

# **Comfort for Mourners**

**Matthew 5:4**

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula  
preached at West University Church of Christ,  
Houston, Texas on April 3, 2011**

The second beatitude of Jesus sounds so untrue: “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.” This statement is a paradox, a truth standing on its head. It sounds as if Jesus is saying, “Blessed are the sad for they shall be happy,” or “Happy are the sad.” How can this be?

The world tells us, “Be happy. Don’t worry. Get all the gusto you can get. Avoid pain. Forget your troubles. Laugh, have fun, take a drink, go to the movies, the beach, Disney World. Get away from it all. Don’t be sad. Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone.”

The Bible says, “There is a time to laugh” (Eccl. 3:4). Proverbs says that “a merry heart does good like a medicine” (Prov. 17:22). But sometimes we may have overdosed on the medicine. Sometimes we are laughing when we should be crying. Maybe we are plastic Mona Lisas who are “amusing ourselves to death” (Neil Postman).

Jesus says something exactly opposite of the world’s philosophy. Why does he say this? What does he mean by it? Is it true that we are blessed if we mourn?

## **The Mourning That God Blesses**

We need to understand what Jesus is speaking about. There are different kinds of mourning. Some of you are mourning naturally over the loss of a loved one. Some are mourning over a disease that’s taking your life or the life of a loved one. Others are mourning because of some bad decisions that they have made. Others are mourning their financial distress, lack of money, or family problems. We that are older are mourning some of the problems in our children and grandchildren’s lives. These mourning are legitimate but they are not the mourning Jesus is speaking of here.

There are some kinds of mourning that God does not bless. Amnon mourned because his lust was not fulfilled by Tamar (2 Sam. 13:2). Ahab

mourned because he could not have Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21:4). "Criminals mourn their arrest; corrupt politicians mourn their loss of power. God does not comfort everyone who mourns for every reason" [Daniel M. Doriani, The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2006, p. 18].

This beatitude is closely tied to the first one: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This first beatitude is not referring to financial poverty, being poor-spirited, being a wimp, or lifeless, or pessimistic, or being depressed with low self-esteem. Last Sunday, we found that this first beatitude is referring to spiritual bankruptcy. It means that those who are in the kingdom of God are those that know that they are unworthy sinners and have nothing about themselves to commend themselves to God. Jesus is saying, "O the pure, inward spiritual delight of being approved by God because you recognize that God is everything and that you come before him empty and void and are filled by him." He means that you are God-contained, connected to God, and that you live with God and know God. This is an intellectual awareness of who you are before God.

This second beatitude picks up on the first one and makes the same statement from an emotional viewpoint. You see the sin in yourself and others so much so that you mourn or grieve over your and their sins.

This means that Jesus is saying, "God approves those who are emotionally touched and grieved by sin."

The question for us today is this, "Does this describe me? Does it describe you?" Are we grieving over sin in ourselves, in the church and in the world?

Sin is a reality. We are children of Adam and while we do not bear the guilt of Adam's fall we do bear the consequences of it. We are all born with a propensity for sin, for wrongdoing, for rebelling against authority. We want to do our own thing in our own way in our own time. As humans, we want to exercise our right to do things our way. We don't want anyone, not even God, telling us what to do. This gets us into all kinds of messes.

Look into your heart right now. If all of us will be honest, we know that we are sinners. We know we have made some big spiritual, moral, and relational blunders. If we are God's people, we grieve or mourn over these wrongdoings.

What do you do with your sins?

Let's look into the Bible and see what some have done with their sins. And we are just like them or we could be.

## The Story of Saul

I want us to compare the stories of King Saul of Israel and of David who succeeded Saul to the throne. These stories are found in our Old Testament books of I and II Samuel.

