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Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

Transcribed Message
September 24, 2017
Matthew 5:4

Suppose I were to ask you this morning to take that pen that's close by and a piece of paper and write down a list of emotions that you think God would have you, as one of His children, experience in your Christian life. Emotions that you believe God wants you to experience day-to-day. What would be on that list? I'd imagine on probably every list in this room would be near or at the top, love. We know love is more than emotion but it certainly is an emotion. It's something that we feel very deeply. I would imagine we could have things like joy, peace, contentment. Maybe a sense of calm that God would want us to experience. Confidence, anticipation, hope – a very strong and powerful emotion that God wants to experience. Maybe somebody would even be as strong or as bold to put down anger, thinking of the words of Paul when he instructed us to be angry but yet still not sin. My question is this: how many of us would have on that list that God wants us to feel sad, that He wants us to mourn, that He wants us to sorrow? Those probably wouldn't make a lot of our lists. We live in a world that celebrates partying and living life to the full, of pursuing happiness at any cost. We are a party-oriented, fun-filled world. Then along comes Jesus, as He so often does, and He disrupts us, if you will, and He says blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. There is something about being happy and sad that our Lord speaks to.

We come this morning to the third study in the Sermon on the Mount and it's the second of the Beatitudes that we're looking at. I would put before you this morning that we're called to cultivate a tender heart. Our heart evidently is easily hardened by the things of the world and Jesus, I believe, is calling us to pursue a tender heart. To mourn but not to be morose; to be serious but not to be sullen; to be sober-minded but not to be coldhearted.

Quick review. The Beatitudes and this section of teaching that Jesus gives to us is first of all the life that Jesus lived. Here it is. If we wonder what Jesus's life looked like,

this would be a snapshot of what that life looked like. This is how Jesus lived His life. This is what a spirit-controlled life looks like. We used to see the bracelet all the time that said WWJD, what would Jesus do. I always thought it would be as appropriate to have another bracelet that said what did Jesus do. What did Jesus say? What were the things that He actually put before us? Not just what would Jesus do, what did He do and this is what He did. He lived life like this.

Secondly, this is the life of every believer. We are all called to live a life like this. We're all called to, in some sense, to mirror what we're reading in the Beatitudes. This is not for a chosen few. This is not for some super group of saints that nobody else can live the way they do. This is only for believers. This is not God's plan of salvation, but this is for all believers.

The third thing we've been noticing is this kind of life is what distinguishes us from the world. If you live this way, you're going to look different in this world. That's the reality, but then again, Jesus looked different. This is going to be a distinguishing set of characteristics that are going to flow out of our life. He's going to go on to say in verses 13, 14, 15 and 16: You're going to be the salt of the earth. You're going to be the light of the world. How do you become the salt of the earth and the light of the world? He is telling us right here in the Beatitudes. It flows right into that section where He says this is going to be distinguishing behavior in your life.

Let's look at this idea of happy are the sad. This second paradox that we encounter in this list that Matthew gives to us. I want to begin by just having us think together what does it mean to mourn? If we're going to do what Jesus said, then we've got to know what it is that we're being called to do. What is it that we are being asked to do when we are asked to mourn? The word itself, or the term Jesus used here, is first of all what I want you to see. It is the word *pentheo*. There are 12 different words in the English Bible that are translated from Greek words with this word suffering, or sorrow, or mourning, or sadness. We have a whole range of words that were available to us. What Jesus does here is to pick what some have said is the most intense of all those words. What Jesus calls us to do is to mourn. It may very well be that this word above all of the others speaks the most powerfully to what that looks like. Even in the Middle East today, when you watch the news or you see a video clip of people experiencing great

sorrow and great loss, they're very expressive. It's very emotional. It's outwardly a very strong response that they offer in the face of serious loss. Even in Jesus's day, there were professional mourners that led the procession. It was their responsibility to create this deep sense of mourning. When Jesus says blessed are those who mourn, this is the word that He is talking about. He's talking about something far more however than just an external appearance. He's talking about a deep inner agony of spirit. He's talking about something that expresses as nothing else can a deep inner pain that we are dealing with and going through. There is a profound sense of loss that this word is to convey to us.

