

Beatitudes-Solace for the Sorrowful—Matthew 5:4
College Baptist Church
June 13, 2021

Today we will continue our summer sermon series on the Beatitudes. You can find the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. So, I invite you to turn there with me. If you didn't bring a Bible, there are Bibles in the pew racks. You will find Matthew 5 on p. 809. The sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes. Today, we will be focusing on the second Beatitude, which is found in verse 4.

As you turn there, I wanted to remind you of my summary definition of the Beatitudes again. The Beatitudes are kingdom blessings, pronounced by King Jesus, upon citizens of his kingdom, which is already but not yet. So, these are pronouncements of divine favor and approval from Jesus on his people that have consequences in the present *and* future. And as we will see today—it is important to keep the present *and* future in mind.

I also wanted to remind you about the structure of each Beatitude before we come to the text this morning. Each Beatitude consists of a pronouncement and a promise. The first half is the pronouncement; and it begins: “*blessed are the/those...*” And most of these pronouncements are shocking in and of themselves. The second half is the promise; and it starts with the word “*for*”, which means “because.”

So, the promise explains the pronouncement. The promise answers the question “why” this shocking pronouncement is actually a blessing, even though it doesn't sound like one. And so, we want to make sure that we hear the whole beatitude—both pronouncement and promise as we study each one.

With all of that as reminder, let's listen again to Matthew 5:1-12; before focusing on the second Beatitude, which is found in verse 4.

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

⁵ *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

⁶ *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

⁷ *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

⁸ *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

⁹ *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

The Pronouncement: Blessed are those who mourn—the sorrowful

Listen again to the pronouncement of Jesus in verse 4. “*Blessed are those who mourn...*” That can’t be right, can it? Blessed are those who mourn, really? I asked my sister the other day what comes to mind when she hears the word “mourn.” And she answered, “wail or lament.” And she was right. To mourn is more than feeling a little sad or disappointed. Mourning is the emotion of grief—which is sometimes expressed in wailing and lamentation.

When I was a kid—maybe 10 or 12 years old—my family went on a camping trip to the Upper Peninsula with some of our close friends, the Robinsons. The trip had been going great—fishing, swimming, sleeping in a motor home and a couple tents, late-night campfires, and lots of laughter. But things changed abruptly mid-way through the week.

First, Mrs. Robinson—Lou Ann—learned that her father was hospitalized back home. Then, one of the Robinson kids—my close friend, Jacob Robinson, got so sick that he had to be hospitalized! Needless to say, the mood changed a bit around the campsite and in the boat—but we weren’t mourning...yet. After all, Jacob was improving and Lou Ann’s father was expected to make a full recovery. So, we went to sleep hopeful in the quiet woods of the UP.

But the quiet was broken the next morning during breakfast with the sound of wailing. Lou Ann had received the shocking news that her father had unexpectedly died—and she wailed like nothing I had ever heard before. The sound of mourning came from deep within...and her cries of lament reverberated around the campground until her husband, Nate, got her inside the mini-van where she could weep in private. She was *filled* with *sorrow*. And that *sorrowful* cloud remained over us for the rest of the trip.

That example might be extreme, but it captures the emotion of what it is to mourn...what it is to be sorrowful. How have you experienced sorrow in your life? What has made you feel sorrowful in the past...or even in the present? Here are a few situations or circumstances that make us sorrowful.

We experience sorrow over sickness—especially sickness that leads to death. For me, this is the first thing that comes to mind when I think about mourning and sorrow. I think of the sorrow of a hospital room, where the prognosis is not good. I think of muffled cries at a funeral service. I picture a family gathered at the graveside with tears streaming down their faces at the graveside—saying that one last goodbye. That’s mourning. That’s what being sorrowful looks like.

