

## ***Beatitudes: Blessed When We Feel Life's Pain - week 3***

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - May 10, 2020

(Drawing from the book by Rev. Darrell Johnson *Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*)

Happy Mother's Day to all our mother's! Thank you for your love! We see when you mourn over the way things are: wanting your children to have a better life and a better world to live in. Thank you. Jesus has good news for you, there will be a new day in His Kingdom when our lives will be whole and healed, when we will have everlasting joy in our Heavenly Father's house. When you mourn over the way things are, trust Jesus to fulfill His promise, put the burden on Him. Draw closer to our Father's heart of love, and may you know the Holy Spirit's comfort.

Would you pray with me?

*Heavenly Father, speak to us today through Your Word, so that we can feel your comfort. Help us catch a vision of Your Kingdom come, as we wait for Your new day. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

We're continuing our series on the Beatitudes drawing from the book by Rev. Darrell Johnson, *The Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*.

Today we're considering the second Beatitude: "**Blessed are those who mourn.**" Rev. Darrell Johnson points out that since Jesus is using the present participle, it is more accurately, "**Blessed are those who are mourning.**" Even more exactly would be, "**Blessed are those who**

**are in a state of mourning.”** Really? Doesn’t that sound a bit upside-down?

Jesus’ second Beatitude catches us a little by surprise. It’s the one that on first hearing simply makes no sense. Blessed? Approved? Fortunate... are those who are mourning? Congratulations? Right-on? In sync are those who are in a state of mourning? Can you imagine standing before a group of people after a tornado and repeating Jesus’ words?

Well two Christian authors might have voiced our initial response to this Beatitude pretty well. J. Barrie Shepherd writes, *“Lord, you might as well say ‘full are the hungry,’ ‘healthy are the sick,’ even ‘alive are the dead.’”* Or, as philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote,

*“Blessings to those who mourn, cheers to those who weep, hail to those whose eyes are filled with tears, hats off to those who suffer, bottoms up to the grieving. How strange, how incredibly strange.”*

What makes Jesus’ second Beatitude all the more strange is that the verb translated “mourn” (*penthein*) is one of the strongest words for grief in the Greek language. It is used of those who grieve the loss of loved ones, shedding those tears that well up from deep within us. It’s a piercing sorrow inside us, whether or not, or how, we let it out. Amazing! **“Blessed, right-on, in sync are those who**

**mourn. You lucky bums!”** Really? Are you sure about that, Jesus?

Now as we have been stressing thus far in this series, these qualities Jesus blesses are not natural human qualities. That's why they might not seem very appealing. Rather, they are the result of the gospel having grabbed hold of us - the result of hearing Jesus' good news of the Kingdom of heaven breaking in upon the earth. Once again, Jesus did not come into Galilee and Judea looking for Beatitude people to call into His Kingdom. No, He first called people to Himself. And then as a result of contact with Him, the Beatitudes began to emerge in their lives.

Therefore, the picture the second Beatitude suggests is not that of Jesus coming into our city, spotting people who are mourning, and reaching out to them with comfort. He did do that. He spotted the widow in the town of Nain, following behind the funeral procession that was carrying her son's body to the cemetery, and He reached out to her in Luke 7:11-17. He also saw the tears flowing down the faces of Mary and Martha as they stood outside the tomb of their dear brother Lazarus, and He so reached out to them that He Himself began to weep John 11:1-37.

But those encounters are not the primary picture suggested by the second Beatitude. Rather, the picture is that of Jesus coming into our city, reaching out, and calling people to Himself, who then begin to mourn. Yes, they

(and we) begin to rejoice deeply! But they (and we) also begin to mourn deeply.

Why? Why is this sorrow, this piercing sorrow, a sign that human beings are being grabbed by Jesus' gospel? Why does Jesus identify "passionate grief" as one of the marks of those upon whom the Kingdom of God has come? My Mother's Day message speaks to it, but before we wrestle with that question more fully, let us take in what it means that Jesus actually is blessing our grieving.

Right off, this Beatitude gives us permission to grieve; it allows us the freedom to grieve. Jesus Himself was overcome by passionate grief on multiple occasions, and He Himself publicly expressed His grief. By this Beatitude and His example, He gives us the freedom and space to grieve.

I think Jesus is also saying, *"Comfort will be found when you allow yourself to feel and express grief. Comfort is not found by insulating your heart but by opening your heart."* One of the ways we can serve one another is by encouraging one another to grieve well. This can be so important for us to learn. I'm glad we have Jesus' example.

Jesus' blessing of grieving is also His way of letting us know right from the beginning that living in His Kingdom in our world will involve sorrow. He does not promise us unbroken happiness in this world. Yes, there is great joy.

Joy springs from the pages of the New Testament. When we read **“The time is fulfilled!”** - We rejoice! **“The kingdom of God has come near!”** - Rejoice! *“The Lover of our souls is here in our midst!”* - Rejoice! *“Our God reigns!”* - Rejoice. *“The Holy Spirit is here to fill us!”* - Rejoice! Yet Jesus is saying that His coming also brings sorrow, heart-piercing sorrow.