In Mark 16:10, when the disciples were faced with the reality that Jesus was dead and He was in the grave, Mark says the disciples mourned and he picked this word. In maybe what was the most evil perpetration of the deception of a parent in the Bible, when Jacob's sons brought the coat of Joseph that was all torn up and bloody with the express purpose of deceiving Jacob into thinking that Joseph had in fact been killed, it says that Jacob went into days of mourning. It's this word that the translators from the Hebrew Bible to the Greek Bible chose to speak of the same sense of loss that he was dealing with.

The other thing I want you to see about this word that Jesus uses in Matthew 5:4 is that it's in the present tense. It is this deep inner agony, but we should understand this as blessed are those who are mourning, and it is to be understood as a part of our daily experience. This is a continuing response that on some level we're to have to the things that are going on in our life and in our world. Luther said this: "We are to be in a continuous act of repentance and contrition." In other words, we're not to understand repentance as something that we enter into one time when we come to faith in Christ and then that's for somebody else in another time and another place. No, we're called to a life of repentance. We're called to a life of being tenderhearted. We're called to a life Jesus says of continual mourning. That is a very interesting thing that He has to say to us here. Whatever else is going on, this is a deeply felt, on-going response to what God is doing in our life.

Let's look at the use of this term. The use of the term goes from this deep agony to what it looks like in our daily experience. What I want us to see is this: there is an

unnatural and an ungodly kind of mourning. There is, we're going to see, the opposite of that. I want to start off by just having you think with me of what is not in view when Jesus calls us to mourn. There is an ungodly sorrow. There is an unnatural sorrow. We can sorrow over the wrong things. We can sorrow in the wrong way. We can sorrow over things that God never promised us. We can be moved to bitterness and isolation if we mourn in the wrong way for the wrong things.

Let me show you what that looks like in Scripture. There are a number of examples where unfulfilled sinful desires caused people to go into deep mourning and sadness. Three very quick examples. In Numbers 11, after the children of Israel were taken out of Egypt, after they were dealing with the realities of being in the desert and no longer in Egypt, it says that they began to mourn for life back in Egypt. They wanted the leeks and the garlic and the onions. They wanted what they remembered as the good things. Forget about all of other stuff. It says that they were mourning about the fact that they were no longer in Egypt.

Another example in 2 Samuel 13 is the story of Amnon, David's son. Amnon had a perverted desire to defile his stepsister Tamar. The Bible actually says that Amnon began to mourn to the point of physical sickness because he could not act on that perverse thought. So he was mourning. What an ungodly kind of mourning that was. What an unnatural mourning that was.

Then you have another example in 1 Kings 21 with Ahab. Ahab the king of Israel. He has everything that he wants ... except not quite everything, because just over the palace wall is a little vineyard owned by a guy named Naboth. For whatever reason, Ahab the king, having everything that he needed, decided he needed to have that little vineyard too. The Bible says that he mourned. He wouldn't eat and he fell into depression because he was mourning over something that was unnatural and ungodly.

All of those things, and many others like that, are motivated not out of a pure heart, not out of a tender heart, but are motivated out of a selfishness. They are motivated out of self-centeredness. There's a self-pity that can sometimes lead to a mourning that is ungodly and unnatural. Jesus isn't calling us to anything like that.

