

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

Not long ago I had an lively, extensive conversation with someone who believes that God’s Word cannot be trusted because the Bible full of numerous contradictions. And I tried my best to explain to that person that while at first glance it may seem that Scripture does contradict itself, a second glance from the proper view point will reveal that such contradictions are nothing more than a paradox – which is *a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained is proven to be true*. We see these things in everyday life. Last fall we put up a new fence in our backyard. The question could be asked: “Why even put up a fence?” The answer is: We put up a fence to keep things *out*. And the answer is: We put up fence to keep things *in*. Those two statements seem to contradict themselves, calling into question the purpose for putting up the fence, - yet they do not, because either one or both could be true at the same time, depending on your viewpoint.

Jesus was always making these kinds of paradoxical statements while he walked on earth. He does so all throughout the Sermon on the Mount and we see that most clearly in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11. In each one of the Beatitudes Jesus tells how the Kingdom of God functions in opposition to our human way of thinking. In each statement, Jesus forces us readjust our thinking - and he puts each Beatitude in definite order of spiritual sequence, revealing the way by which we can gain entrance into the Kingdom of God. He began that process in the text we looked at last week in Matthew 5:3. Jesus declared: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”* because the fundamental first step in our becoming a Christian is recognizing our spiritual poverty which then awakens within our souls our desperate need for God. Today Jesus tell us the next step is: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

At first glance this statement seems to be contradictory: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* Comfort comes from mourning? Seems to be a contradictory statement. Luke’s account of these words in Luke 6:21 surely seem to support that: *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”* Weeping leads to laughing? Those emotional reactions are polar opposites. We live in a culture where mourning and weeping do not equate with comfort and laughing. We love the idea of comfort and laughing, but we do everything we can to move in the opposite direction of mourning and weeping.

Well, let’s look at this biblical paradox from another viewpoint. What does the word *“mourn”* mean? There are nine Greek words that can express *grief*; the word used here is the strongest and most severe of all, in that it is usually reserved for mourning the dead. It is also in the present tense, and indicates continuous action. Literally it reads "the ones continually mourning are continually comforted." We get a clearer understanding of the word morning by remembering that the defining word for the word *“poor”* in Matthew 5:3 three was *“desperate.”* And today, as we are looking verse 4, we get a deeper understanding of what the word *“mourn”* means by knowing he word *“broken”* could very easily be a replacement for the word *“mourn.”* Blessed are those who are *broken*, for they shall be comforted.

Jesus’ use of the word *“mourn”* speaks of an unrestrained broken-heartedness that is so full of grief, so overcome with sorrow, so full of heartache that it just spills out over everything in life. Some us here today have experienced a great deal of brokenness in our lives. The brokenness of being divorced o deserted or abused. The brokenness of gut-wrenching grief and depression over the death of a loved one. A brokenness by the collapse and loss of something you have invested your entire life and soul into. A brokenness which leaves you of feeling paralyzed, numb, rejected, all alone, deep in the pit. Some of us have been deeply and profoundly broken by an experience or event in our lives. Years ago I served as a chaplain of a hospital, and I remember watching cancer destroy a precious six-year-old girl before my eyes in a matter of weeks. That little girl was the daughter of a friend of mine. In sharing in that brokenness with her family, I was changed. Nancy told me later that I was a different person after that experience. *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

Some years ago I followed the story out of Chicago about a child born out of wedlock given up for adoption. And seven years later the child's birth father, in a vindictive act of anger against the birth mother, decided he wanted full custody of the child. Not surprisingly, the courts agreed. But the adoptive parents were not willing; they had raised the child from the day of his birth. But the courts prevailed. And so I remember the night when I was watching the news on TV, when they switched to a live feed of the house of the adopted parents, were we watched law enforcement knock on the door and demand they give up the child, and then the little seven-year-old boy being literally ripped out of the arms of his foster parents by his birth father. The pain, the terror in that little boy's eyes brought me back to my own brokenness as a child. Throughout our ministry, Nancy and I have had the privilege of sharing in the brokenness of many who have experienced tragedy, hurt, and suffering in their lives.

