

## Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

Matthew 5:4

### Overview of the Beatitudes

Our study of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) has shown us a three-fold structure. In each Beatitude, there is . . .

- (1) a statement of **condition** (“blessed”)
- (2) a statement about the **character** (or actions leading from that character) of those in that condition, and
- (3) the **cause** for that condition

	Condition	Character (or the action springing from their character)	Cause (“because”)
5:3	Blessed are	the poor in spirit	because theirs is the kingdom of heaven
5:4	Blessed are	those who mourn	because they shall be comforted
5:5	Blessed are	the meek	because they shall inherit the earth
5:6	Blessed are	those who hunger and thirst for righteousness	because they shall be satisfied
5:7	Blessed are	the merciful	because they shall receive mercy
5:8	Blessed are	the pure in heart	because they shall see God
5:9	Blessed are	the peacemakers	because they shall be called sons of God
5:10	Blessed are	those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake	because theirs is the kingdom of heaven

The word translated *blessed* carries the idea of *flourishing*—like a tree bearing fruit. Taken as a whole, the Beatitudes teach us that true flourishing is possible, paradoxical, and provided.

- Flourishing is *possible*. Jesus emphasizes this nine times.
- Flourishing is *paradoxical*. It involves ideas we assume are contradictory. For example, we wouldn’t expect people to flourish who are poor in spirit, mourn, and are persecuted.
- Flourishing is a *provision*. No one can achieve these characteristics or accomplish these causes for flourishing. If they will be had, someone else must provide them. They are the result of grace, not works.

### Blessed Are Those Who Grieve

The word translated “those who mourn” may be understood as “those who grieve,” since the word indicates a deep sorrow and its accompanying actions and emotions.

This beatitude is especially jarring since we normally associate grief with languishing and woe, not flourishing. Further, we are often conflicted about what to do with grief. Do we suppress it? Give full vent to it? What kinds of sorrows are worth grieving over, and how long is a legitimate time to grieve?

As Christians, we can complicate things even further by holding to a shallow understanding of joy. Shouldn’t Christians be *joyful*, and doesn’t Christian joy eliminate grief?

Misunderstandings of these sort not only lead to harmful and unhelpful counsel (“Cheer up! God is working all things for good!”) but reveal a serious failure to understand how to truly flourish as human beings in a world that has been mangled by the effects of sin. By trivializing grief, we also trivialize comfort and joy.

Christians and non-Christians alike need to understand that Christianity is an utterly realistic faith. It does not deny the reality of pleasure. (Think of the Song of Solomon!) But neither does it deny the reality of pain. (Think of the book of Job!) It holds both extremes in perfect perspective.

This beatitude teaches us that true flourishing and the deepest kind of grief are perfectly compatible. But the question naturally arises: How can this be? How can Jesus say that those who grieve are flourishing? This question may be answered by a close examination of the three concepts in this beatitude: grief, comfort, and flourishing (“blessed”).

### **1. The grief of those who mourn.**

“Those who mourn” does not include *all* who mourn. Many mourn who will never experience final comfort. Jesus is talking about those whose grief arises from realizing that the root cause of all grief is sin. They mourn first over their own sin, as well as the sin of others and its broader effects in the world.

Although he was morally flawless, Jesus himself entered into the sorrow of a sinful world. We gain an important insight into the nature of true flourishing when we consider the primary emotions with Jesus experienced. While he certainly experienced joy (Luke 10:21), the emotions most often recorded in the gospels include compassion, anger, and sorrow (Matthew 9:36; Mark 3:5; John 11:35; Matthew 26:38; see Isaiah 53:3).

We can never truly grieve over sin until we realize how serious it is, and we can never realize how serious it is until we consider that Jesus died for it.

### **2. The comfort of those who mourn.**

But there is no point in grieving over sin unless true comfort is offered. Those who mourn truly are also those who will be truly comforted—now in the assurance that their sins are forgiven, and ultimately when sin is finally banished from the earth.

### **3. The flourishing of those who mourn.**

In a world of sin and suffering, there is much to grieve over. So human flourishing (“blessedness”) is not found in avoiding grief. In fact, feeling genuine sorrow is a sign that someone is truly flourishing. Yet that person does not believe that sorrow will have the final word. Rather, he or she puts grief into a certain perspective: the future, final comfort that God will bring about.

## **Questions for Discussion and Application**

1. In what ways are grief and physical pain alike?
2. Why do people often try to suppress grief and sorrow?
3. How should this beatitude change our understanding of what it means to truly flourish?
4. How does Jesus model the flourishing person in his relationship with grief (consider John 11:35; Matthew 26:38; Hebrews 12:1-3)?