

Sunday, October 4, 2020 | Kingdom Manifesto

Part 2 | Matthew 5:4 | Mourning Before Comfort

Last week we kicked off 'Kingdom Manifesto'. The whole idea driving this series is that Jesus, at the beginning of his earthly ministry, laid out before his followers in no uncertain terms the *characteristics* of the Kingdom of Heaven. These were features of the kingdom not requirements for entry into the kingdom. In other words, they were not "how to's" but rather "now that's". Furthermore, Jesus was not vying for political office. He was already King. He was simply relaying the principles of this invading kingdom in the clearest possible way. He wanted to make God's perspective—what characteristics He thinks are blessed—on life *manifest* to us.

To begin his manifesto, Jesus said that the "poor in spirit" are blessed by God. And though the masses heard him teach, Jesus was primarily speaking to his disciples. He wanted them to understand that a relationship with him begins by acknowledging their *spiritually* poverty.

We are not to come before him bringing our "riches" as if we stand on equal footing. No. We are to come as beggars hoping for something—anything—that would get us through the day. In fact, the truly remarkable thing about doing this is that God not only fills our belly but He also gives us a place at *His* table. He makes us heirs of a kingdom though we had no claim to it previously. Paupers *literally* become princes in God's Kingdom. Therefore, we must become poor in ourselves before we can become rich in God.

Now, today, we'll be breaking down the second characteristic of Kingdom citizens. But before we do, as you know, Jesus structured the Beatitudes in such a way that makes memorization a priority. Because of this, I feel it would be wise if we were to read through this passage every Sunday until we're done with this series. In this way, you'll be able to memorize it, as well as, grow in your understanding of it as we go along. Hopefully you'll start connecting dots that you wouldn't have been able to otherwise. And ultimately, you'll be able to color the world through the lens of this Kingdom Manifesto.

READ: Matthew 5:1-12 (NKJV)

¹ And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,

For they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed *are* the meek,

For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

For they shall be filled.

⁷ Blessed *are* the merciful,

For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ Blessed *are* the pure in heart,

For they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed *are* the peacemakers,

For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus says, "Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." As he did with the blessed are the poor in spirit statement, Jesus is reversing a common assumption. We would never say that those in mourning are blessed. Instead, we are to pity those who mourn, we're supposed to try and alleviate the pain of those who mourn. We are not supposed to consider them to be fortunate. So, why would Jesus call them blessed?

Well, before we can answer that, we must understand what Jesus is NOT saying. He is *not* implying that those who are in a state of mourning (say in the event that a loved one has passed) are not really in an unfortunate situation. He's not telling us to feel blessed when we mourn over the state our country. Jesus isn't telling parents to feel blessed when their children are being rebellious. No. He is not discounting the legitimate feelings we experience during unpleasant situations. That would be utter nonsense!¹

In fact, in Romans 12, Paul is admonishing believers to behave like Christians. He goes through characteristic after characteristic describing how Christians are *supposed* to act. Then, in verse 15, he says that we are to, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." Meaning that the Christian is instructed to both weep when it is appropriate and rejoice when it is appropriate. To fail in this regard is to act

¹ France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2007), p. 165.

inappropriately. Truly, should a Christian fail to act in this way they would prove how very unchristian they are. So, no. Jesus is *NOT* telling us to feel blessed in situations where it far more apt to feel sad and to mourn.

So, if he's not saying that, what is Jesus saying?

Remember, the beatitudes are *spiritually* focused. Just as *spiritual* poverty was the focus of last week, so too is *spiritual* mourning in focus today. Part of our confusion in understanding this is that we do not think of this kind of mourning in the same way that Jesus does. In fact, we call it by another name altogether. Even though Jesus is calling it mourning, he is actually referring to *repentance*.² In other words, **spiritual mourning is spiritual repentance**. Repentance is what occurs the moment we acknowledge our sin and we feel the weight of our transgressions. The result of that acknowledgement is that we then to turn back to God and ask for forgiveness.

Now, there are two things we ought to mourn over:

i. **Mourning over our personal sins.**

This kind of mourning is when we feel the weight of our own sins.

This is the kind of repentance that takes place when we awaken to a startling reality: *that our fallen state is a result of our fallen actions and our fallen actions are a result of our fallen state*. We live right in the middle of that vicious cycle. Remember, sin is not the measure of how bad you are but it is the measure of how good you are not. It is not another's fault; it is our own fault. We alone have sinned before God and are *rightly* condemned because of it. When we come to this realization, the only acceptable reaction is to mourn.

In fact, King David knew this all too well.

READ: Psalm 51:1-5 (NKJV)

¹ Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, *and* blameless

² Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 150.

when You judge. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

He goes on in verse 17 to say that, “God is near to the broken hearted.” There is a comfort promised to those who mourn spiritually. Should we feel like he is far away may we remember that the more broken we are over our own sins the nearer he is.³ But more on that later.

