



The Courageous Heart

Matthew 5:4, Philippians 4:11-13

In Matthew 5:4 Jesus says “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” The word *mourn* conveys the idea of grief of the deepest kind. This is an emotional response to being “poor in spirit.” It is a grief over loss. There are three times in the Bible when Jesus wept. He wept when his good friend Lazarus died. He wept over Jerusalem because of the peoples’ unwillingness to accept the truth. He wept in the Garden as he was about to be made sin for us by his death on the cross.

As Jesus wept over the sins of others and over the sin of the city of Jerusalem which would not receive him, we too should weep more over the evil in the world. Psalm 119:26 says “My eyes shed streams of tears because men do not keep thy law.” In Philippians 3:18 Paul weeps over the “enemies of the cross of Christ” because he knows that “their destiny is destruction.”

In this beatitude Jesus is not speaking of those who are feeling sorry for themselves but he is speaking of those who are in grief from a real loss and about those who mourn over the lack of righteousness of the world. They lament the fact that God’s kingdom has not yet fully come and God’s will has not been done. When Jesus says “Blessed are they who mourn” he is making an objective statement about these people based upon what God thinks of them not about what they themselves feel.

We mourn over sin and failure, over the slowness of our growth in likeness to Christ—we mourn over our spiritual bankruptcy. In the real world no one is exempt from the experience of sorrow. It is a part of the human maturing process. But spiritual maturity is shown in the way Christians handle sorrow. A dependence upon God to lead us through our sorrows and a sure knowledge that God is the one who is ultimately in control of this world is a comfort that only Christians can know.

Luke 6:21 says “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” We are not blessed because we weep, we are blessed because God comforts us when we weep. Comfort is not just a warm fuzzy feeling. When we are comforted by God we can have the courage Paul speaks of. (*Read Philippians 4:11-13*). We become aware that with God’s help we can do things which we never believed possible before. God comforts us by enabling us to be strong in whatever circumstance we find ourselves.

Comfort may also come through a new idea or a new calling. For example, a person who has lost a loved one through death may experience comfort by starting a grief support group and helping others to share their grief. A person who mourns over the unsaved in the world may be comforted by accepting God’s call to ministry or missionary work. Real comfort is not in the people gathering about you to pat you on the back and feel sympathy for you. God’s comfort

comes in being enabled to move on through your grief and to resume a productive life. He enables our hearts to be courageous in any circumstance.

The forerunner to Matthew 5:4 is Isaiah 61:1-4 “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.” In this scripture those who mourned were mourning the devastation of Israel and this mourning was brought about by the disobedience that brought punishment upon the nation. The distress of these mourners could only be relieved by the forgiveness of God.

In Jesus’ day the nation was fairly prosperous. So it was not devastation he was talking about when he said blessed are those who mourn. But as in our day it was easy for the affluent to be unconcerned for the poor. The prosperity was not shared. Jesus is assuring the mourners that the God of justice is not asleep. So this particular blessing is not only for those who mourn for the realization of their own spiritual impoverishment or that of the world but also for those who mourn over the hurts and hardships of life.

Any mourning that we do is caused by evil in the world. This evil may come in the form of such things as sin, sickness, death, disaster, greed or injustice. But God can bring us true comfort and bring us through our mourning to a brighter day and with hope for the future.

Revelations 7:17 tells us that “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” So in the final state of glory Christ’s comfort will be complete, for only then will sin be no more.

Heart-to-Heart Activities:

1. Divide into groups of two. Each person may share about a time in their life when they experienced grief about something or someone and how they felt God’s comfort during this experience. Allow about ten minutes for this exercise.
2. If a member of your group or someone else you know has been helped through grief by a support group such as Forward (or some other Grief Recovery group), DivorceCare, etc., ask them to share a brief testimony. This might also be a good time to invite a local chaplain or counselor to visit your group and share about their ministry or how your group can provide grief support for others.

Reflection Questions:

- ♥ What are some things we grieve over in our communities? Cities? States? Country? World?

- ♥ In what ways does God comfort us in our grief?
- ♥ Discuss with a neighbor how our grief can lead us further along the path toward Christian maturity?
- ♥ With a partner, name someone that you know who has (or had, if that person is now deceased) a courageous heart in any circumstance.
- ♥ With a different partner, name two or three ways you have allowed God to lead you through your mourning into a hope for the future?

Prayer:

God of all comfort,

As we each walk through periods of mourning in our lives, help us to accept the comfort which you have promised. May we each face our grief with the knowledge that You are still in control and that we cannot fail if we continue to depend upon You. Give us courageous hearts and show us how to extend the comfort we have received from you to others that we encounter on our faith journeys and may your name be glorified by our willingness to do so. In Jesus' name, Amen