

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

The Beatitudes (part 3)

Summary: Jesus declared to be commended are those who are poor in spirit and those who mourn. On the face of it, this seems quite at odds with the values of the world, which regards the joyful and prosperous as blessed. Let us be certain what mourning he is referring to, so that we may understand how a sad face is good for the heart.

Scripture: Matthew 5:3–16; Luke 18:9–14

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Introduction

He Gets Us

Two ads were aired during last Sunday's Super Bowl game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles. It is estimated the game was viewed by over 113 million American viewers alone, not to mention the international and online audience. That makes last Sunday's game the third-most watched television program in American history.¹

According to the *USA Today: Ad Meter*, the two ads rated higher than big brands such as Disney, Jeep, Pringles and TurboTax. They ranked #8 and #15 out of the 51 commercials aired in the US during the Super Bowl.

The ads are part of the *He Gets Us* campaign, which was launched in 2022, using billboards and TV spots to point people to a website with articles, videos and other resources to help them learn more about Jesus. The website also provides a way for visitors to connect with local groups so they can learn about Jesus with other people, and website visitors have the option to text a number in order to receive prayer or encouragement.²

There is some controversy over these ads because they reportedly cost \$20 million to produce and air during the Super Bowl. Bill McKendry, advertising expert and director of the campaign, has stated,

We're in God's business. We don't have a product to sell and we don't have a profit to make. What we do have is [a message] and it is life-saving. (Bill McKendry)³

While I agree the money could have been used for other purposes and projects, but the Kingdom starts with proclamation of the King! And Super Bowl 57 is now, arguably, the largest audience to hear the good news about Jesus at the same time. \$20 million dollars is a small price to pay for sharing that good news.

The Boy on the Bus

[Cadbury "The Boy on the Bus" ad]

Cadbury's "The Boy on the Bus" ad first appeared in May 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It features a young boy who has been forbidden by his mother to eat chocolate, only to unexpectedly offer it to a young woman crying near him on the bus.⁴

It is a heartwarming ad, exemplifying the value of comforting those who mourn.

Explanation

Not All Mourning Is To Be Commended

This is a value of the friends of Jesus, those who live in the kingdom of God, is it not?

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)⁵

The answer is yes AND no, for the incorrect translation of this beatitude leads to a paradox. If one is “blessed”, why then do they “mourn”? And if they “mourn”, how is it they are “blessed”?⁶

If we take this beatitude to mean *anyone* who mourns, for *any reason*, is ‘blessed’ —in other words, experiences the good life— then the beatitude becomes nonsensical. Just ask any person who is mourning whether they feel ‘blessed’ and I’m pretty sure they will say, ‘Not at all’. There is nothing especially fortunate, commendable or honourable about grief generally.

If Jesus meant grief generally was a blessed state of living, I am pretty sure the crowds would have reacted angrily to such nonsense. Instead, we read,

When Jesus had finished [the Sermon on the Mount], the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their [leaders]. (Matthew 7:28–29)

Jesus drew the attention of the crowds, and kept their attention, because he spoke not like the political, religious and community leaders, but as one with authority. The Beatitudes are a perfect example. Jesus spoke truth no one could deny. He spoke truth that resonates with the human condition.

Perhaps this is a good place to mention it is best to avoid prosperity preachers who, in contrast to Jesus, ‘tickle our ears’, telling us what our sinful hearts want to hear.⁷ That you are blessed whenever you grieve is a lie, but it sounds nice and it sounds comforting, except that it is neither true, nice nor comforting at all.

Jesus declared to be commended are those who are poor in spirit AND those who mourn. And, truly, this is quite at odds with the values of the world, which regards the joyful and prosperous as blessed.

The dissonance in Jesus’ words here is a cue for us to pay close attention.

How is someone who is mourning in a state of blessedness? It’s a good question. What then can Jesus have meant with this beatitude?

Logically, Jesus cannot have been speaking of all grief here. There is a difference between types and degrees of grief, as noted by the apostle Paul,

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Some grief leads to a positive and healthy outcome, while other grief does not. Some mourning is to be commended, but most mourning is not.

Therefore, Jesus was not speaking about the general grief we all experience as a consequence of the human condition and the circumstances we find ourselves in, from time to time, and some more than others.

What kind of mourning is to be commended?

Mourning Over Sin

The first two beatitudes form a pair. Where poverty of spirit recognises our emptiness and need, it's companion is **mourning over sin**.