First, there's Saul. God did not want Israel to have a king because God was their king. Israel thought that they had to have a king to be like the nations around them. So God let them have a king. God let them have their own way. But God still loved Israel, his chosen people. So God selected the best possible candidate, Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was a humble man who was not campaigning for the job. He was a big, tall man who could command respect. After Saul was appointed, he began to wage war against Israel's enemies and he had some great successes. He was filled with the Spirit of the Lord and he began to prophesy. But soon after he was appointed, he acted impatiently when Samuel told him to wait. Saul would not wait until Samuel the priest arrived to offer a sacrifice to God. Saul went ahead and offered it himself. Now, Saul was king but he was not a priest. He had no right to lead worship before God. When Samuel arrived, Samuel strongly condemned his impetuous actions, and told him that because of that God rejected his dynasty which meant that his sons would not succeed him to the throne. Saul seemingly repented and said, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Saul continued his wars against Israel's enemies. Through Samuel, God told him to utterly destroy all the wicked Amalekites. The Amalekites had fought against Moses when he brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage. God was determined to exact retribution on them for their sins. Saul fought the Amalekites but he only partially did what God said. He allowed his soldiers to bring back some of the choice sheep and cattle and the riches of the Amalekites. Saul spared the life of King Agag of the Amalekites and brought him back in dishonor before Israel. God was very angry at King Saul for being disobedient. Saul thought that he had a better plan than God. Samuel spoke out against Saul and told him that obedience was better than sacrifice and to listen to God was better than animal sacrifices. Samuel then told Saul that now God was rejecting him from being king. In the first case of disobedience, God rejected Saul's dynasty. Now, God rejected Saul himself. Saul grieved before the Lord. He said, "I have sinned against God." It's interesting that no one in the Bible confessed that he had sinned more than Saul did, but as the story continues you will see that Saul's attitudes were more regret and remorse instead of genuine repentance.

The rest of Saul's story goes downhill in a hurry. When his own son, Jonathan, disobeyed a foolish order that his dad gave that the soldiers were not to eat anything on the days of battle, and Jonathan ate some honey for strength, then Saul tried to kill his own son. The young lad, David, had been brought into Saul's presence to play music to try to temper Saul's bad disposition. Saul's army was in a stalemate fighting the Philistines and the 9 foot, 6 inch Goliath had challenged anyone in Israel to fight him with a winner-take-all challenge. David stepped forward to take on the giant. God gave David, using a sling and a single stone, a great victory that day. The people praised David. He became a leader in Saul's army. God gave David great victories. When David returned from the battlefields, the people sang, "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." This aroused Saul's jealousy. His young lieutenant was getting more praise and glory than he was. On two occasions Saul tried to kill David. Saul sent David into war with an almost impossible demand and hoped that the enemy would kill him. The Spirit of the Lord had left Saul. He was a troubled sinner, totally withdrawn, living for himself. God was not communicating with him. Samuel had died and Saul had no word from God. Saul was facing a formidable foe in the Philistines without any divine help. He was desperate enough to seek out a fortune teller, actually a woman who tried to bring messages from the dead, to give him information about the future. The next day Saul's army was greatly defeated by the Philistines. His sons, including Jonathan, were killed and Saul committed suicide by falling on his own sword.

What do you make of Saul? He said, "I have sinned," more times than anybody in the Bible, yet did he really mean it? He excused his sins, he blamed others, he turned against his family when they disagreed with him, he chased David for ten years trying to kill him, he sought out help from a woman who worked for Satan, he was responsible for the death of thousands of his own army, including his three sons, and he died miserably, alone and without God on the battlefield, having taken his own life. That's the way that Saul dealt with sin.

Many people deal with sin the same way today. We make excuses, we blame others, we have a better idea than God, we want what we want when we want it, we are jealous and envious of others, we defend ourselves, we say that we have sinned but we don't really mourn over our sins, and we don't turn from them. We end up a miserable, total wreck, a spiritual and moral mess that ends in spiritual death and can even lead to physical death. That's us: The human being who will not listen to God. There is some of Saul in all of us.

You may look at Saul today and say, “Oh, Lord, that is not me.” It’s not? The very fact that you say it is not you says that it very well may be you. Jesus says that we should mourn over our sins. If we don’t see ourselves in Saul, then perhaps we are not mourning. We are objecting, we are stressing our own moral superiority, we are saying that we are better. But are we, really? We are made out of the same kind of clay and have the same selfish and sinful ambitions that Saul had.

On his television show, *60 Minutes*, Mike Wallace interviewed Auschwitz survivor Yehiel Dinur, a principal witness at the Nuremberg war-crime trials. In 1961, Adolph Eichmann, who as a Nazi army officer had sent countless thousands to their deaths, was captured and brought to trial. At the trial Dinur entered the courtroom and came face to face with Eichmann. He had never before seen Eichmann but Eichmann was responsible for sending him to the prison camp at Auschwitz nearly twenty years before. Stopped cold when he met Eichmann face to face, Dinur began to weep uncontrollably. He then fainted as the judge pounded the gavel for order.

