

The Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who mourn.
(Matthew 5 v 4, John 11 v 32-44, Luke 19 v 41-44, Mark 14 v 32-36)

Think of a little child whose sweets get spilled in the dirt, or whose favourite toy gets tramped on and broken. Their loss seems inconsolable, their tears flow and they wail without restraint. They wake up with mumps the day their school is going to the zoo and they have to stay home. Their disappointment is palpable.

It's not that different as grown-ups. We experience bitter loss and disappointment in life. We may or may not cry but deep inside we mourn. When a dear family member or friend passes away. When a couple separate and a family is torn and divided. When we lose a job and all the security and self-esteem that goes with it. When we knowingly do wrong and our innocence dies and love becomes shrouded with fear. We are human. Sooner or later we mourn.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn". It seems a contradiction of terms, literally, "you are happy when you're sad". What can He mean? Simply this. That people are ultimately blessed by God with greater and longer lasting happiness when we allow the things that cause us sorrow to turn us to Him in faith. The tears of loss and frustration turn out a blessing in disguise if they lead us to a deeper experience of His grace and kindness. If mourning be the means of a careless sinner turning from the broad road leading to destruction to discover the joy of salvation in the promise of heaven it is a blessed sorrow.

Some commentators link these Beatitudes, noting how this one follows very naturally from the previous one. Those who realise they are "poor in spirit", spiritually destitute without the Lord, mourn the sin that makes them so and readily repent and trust the One Who can forgive and restore.

Now there is a school of thought that suggests that is the end of our sorrows and troubles, that Christians should be endlessly happy, as in one of our favourite hymns: "and live rejoicing every day". Common

sense tells us that's not quite the case. Christians are comforted by God in our losses but our losses still hurt, deeply! More than that, there may be times and ways in which it is appropriate for Christians, even though we constantly rejoice in our Saviour, to feel a godly sorrow. There will be times that because we are Christians seeking to share the mind and heart of Christ that we will experience deep sorrow leading us to prayer, and frustration leading us to action.

Consider our Master Himself, sometimes known as "Man of Sorrows", described by Isaiah as "acquainted with grief". Consider Jesus on two occasions when He was seen to be deeply troubled and sorrowful. Let's observe Him by the grave of Lazarus and on the road into Jerusalem. There are others but we'll focus on these two.

Why did the Son of God weep in the cemetery at Bethany? Didn't He know He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead and His friends Mary and Martha would be overjoyed to be reunited with their brother? Yet John describes Him as "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" and openly weeping. What would make the Son of God mourn and shed tears?

The most immediate comforting thought is that our Lord actually feels real compassion for us in our suffering. He loved Lazarus and his sisters. He felt the pain of these broken-hearted sisters – He witnessed for Himself that awful empty space in the house where He had often enjoyed hospitality. He stands with us and shares our sorrow in parting and loss.

But there's more here. The original language suggests indignation, anger. Jesus our Friend and houseguest is after all the Creator of all, the Giver of Life and the Holy One and He is deeply offended and distraught at human sin and its consequences. At the rebellion of our first parents which led to creation being cursed with death. At the failure of us all to practice that which pleases God, meaning we all share this fate of bereavement and sorrow and eventual death ourselves.

This is not the Paradise He intended us to enjoy!

He witnesses His good work spoiled and He grieves. But not content to weep or get depressed, Jesus Who Himself would die for our sins and rise triumphant strides into action, approaches the tomb and with unique authority calls Lazarus back to life.

The sisters are comforted, the family reunited. We cannot raise the dead like this, but as Christians we can stand beside people, share their sorrow, weep with them in their loss and, if given the opportunity, comfort them with the promise of heavenly reunion through Jesus Christ, Who has risen from death and gone on ahead to prepare a wonderful place for those whose trust is in Him.

The Gospel of Luke records another occasion when Jesus was sad and troubled. It was the day He rode the donkey into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Crowds were waving palm branches and shouting. It was meant to be a celebration but the Lord knew His popularity wouldn't last and within a week He'd be despised, rejected and crucified.

As a prophet, knowing His message of grace and challenge from God would be rejected with disastrous consequences for the city, Jesus pauses amidst the cheering crowd and weeps over Jerusalem, saying, "If you had only known what would bring you peace ...". But within a generation of 40 years the Romans would come and massacre the population and demolish the city who did not recognise or welcome their Lord when He came.

Should Christians who seek to know and follow Christ, not share His heart for His Church and His world? Complacent, deceived, wicked and twisted, proudly assuming all is well while all the time racing toward a desperately hopeless end!

Should it not drive us to our knees, praying with tears like people of God in the Bible – Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul – confessing our sins and the sins of our fathers and the sins of our time and community?

Lord have mercy on Jerusalem – on Your Church worldwide, at times heretical or divided or lukewarm! Where are those who will weep with Jesus over His people?

Lord have mercy on our community where alcohol and other drugs are taking such a toll. Lord have mercy on those lonely and hurting who take drugs or abuse sex to try and ease the pain! Where are those who will weep with Jesus for the lost and lonely for whom He died?

Some people just want comfort and no pain. The Lord promises comfort to those who are deeply uncomfortable with their own sin and who share His pain and compassion for others!

As godly sorrow prompts people of faith to pray for grace to flow, we shall be blessed and comforted with the assurance of God's love and acceptance and forgiveness, the joy of others joining us in the family of God's redeemed and together we will rejoice, through our tears in the promise of heavenly glory where there will be no more death or mourning, or crying or pain, where the old order of things is passed away and God makes all things new.

Amen