

A VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst



Lecture #4

Blessed Are They that Mourn



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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The Beatitudes

10 Lectures

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

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The Beatitudes

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Lecture #4

Blessed Are They That Mourn

Dear friends, I may welcome you to this fourth section of the study of the Beatitudes. As we've seen in the previous sections, Jesus' teaching is both profound yet simple. It is searching and yet comforting. Let's continue to seek the Lord's blessing on this portion of Scripture in our own hearts and lives.

The question I want to begin with is the question that Jesus actually ends the sermon with. What is a real Christian, and am I one of those? Now obviously that question implies that there are Christians that aren't real. That is definitely Jesus' own teaching at the end of this Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7. It's not an isolated fact either. No, listen to how Jesus speaks in Matthew 7:22, and He states a startling truth, a surprising truth. He says there in verse 22, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess"—Jesus speaking—"unto them, I never knew you." No relationship between you and me. That's what it is. "Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." That's a solemn conclusion. We must conclude from that, that knowing Christian truth, and teaching Christian lectures, or being involved in Christian ministry are not the ultimate litmus test of being a genuine Christian.

So then, where do we go to answer this searching question? The answer is back to the beginning of the sermon, Matthew 5:3–9, in which Jesus describes the answer in the Beatitude man. In that portion of Scripture, Jesus defines a true Christian, not by the amount of knowledge he has, but by the experiential knowledge or awareness of Biblical truth a person has in his or her own life. Now what do I mean with an experiential knowledge or awareness? That is when the heart and the true facts of God's truth, as given in both law and Gospel, affect us. They do something to us. They humble our heart. They change the direction of our life when they inspire different choices or stir up to unnatural action. An example of experiential awareness is what our children learn when they still touch the hot surface of the stove that you warned them not to touch. After that experiential touch, they have experiential knowledge of what *hot* means, and that will influence their choice, their action. I hold the view that, in the Beatitudes, God has given us the simplest, the clearest, the most searching, and yet also the most comforting answer on our question of what is now a real Christian. The Beatitudes, dear friends, is like a spiritual anatomy of the born-again soul or the regenerated heart.

After this introduction, let's now take a closer look at the second Beatitude under the same two headings as we looked at the first. What is the mourning that Jesus considers blessed—"Blessed are they that mourn"? Secondly, why are such mourners blessed – "for they shall be comforted?" "Blessed are they that mourn." What is this blessed mourning? Don't you see that Jesus' second Beatitude stands again completely perpendicular to how we think or how we feel? We would

call them that are happy, that are joyful, that are laughing, that are having a feast—we call them blessed. Generally, we like to shy away from sadness and mourning and grief, though Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:2, “It is better to go to the house of mourning”—to the funeral home. Let’s be honest, who likes funerals? Our Lord Jesus has no problem stating a startling truth in Luke 6:26, that is kind of connected to this Beatitude. He says, instead of blessed, “*woe* unto you that laugh now”—that are only thinking about the laughing—“for you shall mourn and weep.” Over against that stands these words of our second Beatitude, “Blessed are they that mourn.”

So that is why I’m asking that we think about this—what does Jesus mean in calling the mourners blessed? He’s not talking about the mourning and grief we feel when a loved one dies, or when our business goes bankrupt, or when I fail an important exam, or miss a beautiful opportunity. To be sad and to be grieving in such a case is, of course, totally normal and acceptable, but not a reason to call anyone blessed. Would you ever think of writing a card with the words—“Wow, what a blessed person you are for having lost your business or your spouse!” You wouldn’t ever think of saying something like that. Jesus is also not talking about the mourning and the grief that we sense when our pride gets hurt, when we make a total fool of ourselves, or when you get exposed about dishonesty or theft. That is also grief. That’s also a mourning; but that sadness is biblically called *worldly sorrow* and, according to 2 Corinthians 7:10, ends up in loss or in more death. It simply will not bless us if we don’t repent and return from the actions that may have caused that particular loss. No, Jesus is talking about a different mourning, friends. He’s talking about a mourning that flows from that first Beatitude, that flows from a discovery when we are spiritually destitute in the sight of God, to be and to do what we are meant to do and to be. This discovery of our spiritual condition, as spiritually lost or destitute or bankrupt, kindles a mourning or a grieving of the heart about that very reality. We will feel sadness when we see how we have dishonored God, how we have offended Him. Once we begin to realize how we have ruined His beautiful creation and are continuing to do that in ourselves and in our world, we will feel sad, and we notice that we don’t reach the mark for which we were created—to glorify Him, to praise Him, to serve Him. We will grieve when you begin to discover that everything you do is tinged with this self-idolatry. Pride enters so much in everything we do, it’s about I, me, and myself, so often. Seeing also how maybe our actions, or our words, or our attitudes offend, or pain, or wound others, now that brings grief, that brings a sorrow over the sin, over the wrong that is in it. Sin always hurts us in three ways. It first hurts ourselves. It hurts others. Above all, it hurts God, and it is this last aspect particularly, when we sin against a good-doing, wonderful, a lovely, a tender, compassionate and almighty God, that is where this mourning is most felt. This is the mourning in which you see the weeping or the tears of love.

