

## Matthew 5:4-5: The Mourners and the Meek

We are continuing our look at the Beatitudes this morning. A beatitude, if you recall, just means super-blessed. And what Jesus has done here at the beginning of his sermon where he is calling people to follow him as the new people of God is to understand that following him is fundamentally a life of blessing. Whatever other observation we might make, even a casual read of these first few verses would point us to blessing.

That's an important understanding because many people have a wrong view of what it is to follow Jesus. Many people think that Christianity is primarily a set of rules that we follow. Or it's a type of religion where we sing the right kind of songs or just go to church on Sunday. Or maybe it's an ancient set of values or morals. And there is truth to those things. We do go to church and we do follow rules. But that's not primarily what following Jesus is about. We're not trying to get people to simply conform to our secret club rules.

No, what Jesus says is that following him primarily is about a life of blessing. Nine times at the very beginning of his sermon he mentions blessing. Maybe we don't understand what the blessings are or how they apply to us or what we should do with them, but they are front and center.

Now, because blessing in our culture is a quasi-religious word, it's a word that has lost a lot of its meaning to us. I mentioned last week that what Jesus is getting at here with the word blessing (μακάριος) is that following him is the good life, a life of flourishing and God's favor.

And yet what God sees as the good life of following Jesus, the world rejects. Who would say that the good life is a life of mourning - of sadness? Who would say the good life, a life of flourishing is a life of constantly wanting to be more righteous but never getting there? Who would say that super-blessing is persecution? The unbelieving world wouldn't say that. But Jesus did.

And so here, if you recall, Matthew is painting Jesus as the new Moses - he's up on the mountain, giving God's Law to God's people. And at the beginning of the sermon he is pointing this new people of God to the good life, the flourishing life as God sees it.

Last week we saw the blessing of being poor in spirit - bankrupt and a beggar in spirit. That is, someone who follows Christ in true humility they have the KOH here and now, and in the future they have the Kingdom in its fullness. That's blessing: you have nothing to offer God but to beg for his forgiveness, and in turn what God gives you is his entire Kingdom. That's blessing.

So let's look at the next one:

### 2) The good life is a life of mourning. Read 4

So this is the irony of the Kingdom of heaven: You wanna live the dream? You want to know that God's favor is upon you and that God has blessed you to the max? Then your life needs to be defined by mourning. It needs to be defined by sorrow and sadness. That's what this word means.

That seems unusual on a lot of levels. First, usually we don't think those who go around like Eore from Winnie the Pooh are the blessed people in life. They're the killjoys, they're the pessimists that couldn't see a good thing if it fell out of the sky like a meteorite and landed on them. This is not only true with us, but in almost every culture, people who are defined by sorrow and sadness and mourning are generally looked upon as having a problem to solve.

We call it depression, previous generations called it being melancholy, the blues, dour in disposition. If you're down - you go around mourning all the time - what you need is a vacation or medicine or exercise or alcohol.

In 5th century BC "Hippocrates (Hippocratic oath) credited with the idea that depression, or melancholia as it was known then, was caused by an imbalance in four body fluids...: yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood. Specifically, melancholia was attributed to an excess of black bile in the spleen. Hippocrates' treatments of choice included bloodletting, baths, exercise, and diet." (<https://www.verywellmind.com/who-discovered-depression-1066770>)

Others suggested starvation, beatings and drugs. More modern treatments have used electroshock therapy, psychoanalysis, spinning therapies, exorcisms and music. Interestingly, we saw in **1 Samuel 16:14-23** king Saul used David as a musician in his own household to cheer him through music that would make his harmful spirit depart.

So if you look down through the ages, those who are defined by perpetual mourning - by sadness and sorrow - are always looked at as having a problem that needs to be solved.

In contrast, Jesus says his followers must - **must** - be defined by mourning. Literally: Blessed are the mourners. The good life that Jesus is offering is a life defined by mourning; sadness.

But what does he mean? Does Jesus want people who are depressed all the time? Is he talking about sadness in general? Is he looking for people who mourn their long lost relatives or mourn their sports team not winning the super bowl? And of all the beatitudes, this one is the most puzzling: you're living the good life of blessing and joy if your mourning and sad. How is that even possible?