This beatitude reminds us it is not enough to recognise we are separated from our Creator (which is the Fall), we must mourn for our complicity in this separation (which is our sin). As pastor and missionary Arthur T. Pierson noted,

It is mourning over the felt destitution of our spiritual state, and over the iniquities that have separated us and God; mourning over the very morality in which we have boasted, and the self-righteousness in which we have trusted; sorrow for rebellion against God, and hostility to His will; and such mourning always goes side by side with conscious poverty of spirit.
(Arthur T. Pierson)⁸

The perfect illustration of this mourning is seen in Jesus' parable of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk 18:9-14):⁹

In this parable, we are invited to consider a Pharisee, a religious and community leader who should have known better, who adopts the haughty, self-assertive and self-sufficient disposition the world so much admires and praises. He has so much he can give from his abundance, yet he has nothing of what really matters.

The despised tax collector also has an abundance of material possessions, for all the wrong reasons, yet he recognises he has nothing and can do nothing to fix his separation from God, the only thing that matters.

The tax collector recognises he has a need of mercy. His grief leaps from Jesus' words whenever we read them and grabs our own hearts, if we are honest about the effects of our own sin on ourselves and on those around us.

A Sad Face is Good For The Heart

Let's be honest: No one likes grief, no matter the source or cause.

If grief is to be avoided, then how is godly grief a good thing?

It is written,

Grief is better than laughter, for when a face is sad, a heart may be glad.
(Ecclesiastes 7:3; cf. Pr 14:13)

In our fallenness and sin, the world encourages and equips us to avoid grief, and anything that causes it, at all costs.

"Happy, happy, joy, joy" is our mantra and anyone is to be cancelled or punished if they offend us or make us feel bad in any way.

Yet, the platitude, 'when you're down, there's no where to go but up', carries some truth.

Grief exposes the diabolical and destructive nature of the human condition and the circumstances we find ourselves in and place ourselves in. When we grieve, we have an opportunity to learn. When we're happy, we simply enjoy the moment and no one cares how they got there.

When we grieve we wonder what has caused our grief. We learn to avoid such in the future. When we have caused grief, if our hearts and minds are open, we learn to make reparations and do better next time.

The process of grief leading to a glad heart is more beneficial than the fleetingness of gladness unearned.

Neither Jesus nor I are encouraging you to actively seek reasons to mourn. Keep in mind the mourning Jesus' beatitude is alluding to is not grief generally and it is more than one's initial conviction of sin. The beatitude encourages a perpetual awareness of the consequences of our sin.

While the friend of Jesus stands forgiven, there remain many reasons to remember our sin:¹⁰

Until we are perfected, the sickness of our own heart makes us cry, with the apostle,

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
(Romans 7:24)

Despite our belief and trust, we still are prone to doubt, such that we need exhortation to,

Lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us... (Hebrews 12:1b)

While we are forgiven of our sin, the mistakes we make are still far more in number than we care to admit and should therefore remain a continual source of grief.

For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. (Romans 7:19)

Our faith in Jesus naturally and necessarily leads to a lifestyle based on our faith, which should be characterised by good works, following Jesus' example. Yet there remains an awareness our lives are barren and unprofitable compared to the glorious riches of his grace. This awareness should make us sigh and cry,

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:26)

Our propensity to wander from Christ, our lack of communion with Him, and the shallowness of our love for Him should cause us to sing less joyfully and to instead bow our head and bend our knee in confession and prayer, as did King David, who wrote,

Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight ...
Do not banish me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:4–12)

There are many other causes for mourning in the heart of even the most mature friend of Jesus among us: There is the hypocrisy of Christians, our leaders and organisations, that has

a form of godliness while denying the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5); there is the awful dishonour done to the truth of God by the false doctrines taught in countless pulpits and small groups lacking accountability; and, there is the divisions among the friends of Jesus, the friction and factions between our brothers and sisters-by-faith.

The combination of these would lead the genuine follower of Christ to continual sorrow of heart. Let us not forget the awful wickedness in the world, the despising of Christ, and the untold human suffering, all of which should make us groan within ourselves for rescue.

The closer one lives to God, the more he or she will mourn over all that dishonours our Lord. This is the common experience of God's true people.¹¹

Application

“They Will Be Comforted”

How does this sound make you feel?

Upon hearing the sound of a baby crying, we can be drawn in or repulsed.¹² So too when we hear the sounds of grief, we are just as often repulsed as we are drawn to provide comfort.

What is the best way to support someone who is crying? To be close. Apply a gentle touch. Say little, if anything at all.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

Jesus' second beatitude states those are to be commended who experience godly grief and this beatitude comes with a promise: They will be comforted!

How will they be comforted?

