

GOOD GRIEF!

MATTHEW 5:4

Several years ago the number one hit in America was a song that originated from a Caribbean island featuring an off-beat tune with upbeat lyrics. It was called, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.”

If there was ever a song that reflects the attitude of our culture, that is it. In a society obsessed with good feelings and addicted to good times, a society that has mastered the art of drowning its sorrows and escaping its problems, that song strikes a resonant chord.

Stop and think about it. In our culture we are accustomed to going from one high to the next, with rarely a lull in between. We are constantly searching for a thrill—something that will get our adrenaline pumping, something that will make us laugh, something that will put us in a good mood. Sports, recreation, entertainment, get-a-ways, parties, purchases, drugs. They all have something in common. They are stimulants. They make us feel good.

And so, we go after these things with gusto, and are willing to pay a handsome price for them. Money talks and if it says anything it tells us what we value. And we value good feelings. We value a good rush. That’s why entertainers are the highest paid profession. A boxer can earn almost a thousand times as much in one hour as the President of the US makes in one year. It tells you the value we place on a thrill. Comedians, professional athletes, actors, musicians—they are the gods of our culture.

And why do we worship them? Because they make us feel good. And feel good we must, because we cannot stand to feel bad. We fear feeling bad. We will do almost anything to keep from feeling bad. Because we think it means there is something wrong with us. We think it means we are emotionally impaired. We think it’s destructive. We think it’s unnecessary.

That’s why when someone is wearing a long face or is down in the dumps we are quick to say, “Don’t worry, be happy! Lighten up! Don’t be so serious! Forget your troubles! Go out and have a good time! Turn on the television and watch a sitcom! Pop a cold one! Buy a new pair of shoes! Go on a trip! Do something to get rid of the bad feelings!”

It makes me wonder how we would respond if Jesus were living today in our culture. The Bible never once records an occasion when Jesus laughed or told a joke. He may have, but if He did it was apparently not important enough to record it. The Bible does say that He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3). It does say that on more than one occasion that He wept, and it records these instances because they were important.

What is more, out of His mouth came one of the most peculiar statements ever uttered. “Blessed are those who mourn.” Happy are the sad! Ecstatic are the sorrowful!

Incidentally, if you are a Christian, then the One who said this is your King. We cannot be dismissive of this declaration. We cannot relegate this statement to another age and culture that wasn’t as fun-loving as ours.

We’re going to look at this strange and seemingly contradictory statement this morning. We want to explore what it means, why Jesus said it, and how in the world it applies to us who live in a “feel-good” society.

Matthew 5:1-4. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be

comforted.

This is the introduction to Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord begins with a series of eight declarations that describe blessed people, and these declarations are in logical sequence. *Mourning* naturally follows *poor in spirit*, *meekness* follows *mourning*, etc. So if we want to know what verse 4 means we've got to go back and see what verse 3 is all about.

Last week we discovered that *poor in spirit* is not describing someone who has a poor self-esteem or is psychologically insecure or emotionally fragile. It is an attitude of someone who is confronted with the truth about himself and comes to the shocking realization that he is morally and spiritually bankrupt. It is an acute awareness of one's moral and spiritual predicament before a holy God—that he falls way short of His glory, that she hasn't one ounce of moral virtue in herself that would commend her to God and win His favor, that there is nothing he can do that would make him worthy of His approval.

Being poor in spirit is the disposition of a beggar who cannot help himself, and knows he can't.

But we discovered that the reason he is blessed is because it is only when he comes to that truthful understanding—the realization that his need is not partial but total—that he will be saved. Because salvation is God making a totally helpless sinner totally righteous and acceptable in Jesus Christ. Salvation is the helpless sinner saying, “Nothing of my own I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.” And God transferring the righteousness of Jesus to him, so that he stands before him on the merits of Christ.

