



**Series: The Upside Down Kingdom**

**Date:** March 10, 2024

**Speaker:** Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text: Matthew 5:4**

**Title: Blessed Are Those Who Mourn**

**Intro**

Hey Mercy Church let's praise God for the way he's changing lives! Each of those folks was baptized last year here at Mercy Church and if you have never taken that step, we want to extend an invitation for you to be baptized this Easter here with us. Baptism does not save you; God saves you through faith in his son Jesus. But Baptism is your public declaration Jesus calls us to that says to your church family and all others watching... yes, I believe. And I believe there are probably many of you who are coming to that point. Let's make easter...3 weeks from today...your day of

public proclamation. He went to the cross publicly. And so, you likewise publicly declare your faith in him to your church family. It's an awesome and important mile marker in your walk with Jesus.

Next step? Simple EITHER talk with one of our pastors after the service today. We'll be down front after all services. OR go to [mercycharlotte.com/baptism](https://mercycharlotte.com/baptism).

Matthew Chapter 5. Today we continue our series called the Upside Down Kingdom, which is a study of a teaching of Jesus commonly called the Beatitudes. Which is a fancy-sounding word but it's just Latin for the word blessed. Which is the theme of his teaching here.

And the reason we gave this series the name upside down kingdom is because of the nature of the kingdom of God Jesus describes in these verses. As he depicts the kingdom of heaven where true lasting eternal joy is found...it just feels upside down from the kingdom of this world we live & breathe & walk around in. The world may pay lip service to the poor, may hit the like button on the humble, & may shake the hand of the peacemaker...but the world does not ENVY these people. The world does not see these people as ROLE MODELS, as the ones ahead of them in life that they desperately want to be like.

No, the KINGDOM of this world is one that celebrates & envies the strong. The beautiful. The financially



successful. The proud. Look at the top 10 song charts, look at your voting ballot, look at Instagram, look at a billboard, look anywhere. The kingdom of this world is one where the strong & successful appear to be blessed.

The problem of course is the kingdom of this world is hollow. It doesn't deliver on the promise it gives you if you arrive at the top of the kingdom. Instead, it keeps asking you for a little more. You have to keep climbing. Keep Chasing. I know you thought you'd be happy at this salary level but actually, it's just a little more. This size house..just a little more. This promotion, make this team. Etc.

I try to think about 20-year-old Spence. What would he say when I grumble about my present situation? 20-year-old Spence had a \$400/mo rent payment that he SPLIT with Lee Williams. \$200/mo. An internship where I made pennies. I'm not much of a wine guy but there are these people called sommeliers who are like experts in wine. Can tell you everything about it just with a little whiff & taste. I was a Ramen Noodle Sommelier. Making pennies, spending pennies. And I wonder often what he would say to this Spence who complains about his bills and wishes he had nicer things. Dude, you pay the whole bill yourself!?!? You must have MADE IT! You have a grocery budget!?!? But that's the kingdom of this world. Always wanting a little more. ...And even people at the top of the kingdom of this world deal with it: You can be one of the most

successful recording artists of all time, but still be so unsatisfied you gotta go make a country song.

Here's the thing though. The reason the kingdom of this world is so attractive to us is that we ARE made to live in a kingdom. To serve a king and to build and create. But the kingdom we are made for, the kingdom of God, feels backward to us. Feels so opposite to our instincts that to live this way would feel upside down. And yet there in the upside-down kingdom...we find true life. The kind of life that doesn't ask for more but instead gives more. The way to that life is not up, it's down. That's what we are seeing in the beatitudes. And it's so counterintuitive we are taking just one at a time.

This is going to be felt in our verse for today. Today we are in verse 4. Our second beatitude. Now because these build on each other I will read last week's and then this week's.

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. --

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. -- Matthew 5:3-4 (CSB)

I'm going to show you what Jesus means by mourning because it's way deeper and broader than what you think. So, I'll show you what it IS and then four categories of mourning in the bible. Just like every beatitude, there's a condition & a promise. Blessed are these people for this will happen for them. So, in each



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category of mourning, I'll show you how you will be comforted.

**Ok, first an explanation: MOURNING**

So then, what does this verse mean? Well, I know what we all want it to mean. And that's one of the toughest parts of teaching this promise to you. Because what we want it to mean is only a sliver of what it means.

We want it to mean - we **want it to be a universal truth for all people that when you lose somebody you love, you will experience some sense of comfort.**

That sounds like a warm sentiment you can wrap up in on a cold dark night of the soul. But let's remember something very important - WHO IS HE ACTUALLY talking about? We said this in week 1.

These beatitudes are talking about God's people. The church. Those who have placed their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus as payment for their sins & have surrendered their lives to him. These 8 beatitudes aren't talking about 8 different groups of people. The poor in spirit of verse 3 are not a different group than the mourners in verse 4. In the beatitudes, Jesus is describing ONE people, HIS PEOPLE 8 different ways and announcing 8 promises that are theirs because they are his.

Here's why I say that - **Matthew 5.4 is not a universal promise that you will be comforted in your mourning. It is a Christian promise.** You know how I know that? I've been close to atheists who lose people they love

who are also atheists. Listen to me - there is no comfort in that mourning. It is dark, empty, and terrible.

Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted is a promise from Jesus for those who are followers of Jesus and I say that out front because I don't want you leaving here THINKING this blessing is available to you if you are not in Christ.

Also, this promise actually isn't SPECIFIC to grief or Bereavement. Like mourning the loss of a loved one. It does include that but it's not JUST that. Let me explain.

Matthew 5.4 is a more foundational promise that flows into grief as well as into other places in the Christian life. Think like the head of a river and how the river may split into several streams...this promise is the HEAD of the river and grief is one of the streams that flows out of it. So, I'm going to explain the source now and then show you four streams or CATEGORIES of mourning.