Wallace asked Dinur why he wept and fainted. “Was it because he was overcome by hatred? by fear? by horrid memories?” “No, it was none of those things,” answered Dinur. Rather, Dinur explained to Wallace, it was at that moment that all at once he realized that Eichmann was not the godlike army officer who had sent so many to their deaths. This Eichmann was an ordinary man. “I was afraid about myself,” said Dinur. “I saw that I am capable to do this. I am. . . exactly like him.”

Dinur’s terrible discovery is that “Eichmann is all of us.” This is a horrifying statement but it captures the central truth about us. As a result of the fall, sin is in us, and all of us as sinners are capable of anything, of any sin.

[This story is in Charles Colson, Who Speaks for God? Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985, pp. 136-7].

We are all Eichmann. We are all Saul.

## **The Story of David**

Now let’s turn to a different story: The story of a man who knew what it was to mourn over his sin. I am talking about Saul’s counterpart, David. David was not a perfect man but he was a God-fearing man who when he sinned he turned to the Lord in mourning and contrition. At first

David exhibited some of the same attitudes as Saul but he later repented and sought the Lord in earnestness and sincerity.

After Saul's death, David became king. As king, he accumulated power, glory, prestige, and honor. He married several women and had a large family. When David was about fifty years old, one evening he was on the flat roof of his house overlooking the city of Jerusalem. He saw a beautiful woman taking a bath on her rooftop a few houses over and at a lower level. David's first look was accidental; the second was intentional, and so were the third, fourth and fifth looks. He liked what he saw. He wanted her. He knew she was married to one of his captains, but he wanted her anyway. Through his servants he invited her to visit him in his private chambers. What David and Bathsheba did was sin before God. It was adultery because Bathsheba was another's man's wife. According to the Law of Moses, both parties should be killed. Adultery devastates marriages and destroys families. That one night of fun proved very costly. From their union, Bathsheba soon announced that she was pregnant. The father could not have been Uriah because he had been away for months fighting in David's army. In the meantime, David was resting at home playing with Uriah's wife. David tried to cover up his sin by bringing Uriah home on a weekend furlough. David excused Uriah's visit by claiming he wanted a report on how things were going on the battlefield. We humans can think of all kinds of things, can't we, to excuse and cover up our sins?

Uriah refused to visit his wife because all the other men fighting out there in the trenches did not have the same opportunity with their wives. Uriah is a man of honor, of integrity, and of loyalty. Even after David got him drunk in a party, Uriah still slept with the horses and would not go to his own house. So David had to do something drastic. He sent a death message by Uriah to take to his commander, Joab. This message gave Joab instructions on how to have Uriah killed in battle by having Uriah advance and then all the other soldiers desert him to fight the enemy alone. He would certainly be killed. And he was. Soon afterward David took the grieving widow to become his wife. David thought his sins were covered.

God knew all along about this hanky-panky and he was not going to let it pass, not even for the king. About a year after the sinful rendezvous, God sent Nathan the prophet to David. Nathan exposed David's sin. David was devastated. All along he was afraid the truth would come out, and when it did, it hit him heavily.

We believe this is the time that he wrote Psalms 32 and 51. Hear what he said in Psalm 51 [Read verses 1-12]. Then let's turn to Psalm 32 and read verses one through five [read them].

David mourned over his sin. He repented toward God. His sin was costly. All sin is costly. Sin is expensive. It carries a price tag, and that price tag is death. “The wages of sin is death” unless we repent and turn to God. Jesus said, “Unless you repent you shall perish” (Luke 13:3). The Bible says that previous to the coming of Jesus God allowed some sins to go unpunished for a while because he knew he would be sending a savior into the world. But now that Jesus has come and died on the cross for our sins, then “God commands all men everywhere to repent because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30-31). Real, genuine godly sorrow (mourning) produces repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

Do you see now why Jesus said, “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted”? If we do not mourn, it means that we have not repented, and if we have not repented, we will be separated from God forever because of our sins. Mourning is good because it is a sign of spiritual awareness of our own depravity. Only those that mourn can be comforted.

The Christian life then is not all bubbly and boisterous. We need to realize the depth and depravity of sin in order to appreciate the goodness and grace of God. The apostle Paul felt the weight of his sinful condition. He wrote, “The good I would do, I don’t do. The evil I would not do, that I do. O wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He found the answer in Jesus. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:15, 19, 24-25). He lived his life aware of his sin and of the goodness and greatness of God (I Tim. 1:13-15).

## **The Comfort That God Gives**

How are mourners comforted?

The word “comfort” comes from two Latin words that mean “with strength.” The root word is *forte* and from that word we get “fortify” and “fortress.” God gives strength to those who mourn.