Well, it's possible if you narrow your search to what the Bible has to say about mourning. And if you look up the word mourn in the Bible, you find a pattern that people mourn over just 2 things: 1) death and 2) sin. So it's a safe bet that whatever kind of mourning Jesus has in mind is in one of those categories.

So option 1 is death. Should Jesus's followers be those who are defined by mourning over death? I go to funerals fairly regularly and what always surprises me is the **lack** of sorrow over the person who died. We don't even call them funerals anymore because that's a sad thing. We call them celebrations of life - that's happy. Should we as Christians be the ones who are the primary weepers and mourners at funerals? No. In fact, the gospel message changes even how we mourn for those who have died.

**1 Thes. 4:13-14:** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

So the gospel message of Jesus's death and resurrection and our future resurrection actually acts to restrain our grief when people die. We don't mourn - grieve - as unbelievers do. We also don't shout for joy. The gospel message helps to balance our grief. A loved one made in the image of God has died - that is sad. But if they are in Christ one day they will rise - and that is cause for rejoicing.

Well, maybe we mourn over the death of Jesus. I remember a few weeks before God saved me I was reading through Matthew's gospel and getting to the point where Jesus died. And I knew I should be sad and I kind of worked myself up into this weird emotional sorrow over Jesus.

But did you know we are never called to mourn Jesus's death? We are never called to be sad or sorrowful over his death at all. We are called to remember it in the Lord's Supper. Proclaim it to the nations. But never mourn it. Why not? Because Jesus isn't dead! He is risen!

Even Jesus said to his disciples the night before he died: Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. (**John 16:20**)

How did their sorrow turn to joy? The resurrection. So we don't mourn the death of Jesus because he's not dead! And his death and resurrection and future coming and our future bodily resurrection actually constrain and guide how we are to mourn when a person dies. Which really only leaves us with the other option:

What Jesus is getting at is mourning over our sinfulness. That's the other biblical category. Let me show you this in a couple of places. **Turn to 1 Cor. 5:1-2.** This is where a man happens to be involved in sexual immorality with his step mom and the church is going: "Hey, that's great, look at him exercising his liberty in Christ." Paul says no, this is disgusting. **Read 1-2**

The pagans don't even sin like this and you guys are celebrating? No, you should mourn. You should weep over this sin. Even those who are not committing the sin, their consciences should be so soft and so sensitive that they are weeping over this guy. Get rid of him, he is leaven that will ruin the whole church.

**Turn to 2 Cor. 7:6-13.** Here, Paul is talking about how he had to write the church a very severe letter - it was a letter that no longer exists - we don't have a copy of it. It was written sometime between 1 and 2 Corinthians and most people refer to it as the "severe letter." Where Paul rebuked these guys sharply for their sin and toleration of sin. **Read 6-13**

So what Paul says is that his severe letter produced grieving and mourning and sorrow. And you know what happened as a result? Repentance and comfort from God. And what's interesting is that worldly grief and sorrow and mourning usually produce *in*action. Worldly grief and mourning produce paralysis and people who sit around doing nothing but feeling bad because of the consequences of their sin.

True godly grief actually has the opposite effect: it compels us to righteous living. **Read 11**

People who truly mourn for their sin, not because life is harder now as a result, but because they have sinned against a holy God don't sit around doing nothing. No, true godly grief that is sorrowful that it has offended the Triune God is fueled by the gospel that says Christ has paid for your sins, the wrath of God is satisfied, now go in the power of the Holy Spirit and live to his glory! There is earnestness, zeal, eagerness, indignation at our sin. Willingness to endure any punishment as a result to clear ourselves and make things right.

**Turn to James 4:7-9.** The letter of James, in many ways, reflects the Sermon on the Mount. James was Jesus's half brother and likely heard Jesus's sermons many, many times. It's no surprise that they sound so alike. **Read 7-9**

Same thing: stop laughing at sin and mourn it instead. If you find sin humorous and joyful, in the end you will find an eternity of gloom and mourning in hell. If you weep over your sin now, you will be exalted in the presence of God. What does Jesus say? Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be what? Comforted.

