

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

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### Matthew 5:4

We will continue today our exposition of the teaching of our Lord Jesus on the Beatitudes. And here is the second Beatitude that we find in the gospel of Matthew. Matthew 5:4 reads like this.

*Matthew 5:4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

### Everybody will mourn

This verse is a shocking statement for the natural man because again, you see the exact reverse of the world's thinking. The world regards nothing blessed, or joyful, about mourning. It is something to be avoided. If we are given the choice between laughing and mourning, of course our natural tendency is to choose laughing. But this is not so with the Lord Jesus because in Jesus' eyes, it is those who mourn who are blessed. And in the gospel of Luke, in the parallel passage, the Lord Jesus makes an even more striking statement when He says, *Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.* 'Don't think that everything is all right because you laugh now. The day will come when you will mourn.'

Actually, I would like to draw your attention to this observation in Luke 6. There the Lord Jesus makes two statements about mourning. First, He says in v. 21, *Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.* Then, in v. 25, we have the negative side of this statement: *Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn.* When we consider these two verses together, we have to come to the conclusion that no one can escape from grieving. Everybody is going to mourn; everybody is going to weep. There is no question about it. The only question is the timing of the mourning, whether it is going to be now or later, whether it is weeping with godly tears now or weeping and gnashing of teeth later in hell. Sin is going to bring grief to everyone. It is only a question of when it is going to take place, whether it is sooner or it is later.

### Spiritual mourning

Now, let us examine this Beatitude. What does it exactly mean? We need to ask what is this mourning that Jesus talks about. Does the Lord Jesus mean that anyone who mourns will be comforted, regardless of what kind of mourning? And when you mourn, you mourn for what? And what is this comforting that is being spoken of here?

I think that a good way to approach that verse is to consider what the Lord Jesus means by being comforted. Does it mean that the Lord Jesus will make you feel good again after a bad time in your life? Is it just a matter of nice feeling? We must be careful not to view this Beatitude from a

psychological perspective as it happens sometimes in the Christian circles, especially in the counseling field.

Of course, anything that can relieve a person's anxiety will give a sense of comfort to that person. And the message of the gospel can certainly provide a psychological comfort to anyone in distress. But remember that the Bible is a spiritual book, with a spiritual message, using a specific spiritual vocabulary. And it has to be understood first and foremost from a spiritual perspective. It is only when you get a good grasp of the spiritual meaning of a particular biblical text, that then you can see in which areas of your life you can apply its teaching. But don't jump too quickly into the application of a passage without making sure that you know what it means. Otherwise you can be easily mistaken.

So in this verse in Matthew 5:4, the Lord Jesus is not talking about a psychological comfort as such. He is referring to a spiritual comfort which the Bible speaks about in many places. And comfort in the Scriptures has to do with salvation. Remember that. To be comforted, in the Bible, is not just to have some kind of good feeling. It has to do with the comfort that comes with salvation.

### **The comfort of God's salvation**

This passage of the Lord's teaching finds its root in the OT as everywhere else in His teaching. For example, this is what we read in Jeremiah 31:13. *Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and old together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will **comfort** them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow.*

Jeremiah 31 is concerned about the future restoration or salvation of Israel from captivity. Israel had been carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon and kept captive there. And now God is saying that He is going to save them. 'I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them. I will make them rejoice.' This is a comfort that comes with the promise of the salvation of Israel.

When we look in the NT, we also see that this comforting has to do with salvation. Remember this incident in Luke 2, when Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to present baby Jesus to the temple. In the temple, they met a righteous man by the name of Simeon. It is said of this man that he *was waiting for the **Consolation** of Israel* (Luke 2:25). The consolation of Israel. What is this consolation or comfort? It is the salvation of Israel. He was waiting for Israel to be saved by God as it was promised in the OT.

Or again, we read in 2Thessalonians 2:16 that our *God and Father ... has loved us and given us everlasting **consolation** and good hope by grace*. And the apostle Paul also says in that verse, *May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself ... **comfort** your hearts and establish you in every good word and work*. How can the Lord Jesus comfort our hearts? Well, it is on the basis that God has given us eternal comfort. And eternal comfort here means salvation. Those who mourn are the ones who will be saved. God will comfort them with His eternal comfort, with His salvation. So you see that the comfort of the Scriptures is the comfort of God's eternal salvation.

Once we understand what this comfort is about, we are in a better position to see what this mourning refers to. I would like to show you five kinds of mourning that we find in the Bible, each one taking us deeper and deeper into the essence of this spiritual mourning. And I hope that it will help us to come closer and closer to the point of Isaiah 53:3 where it says of Jesus that *He was a man of sorrow ... acquainted with grief*. The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of a person who knew what it means to mourn and that is why He could become our Savior. I pray that God will teach us how to mourn and how to weep like the Lord Jesus. So here are the five types of mourning.

## **The mourning of repentance**

First, there is the mourning of repentance. For example, we have Psalm 38 where the psalmist, David, is crying out to the Lord in repentance of his sin. He says in the opening verse, *O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in your hot displeasure!* Why? Listen to what he says in vv. 3-4: *Because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head.*

David acknowledged that God was disciplining him for his personal sin. And it was a very painful experience. He says in v. 2, *Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down.* And what was David's reaction to this discipline? *I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go **mourning** all the day long* (v. 6). David was so distressed that he went mourning all the day long, repenting over his sin.