We experience sorrow over strife. I don’t know about you, but the polarization of our country is lamentable to me. Perhaps I was naïve as a child, but I don’t remember seeing the animosity back then that I see today in the news and on the streets and in our government. And the relational strife is not only “out there,” I have heard many stories within the last year of how strife has invaded churches and families—people refusing to speak to one another or see one another for seemingly petty reasons. All this strife has produced much sorrow...and I know some of you have experienced it first-hand.

We experience sorrow over suffering. When people suffer financially—it brings tears. When people suffer persecution—it brings mourning. When people suffer prejudice—it brings sorrow. And as we learned in 1 Peter—the sorrow of suffering is to be expected, even among Christians, as we live in this fallen world.

These are just a few examples of circumstances that produce sorrow. These are glimpses of “*those who mourn.*” And like I said, I am sure you could add your own mournful, sorrowful experiences to the list. And I think these sorrows of sickness, strife, and suffering are certainly included within Jesus’s pronouncement, “*blessed are those who mourn.*” But I believe there was one more foundational experience of sorrow that Jesus had in mind when he spoke to his disciples on the mountain that day.

I’m talking about sorrow over sin. Jesus is especially saying “*blessed are those who mourn*”—over sin. King David knew what it was to feel sorrow for sin—and he wrote a song about it. Turn with me to Psalm 51. When Nathan the prophet approached David about his marital unfaithfulness with Bathsheba, David was filled with sorrow. He mourned over the wickedness of his adulterous behavior. Let’s listen carefully to how David expresses his sorrow over sin in the first four verses.

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight...*

Did you notice how David takes ownership for his sin in verse 3?

*3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

No excuses about the stress of leadership. No, blaming-shifting to Bathsheba. David takes full responsibility for his sin.

And notice in verse 4 that David recognizes that sin is fundamentally an affront to God.

*4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight...*

To say that David “*only*” sinned against God is not to say that he didn’t sin against Bathsheba, or Bathsheba’s husband—Uriah the Hittite. It is to say that sin is first-and-foremost rebellion against God. David is expressing sorrow over his failure to honor and serve and please God. Do you see how this is mourning over sin itself—not mourning the mere consequences of sin. In other words, David wasn’t sorrowful because he “got caught;” he was sorrowful for sinning against God himself. And Jesus pronounces this type of sorrowful mourning “*blessed.*” But why?

The Promise: For they shall be comforted—solace

Well, listen again to the promise that follows the pronouncement of the second beatitude. “*For they shall be comforted.*” It is blessed to mourn NOT because mourning in and of itself is a blessing; but because those who mourn are promised comfort—that is, consolation, encouragement. Jesus promises solace for the sorrowful.

In Psalm 51, David is counting on the solace that only God can give. Look down at Psalm 51, verses 9-12.

Hide your face from my sins,

and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God,*

and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ *Cast me not away from your presence,*

and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation,*

and uphold me with a willing spirit.

David looks to the LORD for solace in the midst of his sorrow over sin. And he finds solace in two things in particular.

First, David finds solace in salvation. The joy of salvation is found in the comforting promise of forgiveness for our sins. David humbly asks God to “*blot out all [his] iniquities.*” To blot is to remove a stain by rubbing or wiping. I suppose if David were writing today, he would ask the LORD to “delete” all his sins. You know when your phone or computer asks you “Are you sure you want to delete this item? This action cannot be undone.” Well, that’s exactly how the LORD forgives—he deletes our sin permanently. That act of wiping our sin away can’t be undone.

And that is the blessing of mourning...of being sorrowful for sin. Those who mourn for sin are blessed with the comfort of knowing that their sins have been finally and forever deleted. Jesus took the punishment for our sins on the cross of Calvary and he extends forgiveness to all those who mourn over their sin in true repentance and faith. The Apostle Paul wrote about this in his second letter to Corinthians—chapter 7, verse 10. And keep in mind that the Corinthians were, like David, enmired in sexual sin. “*Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret...*”

Godly grief is the same thing as mourning over sin. It is taking ownership over sin and it recognizing sin as an affront to God. This leads to repentance—causing us to turn away from that sin and toward God, who grants salvation—forgiveness from our sin.

