

The Be Attitude- Holy Tears

Text: Matthew 5:4

Readings: Matthew 5:1-12; Isaiah 61:1-7

We live in a world that has a focus on frivolity, amusement, laughter. The people we seem to admire the most in the world are those who can make people laugh.

Life, we are told, is all about having a good time. Entertainment is king and a huge amount of time, energy, money, enthusiasm, and talent is spent on this endeavour.

Talkback radio, 774 ABC... push aside some of the seriousness and try and bring in laughter... Red Symonds, Richard Stubbs. TV programs...we look for light entertainment...Big Brother.

Gov't looks for ways to entertain young people...to keep them off the streets. Footy is now referred to as entertainment.

But Jesus says, 'Those who mourn are those who know God's blessing.'

Please don't hear what I am not saying...

I am not saying that we Christians should take on a morose appearance.

Don Carson told of the little girl that saw a horse and said that it must be a Christian because it has a long face!

The beatitude we are looking at today doesn't tell us to walk around with long faces...

But rather understand the seriousness of life, of God, of sin, and of eternity.

This beatitude makes a paradoxical statement about life...

One that stands in contrast to the amusement syndrome of our hurting world.

The idea of blessing and comfort in mourning must sound strange to our culture...

John Stott says it can almost be translated, 'Happy are the unhappy'.

To understand what Jesus is saying we need to remind ourselves to whom Jesus is speaking.

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount were first meant for His disciples.

True, there was a multitude of people, a great crowd.

And it was in the midst of this crowd that Jesus sat down.

However,

"His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: Blessed ..."

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is teaching citizens of the Kingdom.

You can also say: the church.
Jesus is speaking to those who belong to Him.
He is speaking to those who believe, who have faith.
It is these to whom Jesus says, "Blessed..."

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with the words that we looked at recently:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

This first beatitude has to do with our attitude toward ourselves.
Simply put, a Christian is a person who has declared spiritual bankruptcy.
A Christian is one who in his spirit, feels his need, and is willing to admit it.
He is not self-sufficient.
He has submitted himself to the lordship of Jesus Christ and is content to be dependent on God.

Today we come to the second beatitude.
It is closely related to the first.

Matthew 5:4:
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (NASB)

We need to ask three questions.
First, what does Jesus mean by "mourn"?
Second, why do they mourn?
Third, how is that comfort experienced?

What does Jesus mean by 'mourn'?

We say there is great joy in being a Christian.
People react against this by saying...
'How can anyone be happy in a world where there is so much suffering?

This week the news has been dominated by the tragedy in Burma.
It has taken days for the full force of what happened to get out.
Utter devastation and death and destruction.
On our TV we see pictures of suffering and pain...
People have lost homes, livelihoods and whole families.

At times like these the words 'blessed' and 'mourning' seem light-years apart.

Yet in this verse in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus brings them together.

The word Jesus uses for 'mourning' 'pentheo' is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language...
One used in describing the desolation felt by someone mourning the death of a loved one.

When Jacob was tricked by his sons into believing that his son Joseph had been killed we read, 'he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.'

The Septuagint, the first Greek version of the OT, uses this word 'Pentheo'.

So we can't soften the impact of what Jesus says by toning down the force of the word he used.

The mourning he is talking about is not a touch of sadness, but deep heartfelt grief.

So what sort of mourning are we talking about?

There is mourning and there is mourning

and we need to be sure we understand what sort of mourning Jesus is talking about

John Blanchard, in his book on the Beatitudes, identifies three categories of mourning

There is **natural mourning**

The most obvious example of this is the death of a loved one.

No where in human mourning more clearly focussed than at this occasion.

But there is also a broader range of sorrow and sadness that fits this category...

It is not limited to funerals.

We mourn when we fail an exam, lose an important game, forget an appointment, Choose the slowest lane or queue in Safeway, or hit all the red lights on your way somewhere when we are running late!

Where is the blessedness in all these things?

Natural mourning is clearly not what Jesus had in mind.

Secondly, there is **sinful mourning**

The Bible contains numerous examples of this kind of mourning.

An OT example is Cain, after he murdered his brother Abel.

He was more concerned with his punishment than about his sin.

A NT example is Judas Iscariot...

Seeing his sin he seems to have been motivated by fear, rather than seeking forgiveness.

I think that the mourning Jesus is talking about has to do with **spiritual mourning**. Contrasting this with natural and sinful mourning, Paul says 'Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no room for regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.' (2 Cor 7:10)

Cain and Judas, and others, experienced worldly sorrow.

And it led to disastrous outcomes.

Godly sorrow is not a natural characteristic, nor a quality we possess.

It is something God graciously works in our hearts.

It always leads to positive, life giving results.

No one ever regrets godly, spiritual sorrow...

Instead you rejoice in God's gracious dealing with you.

But what is the source of blessedness that Jesus connects with spiritual mourning?

It lies in the Biblical assurance that God will respond in salvation.

False conviction leads to agonies of doubt and uncertainty.

True conviction of sin leads to true repentance and faith.

And the joy of release from the guilt and grip of sin.

So what do we mourn over?

There is something quite basic about mourning.

The word Matthew uses for mourn is a participle: *mourning*,
implying that we are doing it now.

It could be translated 'Blessed are the mourning'. (Present Active Participle)

It is not something that we have done or will do; it is always part of us.

We are characterised by mourning.