It's that person confessing with wonder, “Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God wouldst die for me? That You, the sinless Son of God, bled in my place, bore my sin in Your body, experienced the punishment I deserved, so that I could be reconciled to God and inherit His kingdom.”

Poor in spirit is the attitude that most corresponds to the truth. And it is the truth that sets you free. The same is true of all these beatitudes. They are the result of someone who has come face to face with the truth—who sees reality and doesn't try to hide or escape or deny it or reinterpret it to suit his own fancy.

So what is the meaning of, “*Blessed are those who mourn*” (v. 4)?

Let me tell you first what it does not mean. Of course, mourning implies sorrow and sadness. But Jesus is not saying that just because a person is sad he is blessed, as though there were any intrinsic merit in feeling sad. He's not saying “blessed are the depressed.”

Some are perpetually downcast. Some are melancholy by nature. That is not what Jesus is talking about here. We know from other Scriptures that one of the marks of a Christian is joy. It is a fruit of the Spirit and is the disposition of those who walk in the Spirit. And so, the mourning that Jesus refers to here is not a sullen disposition or a pessimistic personality.

Furthermore, this is not circumstantial sorrow. Some are sad because they have experienced tragedy or trauma. Some grieve because of the consequences of a poor decision. And while Jesus is concerned about all of those things, that is not what He is talking about in verse 4—that is not what this particular kind of “mourning” is about.

So what is it? Keep in mind the context. Jesus is describing the attitudes of kingdom people. Kingdom people are people who are able to see the truth. And so the kind of sorrow Jesus is describing here is sorrow that is the inevitable response of seeing the truth. And whereas

poor in spirit describes someone who has seen himself for who he really is, someone who mourns sees the world as God sees it, and it breaks their heart.

Now, I'm not saying there are not good things in the world. When God created the world and everything in it He said, "Behold this is very good." And we can look at creation—human beings especially—and see many wonderful, beautiful, marvelous things. The world still reflects God's glory and there are good things in the world which God intends for us to enjoy and from which we can derive pleasure. Those are His gifts, for believers and unbelievers alike, and we should rejoice in them.

But there's another side to the world that is not so lovely or so glorious. It was evidenced this week in the school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas where ten people were killed by a 17 year-old gunman. It was evidenced in the violence that escalated on the west bank in Israel killing 57. It is evidenced in the 125,000 abortions that were performed just yesterday in the United States alone. It can be seen in the pornography industry, domestic violence, the fragmentation of the family, poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, insatiable greed, incessant lying, jealousy, strife, rebellion, loneliness, depression, disease, etc.

We could go on and on. If we wanted we could compile a list of social evils and societal sins a mile long. But I'm not sure there's anything constructive about merely naming all the bad things in the world just so we can appreciate how bad things are. That may lead to us to feeling bad or sad or even mad, but that's not exactly what Jesus is talking about here in the text.

The question is not how bad things are, the question is 'why are things so bad?' Do we really see it for what it really is? And, do we really see where things are heading?

The problems that we see in the world are only the results and consequences of a greater reality, a more serious problem. You see, ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden this world has been under a horrible curse. It has come under the dominion of Satan. He is the prince of this world; he has jurisdiction over it; he controls the minds of unbelievers, and blinds their minds with his lies (2 Cor. 4:4). But that's not very difficult for him to do because he is controlling people who have hearts that are already thoroughly deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). People who are bound by sin, so they can't help but sin.

But the real tragedy is how this sinful nature compels us to relate to God in our natural state. We naturally don't want to have anything whatsoever to do with Him. We naturally have an aversion to Him. We certainly don't want to be His friend. We view Him as our adversary. We view Him as an intruder, a threat to our freedom. We ignore Him, oppose Him, and reject Him.

This is the state of the world. This is the nature of the creatures God created for His own pleasure and glory.

What a tragedy!

