

Happy Are The Mourning

TWO YEARS AGO just before Christmas my father died of Lou Gehrig's disease. He was diagnosed one year before his death with a most aggressive form of the disease, Bulbar syndrome. His first symptom was difficulty in speaking. As the disease progressed, he had difficulty swallowing and eating and eventually he lost the ability to speak or eat. In the summer of 1998, he started "eating" through a tube in his stomach and the disease began to paralyze his lungs. It was a slow death and he went home to be with God just before Christmas. We rejoiced and mourned. We rejoiced because he had the best Christmas of the entire family. We mourned because we lost a loved one.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matt 5:4 (NASB)

PAIN OF DEATH. There is nothing new about death. Jesus lost (temporarily) a loved one. His name was Lazarus. Scripture tells us that "Jesus wept" (John 11:35, KJV). The Jews who were present said, "Behold how He loved him" (John 11:36, KJV)! Jesus mourned. This is the sense of the word, mourn, that Jesus used in His beatitude. This Greek word for mourn, PENTHEO, is the strongest word that Jesus could have used for deep emotional grief, sorrow and mourning. Jesus' message must have been a surprise, "Happy are those who are utterly consumed with grief for they shall be comforted." "Happy are the sad!"

HAPPY ARE THE SAD? But what does Jesus mean by this? He is not referring to the future fulfillment promised in Isaiah 61:1-3. 2 Cor. 7:10 is the key to understanding Jesus' beatitude,

For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (NASB) 2 Cor 7:10

The Holy Spirit tells us there is a sorrow that is of this world and then there is a godly sorrow. Throughout our life there have been or will be times that we mourn or sorrow over negative events in our life unless we are hard hearted - and there are some people who are like that.

NOT THIS MOURNING. We can mourn, grieve or sorrow over a wide variety of negative circumstances. Some biblical examples are presented in the table.

Most of us have experienced mourning, grief or sorrow in one of these forms at sometime in our life. These are sorrows associated with things in this life. If left unchecked, these sorrows will lead to anger, bitterness, hatred and the worst - death.

Negative Event	Passage	Response To Event
Death in Egypt	Ex. 12:29-30	Great cry
Rival's persecution	1 Sam. 1:6-10	Misery and weeping
Bad counsel	Job 16:20	Tears
Feeling rejected	Job 17:7	Eye is dim from grief
Loss of one's job	Isa. 19:7-8	Lamenting and mourning
Misfortune	Joel 1:9	Mourning
Frustration	Dan. 10:2	Mourning

This is a picture of us. These are sorrows that lead to death. But Jesus is not talking about mourning over negative events in our life. Jesus is talking about godly mourning over SIN. Our mourning started when we realized that we were enemies against God (Rom. 5:10) because of our sin. And then we believed in the only One who could forgive our sins (Acts 4:12) and we were at peace with God and there was comfort (Rom. 5:1).

But the word Jesus uses for mourning implies much more. It is a verb which is a present active participle. This implies repeated action or an ongoing condition. What Jesus is saying is that the ones who are constantly mourning and mourning over their sin are those who will be comforted (Greek word means "to encourage"). Jesus is talking about an ongoing pattern of life. He is speaking to His disciples. You see, our mourning brought us to Jesus, but our mourning should not stop after we find Him. Jesus is characterizing His true disciples. This is the heart of the beatitude. Jesus' true disciples never stop mourning over sin.

CONCLUSION. Newsweek said it well in an article published some years ago, that American churches have stopped telling congregants they are sinners because it makes them feel worse about themselves. But that is Jesus' point! Some Christians are like the Pharisees who did not see themselves as sinners. Many Christians have a defective view of their sin. They talk about love, doctrine, church, God, family and their children, BUT they do not talk about their sin. Have you ever noticed how we pray? We ask others to pray that

we are healed from our illnesses because our health is very important to us. May I ask when was the last time you asked someone to pray for you - for victory over some sin you are struggling with? Have you ever noticed that good health seems to be more important to us than holy living? Few of us ever ask others to pray that we find victory over our sin. We seem to have a congenial view of God - a view that says He completely "accepts me the way I am." Christians have forgotten that God still hates our sin, even if we are Christians! Do you mourn over your unconfessed sin or just over your physical illnesses?

You see, Jesus' true disciples constantly sense their unholiness - they are constantly mourning over their sin like Paul the apostle (Rom. 7:24-25). We need to see ourselves as Christians who still have a spiritual Lou Gehrig's disease. We are terminally ill people who are going to heaven. But while we are visiting this earth, we need to see ourselves as we really are - forgiven sinners who should be seeking to be holy. Are you like the Pharisees - happy with your relationship with God AND YOUR SIN? We need to put our personal holiness above our physical health. We need to be constantly coming to Jesus. COME and admit that you have a spiritual Lou Gehrig's disease - SIN. The Holy Spirit says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" 1 John 1:9 (NKJV). "Be holy; for I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:16)

Mourning (πενθεω)

THE GREEK WORD Jesus used for “mourn” in Matthew 5:4 is PENTHEO. It is used ten times in the New Testament (Matt. 5:4; 9:15; Mark 16:10; Luke 6:25; 1 Cor. 5:2; 2 Cor. 12:21; James 4:9; and Rev. 18:11, 15, 19). There are four words used for sorrow, mourn or grieve in the Greek New Testament (LUPEUMAI, PENTHEO, THRENEO AND KOPTO).

LUPEUMAI is a general word used for grief. THRENEO has the idea of mere wailing or lamentation and KOPTO is similar having the sense of an external show of grief, like the beating of the breast.

PENTHEO is the only one with the deep sense of inner grief that consumes the person. It has the idea of strong grief manifested externally. Or put another way, Trench¹ says,

... to grieve with a grief which so takes possession of the whole being that it cannot be hid.

Jesus selected His word from among four choices. Jesus wants to make a point about our attitude toward sin. Does your sin cause you to mourn your condition?

¹Trench, Richard Chenevix, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973, p. 238.

The Future (Isa. 61:1-3)

SOME BELIEVE that Isaiah 61:1-3 refers to Jesus' second beatitude since the later part of verse 2 refers to "comforting those who mourn." It is clear the passage refers to Jesus first coming. You may ask, "How do you know that?" Well, look at the following passage,

Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has

sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (NJKV).' Luke 4:14-21

Notice that Jesus stopped at "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." The portion of the passage that refers to "comfort all who mourn" follows. Jesus indicated that the "day of vengeance of our God" and what followed was yet future. Isaiah 61:2b-3 cannot be used to interpret Matthew 5:4.

Comfort (παρακαλεω)

PARAKALEO is a common Greek word with a wide range of meaning. In general it has the idea of ask, beseech, exhort and urge. It can also mean to summon, invite, encourage, implore, appeal and comfort. As you can see the general sense of the word is encouragement. The noun form of this word (PARAKLTOS) is used to refer to the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, 26 and 15:26.