There is an old Arab proverb which says, "All sunshine makes a desert." The truth of God's Word is that we grow and gain strength when we go through the brokenness of pain and suffering. "Growth happens in a valley, not on a mountaintop" we say. It's through experiences of brokenness that we learn deep truths about God and real truth about ourselves. Most of us would agree with I've just said. While we may believe those things are true, and while they may be true for us, that is not true of "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*" When we view the God's Word through the lenses of our own experiences, we are misunderstanding and miscommunicating the truth of God.

Yes, there is some truth to giving and receiving comfort from those who have also experienced brokenness. Yes, many times we do become more mature by going through the bumps and bruises of life. But is Jesus saying that here? I don't think so. Not when you look at the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, where Christ presents the truth that our sinful tendency is to be *reactors*, being swayed and driven by the outside influences of our lives. All through chapters 5 through 7 of Matthew Jesus tells us that's wrong: instead of being *reactors to influence*, we should be *influencers* to world around us. Instead of being shaped by the world, we should be the shapers. But in order to do so, we need to be different. Jesus said: "Be different; *desperate for God.*" Jesus said: "Be different; *broken.*" There is a kind of worldly mourning, an earthly brokenness that does not result in being different *because it is selfish*. This is a mourning, a brokenness that looks only within and thinks about ourselves and our losses. The more we mourn about our losses, the more self-centered we become. This is a worldly mourning, an earthy brokenness that rides the horse of emotion rather than the wind of the Spirit.

In his book, "Battle of the Gods" Dr. Robert Morey writes: "In Scripture, neither reason nor emotion is the determining factor in doctrine or morals. Not once did God ask His people how they felt about his Laws. They were to obey regardless of their feelings. God's revealed truth was never said to be true because someone felt good or comfortable about it. As a matter fact, the history of the people of God as given in Scripture reveals that people did not generally like God's laws at all. And they certainly had some very bad feelings about the judgment of God on their sins. Human emotion cannot be the measure of all things because it is *finite*. It is therefore insufficient as a basis for truth." God's Word tells us that our emotions are hostile to God and our hearts actually hate God (Romans 1:30, 8:7); our hearts are deceitful and cannot be trusted (Jeremiah 17:9); we do not want the light of God's truth but the darkness of human error because our deeds are evil (John 3:19-21); and no one seeks after or understands the true God (Romans 3:11). . . . Whenever conflict arose between human emotion and revealed truth, the authors of Scripture rebuked that emotion as rebellion against God (Romans 9:14-23). . . . Just because we 'don't like a doctrine' or we are not 'comfortable' with it does not mean that is not true. . . . We are told that we are wicked sinners on our way to an eternal hell which we justly deserve. Our pride is trampled to the dust and the Holy Spirit makes us feel guilty and afraid. . . . Does this mean that there is no place for human emotion in the Christian life? Of course not! Human emotions such as guilt and fear are often the very means God uses to bring us to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). . . . Emotion plays a powerful role in the Christian life but human emotion must be made to be a servant of the Lord. Instead of conforming scripture to our feelings, we need to conform our feelings to scripture. We need to trust in the Lord rather than trusting in our deceitful feelings."

On a very basic human level we experience mourning and brokenness when we lament the losses of life on earth. This is the emotion of general sorrow that that we all experience due to the disappointment and death that comes to us by living in a fallen world. These times often become spiritually significant in that Jesus Christ can become more real, more present, more intimate than at any time before. God and God alone is the only one able to truly comfort us during those times of brokenness and mourning.

There is also sense in which we should mourn and become broken over the all the darkness and evil that we have in this world. There certainly is much on earth to grieve over. Yet there are some who continue to live under the delusion that humanity is basically good and that our world is getting better and better. But you don't have to look very far to see that no one can honestly believe that now. While we were created to be good by the creator of light, our rejection of God in Eden has dramatically warped our understanding of good, as we tend to follow our own shadows into the darkness. Our world is not getting better - and no amount of education or legislation or social justice will make this world fundamentally a better place. Rather, we should be moved to shed tears of mourning by the fact that thousands are murdered every year in North America by abortion and euthanasia. We should be moved to shed tears of brokenness as the leaders, law-makers and judges on our continent are doing everything possible to either legalize what God considers to be worthy of His wrath or to prohibit what God considers to be good and godly and worthy of praise. But as important as these kinds of sorrowful mournings and brokennesses are, they are not about the mourning and brokenness Jesus spoke about.

When Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who mourn*" he was talking about *sorrow for sin*, mourning about one's individual spiritual condition. In the context of verse 3, to "*mourn*" is a natural outflow of being "*poor in the spirit.*" This is the strong sense of mourning that rises up as a result of sin; Romans 6:23: "*For the wages of sin is death*". But that not how we normally mourn. By virtue of our fallen nature we tend to deny our weakness in this. We prefer to mourn our temporal losses rather than eternal ones..

In his article entitled *Blessed Are those Who Mourn* Matt Smethurst writes "In the first beatitude Jesus blesses "*the poor in spirit*" - those who acknowledge their moral bankruptcy. He then elaborates further since it's possible to acknowledge moral bankruptcy in verse 3 without mourning that moral bankruptcy in verse 4. Given the human condition, Jesus' promise to comfort those who mourn sin could scarcely be more counterintuitive. Given the spirit of our age it could scarcely be more countercultural. Sin in the late modern west is not grieved. It's not disapproved of. It's not merely tolerated. It is celebrated. Our society doesn't mourn sin, it mourns those who mourn sin. Yet we can succumb to similar tendencies, can't we? No doubt one reason we fail to mourn sin is because we underestimate it. We assume it's little more than a cosmic parking ticket. But sin is not trivial, it is treason, and insurrection against heaven's throne. We have never committed a small sin because we have never offended a small God. To the degree we mourn our sin both individually and collectively, we avail ourselves of Heaven's comfort. But to the degree that we don't, we rob ourselves of it."

"*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*" What do we have to mourn about? The destruction, the desolation, the devastation that our sin has left in its wake in our hearts and lives. The lost opportunities, the wasted time and money, the fractured relationships. The anger, the bitterness, the struggles, the pain and suffering. Jesus is saying when we grieve what sin has done in our lives, brokenness will just come pouring out. Unrestrained broken-heartedness. Christ is telling us that the truly blessed man, woman and child is the one who is desperately sorry for their own sin. This is the message Jesus constantly preached while He walked this earth; the message he preached right from the beginning. We read in Matt 4:17 Jesus proclaimed, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Brokenness and repentance are intimately connected. Brokenness comes when we are sorry for our sins and for what it has done to our lives. Repentance is then turning away from that sorrow and brokenness and turning to God for healing and forgiveness through his compassion and mercy and love and grace. The truth of what Jesus is saying is that no man, woman or child can repent unless they are truly sorry and broken by their sin. And no one can truly be healed and forgiven until they repent.

God's Word tells us that true Christianity begins with a sense of the reality our sin. Church, religion, or even our own personal spiritual experiences mean nothing without first being filled with an intense sorrow for our sin. Faith means nothing without a heart broken for the grief that we have caused ourselves and others and even more importantly – in knowing how deeply we have grieved the heart of God over our pride, arrogance, disobedience, self-centeredness, defiance, and rebellion against the commands, principles, and laws that God has so lovingly given us for our own protection, provision, and salvation. When we first come to realize the reality of the desperateness of our souls, and then come to understand the horrible consequences of what our sin has done to our lives, the lives of others and the heartbreak that we have caused God, the cross will finally, for the first time, really make sense.

Romans 6:23 tells us *“For the wages of sin is death.”* It is at the cross where Jesus took our place and paid the price for our sins. It is at the cross – as we brokenly mourn and grieve, in the depths of sorrow for the wretchedness that lives within our hearts - that we hear the voice of Jesus say to us, *“Repent. Turn away from your sin, turn to me and follow me. I love you. I forgive you. I am giving my life for you. I am giving my life to you. I want to bless you with blessings far beyond your wildest dreams and your greatest imaginations. I want you to live with me and live for me today, tomorrow and forever.”* This is the blessing of God for those who brokenly *“mourn”* their sin - *“for they shall be comforted.”*

The precious words of Jesus regarding *“comfort”* are delivered against the backdrop of Isaiah 61 where Isaiah the prophet anticipates an age in which God's suffering servant would bring *“comfort”* to God's exiled people: *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn”* Seven centuries later Isaiah's promise became reality when Jesus read those same words in declaring the beginning of his ministry on earth (Luke 4:14-21.) The arrival of the Savior that God had promised at the fall of humanity is the *“comfort”* given those who acknowledge their desperate need for God and who are mournfully broken by their sin.