**First, we are comforted in that God forgives us.** David rejoiced when the nagging guilt of sin was lifted off his back. When David came clean with God, God cleansed him. Hidden sin is like a thousand-pound weight that we carry around in our gut and it hurts. It hurts us emotionally, relationally, physically and spiritually. We want relief and, “Oh what a relief it is,” when we come to Christ and let him save us. The only hope for sinners is the forgiveness that God supplies. The Bible speaks of this new

beginning as a new birth, a new creature in Christ. There is comfort in mourning because the pain, guilt and presence of sin are forgiven, relieved and destroyed. Once again, we too, enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit and of a peaceful communion and relationship with God. We have new life. It is as though we have returned from the dead.

The prodigal son experienced this new life. He demands his inheritance from his father. The father grants the son's selfish wish and the son says good-bye to home and family and seeks out to make it on his own. He goes to the far country and spends his money on wine, women and song. Soon his money is gone and his wine, women and song are gone, too. He's got to live so he applies for all kinds of jobs but the only job a good, Jewish kid can get is working for a Gentile farmer feeding unclean pigs. He is slopping pigs. He begins to think about home. He remembers his family and his father and their good times and the joys of being at home with love and joy. In the middle of the pig pen, he repents of his life. He says, "I want to go home to my father. I've wasted my life. I'm not worth anything anymore. I have nothing to offer but I will work for dad as a laborer. That job would be far better than this stinking pig sty." So the young man heads home. He has mourned over his sin and his losses. He recognizes something better. He wants to go home and serve his dad the rest of his life.

Dad has not forgotten the boy. Dad has thought about him every day he's been gone. Dad has been watching the road hoping that someday he will see the figure of a boy coming home. One day, dad sees a figure in the distance. Could it be him? The closer the figure gets, the more it looks like his lost son. Yes, it is him. Dad runs to meet him. Dad hugs him and kisses him. The boy starts his memorized speech, "Dad, I have sinned. I am not worthy to be your son . . ." Dad interrupts the speech with his kisses and his shouts to his servants, "Quick, bring the best robe for my son, put shoes on his feet, and put a ring on his finger. Kill the fatted calf. My son is home. He once was lost, but now he found. He was dead, but now he is alive."

That's the joy of God every time a sinner repents. God throws a big party in heaven over one sinner that repents. The son, once more, enjoyed the blessings and comfort of the father's house. He was loved and accepted. There's great comfort in being back home where we belong in our Father's house.

**Second, we are comforted by the Scriptures, the word of God, the Bible that encourages us.** Here we find the will of God. We read great stories of the faith. We gain confidence and strength from reading what God has done, is doing and will do for his people.

**Third, we are comforted by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.** The Lord's Spirit strengthens and refreshes us. He "binds up the brokenhearted" (Isa. 61:1). God's Spirit is the divine "comforter" (John 14:26).

**Fourth, we are comforted by the presence of others.** God comforts us through the fellowship of his church. Here we find friends, people who really care, people who build us up, who pray for and with us, and stand by us, no matter what. Even the apostle Paul writes that he was refreshed, strengthened and comforted by other people in his life (2 Cor. 7:4). God comforts us so that we can comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4).

**Fifth, we will be ultimately and eternally comforted in the land of fadeless day where our God will wipe away all tears from our eyes (Rev. 7:17; 21:4).**

This comfort is only for those who mourn, for those who return to God. The Bible says, "There is no peace for the wicked" (Isa. 48:22). There is no comfort for those without God. Those who do not mourn over their sins and repent and turn to God will forever mourn. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Jesus said, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep" (Lk. 6:25). According to Jesus, the ultimate, eternal end of those who die without God is a place of "eternal darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12).

God loves you. He wants you to turn to him. He wants you so badly he gave his one and only spiritual son to die on the cross for you. He wants to rejoice over your repentance. He wants to throw a party for your homecoming.

The good news is that today is the day of salvation. If you know that God loves you, that Jesus is the son of God and that he is Lord and savior, and that he died for your sins and the God raised him from the dead, and that he is coming again and holds us now accountable for our lives, then you know enough today to surrender to the Lord and come home to the Father's house.

"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." There's no comfort like the comfort that God gives.

We have everything ready now for anyone to be baptized into Christ. You can be united with the death and resurrection of Christ by your personal faith and obedience. Also, anyone else who desires to know God better is invited to come and let us help you now. Whosoever will may come, while we stand and sing.

-cwarpula@westchurch.com