

## Be Attitudes: “Be Mournful” Matthew 5:4 – May 16, 2010

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted!*

As if last Sunday’s counter-attack on culture’s assumptions about happiness was not enough, get ready for the second wave! If poverty that brings happiness sounds strange, crying that brings happiness sounds even stranger! Who thinks to congratulate a person with tears of sorrow on their face? Happy are the unhappy? This Word seems to come from the moon, not from real life. We ridicule tears. “Big boys don’t cry!” It was a childhood fate worse than death or lima beans to be called a “cry baby!”

I had a nanny for some of my preschool years. She did not like for me to cry, and when I did, she would taunt me with her translation of that old Mother Goose nursery rhyme: “Cry, baby, cry. Stick your finger in your eye and see the water fly.” I’m scarred to this day, can’t you tell!

*Blessed are those who mourn?* Not according to my nanny! Not according to our culture! From preschool through adulthood we are taught the same attitudes: Happy are the tearless! Blessed are those who bite the bullet! To be envied is the person with a stiff upper lip! You may as well stick your finger in your eye as to be a cry baby!

The Greek language of the New Testament is quite descriptive. It has several words for grieving, but Matthew translates Jesus’ Aramaic word for mourn with the strongest word for grief that New Testament Greek has. It has the connotation of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Think mid-eastern funeral. Much of the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek at the time of Jesus and it was known as the Septuagint. Many of the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come from it, rather than from the Hebrew originals.

In that most familiar story in Genesis about Joseph’s supposed death this same word is used for father Jacob’s inconsolable grief. Joseph’s jealous brothers have sold him into slavery. To cover their evil deed they take his treasured coat of many colors, dipped it in goat’s blood and took it to their father, Jacob. Here is the text from there: <sup>33</sup> *[Jacob] recognized it, and said, “It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.”* <sup>34</sup> *Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. <sup>35</sup> All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father bewailed him.*

Happy are those who mourn, who bewail like father Jacob mourned for the horrific death and dismemberment of his favorite son, Joseph!

My first funeral was full of that kind of mourning. I was only twenty-two years old. I had never even assisted in a funeral, and now I *is* one. And it had more bewailing than any funeral since. The deceased, Earl, was a part of the largest extended family in my rural Kentucky congregation. He had a number of children and siblings and tons of cousins, aunts and uncles. He had inherited a kidney disease that affected the males of his family. Several other family members had the disease, so the sanctuary was full of anticipatory grief. Back then dialysis was much more demanding and less successful than today, and during Earl’s long siege of treatment his wife had left him. She was there, full of guilt, and his children were there, full of anger.

As I falteringly started the service, reading from the Pastor’s Handbook I had bought for the occasion, several family members on the front row fell out. In the hundreds of funerals I have done, this, my first, is the only time I have seen a funeral director get out the smelling salts to revive someone! And so it went. Think mid-eastern funeral here! Weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth! When we left the sanctuary, the funeral director and I had to literally peel several family members off the casket. After this “funeral boot camp” for me was all over I was an emotional wreck and asked myself: “What have I signed up for?” Jacob’s bewailing and mourning Joseph didn’t have anything on this grief. So this is my picture of the kind of mourning Jesus is referencing. Blessed are those who hurt even that deeply!

Certainly much, if not most pain does not lead to a blessing. Many who mourn are not comforted and do not find happiness. Many find what they are looking for, which is the worst. Like the card-carrying pessimist who had his id card in his wallet: “In case of emergency, I told you so!” Someone has said that the card-carrying pessimist finds a problem in every opportunity, while a hopeful Jesus-follower finds an opportunity in every problem. The greatest grief in human history is to be found at the cross of Jesus, yet God has turned our mourning into rejoicing.

As we go through these beatitudes, think of them as the “be attitudes” of Jesus. These are the most succinct descriptive of the being part of Jesus as a human being that I know. These be attitudes are not just counter-cultural attacks on our unredeemed way of life, they are powerful autobiographical descriptives of Jesus!

So, blessed are those who mourn like Jesus, for they will be comforted by Jesus. Jesus mourned the loss of a loved one, Lazarus, when he wept near his grave. Jesus grieved over the lostness of humanity when he cried out in the Temple, “*You do not know the one who sent me!*” “*Let anyone who thirsts come!*” Jesus bewailed the lost peace of Jerusalem as he entered that forlorn city on Palm Sunday. Jesus agonized over a tough decision to the point of sweating blood in the Garden. Jesus cried out in abandonment on the cross, “*My God, why have you forsaken me?*” And Matthew says that the last sound Jesus made on the cross before breathing his last breath was one final cry.

Blessed are those who mourn like Jesus. Blessed are those who see the world as God intends it and grieves over the distance between that and the world as it is. Blessed are those who cry out to the point of death over the lostness, the pain, the missed opportunities, the tough decisions, the physical and emotional forsakenness of others! Jesus was indeed a *man of sorrows and acquainted with grief* (Is. 53:3). *Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows* (Is. 53:4). The good news of the gospel is that our joy in Christ is not the absence of pain nor the opposite of pain, but our joy is to be

found because of, through and even with our sorrow. Our joy is to be found when amidst our mourning we come to know better this Man of Sorrows!

Blessed are those who mourn like Jesus. But there is one way in which our mourning cannot be like Jesus, because he knew no sin: Blessed are those who know their sin and mourn over it! The way to God is the way of the broken heart. Augustine wrote in his famous *Confessions* about his conversion: "I grew more wretched, and Thou didst grow nearer." Paul said, *godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation (2 Cor. 7:10)*. There is an interesting progression in Paul's spiritual biography as you read his letters in order of their writing. Galatians was among the earliest of Paul's letters, perhaps written around A.D. 50, and in his opening sentence he lays claim without hesitation to the highest office of the church, calling himself *Paul an apostle (1:1)*. But a few years later he writes the Corinthians: *I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle (1 Corinthians 15:9)*. Maybe around the year A.D. 60 Ephesians was written in which Paul refers to himself as *the least of the saints (3:8)*. And in the early 60's, shortly before his death, Paul is quoted in Timothy saying: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief (1 Timothy 1:15)*.

The longer we know Christ and the nearer we come to Christ, like Paul, the more the standard shifts from judging ourselves against other people to having Christ as the standard of our life. And the more Christ is the standard of our life, the more we will mourn for our sin and the cost of our sin on the cross. Blessed are those who mourn like Jesus could not mourn – who mourn over their sin and its cost to Christ.

Grief and pain can lead us to God! And it is there that we find comfort! It is there that we find the hope of tearlessness and eternal beauty in His bright shining presence! French impressionist painter, Pierre Renoir, suffered toward the end of his life with debilitating arthritis. He painted in great pain, using only his fingertips. One of his students asked him how he endured such suffering. He responded: "The pain passes, but the beauty remains."

"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 ne'er a word said she, but, oh, the things I learned from her when Sorrow walked with me!"

Blessed are those who mourn like Jacob mourned over the seeming death of his beloved son, Joseph. Blessed are those who mourn like Jesus – who cry out over the distance between the world as God intends it and the world as it is. Blessed are those who mourn like Jesus could not mourn – whose tears of repentance over sin lead us to God.

For, *blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted!*