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

*A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

*Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.*

*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 40:1-5*

The arrival of the kingdom of heaven and Jesus ministry brought the first taste of the blessing of God's *“comfort”*. Today God's *“comfort”* is with us as Jesus has come to save us from our sins. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* But we will receive God's final comforting is the presence of the heavenly lamb when God will wipe away our tears of mourning for sin: *“For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”* (Revelation 7:17). This was the promise of God even before Isaiah proclaiming the comfort of God to those who mourn over the brokenness of sin. The Bible tells us that King David was a man after God's own heart. But he was also a liar, an adulterer and a murderer. In spite of the deeply sinful life he was living, David revealed he had a heart for God when he finally came to the point of brokenness. After hearing from a prophet, a preacher whose name was Nathan, David realized and acknowledged the desperate condition of his sin sick soul - *“blessed are the poor in spirit.”* In his sorrow and grief - *“blessed are those who mourn”* - he called out to God in prayer in Psalm 51.

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Psalm 51:1-16

The promises of God are that when we face our sin, when we deal with our sin, when we realize and acknowledge the desperate state of our hearts and lives and souls – we will truly be broken. Then - when we come to understand that our sin has been grieving the heart of God, causing untold destruction and devastation in our lives and in the lives of those around us – we will turn from our sin and turn back to God in repentance - and God will have mercy us. He will love us. He will forgive us. He will wash away all our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin. He will fill us with joy and gladness. He will hide His face from our sins and blot out all our iniquities. He will create in us pure hearts and renewing our spirits by permanently planting His Holy Spirit within us. He will restore to us the joy of His salvation and uphold us with His Spirit. And we will sing praises to him with our lips, tongues and mouths forever and ever. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise!* This is God’s promise to us through Jesus Christ!

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* “True blessedness,” Jesus is saying, “begins with deep sadness.” Or in other words: “Blessed are those who know they are in trouble and have enough sense to admit it.” The apostle Paul said is this way in 2 Corinthians 7:10: *“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”* This is why it often takes a tragedy or dramatic event in our lives to finally come to a living faith in Jesus Christ. Sin is so destructive, so deceitful, so numbing, so heavy on our souls - that we have to be broken by it in order to be free of it. How many times have you seen a fireworks display at 11 in the morning? Probably never. Why not? Because fireworks aren't impressive in the noon day sky. The darker the sky the more stunning the display. In the same way, the brilliance of grace must be set against the black darkness of sin. Thomas Watson once said ‘till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.’ Quoting once again from Matt Smethurst: “For the world, grieving sin is regressive and constricting; for the Christian, it is the pathway to joy. Imagine the implications. If Matthew 5:4 is true, if Jesus really meets repentance with comfort, not condemnation, then no longer do you need to fear being exposed. No longer do you have to present an airbrushed version of yourself to fellow redeemed sinners. No longer do you need to fear studying your heart and plumbing the depths of your disease. If exploring sin brings you to the deep end of the pool, exploring mercy will take you to the Mariana trench. And awaiting you at the bottom of the dive is not a black hole but a solid rock.”

The missionary William Ward once said: *“We should be thankful for our tears. They give us a sense of our need and prepare us for a clearer vision of God.”* God blesses us with the comfort of salvation through Jesus Christ when we mourn over the spiritual condition of our hearts, minds and souls. We mourn over personal sins because we are created in the image of the One who mourns over our fallen state. But as we mourn we become instruments of the good news of the kingdom of heaven as we share the comforter who has graciously given us the comfort of God. Romans 8:22-28 says, *“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*

In the final analysis, the sermon on the mount cannot be separated from the one who preached it. Jesus prayed many prayers during his time on earth, but never once did he prayer pray a prayer of confession. He didn't have to. He mourned over many sins, but never once did he mourn over his own. He didn't have any. Ultimately, our comfort is anchored in the reality that Jesus doesn't just mourn sin, he conquers it. Jesus invites us into his upside-down kingdom of heaven and then dies in our place so we can enter it. May God make our hearts tender to mourn our spiritual bankruptcy so that we can better marvel at his comforting grace. *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

*When my soul was embittered,  
when I was pricked in heart,  
I was brutish and ignorant;  
I was like a beast toward you.  
Nevertheless, I am continually with you;  
you hold my right hand.  
You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will receive me to glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Psalm 73:21-26*

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