

Today we continue our series in the Beatitudes and today the second one “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted”. If you missed last week then you can catch up as ever on the website.

As we consider this Beatitude what I am going to do is simply ask two questions of the verse and then draw some applications

### **1. Who are ‘those who mourn’?**

We probably all know about mourning. We have all lost someone or something even if it is only a pet guinea pig. However, I am aware that many know a more serious loss of someone close to us.

We have to ask is this what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of ‘those who mourn’? Is Jesus saying that when our hearts break because someone we love has died we will receive comfort? Well I believe we do find comfort and solace in the love of God. However, I don’t think that is the primary meaning of the phrase ‘those who mourn’ in this context. I say that because a. those who mourn in this way sometimes don’t find total comfort and their sorrow taken away. Instead they may carry the pain with them for many years but more because b. Jesus hasn’t been talking in those terms. We need to see these words in the context here and in the context of the whole Bible.

Last week we looked at the poor in spirit and saw that they are the people who recognise that in the face of a holy God they are powerless, helpless, unclean and unworthy. They are spiritually bankrupt.

This verse seems to continue that theme by suggesting that it is one thing to realise spiritual poverty but another to grieve and mourn over that situation. What Jesus is speaking of here is the mourning of repentance, the grieving over the sins which cut us off from God and about which we can do nothing because of our spiritual poverty.

This understanding seems to fit the flow of what Jesus is saying and it fits the rest of the Bible.

In Joel 2:12 we read, “Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning”. Then, from the reading we had in Ezra 10:1-2, we see how, while Ezra is weeping over the people’s sins, they come and join him in tears over their sin. Paul in Romans 7:24 while not in tears seems to grieve over his sinful state as he says, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death.” Those of us who come from an Anglican background and remember the Book of Common Prayer may recall the words used in the confession in the Communion service “we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness”.

So I think that when Jesus was speaking here about those who mourn he was referring to those who see their sin and the effect it has on their relationship with God and mourn in tearful repentance over their sin. So let’s ask the second question,

## 2. How are these people blessed?

Let's remind ourselves that by the expression "blessed" Jesus is declaring not what these people feel like but what God thinks of them, what they are and the privileges or blessings of being his people.

What blessing do those who mourn over their sinful state receive from God?

We might ask what blessing do they deserve? When we have rebelled against a holy God what response should we expect? Toplady in his hymn Rock of ages put it well when he wrote "Could my tears for ever flow, All for sin could not atone".

The point of the hymn is the truth from the Bible that there is nothing we humans can do to remove the barrier of our sin. Weeping buckets will not compensate for your sin. However, what Jesus is making clear here is the nature of our God and that our God is a God of justice but also a God of grace and mercy.

I remember when I was young, see the long term memory hasn't gone. A friend and I got caught up stealing little things from the local outdoor market, toys and things. It didn't really seem wrong at the time more like a game. But we got found out and I was sent to bed with the words ringing in my ear, "wait till your father gets home". I waited in some trepidation and a lot of tears. When Dad came home he came and sat on the end of my bed and talked to me about the wrong I had done. He said I would have to go back to the market, take the things back and apologies to the stall owner. I knew I had let him down but that he had forgiven me.

There was justice and there was forgiveness. So it is with God. He is just and cannot simply ignore our sin and so he sent his only son the lord Jesus Christ to take our punishment, dying in our place, so that through him we can be forgiven.

So again I ask what blessing do those who weep over their sin deserve? Well none but because of Jesus we receive the blessing of God's comfort.

Those who mourn over their sins, Jesus says, receive comfort – the only comfort which can remove their sorrow, God's free forgiveness in Jesus. When tears flow the only thing that can stem them is the assurance that God in his grace forgives. It is only through Christ that the turmoil of our restless conscience can receive peace. Those who mourn will be comforted not because of our tears but because of Jesus. The tears are but a sign that our sorrow over our sin is real.

Let me also remind us that, as we saw last week, these blessings given by God to those who share in his kingdom are both now and not yet. It says those who mourn **will** be comforted. Here and now God the Father declares forgiveness to all who come in poverty and repent of their sins. Yet because we are fallible sinful people we have to do it daily. Daily the tears should metaphorically flow and will flow until we enter heaven where there is no sin and where God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev 21:4)

Here is what Jesus was saying that if we come in heartfelt sorrow over the sin which spoils our relationship with God and separates us from him then in his grace and mercy he will bring us comfort through the assurance that our sin has been dealt with.