There is one of the broader category that I want you to see. There can be a morning over guilt because of sin, and I think you see this in David's life. David, as he

dealt with Absalom. You remember Absalom his son. A young man who made a lot of really bad choices in his life and he lived in open rebellion against God. He lived in open rebellion against King David to the point that he was doing everything that he could to usurp the throne, kill David, and take over the kingdom. As that story unfolded, word came to David that Absalom had been killed. The Bible tells us that David fell into an extended state of mourning and sorrow. Now immediately, all of us as parents could relate to the loss of a child at that level for sure. That would be totally appropriate. But in this case, David's mourning, I believe, was motivated out of a sense of guilt for his failure as a father to ever engage in Absalom's life. That's what the Bible tells us. David just turned a blind eye to all of Absalom's misbehaving. Now at this point, he totally loses perspective and he actually says it would be better if I had been killed and Absalom had lived. It's his general Joab that has to step into his life and slap him upside the head and say David, what are you doing? The whole nation is watching you mourn and be guilt ridden over something that is unnatural and ungodly. Joab awakens him to his loss of perspective, the fact that he was mourning in a way that God never intended for him to mourn. That's not what Jesus is talking about.

So what kind of mourning are we to engage in? who is blessed when they mourn in the way that Jesus calls us to? let's look at that. Let's look at the other side of that. Let's look at a godly mourning. Let's look at an natural mourning from the standpoint of the way God puts this forward to us. The reality is, my friends, that we live in a broken and fallen world. It is a broken and fallen world in which there is more pain than you and I can grasp and take in and deal with. The reality is within this room this morning there are many broken hearts. There are many people who are mourning over losses of different kinds that they're dealing with. Some of them you know of, and some of them, I assure you, you probably don't know of. That's the reality of our world. That is the brokenness of our world. That is the fallenness of our world. Jesus said in this world you will have trouble. That's what He was talking about. God made us fully capable of weeping and mourning and sorrowing and crying. That was a part of God's purpose. We read blessed are those who mourn. That's a good thing that we have that capacity. So when we come to this verse 4, I'm going to do what not that many do. Most people when they are handling this passage go immediately to one thing that they believe God

wants us to mourn over. I agree with that, but I want to enlarge this a little bit beyond that one area.

I want to suggest that maybe there are a number of things that God would have us mourn over. The first one that I would have come to mind is what I just spoke of – just the trials of life, the hardships of life. One of the first things you encounter in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, into the lives of God's people because of sin what comes? Death. So you have imagery it in the opening chapters all the way through Genesis of God's people dealing with the matter of loss and separation of loved ones. Abraham mourns and sorrows over Sarah. Joseph sorrows over his dad Jacob, just as Jacob had sorrowed over Joseph. Jesus wept at the gravesite of Lazarus. The disciples, as we already said, mourned. This idea right here. This deep inner agony when they contemplated life without Jesus. Jesus is furthermore said to be a man of sorrows and one who's acquainted with grief. When Paul had his final encounter in Acts 20 with the elders at Ephesus you know what they did? They mourned. They sorrowed. They cried together because they realized that they were very unlikely to see each other again. They knew Paul was going to Rome. They knew a fate awaited him that probably was not good. They were not going to see each other again, so we read they cried, they sorrowed, they mourned in the way, I think, Jesus is talking about here.

What about our thoughts of the persecuted church? What about believers this morning who live in North Korea, in a place of incredible oppression? Believe me, there are believers in North Korea. Word is coming out, and it has always been true, but there's a strengthening on the part of some of these reports of believers in North Korea in the face of tremendous adversity. Or believers in Iran or in Syria? Just think of what fellow believers around the world are dealing with day to day.

It seems to me, it falls into this category as we have those thoughts that we should mourn. We should be sad. There should be a sorrow of heart, realizing what they are dealing with. I didn't even realize it until this morning but this is what's called Freedom Sunday. There is an attention that is being paid to the reality that slavery still exists in countless modern countries in 2017. People are literally still being bought and sold to work as slaves. So this was designated as Freedom Sunday. Ecclesiastes says there's a time to mourn. The psalmist himself says that his pillow is wet with tears.