When we see the world for what it is, and we face that truth squarely—when we let ourselves think about it and reflect upon it—we cannot help but mourn.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was a Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief? Ever wondered why He wept? Remember, He was the One who created it all—and when He created it, "behold it was very good!" He saw what it was before it got polluted and corrupted and defiled. He is the One who enjoyed that sweet, intimate fellowship with the glory of His creation, Adam and Eve, before they chose to sin. He saw it when it was good and perfect and holy and right. And then He saw it for what it had become.

What is more, Jesus had just left the splendor and glory of heaven prior to coming into this world. A place in which there is absolute peace and righteousness and joy. And He came to a world—a world that He had created for His own glory and pleasure; a world full of people that He himself had fashioned, people for whom He couldn't have cared more—and He came into a world that couldn't have cared less. A world controlled by sin and Satan and death. A world saturated and dominated by the very things that are the opposite of who He is and all that He desires.

When Mindy and I first moved to Salem twenty one years ago we rode our bicycles from the parsonage here at the church into Salem, and we went north on Howell Prairie and then west on State Street. Just before crossing Cordon Road we were waiting at the stoplight underneath a large, beautiful tree that was in full blossom. And the fragrance that emanated from that tree was so fresh and so sweet.

Then we crossed Cordon and continued on State Street and my nostrils were invaded by the most offensive, foul odor I have ever smelled. It was the mushroom plant. Suddenly we were not aware of anything else. We felt as if we had been enveloped by a horrible stench. As we peddled as fast as we could, I couldn't help but notice the houses and wonder out loud to Mindy, "How can these poor people live here?"

But I looked around and didn't see one person with a gas mask on. I didn't see anybody that seemed to be bothered by it. Why? You get used to it.

Do you see the point? We have never lived in anywhere but the world. Jesus has. After having lived for eternity past in heaven's splendor and glory He entered the moral stink of this world. He saw it for what it was, and it broke His heart.

The New Testament declares that Christians who have been born again have the mind of Christ. In other words, we have the capacity to think as He thinks—to have His perspective. If you have the mind of Christ you will see the world as He sees it, and it will break your heart, just as it broke His.

Please note: That's different than getting irritated or annoyed by it. That's different than complaining about all the bad things. Yes they are bad! But why?

Because people are under the curse of sin and the dominion of Satan. Because people, in their blindness, in their rebellion, have rejected Jesus. They have spurned His love. They have forfeited the blessing He wants to give them and chosen instead to go their own way. They've listened to the lies of Satan and those lies have convinced them to believe things and do things that are destroying them.

When you have the mind of Christ, you will see people as Jesus sees them—not through eyes of self-righteousness that makes you disgusted by them or angry with them, but through eyes of love that makes you weep over them. You will see them as victims of sin's curse and Satan's dominion, and it will break your heart.

I mentioned earlier that those who mourn not only see sin for what it is and where it comes from, but they see where it's heading. They see the consequences of sin.

And that consequence is perhaps the thing which ought to make us mourn more than anything else. It is the destiny of those who reject Christ and His offer of salvation. It is a destiny of those who continue to go their own way. It's a destiny far more troubling and painful than the consequences we see in this life. Yes, we see broken families, mental illness, disease, scars,

bitterness, depression, hurt, alienation, abandonment.

But that's nothing compared to the fate that awaits those who ignore God and reject His provision for their salvation when they depart from this life.

I submit to you that Jesus was a Man of sorrows because He was conscious of the eternal destiny of those who reject Him. He knew about this place of conscious, unending torment. He knew that there were those He loved who would experience the pain of being burned in the intense heat of the flames, yet never consumed. Who would be in the midst of those flames yet see nothing but blackness. Who would cry out for deliverance, yet never be heard. Who would long for friendship, yet be utterly alone. Who would feel the most intense alienation and abandonment, fear and loneliness, shame and guilt, not to mention excruciating physical pain.

Oh, dear friends. Think about it. Don't turn away from it. Stare at it straight in the eyes. Don't ignore it, try to escape from it, retreat into your own comfortable, private world. See it for what it is and mourn over it. As Jesus did.

