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King's Harbor Church  
Torrance, CA  
**"Blessed Are Those Who Mourn"**  
By Kevin Springer

**Matthew 5:1-4** Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

**BACKGROUND:**

Jesus taught the Beatitudes, part of the Sermon on the Mount, shortly after calling the Twelve Disciples. He went throughout Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God & healing the sick & casting out demons, which attracted a following of curious & mostly uncommitted Jews. This crowd & his disciples formed the backdrop as he taught the **Sermon on the Mount**.

Today we look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 8 beatitudes that form the introduction to the first of 5 messages found in Matthew's Gospel:

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

Jesus taught the Beatitudes to his Disciples at the beginning a three-year transformation tour with him. They were **un-discipled disciples**, but as good Galilean Jews they were committed to becoming just like their Rabbi—learning to *think* and *act* just like Jesus. So think of the Sermon on the Mount as **Freshman Orientation to Disciple Making**.

Jesus is saying to the disciples, **"This is my goal for your life—total transformation into *my* character and *my* way of life.**

**This—the Sermon on the Mount—is what you will look like when I finish with you.”**

The Beatitudes, then, aren't **virtues to follow that qualify you to enter heaven**; nor are they **rules of conduct laid down for new converts**. **The Beatitudes are the signs of grace that come as a result of following Christ.**

Throughout his ministry, Jesus challenged one cultural assumption after another. The first beatitude—poverty of spirit—is an excellent example of Jesus' upside down kingdom. “Blessing” is *unexpected* because the **poor in spirit** are broken, crushed and contrite. **Never-the-less, Jesus says that they are blessed because they have nothing in themselves to commend them to God and no claim on God beyond His mercy.**

Jesus began his Sermon in a way that led his audience immediately to the God's grace. He was saying that **heaven is reserved for those who know they don't qualify**. Those who have God's favor resting on them are those who know how much they don't deserve it. That's paradoxical to the human mind!

And, if being blessed and poor in spirit seems paradoxical, the paradox becomes more startling when Jesus pronounces a blessing on mourners.

*Blessed are the sorrowful? Blessed are the grieving? How could this be?* Luke's abbreviated version of the Beatitudes captures the upside down nature of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beatitude:

**Luke 6:21, 25** Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. ...Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Laugh now, mourn later; weep now, laugh later. **To follow Jesus is completely counter-cultural**; we naturally resist. We want to say: “Blessed is the person who has no sorrow or sadness.” What kind of mourning or sorrow could someone experience that would make him or her blessed?

Since there are many kinds of sorrow, could Jesus *really* be saying that *all* who mourn are blessed and comforted? How do we understand this? **What kind of mourning is blessed by God?**

### **Mourning over our sinful condition before a holy God.**

**ILLUSTRATION:** I recently had an experience that helps understand what Jesus is teaching us in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beatitude.

Back on January 28<sup>th</sup> I had the opportunity to see 27 examples of this kind of transformation at a three-hour graduation ceremony at the **House of Miracles** in San Bernardino. (18 residential homes for men & women.)

**TESTIMONY:** Gang member in prison for life; no possibility of parole... **They were spiritually bankrupt, overwhelmed by the sadness of life in this world.**

These were people out of prison, off the streets, released from mental institutions; on drugs and alcohol, mentally ill, sexually out of control; con men, gang members and hookers. And they knew it. In a word, all 27 were acutely aware of their spiritual poverty; and all 27 were blessed...

### **POVERTY OF SPIRIT**

By way of quick review from Gregg's wonderful message two weeks ago, what did Jesus mean when he said "blessed are the poor in spirit"? Two examples in Scripture illustrate this well...

First, there's the **Centurion**. [sick servant] "When [Jesus] was not far off from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, 'Lord do not trouble yourself, for **I am not worthy to have you come under my roof**; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.' ...When Jesus heard this, he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude, 'I tell you, not ever in Israel have I found such faith'" (**Luke 7:6–9**).