When Jesus blesses our grieving, it is His way of telling us that this sorrow is part of the process by which we grow. Sadness can be a launching point for growth. C.S. Lewis observed, *“God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”* We need to listen to our pain, our sorrow, and our sadness, for it may be one of the ways that God is maturing us.

Now the Beatitude: **“Blessed are those who mourn.”** Why? Why is mourning a sign that human beings have been grabbed by the gospel? Why is passionate grief a sign that Jesus and His kingdom are getting a hold of us?

Rev. Darrell Johnson writes of three reasons.

1. We mourn because of the painful reality of sin.

The first reason is related to what we realize from the first Beatitude, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”** When we meet Jesus in all His fullness, we are forced to face the reality of sin, especially the reality of sin in our own lives.

Not that Jesus walks into our lives and tells us that we are “sinners”! Not at all - nowhere in the gospel do we find Jesus telling someone that he or she is a “sinner.”

It is just that in His presence, we cannot but realize our sinful condition. This is part of the reason we may resist deeper intimacy with Him: We are afraid of what He will do with what is exposed in His presence. In Him we see what humanity was created to be. And when we see what we were created to be, we then grieve over what humanity has become because of the power of sin.

Consider the Apostle Paul’s own response to Jesus, even after years of walking with Jesus. **“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”** (Romans 7:24). Paul is not suffering here from low self-esteem. He is wrestling with the fact that even though he knows what is good, and even though he wills to do what he knows is good, he still keeps doing the very evil he does not want to do (Romans 7:19). Can you identify with that? I think we all can. In the presence of Jesus, we see and rejoice, and we mourn.

You know, this is not “worm theology” though, the theology that says that in order to know God we have to first feel like a worm, and squirm and wriggle in the mud for a while. God does not think of us as worms! Jesus never called anyone “worm.” The second Beatitude is not advocating a *“put-yourself-down”* spirituality. It is simply recognizing that in the presence of Jesus the Holy One,

we cannot but grieve over our unholy condition. Grieve that life is not the way it's supposed to be. In His presence we rejoice, but we also grieve. And that's okay.

The wonder of the gospel is that the Holy One chooses to draw near to us, to draw us near to Himself, and to live among us unholy ones - indeed to live in us unholy ones! The wonder is that He does not wait until we are holy before He comes. He comes in all His Holiness into our unholiness, our unholiness is automatically exposed, and we grieve. But we don't have to be afraid.

**“Blessed,”** He says. “Blessed are those who so grieve.” Right-on. It means the Holy one has a hold on you! It means you are in sync with the really real Kingdom of Heaven. It means you are alive!

We mourn because of the painful reality of sin.

2. When we draw near to Jesus' heart, we begin to mourn with Him over the way things are.

The second reason why mourning is a sign the gospel is breaking through is that as we get closer to Jesus we get closer to His heart, and we discover that it is a broken heart.

Yes, Jesus is a man of joy! So much so that He was accused by stuffy religious folk of being a glutton and a drunkard. But He is also, as the prophet Isaiah says, “a

**man of sorrow, acquainted with grief”** (Isaiah 53:4).

Yes, He is the eternally joyful Creator, who out of infinite joy creates us to enter into His joy. The psalmist is right - **“In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever”** (Psalm 16:11). But there is in His heart, because of the destructive power of sin, great sorrow over the world and over the church. How often throughout Scripture do we find the phrase **“and it grieved the Holy One”**?

Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the multitudes bringing their sick to Him, He **“felt compassion for them”** (Matthew 9:35-36). The word there for compassion is *splankna*, meaning guts. That Jesus **“felt compassion for them”** means **“His guts were ripped up.”** Amazing! The Living God chooses to so enter all the wreckage that He feels it in Himself - He feels it as His own.

And John tells us that **“Jesus wept”** at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35). The word John uses means a *spontaneous out-breaking, an uncontrollable weeping*. Jesus stands alongside the grave of His good friend Lazarus and tears roll down His face. Why? Because of the pain He could feel in the hearts of Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha. And because of the pain He Himself was feeling. The tears are the overflow of the Creator’s broken heart, saying, **“Death ought not be.”** Get close to that heart and we cannot but be moved in the same way.



Luke tells us that as Jesus came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He wept over the city (Luke 19:41). The word Luke uses is a strong word that describes a chest heaving with *“the sob and the cry of a soul in agony.”* Why? Jesus is the Sovereign King of Glory. Why would He sob? After regaining His composure, He explains that it is because they did not know the things that make for peace (Luke 19:42; see also 13:34). Get close to that heart and feel what it feels for the world, and you cannot but mourn with Him over the way things are. That leads to number 3.