I know there’s also in our Scripture that he’s talking about mourning rather than weeping. We all weep at times. How many of us have not gone to funerals where we are moved to weep as we see the loss of others and we share their loss to a certain extent. These are emotional tears that we share with them. Let’s be honest, they disappear rather quickly. After we have gone away from the funeral and from that scene, we move on. Who don’t move on? That’s the ones who go home to the empty home, who face the empty place, now that is when weeping becomes mourning. Now those who have buried a loved one miss their loved one, they mourn. So I always say that mourning usually begins when weeping stops, and that it becomes a condition in which you, in a person, grieve over a loss.

So that is our next question. What is then the ultimate cause of this ongoing mourning? “Blessed are they that mourn” is ongoing, and what is that? It is that constant discovery, that in me there is much that is not good. There are sins or sinfulness in a spiritually bankrupt condition that I face in various ways in my life, in my daily walk. This realization brings sorrow, that brings a sadness, that brings a grief, that brings a mourning. You go to the Bible, you find in Romans chapter 7 a man that I consider holy and good and sacrificial and a model of godliness. Yet he shares with us that

continual tug of the old man within him, that in moments of weakness and inattention, despite his best efforts, continues to be there, and that makes this mourning intense. For as we increase in the understanding of the raw facts of our fallen character, and we see the flaws in comparison to the great Captain of salvation, Jesus Christ, as we see His glory, as we contemplate on Jesus' glory, we mourn. For we compare ourselves, and we see envy of others in ourselves. We see discontent with the lot we are having, or we still meet with this inner covetousness, or this self-exalting principle, wanting to be in the first row and being on the pedestal. All of that is completely absent in the Lord Jesus Christ, as He completely moved Himself out of the picture all the time. Maybe you say, well, that doesn't quite square, this whole talk, with 1 John 3:9 when John writes, "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin." So why mourn? "For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." So how do we explain that with this ongoing mourning that Jesus speaks about? Well, that's a misunderstanding of John. John is not speaking at all about sinless perfection. He says indeed that new man doesn't sin, but there is still an old man living within us. So John points that out in chapter 1:8, when he writes to counterbalance the other verse, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." So instead, what John is teaching is that someone who is born-again will not live habitually and continually in the practice of a known sinful lifestyle or action, though it is true, and sadly true, that even the best of God's saints are not immune to falling into grievous sins.

One more question then, before we look at the comforts of this beautiful Beatitude. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, the Apostle Paul writes about two kinds of sorrow. He writes about the sorrow of the world, that leads to more loss and death, and the godly sorrow. Now, how can I be sure that *my* sorrow is this godly sorrow, this godly mourning? The answer is again by the simple and the sensible test that Jesus gave us in a principle in the end of this sermon—by the fruits, you shall know the tree. That really also applies to the godly sorrow. If your Bible is open to 2 Corinthians 7:10–11, notice what he says, "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort." Now, what did that do to you—the fruits? First – "What carefulness it wrought in you"—to make things right again. Secondly, "What clearing of yourselves"—what you did to purge it out or to reform it. Thirdly, "Yea what indignation." Indignation is a righteous anger against your own sin that you see and that you want to resist. Fourthly, "Yea, what fear"—fear of falling into sin again. Fifthly, "Yea, what vehement desire"—the desire to be kept from the temptations. Sixthly, "Yea, what zeal," not only for yourselves, but also for others, for as we see sin as offensive to the God you love and destructive to sinners, you will zealously do all to destroy sin. Seventh and last, "Yea, what revenge"—revenge against yourself for all what you have done wrong. Then he caps it off—he says, "In all things, you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." You've proven this godly sorrow.

Now a second evidence of this godly sorrow that confirms it to be genuine is that it is not a sporadic sorrow. It's a sorrow that continues, it's a sorrow that goes along with you all your life. In some way, it also increases, and the reason is because the presence of this old nature of sin remains within us as a reality. There's a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. As I already hinted that in Romans chapter 7, Paul confesses his own personal struggle with this inner corruption. He says simply, I cannot master or drive this away forever as I want to. He groaned under that reality. He panted, as it were, to be delivered from it. Other well-known words—Oh! the wretched indwelling sin, who shall deliver me from this, from this inability to cancel out my evil desires and evil imaginations and my pride and my selfish motivations?

