

August 25, 2015

Happy are Those Who are In Sorrow (Part 1)

Matthew 5:4 (NASB), **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”**

In Psalm 55:6-8 David writes, **“I said, ‘Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Behold, I would wander far away, I would lodge in the wilderness. I would hasten to my place of refuge from the stormy wind and tempest.”** All of us at one time or another have had these same thoughts rush through our minds. All of us at one time or another want to escape our problems, we want release; release from pain, release from sorrow, we want freedom from the things that weigh heavily upon our souls. When we face these things we wish that we could just escape our troubles and find **“refuge from the stormy wind and tempest”** by just running inside and getting out of the rain. But refuge from our troubles and from despair is much harder to find than shelter from a thunderstorm. The deeper our sorrow and despair, the more difficult it is to find elusive comfort.

Before we get much further I must apologize for being so derelict in the writing of these devotionals. Way back in July I had intended to begin this series of devotionals on the Beatitudes and now over a month later I have finally returned to them. If you can remember all the way back I had mentioned in the beginning of this study that the Beatitudes are paradoxical, because what they promise for what they demand seems contradictory and just plain upside down in the eyes of the **“natural man.”** We see this here in Matthew 5:4 as we begin our look at the second beatitude. I mean what could be more contradictory than the concept that those who are sad are really going to be happy? That the path to happiness is sadness? That the way to rejoicing is in the sorrow and mourning?

This idea seems rather absurd when one considers that the entire structure of most human living – whether it be in primitive cultures or in sophisticated cultures, rich or poor, the educated or the uneducated – is based upon the principle that the way to have happiness is by having life go your own way. Pleasure brings happiness, money brings happiness, entertainment brings happiness, fame and praise brings happiness, self-expression brings happiness. The opposite and negative side of this is the avoidance of pain, trouble, disappointment, frustration, hardships, and other problems bring real happiness. In order to be happy one has to avoid these things. Throughout history a basic truth of the world has been that favorable things bring happiness, whereas unfavorable things bring unhappiness. The principle seems so self-evident that most of us would not bother even debating this.

In Luke 6:25 Jesus said, **“Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”** Jesus turned the world’s principles exactly upside down. He reversed the path to happiness.

In order to discover what our Lord meant, and what He *did not* mean, in this wonderful beatitude we will look at the meaning of mourning as it is used here. Then we will look at the result of mourning, the way to mourn as Jesus teaches, and the way to know if we are truly mourning.

The first item we will look at is the meaning of mourning. Sorrow is common throughout all of humankind and it is experienced by the believer and the unbeliever alike. Some sorrow is normal and legitimate, and there is sorrow which concerns the Lord and for which He knows our need. Other sorrow is abnormal and illegitimate, brought about solely because of sinful passions and objectives.

Today we will look at what improper or un-biblical mourning is. This is the sorrow or sadness of those who are frustrated in the fulfillment of their sinful plans and lusts, who have very misguided loyalties and affection. These are those who mourn in a way for which the Lord will offer them no relief or help.

For example in 2 Samuel 13:2 we meet Ammon who was one of David's sons and it says of Ammon, **"Ammon was so frustrated because of his sister Tamar that he made himself ill, for she was a virgin, and it seemed hard to Ammon to do anything to her."** This young man's grief and sorrow was caused by his incestuous and unfulfilled lust for his sister! God was not and did not grant Ammon relief from this despicable sorrow.

Others carry legitimate grief and sorrow but they carry it to extremes and which makes it improper. When one grieves so hard and for so long over the loss of a loved one that they cannot function normally, their grief becomes sinful and destructive. Such depressing sorrow is a mark of unfaithfulness and a lack of trust in God.

If you turn back to 2 Samuel 18:33-19:4 we see that King David grieved in the same way in part to atone for his guilt. When David's rebellious son Absalom was killed David fell into an inconsolable grief. In chapter 19:5-6 Joab David's commanding general rebukes the king: **"Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who today have saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines, by loving those who hate you, and by hating those who love you. For you have shown today that princes and servants are nothing to you; for I know this day that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased."** David's son Absalom had raised a rebel army against his father and had driven David from Jerusalem, and had taken over the palace.

David's love for his son was most certainly understandable, but his decision making and his judgment were clouded and perverted. No doubt because of his great feelings of guilt for having been such a poor father, and because he knew that Absalom's tragic death and rebellion were all part of the judgment of God on David for his adultery with Bathsheba and for his murder of her husband Uriah. King David's mourning over Absalom was abnormal and it was wrong. The judgment that had fallen on Absalom was entirely deserved and justified.

Grief and sorrow are part of the human condition. Therefore it is something that we all experience but we have learned today that there are improper and sinful kinds of sorrow. Next, as we continue to look at Matthew 5:4 we will look at what proper mourning looks like.