Jesus doesn't mean that those who are naturally negative, have a poor self image, constantly seeing the dark side of life...

But he is pointing to those who have hearts that see and grieve over sin that raises its head.

God's people have an acute awareness of their sins.

See David in Psalm 51... 'my sin is always before me.

So we mourn over our personal sin...

It is the mark of a maturing believer...

The more we grow in grace, the more we know God and Christ and ourselves...

The more we mourn as we see how far short we fall of the perfect life we are called to live.

As true believers we must be sensitive to our own sin.

For the Christian there are many other things that cause them to mourn.

Those who belong to Jesus realize that we live in a *crooked world* which has abandoned God.

When we listen to the news or read the newspaper it becomes more than obvious that human life lies under a curse. We mourn about the fallenness of the world.

We mourn over the disaster that unfolds before our eyes in Burma.

We mourn over the condition of our inner-cities, the injustices that exist in our land, the prejudices and racial hatreds and tensions that exist.

We mourn about government greed, waste, and inaction on the real problems facing our land.

We mourn about the destruction we cause in the environment.

We mourn about every person who dies without repenting of their sin and knowing Christ. When we see sin in society we should mourn!

When Jonah confronted the city of Nineveh about her sin and corruption, her king and people went into mourning: they fasted, they covered themselves with sackcloth, they sat in ashes, they prayed urgently to God (Jonah 3:6f).

You know something else we should mourn about?

The church.

We mourn about hypocrisy, lack of love, departure from the truth, gossip.

We mourn that those within the church know divorce, adultery, homosexuality, drug-abuse, and alcoholism.

We mourn that in the church there are those who physically, emotionally, and sexually abuse others and that within the church there are those who have been abused.

When we see sin in the church we should mourn!

One problem we face increasingly in our day is a lack of seriousness concerning sin. In many places, even among Christians, sin is seemingly not taken seriously anymore.

How seriously does God take sin?

God takes sins so seriously that He sent Jesus, His only Son, to die to pay the penalty for sin.

In God's sight, sin is so serious that nothing else short of the death of Jesus Christ could deal with it.

It was because of the seriousness of sin that Jesus Christ had to go to the Cross.

When those nails were driven through His hands and feet, it was because of your sin and mine.

Because of my sin and yours He suffered hour after hour upon the Cross, His life slowly ebbing away.

God the Father watched His Son suffer this horrible agony because it was the only way to deal with our sin.

Let there be no doubt what is God's opinion of sin.

As we casually joke about sin, we need to be reminded that to God it is not funny

How seriously do you take your sins?

Does it break your heart when you have sinned against God?

Do you **mourn** over your sin?

Or do you take pleasure in your sin?

Do you experience a godly sorrow which leads you to repentance?

Like the sinful man in the temple, do you bow your head in sorrow and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner"?

This kind of mourning for sin precedes the blessing of God

But what is the Christian comfort?

We touched on it briefly...God blesses the repentant sinner by releasing him from the guilt and grip of sin, and granting us a place of eternal security in his kingdom.

There is comfort because we receive forgiveness and restoring of the joy and assurance of salvation.

But wait! There's more!

There are a number of ways we receive this comfort...

God the Father...

In Romans 15 Paul speaks of the God of all comfort and encouragement.

His grace can transform us from the worst kind of place.

God the Son...

We have one who speaks to the Father in our defence.

God the Holy Spirit...

Just before his death, Jesus told his troubled disciples that when he returns to heaven he will plead with God who would send the people another counsellor.

The Word of God...

God speaks to us through His book... the best thing we can do is read it.

The fellowship of other Christians.

1 Thess 5 'therefore encourage (parakaleo) one another and build each other up.'

The certainty of Christ's return.

The certainty of Christ's return should be a source of great comfort to us at every level of mourning for sin.

Our lives, the church, and our world will be cleansed and made new...

You and I are part of that church and world...

What a great comfort.

Conclusion

Those who mourn will be comforted by the only comfort which can relieve their distress, and that is, the free forgiveness of God.

Horatio Spafford knew about loss, pain, tears and comfort.

He lived in Chicago at the turn of the century.

He was a dynamic Christian man who was influential in the founding of the Moody Bible Institute.

Following the great Chicago fire in 1871, he put his wife and children aboard ship and sent them to Europe.

He wanted to get them out of the city while it was being rebuilt.

As they were crossing the Atlantic Ocean, the ship was struck by another vessel and both ships sank.

This mother saw her four children drown.

She herself was struck by a falling mast, but she was miraculously saved.

She fell on some floating debris and later was rescued and taken to Wales.

While she was in a hospital there, she telegraphed back to her husband the two words: "Saved alone."

Horatio Spafford took the first ship to Wales.

As it neared the area in the Atlantic where the other ship had gone down, Dr. Spafford was walking along the deck, contemplating all that had happened.

It was then he was moved to write the song we are going to sing to close our service morning,

It Is Well With My Soul:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,

When sorrows like sea billows roll;

Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,

It is well, it is well with my soul.

That is the message Jesus wants to communicate to us today.

Whatever my circumstances, you have taught me to say, "It is well with my soul."

Joy is not the absence of suffering but the presence of God.

In a troubled and hurting world...

In our lives we have, or will, experience loss and grief.

We can take great comfort in knowing that we know the end of the story...

We have read the book and so we know how it is going to end...

Read revelation 21:3-4