### 3. When the gospel breaks into our lives, we begin to grieve over what is

The third reason why mourning is a sign that the gospel is breaking through: In Jesus, we see what the kingdom of God is all about, what God’s new day is all about. In Jesus we see what was supposed to be, and what will be, when the Kingdom comes in all its fullness, and we grieve over what is. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it regarding the world, the disciples of Jesus *“see that for all the jollity on board, the ship is beginning to sink.”*

Yes, disciples do begin to see signs of the Kingdom in our midst. Hallelujah! Yet the more we see of what can be, the more our hearts break over what is. The problems of our world are symptomatic of the deeper spiritual crisis of our time, the lack of knowing our Heavenly Father. Billions of people on our planet go about their daily lives, most in “quiet desperation” unaware of the great fact of Jesus and

His Kingdom. It does not have to be this way. Every person ought to know the good news we have a loving Father in heaven and a Big Brother who came to rescue us. The “**harvest is plentiful,**” says Jesus, “**but the laborers are few,**” too few (Luke 10:2). It does not have to be this way.

Earlier I quoted philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff. A number of years ago he and his wife lost their 25-year-old son, Eric, in a mountain climbing accident. In his book titled *Lament for a Son*, Wolterstorff openly shares his grief, agonizing over the way the world is, in light of the way the world is supposed to be. In the chapter where he reflects on Jesus’ second Beatitude, he asks, “Who then are the mourners” that Jesus blesses? Wolterstorff answers (and I think this is beautifully written):

*The mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God’s new day, who ache with all their being for that day’s coming, and who break out into tears when confronted with its absence. They are the ones who realize that in God’s realm of peace there is no one blind, and who ache whenever they see someone unseeing. They are the ones who realize that in God’s realm there is no one hungry and who ache whenever they see someone starving. They are the ones who realize that in God’s realm there is no one falsely accused and who ache whenever they see someone imprisoned unjustly. They are the ones who realize that in God’s realm there is no one who suffers oppression and who ache whenever they*

*see someone beat down. They are the ones who realize that in God's realm there is no one without dignity and who ache whenever they see someone treated with indignity. They are the ones who realize that in God's realm of peace there is neither death nor tears and who ache whenever they see someone crying tears over death. The mourners are aching visionaries.*

**“Blessed,”** says Jesus. **“Your aching shows you are in sync with His gospel. Your aching says you are alive in His vision for the world.”**

**“Blessed... for you shall be comforted.”** When? When are the mourners to receive comfort?

On that new day, when the kingdom of heaven is fully realized, yes. When, as the Voice from the throne of the universe says, God **“will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain”** (Revelation 21:4).

But we will also be comforted before that day, even now. How? The word translated **“comfort”** in this Beatitude is the verb *parakaleo*. The primary meaning of *parakaleo* is *to exhort, to encourage, or to embolden*. It is used of soldiers cheering each other on. This is also the original meaning of the English word **“comfort”**: com meaning “with,” fortis meaning “strength” - com-fort, **“strengthen by being with.”** Jesus is saying that as we dare to open

ourselves up to pain and grief, we feel ourselves strangely strengthened.

How? Why? From the verb *parakaleo* comes the noun *paraklete*. *Paraklete* is the word Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit, with whom and in whom Jesus baptized His disciples. Before that new day when every tear is wiped away, the *Paraklete*, the personal embodiment of the Kingdom, comes alongside those who are mourning.

When we become aware of the depth of our sin, the *Paraklete* speaks His word of comfort: **“Jesus paid it all. Your guilt is removed, your iniquity is forgiven, your sin is covered by the blood of the Lamb.”**

When we feel just how broken the world is, the *Paraklete* speaks His word of comfort: He reminds us that even now the Father and the Son are at work.

When we feel despair over how far we are from the Kingdom’s way, the *Paraklete* speaks His word of comfort: The kingdom has come near; the Kingdom is breaking in all over the world, and nothing can ultimately stand in its way. Hallelujah!

When we have this vision of what can be, we then know the world does not have to be this way. Things can change. But don’t carry on your shoulders the weight of making this vision happen. Trust Jesus. Trust the Father to fulfill it. He wants nothing more than your joy. Hear the

word the Holy Spirit spoke to the prophet Habakkuk, **“The vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.”**

Habakkuk 2:3

When you and I feel the broken heart of God for us, the *Paraklete* assures us that it is the heart of God. He weeps for us and wants to replace our sorrow with joy. For us and for God, **“Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning”** (Psalm 30:5). God will have His way! Everlasting joy will be the everlasting state of being for you and me, for our children and for God. *You lucky bums! What a party!*

If the first Beatitude blesses those who know they don't have it all together before God; the second Beatitude blesses those who are vulnerable before life and who dare to feel its pain. Theirs is the kingdom of joy, and theirs is the embrace of the God of all comfort.

Would you pray with me?

*Heavenly Father, Jesus our Brother, reveal to us aching visionaries more of Your Kingdom come and remind us we do not carry Your burden of making it happen. Comfort us and draw us ever closer to Your heart of love as we wait for Your new day to come. In Jesus Name, Amen.*