That's the mourning that Jesus speaks of here. All of us can relate to that. All of us experience disappointments and when we face those losses and we face those disappointments, we mourn. We should. There should be a deep inner agony in the face of significant loss. Paul says in Romans 12:15 "Weep with those who weep."

Now, he also says rejoice with those who rejoice. I'm not calling for, nor is Jesus, a group of people to be morose all the time, or to be constantly solemn, or to be so sad that they can't laugh. Of course, that's not what He's saying. We don't want to experience what Robert Louis Stevenson experienced when he went to church one morning. He went home and he wrote in his diary: "I went to church this morning. I'm not depressed." That was his reflection of his normal evidently Sunday experience of going to church. Laughter is good. Proverbs says it's good medicine. But we also understand what Jesus is saying here in the face of the hardships and the trials and difficulties of life, blessed are those who mourn.

There's a second category, I think, that we should apply to what Jesus says. We mourn the lost people in our world. A world of humanity that doesn't know Christ. There are two occasions on which Jesus is said to have wept, to have openly sorrowed by crying. One, as I have already mentioned, is at the grave of Lazarus. The other had to do with Him looking out over Jerusalem and in Luke 19:41 it says that when He drew near and He saw the city, He wept over it. He saw them as being sheep without a shepherd. Matthew says that the terminology that came to mind was as a mother hen gathers her chicks and protects them, so He wanted to do for His people. But they would not have Him. Jesus is moved to tears. He sees this great spiritual need of people lost without a shepherd, without a savior. How do we see the world around us? How often do we think about the multitude of millions of people who have no idea about Christ, the gospel, salvation? How often do we sorrow? How often do we mourn? How often are we sad over the prospect of people not knowing Christ?

What's easier to do? It's easier to look at lost people and make judgments about them. It is easier to look at lost people making bad choices and say that's what you deserve. Jesus saw all that too, but He wept. The apostle Paul in Romans 9 gives us an insight into how he saw these people: "For I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsman according to the flesh. They are

Israelites and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises of God.” The words that he speaks actually jar us. At least they should. Paul was thinking of his Jewish brothers and sisters and he is thinking of their lost condition. His prayer before God is I wish I could take their place. I wish I could exchange what I know about Christ as the Messiah in exchange for their unbelief. What an incredible thing for Paul to say! Paul knew of the sovereign grace of God. He just finished Romans 8 leading into that 9th chapter. He just spoke of the glory of what that salvation looked like in his own life. The pinnacle at the end of Romans 8: nothing shall separate us from the love of God. He moves right from 8 into 9 and he says as I look around and see people, my heart is broken that they don't know You. Again, I would have to confess my heart is seldom reflective of Paul's. How often do I find myself mourning and sad and sorrowed over the fact that the people sitting in the cubicle next to me don't have any idea of the glory of Christ? How do I view my next-door neighbor in light of where they are in their relationship with God? What about people within our own family? I think Jesus would say to us blessed are those who mourn over those who are lost, for they shall be comforted.

I think the third thing is we mourn because of sin. We mourn because of sin. There's a definite connection here with the first two that I've listed and this one, because why is it that people are lost? Because sin has separated us from God. Why is there heartache, disappointment and hardship in life? It's because of sin. We live in a broken world. It does all naturally come back to this explanation. But here, I think, Jesus would have in mind it is not just sin in some broad general sense.

I want to suggest to you first of all that it is sin in the lives of other people that should cause us to respond with mourning. The psalmist says in Psalm 119 verse 136: “My eyes shed streams of tears because people do not keep your law.” He's heartbroken. He looks in the lives of people and he sees that there is nothing there by way of any regard for God and for His Word, for His truth, for His ways. The prophets of the Old Testament often spoke of this. Ezra chapter 9: “Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel. I sat appalled and I spread out my hands to the Lord my God, saying, ‘O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has mounted up to the

heavens.” That is Ezra as he looks around and he sees sin within the lives of people that are right there around him.

