read this way, "Blessed are those who mourn for they alone, or only they shall be comforted." The emphatic use here of the pronoun to emphasize there the only ones who will be comforted. Only those who mourn over sin know true forgiveness. And I'll tell you the most comforting reality of all realities is that all your sins are forgiven in Christ, right? And that there's nothing between you and God and you're free to enjoy the fullness of His blessing.

There's no comfort for the world. There's no one to dry their tears because they're not tears of penitence. But we who mourn weeping tears of penitence are comforted because of forgiveness. What does the word "comfort" mean? Parakaleo, it means to be comforted, technically means to call someone alongside to help, para, alongside, someone comes alongside, kaleo, called alongside to help. God has called alongside of us in our mourning and He helps us. He admonishes and consoles and sympathizes and encourages and strengthens and restores as a part of forgiveness. As our mourning rises to Him, His unsurpassed and matchless forgiveness flows to us and there is dispensed to us His care and comfort, strength.

This is not just talking about some future event, not just the Messianic Kingdom, as some have suggested, or everybody would be comfortless until then. Some people have tried to put this Sermon on the Mount in the millennial kingdom which leaves all of us comfortless until we get there. And most of us, of course, when we get there will be in our glorified state and we won't be mourning about anything. That's a foolish way to interpret this. God is a God of comfort now. Second Corinthians chapter 1, God is called the God of all comfort. He's a God of comfort now and He provides comfort now to everyone who penitently mourns over sin and cries out for the provision of forgiveness which God has provided in Jesus Christ. Some day, Revelation 21:4, when we get to heaven He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there shall no longer be any death, there shall no longer be any mourning or crying or pain, the first things have passed away. There is that final experience when all tears are wiped away, but until then, even now, God provides for us continual ongoing comfort.

I think of Matthew 11:28 and 29 in that same light. "Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your souls for My yoke is easy, My load is light." The Lord lightens the load by forgiving us, taking off the hand of chastening and placing on us the hand of blessing.

Now that leaves us with a couple of closing questions. How can I become a mourner? If the mourning is the way to that parental ongoing moment-by-moment forgiveness which is the way to happiness and blessing, how can I be that kind of person?

Well, there are several obvious and simple keys. Number one, eliminate the hindrances...eliminate the hindrances. And what are the hindrances to this kind of mourning? Very simple, hardness of heart, being passed feeling, resisting the Holy Spirit, a heart of stone, the Bible talks about all of that. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 3:7 and 8, "Don't harden your hearts." A stony heart can't mourn. Its void of all grace, the plow of the Word can't break it up. It just treasures up wrath against the day of wrath. Don't let yourself become hard-hearted.

Now what causes hard-heartedness? I'll give you several suggestions. One, love of sin. Nothing freezes the heart and makes it harder than the love of sin. This is what makes the heart stony...the love of iniquity. The second thing that makes the heart stony is despair. Why do I say that? Because there are some people who just say, "Well, I'm beyond help. Well, it's too bad, I'm too far gone. Life is too unfair." They literally underestimate and undervalue God's power and minimize the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jeremiah 18:12 says, "They said there is no hope and we will walk after our own devices and we will everyone do the imagination of his evil heart," end quote. Because there's no hope, there's no way out so we might as well just do whatever we want to do. That's the language of despair. Despair hides mercy behind a black cloud. The Lord is gracious but despair doesn't believe that. And righteousness is better than sin, but the love of iniquity doesn't believe that.

Another thing that makes the heart stony is conceit, or arrogance. This says, "Well I'm really not that bad. I'm not so bad I need to be penitent." Is it not a little one...Genesis 19:20? Foolish doctor, a foolish doctor would treat a deadly disease as if it were a cold. So the sinner in conceit will not see the ugliness of his sin is a fool. If it cost the death of Jesus Christ, it is serious.

Another thing that contributes to a stony heart is presumption. Presumption is the idea that I'm good enough. And some token thrown at God, some expression of faith under the category of cheap grace will surely be enough for me. I'm a good husband, I'm a good father, I'm a moral person, etc., etc., I'm a religious person and I believe in God and that should be enough. I don't need to grovel. I don't need to listen to the prophet Isaiah who said, "Let the wicked forsake his way and return to the Lord and He'll have mercy on him and He will abundantly pardon." I don't need to go that far.

Another thing that contributes to a stony heart is procrastination. Hebrews 3, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart." Some people just keep pushing it off and pushing it off and the heart gets harder and harder and harder and harder. The folly of postponing mourning over sin to a convenient time that never shows up. The sooner the sin is dealt with, the sooner the comfort comes and with it the happiness. Don't be a fool.