Do you possess godly grief over your sin? Do you mourn over your rebellion against God? Grief and mourning and sorrow over sin is the ONLY way to experience the comforting blessing of salvation. If you have never truly mourned over your sin, I invite you to mourn over your sin today—use the words of David from Psalm 51, that you might know the solace of salvation that comes from God alone.

And let this beatitude also serve as a reminder for us to mourn over the sins of society. While we can't be guilty of the sins of others, we can weep at their reality and lament at ways we have not done more to address societal ills and wickedness. Psalm 119:136 says, *"My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law."* Let's mourn over the sin of the church and the world. And let's pray that the LORD might lead many people to the sorrow of repentance so that he might pour out the solace of salvation on people in need of forgiveness.

Second, David finds solace in the Spirit. In verse 11 he says, *"take not your Holy Spirit from me."* David knows that the Holy Spirit is God's abiding presence with his people. And he needs the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit—in spite of his unholy behavior. The Spirit brings the comfort of God's approving presence with his people.

Did you know that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Helper or Comforter? In John 14:16-17, Jesus made this promise to his disciples.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper [or Comforter], to be with you forever,¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

The comforting presence of the Holy Spirit is a blessing to those who mourn. The presence of the Holy Spirit indwelling God's people is a reminder that God has not abandoned his people. He dwells with his people—helping us and comforting us in the dark times of mourning and sorrow. It is the Spirit who grants that peace that passes understanding that Paul writes about in Philippians 4.

And it is the Spirit, who supernaturally helps us understand and claim the promises in God's Word. 1 Corinthians 1:12 says, *"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God."* So, the Spirit helps us understand. This is especially important when we are mourning. When we are sorrowful over sickness or strife or suffering or sin, we don't always think clearly on our own. But the Spirit helps us understand the things of God—especially those promises written down in his Word—the Bible.

David seemed to understand in the Old Testament, what Jesus reiterates in the New Testament. Blessed are those sorrowful for sin, for they *shall* receive solace in salvation and in the Spirit. Do you understand that crucial connection between sorrow and solace?

In closing, let me focus briefly on one word in the beatitude. It is a word in the second half of the beatitude—the promise section. The word I am talking about is *"shall."* Shall is a future tense verb. It speaks of things that are not yet fully realized. And when we think about the comfort of salvation, we need to remember that the blessings of salvation are already, but not yet. We are already forgiven; and we already enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit. But we have *not yet* experienced all of the comfort Jesus promised in the second beatitude.

- We have not yet been reunited with our loved ones who have succumbed to sickness and death. That's why it is important that funerals not be only a celebration of life. We lament at funerals because death is a real consequence of sin. And death brings separation from loved ones. As Paul says to the Thessalonians, we grieve even as we await the certain hope of resurrection, reunion, and eternal rejoicing.
- We have not yet experienced relationships free from strife. Relationships at home and in the church and in the world are still very messy. And so, we wait for the comfort of an eternity in the presence of God where there is no longer strife between brothers and sisters.
- We have not yet seen suffering alleviated from our world. While we have made great advances—global poverty and racism and persecution are still real in the world today. And so, we await the comfort of the harmonious new heavens and new earth described in Revelation, where there are no more tears of sorrow and suffering.
- And we have not yet been freed from the presence of sin. While we have been freed from the penalty of sin, we still grapple with temptation and besetting sins. This can be terribly discouraging. But here in the second beatitude Jesus promises that all those who mourn sin *shall* be comforted. We will one day be comforted with the presence of Jesus himself and the absence of the sin that so easily entangles. And we shall experience the full-fledged solace of salvation for all eternity.

So, let us continue to mourn, knowing that we *shall* be comforted; because Jesus promises solace for the sorrowful.

Benediction—Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ *The Lord bless you and keep you;*

²⁵ *the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

²⁶ *the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*