Then there's the **Canaanite Woman** in **Matthew 15:21-28**. When at first Jesus refused her request to heal her daughter, since she wasn't a Jew, the woman said, "**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.**" To which Jesus responds, "O woman, great is your faith!"

(Peter's response to Christ when called in **Luke 5:11**... "Go Away from me, Lord, because I am a sinful man.")

### **What then is Poverty of Spirit?**

- It is a sense of powerlessness in ourselves.
- It is a sense of helplessness before God.
- It is a sense of moral uncleanness before God.
- It is a sense of personal unworthiness before God.
- It is a sense that if there is to be any life of joy or usefulness, it will have to be all of God and all of grace.

I say it is a **sense of powerlessness** and a **sense of uncleanness** and a **sense of unworthiness** because, objectively, everybody is poor in spirit. Everybody, whether they sense it or not, is powerless apart from God. But when they acknowledge it, when they confess their powerlessness, well, *then they are blessed*.

**What about this word "blessed"?** Since each beatitude begins with the Greek word *makarioi*, translated "*blessed*" or "*happy*," we need to define this term.

There are a number of reasons why the word "blessed" is a better translation. The term "happy" denotes a subjective emotion or state, while the word "blessed" refers to an objective judgment or condition, literally meaning "an enviable state."

An objective condition is obvious in the second beatitude. If we use the word "happy," verse four would read "*happy* are they that mourn [= experience deep grief]." Jesus isn't saying that mourners are subjectively happy; **but they are blessed because they have a right relationship with God. Jesus says that you can be blessed now, in the present—even in the midst of deep grief.** Even when

sad the Christian is blessed—which is good news. But why? Because God’s favor is on him.

This point is confirmed by the statement regarding *why* those who mourn are blessed: **because “they will be comforted”**—i.e. in the future. I’ll have more to say about this in a few minutes.

At the end of the beatitudes in **Matthew 5:12**, Christians are *commanded* to “rejoice and be glad” on account of the blessedness that they already possess. **In other words, their objective condition of God’s favor and comfort through Christ ought to lead them to subjective feelings of joy, peace and happiness.**

So, think of it this way: **Mourning is the subjective side of being poor in spirit.** John Stott writes, “It’s one thing to be spiritually poor and to acknowledge it; it’s quite another to grieve and mourn over it.”

I paraphrase like this: “Blessed are the poor in spirit who mourn.” By that Jesus means blessed are the people who feel keenly their inadequacies and their guilt and their failures and their helplessness and their unworthiness and their emptiness—who don't try to hide under a cloak of self-sufficiency, but who are honest about them and grieved and driven to God’s grace.

Jesus’s parable of the **Pharisee and the Tax Collector** who went up to the Temple to pray is a good illustration of how the first two beatitudes fit together. Contrasting the tax collector with a Pharisee, Jesus said, “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, **‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’** I tell you this man went down to his house justified” (**Luke 18:13–14**). Which is just another way of saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

But mourning encompasses more than grieving over our personal unworthiness. Sometimes the world’s sin, the injustice, the cruelty, the cheapness, the selfishness, all pile onto the consciousness of sensitive men and women and make them weep.

**DA Carson** says that the person who is poor in spirit is the **truest realist**:

“He reasons that *death* is there, and must be faced. *God* is there, and will be known by all a savior or judge. *Sin* is there, and it is unspeakably ugly and black in the light of God’s purity. *Eternity* is there, and every living human being is rushing toward it. *God’s revelation* is there, and the alternatives it presents will come to pass; life or death, pardon or condemnation, heaven or hell. These are realities which will not go away. **The man who lives in the light of them, and rightly assesses himself and his world in the light of them, cannot but mourn.** He mourns for the sins and blasphemies of his nation. He mourns for the erosion of the very concept of truth. He mourns over the greed, the cynicism, the lack of integrity. He mourns that there are so few mourners.”