And to be clear, this isn't just sadness over anything. This is not sadness because you didn't get that job you wanted or your boyfriend broke up with you or finances are tough or your family is passing around a cold for the millionth time. Those are difficult things that can cause sadness. But what Jesus and the rest of Scripture have in mind is mourning over sin. The followers of Jesus are defined by those who have a proper response to their own sinfulness. We mourn our sin.

Our Lord is saying that a person has to come to the sobering and harsh reality of blackness of their sin before they will ever come to a place where they mourn for their sin. This is why when we tell people about the gospel, we have to spend a lot of time connecting the dots between a holy God, the gravity and consequence of our sin that are deserving of hell, before anyone will ever mourn. And you say, well, do we just want people who are just sad all the time? Jesus says yes!

Not mokey and weepy for no reason. But Jesus fundamentally wants a people who are broken when they sin. A people who realize they have profaned the God who made them and saved them. A people whose mourning isn't just crying because they messed it all up only to go do it again. But a people whose mourning over their sin, when met with God's grace produces repentance and change and zeal to follow Jesus all the more. True mourners repent, they change, they do everything in their power to make things right.

By the way, that's not something we can manipulate in people. If your kids or your parents or your friends aren't saved, you can't manipulate them into mourning. We can't build people up emotionally into a place where they produce in themselves enough sadness to be pleasing to God. Only the Spirit can produce true mourning.

If you're sitting here right now and you call yourself a Christian but you've never really mourned for any sin, you've never been grieved by the fact that your transgressions offend the holy God of the universe - then let me be very clear: you're not in the Kingdom of God.

“You can’t say that!” I didn’t. Jesus did. If you’ve never mourned for your sin then from God’s perspective you’re not blessed. And you will never receive comfort. And I don’t think Jesus is asking for us to mourn perfectly. It’s not like every time we blow through a stop sign we need to pull over and have a good cry because we’ve violated the God of the universe and get out and prostrate ourselves on the ground before oncoming traffic to show just how repentant we are.

But there should be some amount of grief over sin. It’s not a grief and a mourning that is manipulated, it’s something that wells up within us from the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. Jesus says that is what it is to be his follower. And the promise for those who mourn is that they will be what? Comforted. **Turn to Rev. 21:1-6.**

We know that there is comfort in this life knowing that our sins are paid for. We are comforted by the knowledge that God is sovereignly in control of all things and that his sovereignty wipes away our anxiety and fears. We know that the Holy Spirit is called the comforter - his job is to comfort the saints. But as with all the other Beatitudes, it is only in the NHNE that final comfort comes. And it is to that time that Jesus is speaking.

### **Read 1-8**

This is the comfort Jesus points us to. Even right now, in heaven, this does not exist. In heaven there is war, in heaven there is distress as the saints in glory ask “How long O Lord before you judge and avenge our blood” (**Rev. 6:10**). God does comfort them, but it is not final comfort. This, the NHNE, is the final comfort for the mourners. This here is where it is all wiped away. Final comfort and joy in the Lord forever.

Now, keep this scene in mind. Because because it may or may not be the eschatological hope of the next beatitude. Let’s **look** at **Matt. 5** to see the next one.

- 1) Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
- 2) Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- 3) Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

So the good life belongs to those who are meek. Blessing and flourishing and good times come to Jesus’s meek followers.

Now, of all the beatitudes, this one has been most misunderstood. What does it even mean to be meek? We don’t use that word at all, really. There are many ways people have translated it.

What does it mean to inherit the earth? Is the Greek word even earth or should it be land? When do we inherit the earth?

To even begin answering that, look at **Psalms 37:11** for just a minute.

Now, follow along with me for a few minutes because this is going to connect some dots.

To understand the gravity of what Jesus is saying we have to understand that one of the central themes of the whole Bible is land and the earth. God could have created a universe that was totally spiritual, no land at all without any physical properties. But he created earth and land. And within the earth there are sacred spaces. In Genesis 1 and 2 there is a sacred space on the earth, what is it called? The Garden of Eden. Inside is blessing and abundance, outside is harshness and difficulty. And because of sin, Adam and Eve are kicked out of the sacred space of God’s Garden and things get so bad God eventually floods the whole world to destroy the wickedness.

But not long after the flood event, we meet a character named Abraham and he is promised to inherit another sacred space. The space, as we know it is the land of Israel. We call it the Promised Land because God promised to give it to Abraham and his descendants. And Abraham lives there for a time.