Listen to the words of Ezekiel. Ezekiel chapter 9: “And the Lord said to him, pass through the city and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over the abominations that are being committed.” How many people do you think got a mark on their head? I think the understanding would be there would probably not be that many. They're not that many who are mourning and broken over the abominations that are happening all around them. Or the words of Hosea, in the 4th chapter verse 3 he says: “Therefore the land mourns.” The land mourns. My friend, how often do we look around our country and grieve over the sins of the United States of America? How often do we have any sense of sorrow and true agony of spirit over the total disregard for the laws of God, the ways of God, the things of God, the purposes of God? There is total disregard for life. We live in a sexualized society that has thrown off all restraints. We live in a in a country where violence is the daily experience of far too many people. We live with vulgarity, blasphemy, idolatry, greed, corruption, injustice and inequality. It should be true of us as it was true in Ezekiel's time. We should be ones that would have a mark on our life because we grieve over what we see in our nation. The coarsening at every level. The breakdown of the family. The neglect of children. The abuse of children. The abandonment of children.

I think one of the great dangers that we face is that we're not bothered by sin. In fact, sadly I confess that at times I laugh at what I shouldn't be laughing at. Some TV show, some comment that somebody makes. It just reflects the coarsening of life and I find myself laughing. On some baser level, I guess, there is humor in some of that stuff. That's why it's presented that way. That's why whole shows are put together by comedians who do nothing but go into the baser side of life. In rooms 10 times the size as this room, people are just laughing over things that God says are an abomination to Him. That's where we are.

I have to say it and this is not a political statement. It doesn't really have anything to do with politics other than the person involved. I have to say that I'm grieved in my heart at the things that the President said Friday night. I don't agree with that commentary on our current culture. I think that's taking us in a place we don't need to

go. It's further dividing our country. I think we need to grieve about stuff like that. It doesn't matter where you are in the political ideology spectrum. Those things should be grievous to us on some level. They should cause us to mourn. I've had a heavier heart probably than I can remember over things happening in our country. Again, that is not a comment from the left or a comment from the right. It's just what is happening in our land. Maybe God wants to use these things to awaken us as His people to the reality of where the true answers lie.

Jesus said blessed are you if you mourn when you see the sins of those around you. But then you know what He also intended for us to see? We're to be mourning over our own sin. Let me say to you, self-righteous people don't do very good at mourning. Self-righteous people don't mourn. That's why Jesus said at the first of the Beatitudes blessed are the poor in spirit. The poor in spirit are those who understand their bankruptcy before God, who understand their brokenness before God. Thomas Watson said, "Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweeter." Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweeter. We should be like Isaiah. We should be like everybody in the Bible when they were confronted with the holiness of God. They fell as if dead people in response to their own sinfulness. Isaiah said woe is me. I'm a man of unclean lips. Paul says as much in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 9: "As it is, I rejoice not because you were grieved, but because you are grieved into repenting, for you felt a godly grief, that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." There is a godly grief in response to our own sinfulness.

James is the Sermon on the Mount in the epistles. James says: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you." It is the very words of our Lord. Look at the sin in your life and you mourn and you weep. Stop laughing, James says. Again, he is not calling us to be morose and coldhearted. He is not saying we should never laugh. He is saying we should never laugh when we are looking at the condition of our heart before God. We should never laugh at sin in our life.

We fail to mourn because we underestimate sin. We've never committed a small sin in the eyes of God's because we don't have a small God. We have a holy God. We have a righteous God. We don't commit little sins. He is holy, righteous. Christianity, today especially in America, is all about happy times. I understand people want to go to church where they are going to be entertained, where they're going to have fun and laugh. I like to laugh. I like to have fun. There is also a time when we have to acknowledge that laughter isn't appropriate. It's appropriate in here. It's okay. I don't want you to never laugh again so that you're group of mourners all the time. It's Ecclesiastes, right? There's a time to laugh. There's a time to cry. There's a time to be lighthearted. There's a time to mourn and to be sad. I think we understand that. But that's what, I believe, He is calling us to here.