God himself mourns in **Genesis 6:5-6**, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, **and he was grieved in his heart.**”

**John Wimber’s Prayer:** “Lord, break my heart with the things that break your heart.”

**Now, there is also sorrow that isn’t blessed.** Some people give a show of sorrow about sin but they’re really sorry for the *consequences* that their personal sin caused them. This is the sorrow of the world.

Worldly grief is sorrow over getting caught and having to suffer. When they give a display of confession, they express it in relation to themselves—to *their* hurt and *their* pain—but not in relation to God and others. Self is central. So worldly sorrow is self-pity, not turning to God for mercy. Listen to the Apostle Paul:

**2 Corinthians 7:9-10** [Paul] I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a

**godly grief...** For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly grief** produces death.

Scripture even says that those with worldly, self-centered sorrow, will end with weeping at the final judgment.

**So, how are we comforted when we mourn?** The blessing of godly mourning is directly related to the fact that, “they shall be comforted.” There is a present and future aspect to this comfort. Just as the Christian life begins with poverty of spirit and an emotional response of godly sorrow, it breaks out into the joy of forgiveness and salvation.

The psalmist says, “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him...” (**Psalm 32:1-2**). You can know God’s mercy and goodness today; that’s the Good News! Jesus was hung up for your hang-ups. He came to save us from our poverty and deep grief over sin. Now. Today. This moment.

However, the awareness of sin and sorrow, even when following Christ, never goes away in this life; if anything, *it intensifies as we grow closer to God*. There is an ever-deepening awareness of pervasive evil against the holiness of God.

**Thomas a Kempis**, writing in the devotional classic *The Imitation of Christ* over 600 years ago, confessed: “Oh, how humbly and lowly I ought to feel about myself, and even if I seem to have goodness, I ought to think nothing of it. **Oh, how deeply I ought to submit myself to your unfathomable judgments, Lord, where I find myself to be nothing but nothing, absolutely nothing.** O measureless weight! O impassable sea! I peer deep within myself and I find nothing but total nothingness.”

**The “already not yet” reality.** Jesus understood how discouraged we could be by the world, the flesh and the devil. So before he left earth he promised to send us the **Holy Spirit, which he called the Comforter**. In **Romans 8:23** Paul said that we have the “firstfruits of the Spirit,” a foretaste of the fullness of heaven—

even as we, in his words, “inwardly groan” while awaiting redemption of our bodies.

**So mourning over sin doesn't end when we begin a relationship with Christ; it's a sign that we are in relationship with Christ.**

**John Stott:** “Some Christians seem to imagine that, especially if they are filled with the Spirit, they must wear a perpetual grin on their faces and be continuously boisterous and bubbly... The truth is that there are such things as Christian tears, and too few of us ever weep them.”

### **CLOSING: A HEART CHECK...**

**Confession:** That night in January at the **House of Miracles** I felt like I was on the outside looking in. A part of me said, “Thank God that I'm not like them.” Oh, it was subtle; certainly I didn't use *those* words. But it was an uncomfortable feeling. A dirty feeling.

Then, as I prepared this talk, I realized why my spirit was unsettled, *and it wasn't pretty*. Remember Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector? I conveniently skipped over the Pharisee's part earlier, so let's look at the parable again:

**Luke 18:9-14** He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “...The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘*God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.*’ ...*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*”

**I was the Pharisee!** *I trusted in myself—in my accomplishments (heck, I'm an Eagle Scout!). “By God's grace,” I thought, “I wasn't like them!”*

Since then I've come to accept that I am no better—and probably worse—than those who gave their testimonies that night.



Worse, you say? Yes, **because I failed to understand and sense the depth of my nothingness was as dark as the sin they confessed. *And that made me worse.***

So I mourn my poverty of spirit with deep sadness, which makes Christ's grace shine more brightly. And, in Christ's words, I am blessed and comforted.

How about you?

**PRAYER**