Pastor and author Arthur W. Pink wrote,

Here, then, are the first birthmarks of the children of God. He who has never come to be poor in spirit and has never known what it is to really mourn for sin, though he belong to a church or be an office-bearer in it, has neither seen nor entered the Kingdom of God. **How thankful the Christian reader ought to be that the great God condescends to dwell in the humble and contrite heart!** This is the wonderful promise made by God... (Arthur W. Pink)¹³

The friend of Jesus, when he or she experiences godly grief, will be comforted by God drawing close in the form of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus called our Comforter, our Counsellor, the Spirit of Truth,

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn't see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–17)

Jesus' life and earthly ministry proved God's promise that he wants to dwell among us (Jn 1:14), proves Jesus' readiness to comfort us (Mt 9:22), his willingness to take on our suffering (Jn 18:3–8), and his grief over our sin and fallenness (Mt 23:37).

Indeed, the story of Lazarus demonstrated Jesus weeps for his friends, for it is written,

“Where have you put him?” he asked. “Lord,” they told him, “come and see.”
Jesus wept. (John 11:34–35)

The story of Noah demonstrated God weeps for humankind. The whole drama took place because

When the LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time, the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was deeply grieved. (Genesis 6:5–6)

Revealed in these and other instances described throughout the Bible, our Creator is grieved by what causes our grief. Is it really so hard to believe he would comfort us?

Mourning Makes Allowance

As the prophet wrote,

For the High and Exalted One, who lives forever, whose name is holy, says this: “I live in a high and holy place, and with the oppressed and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the oppressed. (Isaiah 57:15; cf. Isa 66:2.)

As uncomfortable as it truly is, godly grief creates the conditions in which we will be comforted.

Mourning allows the Holy Spirit to draw near and work within us our transformation.

Mourning removes guilt, for it is one thing to ask for forgiveness and another thing to know one needs forgiveness. Guilt leads to grief which leads to gladness.

This gladness is experienced especially when **mourning remembers grace**, as it is written,

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor, a lifetime. Weeping may stay overnight, but there is joy in the morning. (Psalm 30:5)

Conclusion

Recognise you are poor in spirit and that mourning the causes and effects of your fallenness and sin actually creates the opportunity and the conditions within you to remember God's grace. He will not treat you as your sin deserves, yet is ready to lavishly pour out his love into your life. Our sin is great but his grace is greater.

Jesus declared to be commended are those who are poor in spirit and those who mourn. Yes, this is quite at odds with the values of the world, which regards the joyful and prosperous as blessed. But this is a lie! The evidence of brokenness and alienation is all around us and deep within you.

A sad face is good for the heart. Let us mourn for the consequences of our sin that we might be freed from it finally and fully.

Endnotes

- 1 Dan Treacy, “How many people watched Super Bowl 57? Chiefs vs. Eagles draws third-highest viewership ever for a TV event”, *The Sporting News*, 15-Feb-2023, <https://replug.link/256a2a90> (accessed 15-Feb-2023).
- 2 Jessica Lea, “He Gets Us Super Bowl Ads About Jesus Spark More Controversy Than Rihanna’s Halftime Performance”, *Church Leaders*, 13-Feb-2023, <https://replug.link/ff62da80> (accessed 15-Feb-2023).
- 3 Carey Nieuwhof, “Bill McKendry on How to Build a Super Bowl Ad, The Marketing Mistakes Churches and Non-Profits Make, And How to Brand When You Have No Budget”, *The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast*, episode 549, <https://replug.link/9b414980> (accessed 15-Feb-2023).
- 4 “The Work: The simple delight of Cadbury’s boy on a bus”, *AdNews*, 11-Jan-2022, <https://replug.link/6aad3c40> (accessed 15-Feb-2023).
- 5 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 6 Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer* (Bellingham, WA, USA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), pg 17.
- 7 See Isa 30:10; 1Kg 22:8,13; Jr 6:14; 23:17,26; Ezk 13:8–16; Rm 16:18; 2Tm 4:3–4.
- 8 Quoted by Pink, pg 18.
- 9 See also Ps 40:12; 51:17; Is 57:18–21, 61:1–3; Jer 31:13; Rev 7:17, 21:4.
- 10 Pink, pg 20.
- 11 See Ps. 119:53; Jer. 13:17; 14:17; Ezek. 9:4.
- 12 Alok Jha, “Why crying babies are so hard to ignore”, *The Guardian*, 18-Oct-2012, <https://replug.link/c2f3ee10> (accessed 18-Feb-2023).
- 13 Pink, pg 19.