Another thing that contributes to a stony heart is shallowness. Some people just never want to think deeply about anything, least of all their sin. They are shallow thinkers. They trivialize life at every

point. Everything is a source of laughter for them.

In Amos 6:5 and 6, it talks about people who improvise to the sound of the harp. And like David, composed songs for themselves and drink wine from sacrificial bowls, anointing themselves with the finest of oils, yet they have not grieved. That's typical of the world. I mean, they're in a party. Who is going to grieve in the middle of a party? That's why James 4:9 says, "Let your laughter be turned into mourning."

So, the first great hindrance is a hard heart. And hard hearts are the result of the love of sin, despair, conceit, presumption, procrastination, shallowness. One way to look beyond that, one way to do a little inventory is to look at the cross of Christ. If that can't break your heart, I don't know what can.

Years ago I began reading the poetry of Christina Rossetti who died in 1894. This woman wrote some profound poetry. Here's one of my favorites. Its title is "Good Friday." She asked the question, "Am I a stone and not a sheep that I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross, to number drop by drop Thy blood 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 ore but seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock. Greater than Moses, turn and look once more and smite this rock."

She was right. Looking at the cross is a good place to have your hard heart smitten. Remove the hindrances. Secondly, study the penitence of Scripture. I don't think there's anything better, and I've tried to do that with you tonight, to understand penitence than to see the penitent in Scripture...David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, Job, etc...Ezekiel. Listen to them as they say with David, "My sin is ever before me." Understand what they understood about the power of sin, that sin tramples on God's law, that sin sleights His love, that sin grieves His Spirit, that sins spurns His blessedness, that sin affects us drastically, it makes us impure, it robs us of joy and reward, it spoils our glory. It leaves us vile and useless. And though made in God's image, men without God become like beasts that perish, according to Psalm 49:20. Eliminate the hindrances and study the penitence in Scripture.

Thirdly, pray for a contrite heart. I think you have to ask the Lord to break your hard heart. If you're not a Christian that's where you have to begin. "Lord, break my heart, teach me how to mourn over my sin, show me the true blessedness, true happiness comes through the comfort that comes because You forgive the sin over which I grieve."

Well, you can ask one final question and we'll be done. How do I know if I'm a mourner? Very simple, are you sensitive to sin? Or do you take pleasure in it? Does it grieve you? Do you mourn over the sins of others? Do you mourn over the sins that you see in the people you know and the people you don't know? Do you mourn over sin running rampant in the world? Do you mourn mostly

over your own sin? And is your repentance real, or are you like Saul, the phony who said, "I have sinned but had no shame," because he immediately said, "Honor me before the elders," to Samuel? Do you mourn the fact that the Father's world has been polluted by sin? Do you mourn the fact that Christ's church is polluted by sin? And most of all, do you mourn the fact that your own life is polluted by it?

You know you're a mourner if you're genuinely in your heart grieved over your sin and long to turn from it and seek the forgiveness of God and the blessing that He brings.

Secondly, you can know you're a mourner if you're comforted. Do you know the joy of forgiveness? Do you have a happy heart in spite of your mourning? Are you in that sort of constant spiritual ambivalence where you're sorry about your sin and happy about your forgiveness? Are you at the one hand contrite and broken before the Lord, and at the other hand relishing the unlimited grace and mercy dispensed to you? Are you constantly going between sorrow and joy that should show up in true humility?

Well, in the end I guess we can sum it up by saying happy are the sad if your sadness is the right kind of sadness. Who enters the kingdom? Those who are spiritually bankrupt and those who mourn over their sin. And once they enter the kingdom it doesn't change. All believers continue to recognize their situation as one of spiritual bankruptcy and they will continue to mourn over the sin that causes them to forsake the comfort that produces the true happiness.

If that's not you, then you're not in the kingdom. But God invites you to be a mourner and to come with a broken spirit, realizing you bring nothing but reach out for the mercy and grace of God provided through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for your sins. Take the gift, mourning over your sin, and enjoy the happiness that God provides. That's Jesus' invitation. That's how He started His preaching ministry, offering true and lasting happiness. I rejoice that in His grace He saw fit to include me, do you? Amen.

Father, thank You for our time tonight. It's been a great day and a great evening. This is such rich truth, so compelling. Help us to grasp it, to rejoice in it. Thank You again for Your Word. Seal it in our hearts. Manifest it as we live our lives, for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).