

Foundations: The Second Blessing
Matthew 5:4 (AFBC 9/16/18)

**"Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted."**

Welcome to week two of our "Back to School" series on the Beatitudes. As everybody gets back to a more normal routine—in theory, at least--we're taking an eight-week look at the teachings of Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount, specifically the eight brief statements that we know as the Beatitudes.

As noted last Sunday, these teachings are tailor-made for lifetime learning. In eight short sentences, Jesus turns all the wisdom of this world upside down. His teachings are powerful always, sometimes perplexing; but they also have the potential of being life-changing.

Matthew begins his Gospel by pointing to the uniqueness of our Lord and Savior. In chapter one, we find the unique genealogy of Jesus. We don't read this passage very often; but when we do, we find Jesus' ancestry traced all the way back to Abraham.

Then Matthew describes the birth of Jesus. Although there were some similarities to any birth, Matthew emphasizes that this was a birth unlike any other: the way Jesus was conceived, the way Joseph found out about it; and then in chapter two, we're told about the wisemen who traveled long distances to bow before Jesus and present Him with precious gifts.

Chapter three tells of His baptism--unlike any other. The heavens opened and God's Spirit descended like a dove and landed on Jesus, declaring Him to be the Son whom the Heavenly Father dearly loves and with whom He is well pleased.

There's a unique test for Jesus in chapter four of Matthew. He's tempted by Satan after spending a grueling forty days fasting and praying in the wilderness.

To all those who are back in school now, I remind you that Jesus passed that test with a perfect score—a feat that got Satan off His back... for the time being. And students, let me remind you that good grades just might keep parents and teachers off your backs!

This brings us to chapter five which, in Matthew, begins the unique teachings of our Lord. Most of us would probably recognize the Sermon on the Mount as the greatest single collection of teachings in the history of the world.

Matthew tells us that Jesus first climbs a hillside on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. He sits down. His followers gather 'round. And Jesus begins His lesson with this: **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."**

He tells them at the outset that they will never understand what He's trying to teach them unless they're willing to let go of their pride and humble themselves. They'll have to lower their defenses, listening to Jesus with their hearts. It's not all that complicated, but neither will it be easy for them to follow Jesus.

Jesus needs to teach them what this will mean, to get them ready for the challenging journey ahead. Young people, it's not so unlike what your teachers are attempting to do for you.

Back to school for your teachers means that each day, they're planning the best ways to convey important information to you.

They have a body of material they want you to learn—not just hear about, but actually learn--letting it become such a part of yourselves that when needed, you'll be able to recall what you've learned and put it into practice.

I've heard from a sister, a daughter, and a niece—all of whom are teachers--that in order to facilitate learning, they develop a lesson plan for every class they teach.

Each plan is built around an "essential question." This can go by other names, but whatever you call it, it points to the one thing that the teacher most wants to communicate to their students through this lesson.

Jesus does something like this in the Beatitudes. He focuses His teaching on what it means to be happy... or blessed.

We talked about what this means last week; but bottom line, we all want to be happy. We want to be blessed. Nobody in their right mind would want to be otherwise, right?

So Jesus' essential question might go something like this: "How can we have a life that is truly happy, contented, and blessed?"

Or maybe something like this: "How can this satisfying, fulfilling quality of life that Jesus wants for us actually take shape within us?" How can this blessedness be ours?

It seems clear that Jesus intends this question to apply to everyone. No one is left out of His teaching. By God's design, everyone has access to the blessings that Jesus describes.

If Jesus said, "Blessed are the rich"—well, everyone would have understood that—and likely agreed with it—then and now. We sometimes speak of people with elaborate houses or huge yachts as being "blessed."

Under those conditions, some would claim they are blessed by God—and maybe they are—hopefully, they are—but boats and mansions are no indicators of this, not according to the teachings of Jesus!

Likewise, Jesus would not have surprised anyone if He had said, "Blessed are the strong... or the popular... or the exceptionally gifted." I had a teacher laugh and tell me that at her school—which happened to be located in a very affluent area—she told me that where she teaches, every parent believes their child is gifted!

Well, in the sense of being truly exceptional, by definition, that can't be. Maybe their children, as Garrison Keilor used to say on *Prairie Home Companion*, are "all above average"—all the children in Lake Wobegon were—just as all the women were strong, and all the men were good-looking—so he claimed.

But here's good news in the Beatitudes of Jesus: EVERYONE can be poor in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." No one gets excluded by this blessing—unless they do it to themselves.

And if we live long enough, all of us will surely connect in some way with the second beatitude. We will experience a time of mourning. Listen to it again: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." This is also universal in its application.

But, then again, who would want this blessing? If we find the "poor in spirit" beatitude hard to get a handle on, this one could be even tougher. I've experienced grief on a few occasions.

I've mourned the loss of loved ones—and I'd just as soon avoid that experience, thank you. You know?

So what is Jesus trying to say? Does He really expect us to believe that our happiness could in any way be tied in with that sad and unpleasant experience of "mourning?"

Well... evidently so--but again, this turns our way of seeing the world upside down.

As Jesus would say, though, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Keep listening. Listen closely. Listen with the ears of your heart, because this is where Jesus' teaching is aimed.

Listen from those deepest places in your soul, and you will begin to understand—not completely at first—remember, this is life-long learning; but we have to start somewhere. Listen with ears of faith and with a humble heart, and you'll begin to understand.

What causes you to mourn—to grieve—to experience sadness and heartbreak? Is it not when you lose someone you love or you lose something else that is very important in your life?