The irony, of course, is that David had also sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, and their whole family. One could even argue that David sinned against the entire nation of Israel as well for abusing his power and failing to execute the office as he was expected to. Anyone with two eyes and brain could see that David abused his power and his influence. Had he been president today, he would’ve been rightfully impeached. God wasn’t the only one who deserved an apology. However, sin must first be made right in God’s eyes before it can be addressed in man’s eyes. We must come to God and deal with our guilt with Him before we come to man and confess the sins we’ve committed against them.

ii. Mourning over our collective sins.

This kind of mourning is when we feel the weight of the world’s sins.

This sort of contrition is both sobering and enlightening. To mourn in this way leads one to view the world as it truly is: *broken*.

How many of us go through this life oblivious to the plight of others? How many of us do not see the destitute outcast outside our doors because we are too deep within our rich delirium? How many of us mourn over the loss of our bank account but never shed a tear over the spiritual bankruptcy of our world?

READ: Psalm 119:136 (NKJV)

Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because *men* do not keep Your law.

As much as this may sound counterintuitive, we are, all of us, living in an earth-sized funeral parlor. This world is damaged. It malfunctions on a deep, deep level. And no one wants to avoid unpleasant feelings other than me, but even I must acknowledge the utterly fallen and seemingly irretrievable state of mankind. Failing to do so means walking through this world

³ Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1999), p 170.

blind to the true reality of it. When John the Baptist came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand”, he did not expect to hear shouts of joy but cries of contrition.⁴

EXAMPLE: Laughing at a funeral.

In thinking about mourning over the sins of others, my mind cannot help but recall Daniel’s prayer of repentance on behalf of Israel in Daniel 9. Though he, himself, lived an upstanding and entirely blameless life, he took responsibility for the sins of his people. He, of all people, mourned over the collective sins of his own people.

READ: Daniel 9:16-19 (NKJV)

¹⁶ “O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us. ¹⁷ Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord’s sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. ¹⁸ O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

Our memories are short and our passions are strong. We are wayward souls who need to be reminded of our waywardness. We are like ships with broken rudders in constant need of repair.

This ought to position our hearts and minds in such a way that does not leave us depressed. If you were traveling the wrong way down the road you would not simply pull the car over and forever wallow in your wrongness. No. You’d do a U-turn and head back the way you came and find where you made the wrong turn. Meaning this sobering mindset ought to lead us to repentance and restarting of our lives. Yes, we ought to feel the weight of condemnation in our fallen state but with those feelings of contrition ought to also come with feelings of relief because we are redeemed. We’re finally on the road we should be when we repent and turn the way God wants us to go.

SO, WHAT’S THE TAKEAWAY?

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Carson, D.A., *Matthew*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew & Mark, Revised Edition, General Editors Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 163.

Why should we mourn? What's the point? Why would I tell you to repent? Because, **mourning now leads to comfort later.**

READ: 1 Jn. 1:5-10 (NKJV)

⁵This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Just as the Kingdom is freely offered to those who are poor in spirit, comfort is willingly given away to those who acknowledge their sin and turn back to God. Or, as John just put it, should we confess, God will forgive, and He will indeed cleanse.

Word Nerd Segment:

In fact, the Greek word used here for “comfort” is **παρακαλέω** (pa-ra-ka-l-eh'-o). It carries with it the full meaning of the word *encouragement*.⁵ The idea being that someone is lacking strength or direction and so an individual *fixes* and *sends* them towards a better goal (cf. Heb. 10:25). In other words, it's the kind of **encouragement that restores and redirects**. In this case, someone is mourning over their spiritual state and it is God who then turns to comfort them.

Isaiah the prophet talking about the salvation of the Lord says this very thing:

READ: Isaiah 61:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ “The Spirit of the Lord God *is* upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; ²To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, ³To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of

⁵ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1992), p. 97.

joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

I like how commentator R.T. France sums up this point, “For those who, as God’s people, find their current situation intolerable and incomprehensible, there are better times ahead...[However, while] there will be times of rejoicing, their situation in the world is generally one of disadvantage and therefore of mourning.”⁶ Meaning, mourning in this world is unavoidable. But rejoicing is likewise inevitable.

Essentially, this is the point that Jesus is making in John 16:33.

READ: John 16:33 (NKJV)

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation [you will mourn]; but be of good cheer [be comforted], I have overcome the world.

In fact, did you know? There is a day coming in which all of our mourning will be turned to rejoicing. All will be comforted in the New Heaven and New Earth.

READ: Revelation 21:1-4 (NKJV)

¹ Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

So, what’s the takeaway?

Mourning now leads to comfort later.

For those who mourn today, Jesus promises to forgive our transgressions (cf. Col. 2:14). When this occurs, he also gives us the promise that someday all pain will be utterly forgotten. Meaning, just as Jesus wipes away our *sins* today, He will also wipe away even our own *sorrow* in the end.

⁶ France (2007), p. 166.

This is why Jesus can say that blessed are those who spiritually mourn. Blessed are the ones who are repentant, penitent, and contrite over their fallen state. Because it is only to *them* that true and everlasting comfort will ultimately be given. And in the end, when the last tear has fallen, God himself will wipe it away. The time of a painless age is coming. But only those who mourn today will enjoy its' eternal bliss tomorrow.