Now our third evidence that confirms this to be a genuine mourning is that we not only mourn about the sins in ourselves. The real Beatitude man mourns about the sins he sees in others, he sees in the world around him, he sees in the church to which he may belong, he sees even in the saints of God. That is what makes him also mourn. You say, why would anyone mourn over the sin in others? It's not their problem. It is because the sins I see in others are sins done against Him whom

we love. If someone would touch your spouse or your child, and say bad things about them, or do bad things to them, you would feel sorrow, you would mourn, you would be angry even, but also grieve because you love them. So this, when we see others sin, we mourn as well about that.

So then, in conclusion, why is this mourning called *blessed*, especially because it's kind of bitter. It's kind of a constant reality. Jesus said before, and as I have already pointed out, these Beatitudes are rather startling. Why call a mourner a blessed person? The first is the same as the previous Beatitude. This is a second evidence confirming that there is a spiritual work of God going on in your heart. When we get a child born, we rejoice when the newborn child cries. Now, if you ask the newborn, he doesn't feel well when he cries, but we feel joy when the baby cries because we know that means his lungs are working. Now so spiritually, godly sorrow, spiritual mourning is a sign of life. It's not the basis of salvation. It's not salvation itself, but it's an evidence that God has begun a good work within you. For example, after God stopped the very vicious and angry Saul, persecuting the Christians, on the way to Damascus, He called Ananias to go there. The Lord convinced this hesitating and objecting Ananias to go visit this man with one short clip about Saul. He says to him, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). So likewise, God could have said, "Behold he weeps, he mourns about his sins." It is an evidence of a new life.

Now the second reason that Jesus calls His people blessed is because He says they shall be comforted. What God has begun He will also finish. The tears He has caused to flow in opening our minds to this ugly and painful reality of sin, He also will wipe away from our eyes by removing the *cause* of these tears and sorrows forever—that is sin. So how does God comfort us as we face this reality of our fallenness and of our inability and of our bankruptcy? That's the precious work of the Holy Spirit. One of His names is the Comforter, and His work is to comfort sinners in this grieving process. How does the Spirit comfort these spiritual mourners about their sins? He does that in three ways, first, by leading them to the promise and the truth of Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit enables us to rest our heart upon the Gospel truth of the finished work of Jesus Christ, we experience the comfort of the rest and of the hope. I see that His life that He lived as a sacrifice to God is a sufficient payment to the justice of God which I cannot satisfy; that He gave Himself as the Savior and the substitute on behalf of sinners; and that He invites me to come unto Him and to rest my life, my failures, my guilt and everything on Him with the promise that "whosoever"—no matter who you have been, no matter where you have been—that "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish" (John 3:16). My friend, *then* I experience comfort; I experience a security and joy and a hope.

The second way that the Holy Spirit comforts this mourner is when He leads us into truth of the reconciliation and the favor with God the Father through Christ. There's nothing more comforting, when the child that is hurting and feeling sorrowful about what he's done, to again feeling the loving embrace of his father and his mother reassuring him all is well. Likewise, there is nothing more comforting when, in the sorrowfulness of your soul, you begin to sense the loving embrace of God the Father, and you sense the deliverance from the spirit of fear and bondage that held you in some despair, and to be able to say "Abba, Father" and rejoice in Him.

Now, ultimately and thirdly, the fullest comfort is experienced when finally God will deliver these mourners from the presence of indwelling sin and out of the scene of sin when we are brought into the eternal glory. Nothing appears as a greater joy than to be free from sin forever, never again having to face the reality of sin and evil in myself and others—in my thoughts and in my words—never again to have to hear and to witness the utter disregard and dishonor done to the God we love. Now clearly these comforts, they are precious, and they are divine. It is truly God who needs to wound us to make us see the need for healing. So He wounds us in discovering us to ourselves, but He heals us in discovering and bringing us to Himself, as He opens His heart and grace and love and mercy.

So let us wrap this up with stating just one or two points in conclusion. First, don't make the

mistake to think that these spiritual mourners are people that walk with long faces, are depressed and unattractive people, depressed mindsets. No! The mourner can be a very jovial person, optimistic person, positive person, and yet within their heart there is this constant tear, the inner tears about the sins that he has committed or feels striving within or sees around him. Secondly, the closer you live to God, and the closer you aim to live to His glory, and the more you serve others, the more you will mourn over all that dishonors God either by yourself or by others. Therefore it may sound like an exaggeration; it is a poetic expression in Psalm 119:136, where the author says, “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes”—and why?—“because they keep not Thy law.” That then is the comfort that I may point to here at the end. There’s a world coming in which all this mourning will cease forever because sins have ceased forever. Revelation 7:17 reveals that “God shall wipe away all tears from” the eyes of the redeemed, not only the tears of our own actual sins, but there are also so many tears in eyes over the sins that others have done to you. There are now wounds and scars in your life that ooze with pain, also the sins we see others do in the world—it will be all over forever. What a delightful prospect, for then we shall truly be comforted. So may God bless these words and make us all a source of a real blessing to others. Thank you very much.