How are we going to be comforted? Jesus says blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. How is that going to happen? What is that going to look like? I want you to see three things. First of all, we're going to be comforted by God Himself. We take this position of being tenderhearted before God, of seeing the pain and the brokenness of our world, of seeing lost people who are bound for a Christ-less eternity, of seeing sin in the lives of others and sin in our own lives. How does God meet us at that point? He meets us – Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a God of comfort. That's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 3: but the God of all comfort. So there it is. Our God is the God of all comfort.

I want you to notice two things about what Jesus says about God comforting. First of all, they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. That's in what we call the passive voice. The passive voice is the voice of grace, which says that God is going to be the God of comfort to us. When we assume the place of tenderheartedness before God and mourn over these things, it is God who moves on our behalf and into our lives.

The other thing I want you to see is that word "comfort". That word "comfort" is the word *parakleo*. It should sound somewhat familiar. *Parakleo* is a word that is used to talk about the Holy Spirit. In John 14, when Jesus in the upper room is talking about the one that He would send, He called the Holy Spirit *parakleo*. He called Him the *Paraklete*, the one who comes alongside of, the one who comes with words of comfort

and words of encouragement, the one who lifts us up. God is going to do that. That's His promise to us. God promises if we assume a position of mourning, He's going to be the God of all comfort in our life.

Secondly, it's going to be by the Word of God. In Romans chapter 15, listen to what Paul said in verse 4: For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that we through endurance and through *parakleo*, that we through encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope." It's this word that comes into our life that fills us with hope. In 1 Corinthians chapter 14, Paul is talking about the one who brings the Word of God to people by way of a word of prophecy and it is a word that Paul says is a word of encouragement. It is a word of lifting others up. It's the word of God that does that. Psalm 94:19 – "When the cares of my heart are many, Your consolations, O God, cheer my soul." That's a wonderful promise. Psalm 119 verse 28: "My soul melts away for sorrow. Strengthen me according to Your word." That's why we're people of the book. We're people of the book. Why people of the book? Because we learn of the God of all comfort, because it is the Word itself that brings us comfort.

We learn thirdly that it is the people of God whom God uses to bring comfort into our life. That's life in the family. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says to encourage one another. Build one another up. *Parakleo*. Be a *Paraklete* in each other's life. You can engage and experience that comfort, or you can detach yourself. You can be in isolation from the body and from others. That's why we value small groups at Covenant. That is why we think everybody should be in a setting smaller than this one, because it is in that smaller group that you find that *parakleo*, that comfort that can take place through the people of God. Jesus says blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

Here's a quote: "I walked a mile with pleasure. She chattered 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 her, when sorrow walked with me." The value of mourning in our life. Jesus said if we do that, we'll be blessed. We'll be blessed by the Father. We'll be blessed by the Son. We'll be blessed by the Holy Spirit. We'll be blessed by the Word. We'll be blessed by each other. Blessed are those who mourn.

What do we take away? There is a sorrow to be desired. That's what we take away. There is a sorrow to be desired, not to be delivered from. That sorrow reflects the Christ-like love that we see in the life of our Lord. God, give me a heart like yours.

Let's pray. Father God, we're grateful again for Your Word. We're grateful for the truth that it speaks into our life. Father, it is a truth that is so different from the world that we live in. Father, I pray that as Your people we would find ourselves drawn by Your Spirit, to Your Word, to each other to experience what You have put before us here in the words of our Lord. If there's anybody here this morning who does not know You in a personal way, who may have never had a personal understanding that what You want is not working their way to heaven. Instead, may they understand that the work was done by Jesus on the cross. Open their eyes as we wrap up this morning around this communion table to the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He has done everything that was needed to provide for us the gift of eternal life if we will but believe in Him. That is Your promise to us. We thank You. In Jesus's name, amen.