He says later in this psalm, *I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin* (v. 18). To be in anguish over his sin. Do you feel the heart of this man? That is a cry of repentance. No wonder David was a man of God. He understood what it means to weep over his personal sin.

## **Mourning over the consequences of sin**

The second kind of mourning is the mourning over the consequences of sin. We don't mourn forever over our sins in terms of repentance in the past even though we remember them with grief. When God forgives us our sins, our sorrow is turned into joy.

Now, closely associated with personal sin are the consequences of sin. The consequences of sin are all around us. There is pain, there is sorrow, there is despair. We hear about it almost everyday on the media. It is often heartless, brutal. And we grieve, we weep over these things.

In my work with the medical emergency system of our city, I was once called to go to an apartment where a crime had been committed. We were told that there were two people lying on the floor, unconscious. When I arrived in front of the apartment building, five police cars were already there, along with two teams of ambulance technicians. In the apartment, I saw two patients, one male and one female, both in a very critical condition. They both had marks of stabbing in the chest and in the abdomen. There was evidence of active internal bleeding and their only chance of survival is to get to the operating room as soon as possible. So the male patient was rapidly evacuated. I stayed with the female patient because her condition was worse. As a matter of fact, before we were able to bring her to the ambulance, her heart stopped beating. We managed to resuscitate her before we arrived to the hospital. Unfortunately, she died four hours later in the operating room.

I learned from a newspaper the following day that the man and the woman were actually husband and wife. They had an argument that night. The husband initiated the stabbing. The wife apparently had her own knife and she stabbed her husband too. So they stabbed each other until they were too weak to hold their knives.

The consequences of sin. Heartless, brutal, barbarous. It grieves our heart to see these things. In a way, we share the same experience as Lot. We read in 2Peter 2:7-8 that Lot was grieved by the sins of his generation. *...righteous Lot...*, we read, *was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked.* He was tormented *from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds.* That is what the Christian ought to be in this generation, grieved to the heart by the consequences of sin.

## **Mourning over persecution**

This takes us to the third kind of mourning. And here we mourn over persecution, over oppression, when the righteous are oppressed by the unrighteous. We weep because we are persecuted.

We suffer for God's sake, just like what we find in the Beatitudes, *Blessed are you who are persecuted for righteousness' sake*. And it grieves us to see that there are people who are so heartless, so insensitive to the truth.

Let me read to you Psalm 6:6. Here you find that the psalmist knows a great deal about weeping because of persecution. This is what he says in Psalm 6:6-7.

*Psalm 6:6. I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim, I drench my couch with my tears.*

*7 My eye wastes away with grief; it grows old because of all my enemies.*

‘Every night I make my bed swim with my tears. My eye has wasted away with grief because of all my enemies.’

Who likes to be oppressed? Who enjoys persecution? We weep that others do not understand our stand for the truth. We weep that others will go so far as to slander us, to oppress us because we speak the truth.

The psalmist understood this very well and he grieved over this. He says in verse 8, *Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping*, the weeping over persecution.

## **Mourning for the sins of God's people**

The fourth type of mourning is the mourning for the sins of God's people. Here the concern is for the spiritual condition of the church where we look at God's people with God's eyes. And when we look at the sins of God's people, it cuts us to the heart. We thank God for men like that in the OT, who wept over the sins of God's people. Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Isaiah. Listen to what it is said of Ezra, that great servant of God through whom restoration was brought to Israel.

*Ezra 10:6. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, **for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.***

Those exiles, those from the captivity were the remnant that had been sent into slavery when Jerusalem was destroyed. And yet, in spite of the judgment that came upon them, they had learned no spiritual lesson up to that point. They were still in their sins. They were still faithless. Seeing that, Ezra wept over the sins of God's people. He went fasting. He had neither bread nor water. He didn't eat anything. Why? Because he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles. And as a result of that, God brought revival to Israel. If we want God to bring revival to the church, we have to learn, as the body of Christ, to weep over the sins of the church, of God's exiles in this world.

## **Weeping out of concern for the church**

Here we come to the last kind of mourning. We weep not necessarily because brothers or sisters have sinned, but out of our concern and love in seeing them grow spiritually. We weep in our concern, in our love for them, that they are standing in Christ, that they continue to stand fast, and that they continue to grow.

This point, the apostle Paul expresses it very well in Acts 20. Look at the quality of this man. In Acts 20, Paul was saying good-bye to the Ephesian elders whom he had taught for three years, building them up. It was a painful farewell. Paul spoke to them with the consciousness that he will

never return to Asia again. He was planning to go to Jerusalem after that, where he expected to be arrested and put in jail. This is what he says in Acts 20:18-19 to the elders.

*Act 20:18 ... You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,  
19 serving the Lord with all humility, with **many tears** and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.*

Serving the Lord with tears. O, the depth of this man! Such was his love for the church. He served them with tears. He watered the seeds with his tears. And they grew spiritually. What a reward!

Again in the same chapter in v. 31, in his final words to the Ephesians, he said, *Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day **with tears**.* 'For three years, day and night, I did not cease to admonish you with my tears.' The tears of concern and love for the church. What a great servant of God! May we have more men and women of that quality in this generation.

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* Happy are you when you experience each one of these kinds of mourning:

- the mourning of repentance
- the mourning over the consequences of sin
- the mourning over persecution
- the mourning over the sins of God's people
- and the mourning that comes from a sincere concern for the church.

Because in all that weeping, you will come to experience the comfort of God's eternal salvation.