Yes, I know it's painful, but it's real. Loved ones are dying and going to hell. And if the thought of how they will spend their eternity in that place doesn't make us mourn, I don't know what will.

I vividly remember the day that James, our oldest son, asked Mindy some questions about hell. He was three years old. That night, after we had put him and Lucas to bed, I was in the living room and I heard James whimpering in his bedroom. I walked in and asked him what was wrong. I will never forget the anguish on his face and the panic in his voice when he blurted out, "Dad, Dad, do something!"

I said, "Son, what?"

"There's people going to hell! You've got to tell them!"

I've entitled this message "Good Grief!" Some of you may be wondering what possible good is there in feeling this way. Let me say, first, that it is always good to be aligned with the truth, even if the truth hurts. Living in denial by ignoring or rejecting the truth is never good, and leads to horrible consequences. Facing the truth squarely is good because it takes into consideration the whole story. And when you know the whole story, you know that the mourning we experience now is temporary. Mourning will eventually be turned into joy. Look at **verse 4.**
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"

How will mourners be comforted?

Mourners will be comforted in knowing that even though sin and Satan dominate this world now, the kingdom of Christ has come. The disciples and followers of Jesus got a wonderful dose of this comfort after witnessing the brutal crucifixion of their beloved Master, the Lord Jesus. They had seen pure, unfiltered, undiluted evil in the way Jesus had been treated the night of His trial and the morning of His crucifixion. And they mourned intensely.

Yet three days after He died, their sorrow turned to pure ecstasy when Jesus appeared to them after rising from the dead. To say they were comforted is putting it mildly. And their joy and comfort only intensified as they discovered that on that cross Jesus won the victories over sin, Satan, and death—that His death was actually the means of inaugurating His eternal kingdom. And that joy and comfort remained even when He left them after forty days, because they saw Him ascend to heaven, where He took His seat on the throne at the Father's right hand, and they were assured that He would one day come back to earth in the same way they saw Him

go up to heaven.

And we can anticipate that intense joy and comfort, too, because that day is still ahead of us. Just as soon as the Father gives the word, Jesus will arise from that throne and return to this earth to meet us in the air, and then rule and reign in visible glory and splendor for all eternity. A day is coming when evil will be eradicated once and for all, and sorrow will be turned into rejoicing once and for all, and our Lord Jesus, Himself, will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and welcome us into His kingdom forever and ever.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” And that comfort will produce what Peter called an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:7).

“Good Grief!” Matthew 5:4

Main Idea: Those who see the world as God sees it will inevitably mourn, but will eventually be comforted because the kingdom has come and King Jesus has overcome the world.

Introduction: Our fun-loving, “feel good” culture

Happy are the Sad!

What this does *not* mean

A melancholy personality or disposition

Circumstantial grief

The inevitable response of seeing the truth

How it relates to “poor in spirit”

Seeing the “world” as God sees it

Sin’s devastating effects

Rejection of our loving Creator

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They will be Comforted

Because the kingdom has come

Jesus will win the victories of sin, Satan, and death

Jesus will one day eradicate all evil

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“Good Grief!”

Matthew 5:4

Main Idea: Those who see the world as God sees it will inevitably mourn, but will eventually be comforted because the kingdom has come and King Jesus has overcome the world.

Matthew 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

1) If “good grief” (mourning) in verse 4 is the inevitable response of seeing the world as God sees it (sin’s devastating effects, rejection of our loving Creator, the destiny of those who reject Him), how are we able to “see” as God sees? What role do we have in gaining God’s “vision?” What role does God have in giving us His “vision?”

2) Does this “good grief” continue throughout our lives on this earth? Why or why not?

3) How does *mourning* correspond to *joy*, which is a fruit of the Spirit and a prominent quality of those who live under the Spirit’s influence?