

“COMFORT FOR MOURNERS”

I. Introduction

- A. We noted last week in our first sermon in this series that the Beatitudes are a summary of basic Christian character.
1. They are the traits that set Christians apart from their non-Christian neighbors.
 2. This is especially evident with the second Beatitude, where Jesus says that those who mourn are blessed by God.
 3. Such a notion is counter-intuitive to the people of the world.
 4. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it, “The one thing the world tries to shun is mourning; its whole organization is based on the supposition that that is something to avoid. The philosophy of the world is, Forget your troubles, turn your back upon them, do everything you can not to face them.” [53]
 5. One of the places where you see this so clearly these days is at funerals and memorial services.
 6. Most of the people who attend such services do not want to mourn.
 7. Typically, they are only interested in either celebrating the life of the deceased or putting themselves in the spotlight for a few moments.
 8. The last thing that people want to think about when they attend a funeral these days is the undeniable reality of death.
- B. The second Beatitude exposes the folly of this mindset.
1. It faces up to the fact that there is something profoundly wrong with the world in which we are living.

2. It tells us that there is something profoundly wrong with us.
3. And it tells us that it is only those who face up to this wrongness and mourn over it who will receive the comfort that is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

II. The Nature of Godly Grief

- A. Jesus is not offering a general kind of comfort to all who mourn in this verse.
 1. He is not saying something superficial like 'This too shall pass' or 'Time heals all wounds.'
 2. He is not speaking about bereavement but about mourning over sin.
 3. This is clear when we remember that this sermon was addressed to the disciples.
 4. The type of sorrow that Jesus is talking about in this verse is the sorrow of repentance.
- B. Repentance is the product of something that the apostle Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 7 as "godly grief."
 1. In that chapter, Paul distinguishes this "godly grief" from "worldly grief."
 2. He writes, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." (2 Cor. 7:10)
 3. This tells us that a person can be grieved over the consequences of sin without being grieved over sin itself.
 4. The writer of Hebrews points out how this was the case with Esau, "who sold his birthright for a single meal" and "afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was

rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears." (Heb. 12:17)

- C. Godly grief is something that God produces within us by opening our eyes to the sinfulness of sin and the greatness of his grace.
1. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." [WSC 87]
 2. Notice that the Catechism calls repentance "a saving grace."
 3. It is not something that we can produce.
 4. It is the result of God's grace at work in our hearts.
 5. True sorrow for sin only comes after a person is convinced of God's love for him in Christ.
 6. This is why Jesus says that those who mourn are blessed by God.
 7. God is the One who enables us to mourn over our sin.
 8. As Edward Fisher writes in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*: "when faith has bathed a man's heart in the blood of Christ, it is so [relieved] that it quickly dissolves into tears of godly sorrow; so that if Christ do but turn at look upon him, oh then, with Peter, he goes out and weeps bitterly! And this is true gospel-mourning; and this is right evangelical repenting." [205]
- D. As Christians, we should mourn over our own sins.
1. This is what Paul is doing in Romans 7 when he says, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24)

2. The Christian does not excuse or ignore his sin.
 3. He does not try to minimize his sin by comparing himself to others who are worse than him.
 4. Instead, he admits his sin and grieves over the fact that he has offended his Lord and Savior.
 5. It is a good practice to take some time at the end of each day to reflect back and consider your sins so that you can confess them before God.
 6. Think about the things that you have done that you should not have done, whether in thought, word or deed.
 7. Think about the things that you have failed to do that you should have done.
 8. Ask God to help you in bringing your particular sins to mind so that you can repent of them particularly.
 9. Pray the prayer that David prayed at the end of Psalm 139: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (vv. 23-24)
- E. We should also mourn over the church's sins.
1. We see the prophet Daniel doing this in chapter 9 of his book of prophecy.
 2. When Daniel looked upon the dreadful consequences that sin had brought upon the covenant people, he confessed Israel's sins to the Lord.
 3. Commentator D.A. Carson points out that the same thing took place in the first century among God's people, noting that "The godly remnant of Jesus' day weeps because of the

humiliation of Israel, but they understand that it comes from personal and corporate sins." [133]

4. There is a lot that is wrong with the church in our day.
 5. There is a lot of compromise, a lot of disobedience, a lot of worldliness, a lot of apathy.
 6. It is tempting for us to look at these things and become frustrated or disillusioned.
 7. It is tempting for us to measure ourselves against the failings of other professing Christians and think that we have something to be proud of.
 8. But that is not a biblical way to respond to the church's failings.
 9. We should mourn over such things.
- F. It is also proper for us to mourn over the sins of non-Christians and the evil that we see in the world today.
1. We should be like the psalmist when he said, "My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law." (Ps. 119:136)
 2. We know the reason why the world is in such a messed up state.
 3. When we see families being torn apart, when we see nations being destroyed by war, when we see people in bondage to various forms of addiction -- we know that these and all of the other ills in the world are due to man's rebellion against God.
 4. It should break our heart to see God's good creation ruined by man's sin.