And as you read through the OT, there is this constant tension about the Promised Land of Israel. The Jews are enslaved in Egypt where God delivers them in order to give them the Promised Land. But that generation

doesn't get it. Then next generation enters the land - God gives it to them, but never conquer it all because of their sin. And the rest of the OT is a back and forth story of the Jews either trying to drive the pagans out of the land of Israel or of the Jews being so wicked that God drives them out of Israel.

Even within the Promised Land, there are levels of sacredness. The most sacred space on the planet in the OT is the Holy of Holies. Just outside of the is slightly less sacred, the holy place. Outside of that is the Tabernacle or Temple. The Tabernacle resides in Jerusalem, the holy city of God. Jerusalem is in Israel, the sacred Promised Land. And everything outside of Jerusalem is the pagan unbelieving world.

So the story of the Bible revolves around land; and specifically the sacred space that God has promised to give to his people. And even as Jesus is preaching the SOTM, the Jews do not own their land. They are subservient to the Romans who control it and who, by 70AD, will utterly destroy Jerusalem and the Jews will be scattered among the nations.

It's in the midst of that whole land context that Jesus says the good life is for the meek, because they will inherit the earth, which is a direct quote from **Psalms 37:11**. **Read**

So Jesus is tapping into this idea of this idea of Land. It's not like the whole OT was about land and the NT is like "Nah, we're not worried about land anymore." No, Jesus makes land a blessing for his followers.

But before we get there, what what does it mean to be meek? Probably the most popular definition in recent times is "power under control." And I think people get that because Jesus is described as being meek. Jesus was God in the flesh and yet restrained himself. But I don't think that's the right answer. That's not what the English word means. The English definition is quiet or gentle or submissive. And that is basically what the Greek word means too.

But I think **Psalms 37** gives us an even better answer.

It's not as pithy and memorable as "power under control" but I think it's more accurate. Definition: A meek person humbly lives a righteous life in the midst of wicked people. I get that because that is what this whole psalm is about.

This psalm of David that Jesus quotes mentions inheriting the land over and over again: 6 times. And each time he mentions inheriting the land there is a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. And I think what David is doing is describing the same person over and over. **Read 1-3, 8-9, 10-11, 21-22, 27-29, 34**

So do you notice the theme? The wicked person is punished, the righteous person will inherit the land. And I think this psalm just poetically depicts the same person and the same contrast over and over.

David is saying that the meek person: trusts in the Lord, does good, waits for the Lord, is generous and gives, keeps the ways of the Lord. That is the meek person. Meekness is not having power under control. Meekness is living a righteous life in the midst of a wicked people. It's submitting to God knowing that he knows best.

But here's the hard part about being righteous: we look around at those who are wicked and they seem to be doing so well. They make a lot of money, they're beautiful, life seems to go well with them, they persecute us. And here we are trying to live a righteous life according to God's Word and what's it getting us? Is there really any payoff for living a righteous life?

And God says: yes! There is a payoff. Under the OC which was the Law of Moses, if Israel was faithful to the Lord they would stay in the Promised Land.

Well, what can Jesus offer his followers that's better than the Promised Land? Remember the Promised Land was a land flowing with milk and honey. It was amazingly rich and blessed.

What can Jesus offer the one who is righteous, striving to follow him in the midst of wicked people? He doesn't offer them the Promised Land. He offers them the New Earth. That's the word that Jesus uses in Matt. 5: earth. It's no longer a slice of real estate in the middle east that Jesus is offering the followers of God. He's offering

the glory of the new creation, where sin is no more, where the black top that people walk on is described as pure, clear gold. Where there is no more night anymore or temple any more because God dwells with his people in perfect glorified harmony.

That's the new earth. The recreation, the regeneration that Jesus promises us and that we look forward to.

**Look** over at **Rev. 22:1-5**. Like it or not fall time is coming on our little slice of the earth. And the curse is still upon us. We planted these little sweet tomatoes and they're all turning orange now and soon we'll be covered in snow and ice and be eagerly waiting for signs of green when we can begin to plant.

Not in the new earth that God is giving his people. We look forward to a day when it is always harvest time.

**Read 1-5, 20-21**

**Pray**