### **3. How then should we live?**

As Jesus spoke to his chosen disciples round about him and the words echoed on to the wider crowd what did he expect them to do? Remember this is early on in his ministry and possibly all those there were in the same boat in terms of needing to recognise their poverty and come to God with weeping.

I am well aware that many here know this and our sorrow over sin is indeed part of our daily walk with God. This teaching is the basics of our Christian life and yet we need often to be reminded of the basics. Peter was aware of this and in 2 Peter 1:12 we read, “ So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.” So for all of us it is good to be reminded of the basics and that God’s children should live with a deep sorrow over their sin.

However, some will be hearing it in the same way those first listeners heard. This may be fresh for some here or for some listening on download.

The question though still stands no matter where we are in our walk with Jesus, what would Jesus have us do?

**a. recognise** the seriousness of sin. Sin is not the odd mistake, the occasional thing we do wrong, our little foible. No sin is serious because sin cuts us off from God. It is a serious matter.

But of course we don’t always see sin seriously. Recently Chris my son-in-law told me of how he was disciplining Caleb his oldest child who had broken a table. Caleb was sitting sorrowfully on the naughty step. At that point Toby who is number 3 and aged 2 came out of the kitchen with chocolate running down his chin. “Toby what have you been doing,” Chris asked. “Chocolate” was the only reply he got. So Chris went into the kitchen to see what had been going on to find Beth aged 3 also eating chocolate. When asked what she was doing she replied, “I was seeing if it was still OK after Toby had been eating it!” So you had one child aware of sin and with tears, one totally and brazenly denying any sin at all and the other trying to work out how she could get away with it.

Friends we need to recognise that sin is sin, that we can’t ignore the sin in our lives and we can’t talk our way out of the consequences of our sin. More we need to recognise that sin is serious it more than damages your health it cuts us off from God and unless it is dealt with it will do so for all eternity. I hope you are clear about this. I hope as you sit here this morning you do recognise your sin.

**b. repent** – that is the point here. Jesus through these words wanted his hearers to see their sin as serious. He wanted them to become members of the Kingdom of God. However to do that they had to understand the effect sin has not just on others but on God and then grieve over their sin not with crocodile tears but as those who in their hearts regret sincerely their sin.

In the Psalms we see the example of David. Having committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged the death of her husband Uriah he found the prophet Nathan spelling out to him his sin in graphic detail. As King there were many courses he could have taken but in Psalm 51:4&17 we read David's response, "against you (O Lord) only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight;" "a broken spirit and contrite heart O God you will not despise."

He recognised his sin and his words were those of sorrowful repentance.

Is this your response to sin? Do you grieve over it? Do you mourn? Do you weep? I'm not saying we need to do this literally as if somehow by our histrionics God will forgive but the whole is making a point that we need not only to recognise our poverty but to repent of the sin which separates us from God.

**c. receive** – the blessing of comfort. Now you might think that is obvious but often we humans struggle to accept gifts. We struggle to believe it is that simple. I have mentioned before a man I used to visit whose response to any talk of God was that God couldn't have anything to do with him because as he always said "I'm too wicked".

This is not so. God assures us of the comfort of forgiveness if we repent. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

There is forgiveness for even the worst of sinners. The thief on the cross next to Jesus asked for forgiveness and received it immediately. There is forgiveness for the worst of sinners.

Richard Baxter the 17<sup>th</sup> Century pastor and hymn writer speaking about John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life", said, "I thank God for this word "whosoever". If it had read there is mercy for Richard Baxter, I am so vile, so sinful I would have thought it meant some other Richard Baxter. But this word whosoever includes the worst of the Baxters that ever lived."

If we mourn and repent we will be forgiven and restored as God's children. So let us accept that and receive the blessing God offers to all who mourn over their sin.

"Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted". Let us hear the words of our gracious God today as we go through Lent. Words which call us to come back to him in sorrow for our sins but with the assurance that, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins" and will restore us to himself as dearly loved children of God.