



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

Kingdom Living: Those Who Mourn
Matthew 5:4

In the bulletin this morning you see the title of the sermon: *Kingdom Living: Blessed Are Those Who Mourn*. I limit the length of a sermon title to fit the one line provided for it in the bulletin, but maybe a complete title would be, *The Quick Start Guide to Kingdom Living, part 2: Blessed are Those Who Mourn*.

Or maybe a *Quick Start Guide to the Quick Start Guide to Kingdom Living*. Alright, I am going overboard on trying to title this sermon, but I hope you get the point. As I mentioned last week, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount could be equated to the Quick Start Guide of your new computer, or phone, or other electronic gadget. The Quick Start Guide does not tell you everything, but it is more than enough information to get started. The Sermon on the Mount does not tell everything in God's revelation, but Jesus tells us what is expected of those who live as citizens of the Kingdom of God. The Beatitudes boil this understanding down to eight beatitudes and can be for us a Quick Start Guide to the Sermon on the Mount.

Last week we looked at the first Beatitude and today we turn to Matthew 5:4 where we read, **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."**

Now once again, take your bulletin home with you today and cut the text off the front cover and put it on your refrigerator, or your desk, or your computer monitor just under last week's text and make it a goal to say these two beatitudes everyday as you put them into your memory.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted."

To live as a Christian is the most rewarding and thrilling way anyone could live. Oh, don't get me wrong; being a Christian is not an easy way of life. It is difficult to dedicate one's life to Jesus Christ. Christians will suffer hardships and broken hearts like everyone else in the world, yet the closer one is to Jesus Christ the better prepared we are to bear the inevitable pain which will come our way. Part of what it means to be a Christian is to understand the hope we have in Jesus Christ and the comfort of our hope.

Well, no matter how many times I think about this text, it simply does not seem blessed to mourn. It seems better not to have to mourn at all, and thus not to have to be comforted. Yes, we will mourn, but it seems odd to be blessed because we mourn.

I cannot say exactly what Jesus is trying to get through my thick skull, but maybe what Jesus meant was something along the lines of the grief that is felt by a spouse when they experience the death of their life long partner. The intensity of mourning is an indication of the depth of the relationship. I am always glad when I talk to a man or woman who is about to bury their partner and they are deeply grieved, not that they are feeling the pain, but their pain points to the love that was shared. You know it was a bad marriage if the surviving spouse is happy.

This could be what Jesus was saying, that our mourning indicates the depth of our love.

William Barclay mentioned that what Jesus was talking about is that we cannot know joy and love or happiness and satisfaction unless we also have known heartbreak, loss, pain, discouragement, and disappointment. As the Arabian proverb goes, "No rain makes desert."

Barclay also wrote that it could be that this beatitude is about the guilt and mourning we feel when we recognize our sin. You see, our sin breaks the heart of God and therefore, it should break our heart to sin, therefore we mourn. We mourn over the fact that we are sinners, we mourn over the fact that God hates our sin, and in all likelihood we mourn over the fact that there is a good chance we will continue to sin. And we mourn over the fact that Jesus had to give his life in an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

Maybe Barclay was getting close, and far be it from me to try to improve a scholar like William Barclay, but maybe what Jesus was saying is, "Blessed are those who mourn over the things that break the heart of God."

Examples abound; one only has to open the newspaper to see story after story of events in this world that break God's heart. We read again this week about a terrorist bomb in Syria, and a shooting at a hotel in Kenya.

We open the obituary page and notice an announcement about a child. The list ranges from death to any act of ungraciousness. Yes, maybe Barclay is right that we are blessed when our hearts are broken by what breaks God's heart.

Dr. Roberta Hestenes once served as President of Eastern College in St. David's Pennsylvania. Each January, Eastern College sends some of its students to Haiti. The

purpose is to give their students a first hand view of the suffering in the world. On one occasion in Port-a-Prince, a little boy came crawling toward the leader of the group. He was a crippled, and not because he had been born that way, nor because he had been in a bad accident, but because his parents deliberately broke his arms and legs and made him into a cripple. His parents understood one tragic fact; a crippled boy can collect more money begging than a child who is not crippled.

I mourn, and I am sure you do as well, that though we have been blessed with all the comforts of life, there is a cripple in Haiti who was made that way for life, so he could beg for enough money to eat.