Sometimes we overlook the fact that people can grieve over the loss of a job or the loss of mobility—their health, for instance. It can be any number of things; but if it used to be an important part of our lives... and now it's gone... we mourn the loss. We grieve.

Usually, though, we associate grieving with the loss of a loved one. This is when the pain becomes most intense. In my 23 years here, I've spent so much of my time with people who were travelling through "the valley of the shadow of death."

Sometimes it's with those who know they have only weeks or days to live. Often it's with a family who's just lost a loved one. Sometimes it's in the weeks following the loss when I call or stop by to offer a bit of pastoral care as they continue to grieve.

This is not an easy ministry, but it's an important one—for me, and for you. We need to recognize the dynamics of grieving—how it affects our lives and the lives of others.

Denial, anger, and depression, are some of the byproducts of grieving. In my time here, I've realized how these can affect not just individuals and families, but a whole community of people.

We've all been affected by these sadnesses at times. Together, we have mourned and perhaps grown angry or depressed because of it.

The Bible recognizes our need to grieve. King David grieved deeply over the death of his rebellious son, Absalom. "If only I had died in your place," David cried. Some among us here have experienced such a terrible sadness and loss as that.

Jesus Himself wept at the graveside of His good friend Lazarus. Many of us have been grieved in this way, and there have been many other causes of grief as well. Some of them, we recognize; but there may be others that we don't.

So it's important for us to understand that grief cannot be avoided. Faith does not make grieving unnecessary. We do not grieve as those who have no hope, but we do... grieve. And that's okay, for Jesus promises that "those who grieve will be comforted."

We do have to go through that valley, though, strengthened by the assurance that the Good Shepherd is with us, and that He will lead us over to the other side of that dark valley where we'll find the blessing of comfort. But only those who allow the mourning to take place will be able to receive the blessing of comfort.

The Psalmist said, **"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).**

Then, in Jesus' first message to the people in His hometown, He quotes from the prophet **Isaiah (61:1-2): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted... and to comfort all who mourn..."**

Thankfully, most of us aren't struggling with that kind of grieving today. Some are--and our hearts and prayers go out to you. But most of us are not in that particular valley right now.

So... are we to just skip over the second beatitude, coming back to it on some sad day out in the future? I don't think so. This blessing is for all of us, and it's available on any and every day that we are open to receiving its truth.

Here's a question for us to consider. Do we ever find ourselves with heavy hearts when no one we know personally has died and

we've not experienced any other significant loss—and yet, somehow... we're still grieving?

If so, the Lord may be preparing us to receive this blessing. It's entirely possible that Jesus Himself found that He never went through a single day here among us that did not include grief.

Could He be telling us that this should be true for OUR lives also? Will we not experience some daily sadnesses if we've not allowed our hearts to become too hardened toward the problems of this world and problems in our own lives?

I'm talking here about the things that deeply grieved Jesus—should these not also cause sadness in us? There were sins and evils in this world that broke Jesus' heart.

Because of this, Jesus chose to come among us to both teach and show us a better way to live. He even went so far as to die on a cross in order to impress upon us how sad and desperate our situation is.

Jesus not only taught us the Beatitudes, you see--He embodied them. Luke provides this account of Jesus on His way to Jerusalem. It is just before His triumphant entry into the city, on the day we call Palm Sunday. Luke records it this way:

“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.’” (Luke 19:41-42)

Earlier, we mentioned that Jesus experienced the death of a friend, and that painful loss brought Him to tears. But here, Jesus weeps over the sins and evils and the terrible brokenness in people's lives—and their refusal to receive the hope He wants to give them.

Centuries before Jesus came, there was Jeremiah. He's called “the weeping prophet.” He shed tears over the sins of his people: **“Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.” (Jeremiah 9:1)**

How long has it been since we were that burdened over the lost and hurting and dying people of our world? This is important,

because Jesus said it is our “mourning”—our heart-felt grief--that prepares the way for the blessing of God’s comfort.

Friends, this blessing begins in my life and yours as we recognize and confess the presence of sin in us (not just in the world). Sometimes the sin is seen in our actions; but often it’s present primarily in our attitudes, where it’s much harder to detect.

Having a growing relationship with Jesus Christ means recognizing our sin, confessing it’s presence in our lives, and being concerned about it to the point of grieving.

This is a broken-heartedness that leads to repentance. Indifference is confessed, sorrow is expressed; and this sincere repentance for sin brings the blessing of God’s comfort—the assurance of His forgiveness and healing, His salvation and His peace.

How blessed we are, friends, when we grieve over our sin and because of this, we plead, “Lord, forgive me.”

If we mean it, He answers our prayer; and with God’s forgiveness comes the strength to forgive ourselves, and the grace and mercy to forgive one another.

Our hearts are blessed and comforted, you see, through both the giving and receiving of forgiveness. They go together.

In fact, Jesus said we cannot separate one from the other, nor experience one without the other. And the result of both is peace. We are comforted.

This is such an important teaching. Jesus reminds us of this truth throughout His ministry, but He begins right here: “Blessed are those who mourn—who mourn for the right reasons; who mourn for themselves and for others--for they will be comforted.”

May all our sadnesses, and our griefs, and our sin-broken hearts... lead us to Him who is the source of all comfort.

This is Jesus’ message to us here in this second Beatitude: until we mourn, we cannot know God’s comfort.

Blessed, then, are all those who mourn—because they can be, and by God’s grace, they will be... comforted.