III. The Reasons for Godly Grief

- A. I want to turn now to consider three reasons why we should mourn over sin.
1. First, we should mourn in response to the misery that is produced by sin.
 2. Our Lord does not want us to pretend that everything is alright with the world.
 3. He doesn't want us to give ourselves over to escapist pursuits and numb ourselves to the sad aspects of life in this fallen world.
 4. Jesus was described by Isaiah as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isa. 53:3)
 5. Jesus came into the world to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows by bearing the curse that resulted from our sin.
 6. We cannot bear griefs and sorrows in the sense that Jesus did, but the Scriptures do tell us to "Bear one another's burdens." (Gal. 6:2)
 7. The devastation that sin has caused in this world broke our Lord's heart, and it should break our hearts as well.
- B. The second reason why we should mourn over sin is because of the judgment that is coming into the world on account of it.
1. The biblical accounts of the day of judgment paint a dreadful picture.
 2. Jesus said, "For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." (Mt. 24:37-39)

3. Paul tells us that when Jesus returns he will inflict “vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might.” (2 Thess. 1:8-9)
 4. And the book of Revelation says that at his Second Coming Jesus will appear as a rider on a white horse who will use his sword to “strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.” (Rev. 19:15)
 5. Though we will rejoice on that day because of the vindication of God’s justice, it is right for us to mourn now as we consider the wages that will invariably be paid out for the sins of the world.
- C. The third and most important reason why we should mourn over sin is because it is an offense against God and his holiness.
1. This is what we see David doing in Psalm 51, where he mourns over his sin of committing adultery with Bathsheba.
 2. As he confesses his sin, he says to the Lord, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” (v. 4)
 3. In saying this, David was not denying the fact that he had sinned against Uriah, and Bathsheba, and the people he ruled.
 4. He was simply acknowledging that all sin is ultimately an offense against God.
 5. The fact that this is true does not make light of the harm that our sin does to other people.
 6. On the contrary, it heightens it.

7. The sins that we commit are never merely against our fellow creatures.
8. Every sin that you and I commit is a sin against holy God.
9. True repentance is always marked by this realization.
10. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith describes repentance unto life by saying that “By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.” [WCF 15.2]

IV. Our Only Comfort

- A. This brings us to the second part of this Beatitude, where Jesus describes the reward that awaits those who mourn over sin.
 1. He says that those who mourn “shall be comforted.”
 2. The first thing to note about this comfort is that it is a spiritual comfort.
 3. If the mourning that Jesus is talking about here is mourning over sin, then the consolation that he is talking about must be consolation for sin and its consequences.
 4. Such consolation can only be found in Christ, because he came into the world to put an end to sin.
 5. This is why the old man Simeon, in Luke 2, was described as one who was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” (Lk. 2:25)
 6. Simeon knew that Israel’s consolation was only to be found in the coming of the Messiah.

7. This is also why the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism begins by saying that the Christian's only comfort in life and in death is "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ."
 8. The comfort that Jesus promises us in this Beatitude is the comfort that was prophesied by Isaiah when he described the Christ as one who would "bring good news to the poor" and "bind up the brokenhearted" and "comfort all who mourn" and "grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit." (Isa. 61:1, 3)
 9. This is the comfort that will be consummated in the new creation, when "God will wipe away every tear from [his people's] eyes." (Rev. 7:17)
- B. As Jesus announces this comfort in this Beatitude, he describes it as a future comfort: we "shall be comforted."
1. This teaches us to fix our hope upon things above, not on the things of this world.
 2. The comfort that Christ extends to his people is heavenly in nature.
 3. As John Calvin explains, "everything which is earthly, and of the world, is temporary, and soon fades away. Christ, therefore, to raise our hope to the heavens, declares that his kingdom is not of this world... let each of us, when he hears that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, be roused by the thought to entertain the hope of a better life." [*Institutes*, 2.15.3]
 4. Because this present world has been ruined by sin, true comfort can only be found in the world to come.

- C. While it is true that the new creation is the only place where we will experience perfect comfort in its fullest sense, this does not mean that we do not experience this comfort at all in this life.
1. In fact, the word that is translated as “comfort” in this passage shares the same root as the name that Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit’s ministry in the lives of his people.
 2. The Spirit is “the Comforter.”
 3. By coming to us and sealing us for the day of redemption, the Spirit comforts us in this present age with heavenly comfort.
 4. He assures us that, no matter what happens to us in this life, Christ has made satisfaction for our sin and we have an eternal inheritance in a kingdom where there will be neither “mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.” (Rev. 21:4)

V. Conclusion

- A. In Romans 8, Paul says that “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”
- B. Listen to Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ comments upon that verse: “In other words, as the Christian looks at the world, and even as he looks at himself, he is unhappy. He groans in spirit; he knows something of the burden of sin as seen in the world which was felt by the apostles and by the Lord Himself. But he is immediately comforted. He knows there is a glory coming; he knows that a day will dawn when Christ will return, and sin will be banished from the earth.” [61]
- C. That is your hope if you are a Christian, and it is a hope that only belongs to the Christian.
- D. For there is no hope for this world, no true comfort, apart from Jesus Christ.

- E. But in Christ we find a comfort that is so profound that it prompted Paul to say this: “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Rom. 8:18)