When I hear stories like this I remember the words of Jesus, **“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”** And indeed, there is comfort that is only for those who enter into the suffering of Jesus. And I give thanks for the church throughout the world, which is compelled to serve in a way to relieve the pain all around them, and in doing so they are comforted.

There is a joy in this walk with Jesus, but there is agony too. Dr. Campolo wrote, “To be a Christian is to mourn for the things that break the heart of God. To be a Christian is to begin to care about people as you never cared before. To be a Christian is to allow the hurt of the world to become your hurt, and their agony your agony, because that is what it means to be in Jesus and to have Jesus in you.”

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The concept of comfort has a couple of applications. First of all, when we sin and are sorry for our sins, we mourn that we have hurt others and have broken the Law of God. Yet, we are comforted when we repent and are assured of forgiveness. We are assured of God’s love and we are assured of eternal life. However, the gospel is much more than pie in the sky, that when we die we all go to heaven. The gospel is the good news that Jesus is here this morning in our midst and that he will enter into our lives in the here and now. He will remove a lot of things from our consciousness that this culture has bred into us. The gospel will make us love people who we thought to be unlovable. When Jesus enters our lives he can change us into his instrument through whom he can change the world.

When we come to an understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and his work on earth we figure out that Jesus did not only come to save us so that when we die we can go to heaven. This is true, but Jesus also saved me in order to make me into somebody whom he can use to change the world into the kind of world he willed for it to be when he created it. We are saved in order to receive comfort by caring for those who need comfort.

As a matter of fact this is the key to finding the comfort God promises. What did Jesus say? **“Blessed or happy are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”** This comfort is much more than a good feeling that God supernaturally gives even when our world is falling apart. This comfort comes when we give ourselves to God. This comfort comes when we lose ourselves in the lives of others who need us.

There is an old Jewish tale that beautifully demonstrates the point. Some years ago there was a widow whose son died in a tragic accident. The woman, crazy with grief, mourned her loss so deeply that no one could provide her with comfort. At last a friend took her to the house of the rabbi where she made a sobbing plea. “Use your powers to bring my son back to life. Surely, you are able by prayer to induce the Almighty to lighten my grief.”

The old rabbi spoke kindly to the woman saying, “Bring me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. I will use that seed to remove the pain from your life.

Immediately the woman set out in search of the mustard seed. She thought that first she would visit the home of a wealthy family. Tragedy is less likely to strike them. Soon she approached a beautiful mansion, knocked on the door, and spoke to the woman who greeted her. “I am in search of a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? Please, it is vital that I know.”

“Never known sorrow!” cried the woman who had answered the door. “You have come to the wrong house.” As she sobbed she began to describe all of the tragedies that had touched her family. She invited the widow into her home to explain in greater detail what had taken place. The widow remained in that home for many days, listening and caring.

When she left to resume her search the widow visited a modest home about a mile away. The experience was the same. Wherever she traveled, from mansion to humble hut, she was greeted with tales of sadness and sorrow. But, everyone found her to be a willing and caring listener.

After months of travel she became so involved with the grief of others that she forgot about her own search for the magic mustard seed, never realizing that it had indeed driven the sorrow from her life.

I am convinced that when God looks down to earth and sees the personal suffering of people, whether they are rich or live in poverty, God weeps. And I am convinced from my reading of the New Testament that God has called us to proclaim the Gospel. Yes, there

is salvation. Yes, we can have eternal life. Yes, in the end God will make things right. But we are also to proclaim the Gospel by our actions. We are to help comfort those who mourn, and in doing so we too will find comfort.

I don't think the illustration is overused, but we are the hands and feet of Jesus right here in Nacogdoches. God can use us to change the world, and in changing the world God comforts us in our afflictions. You want to know how to be comforted, then you must give comfort.

Today, I invite you to be generous with your time and talents in order to serve Jesus by serving those whom Jesus loves, and in doing so we will find comfort.

I pray we will do great things for Jesus, that we will do more than believe in him. I pray that we will say, "Yes, Jesus I am ready to do what you want me to do and go where you want me to go. Help me to mourn this day over the suffering of the world, that we may find comfort in doing our part in your service."

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."