To understand mourning we look back at the first beatitude in verse 3. Because they build on each other. It's not just blessed are the poor, but blessed are the poor in spirit. Remember we said blessed are those who are spiritually poor. Who are AWARE they have nothing to bring to God. It's the tax collector standing far off and beating his chest saying, "God have mercy on me a sinner."



Jesus is saying Blessed are those who are spiritually poor. Because they surrender their own kingdom and receive his. Well, he hasn't left the spiritual concept behind. No, he's still talking about the spirit. **If the first beatitude spoke a blessing...the favor of God...over those who are aware of their spiritual poverty. Then this one speaks that favor over those who GRIEVE their spiritual poverty.** In other words, I'll keep the definition real simple for you:

**Spiritual mourning is grieving sin and its effects.**

THAT is the Head of the river. Grieving sin and its effects. By sin we mean anything that breaks God's law and goes against God's created design. And what you are going to see in these four streams is the TOTALITY of the effect of sin on the world. It's devastating. In fact, the New Testament actually has NINE different words for mourning. And that's because, little pastoral aside here - there's a lot of pain in this world. There's a lot to mourn. And the fact that the bible speaks so much about it is, to me, an argument for why it should be trusted. Because it speaks to real life. We'll get to that. Let's look at the four ways Jesus calls us to mourn & how we find comfort from Jesus as we mourn.

**We mourn the brokenness of the world caused by sin.**

I wanted to start here because it's the one that immediately came to mind right? We are called to mourn, to grieve, that the world is NOT the way it's supposed to be. Listen, I'll just say it plainly how I feel -

I'm too young and our church is too young to have done so many funerals for people younger than me. And EVERY TIME what I feel crying out in my heart is "THIS ISN'T RIGHT!" It shouldn't be this way. Why is it this way? These people I love, and God has called me to shepherd, and, in a moment, they are GONE, and their families are left behind and it just feels WRONG. Right? Some of you know that feeling really well. Here's the truth of the bible - Romans 5 says that when Adam and Eve sinned - recorded all the way back at Genesis 3...Sin "entered the world." Sin came into the world and sin brought death with it. And it didn't just bring death to us as a consequence of our sin (it did, and we'll talk about that in a minute), but it also brought death & dysfunction to the whole created order.

**20 For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it -- Romans 8:20 (CSB)**

So, Paul goes on to say Creation GROANS and we GROAN.

**22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits — we also groan within ourselves -- Romans 8:22-23 (CSB)**

That's one stream of spiritual mourning. In a broken world, bad things happen, and they are terrible and so we mourn. But The people of God don't **just** mourn the



bad things that happen. WE DO, but to find comfort we go upstream to the source & mourn the cause as well. how sin has BROKEN the world. And it brings so much grief and pain and sorrow. And then we are able to find the comfort. Where is the comfort? Well, did you notice I quoted Romans 8 verses 20, 22, & 23? I left out 21. So that I could drop it on you now.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it — in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. -- Romans 8:20-21 (CSB)

In other words, When Christians MOURN the tragedies of life. The brokenness of this world...we don't have to explain it. Why God? Why did this happen? No, we don't need explanation because we know Sin creates unavoidable chaos and God allows it but doesn't always give us explanation. NO, he gives us two things for comfort - FIRST, he gives us HIMSELF in the form of the Holy Spirit. John calls him in John 14 & 15 the great COMFORTER. And the COMFORTER will be WITH YOU. and second, he gives us the hope of Heaven.

THAT is Revelation 21.4

4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. -- Revelation 21:4 (CSB)

I told you last week one of our biggest problems is we don't think about heaven enough. But when you face the real pain of this world, heaven becomes a powerful promise for the people of God. Man, I just need to let that verse stay up there for those who've experienced loss, pain, & suffering. If you are in Christ and you have shed some tears, I just want your soul to be lifted this morning by the hope of heaven you have in Christ. Here's the way I'll summarize the comfort we find in this first stream of mourning.

When we mourn the brokenness of the world caused by sin, we are comforted by the presence of God and the promise of heaven.

That's the first stream of spiritual mourning. And at the end of our sermon, our response time is going to give you time to mourn and some of you need to just come to the altar & grieve and find comfort in the presence of God & promise of heaven. I watch & listen to all the babies swarming our church right now and its beautiful. But I know for every 3 babies there's one that was lost in miscarriage. And that means a lot of you are grieving and there's usually no funeral. That's what happened for Courtney and me. No space designed to mourn. We are just supposed to go on. And to you God offers comfort. Presence & Promise. And I want to offer the space to you today to just mourn & receive that comfort.



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Here's the second stream of spiritual mourning. Again, remembering that spiritual mourning is mourning sin and its effects. The second is grieving your own sin. And if the first stream was the most familiar, this one may be the most foreign.

We mourn our own personal sin and the devastation it brings to our relationship with God.

In 2 Samuel 11 we read about King David desiring the wife of one of his own loyal soldiers. So, he has the soldier sent to the front lines & then orders others to retreat. This man named Uriah Dies. And then David, back safe in the palace, takes this man's wife for himself. The story of David & Bathsheba. Well, just a little while later the prophet of Israel, a guy named Nathan confronts David. He does it in a really clever way through a parable where he gets David to understand he has committed a grave sin. And the fascinating thing is how David responds. We see his response in 2 places. In the narrative of 2 Samuel David says

13 David responded to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."  
-- 2 Samuel 12:13 (CSB)

4 Against you — you alone — I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. -- Psalms 51:4 (CSB)

Which is a little bit like...WHAT? Didn't you sin against the man you murdered? Didn't you sin against Bathsheba? But David is showing us something about spiritual mourning. He is showing us the first and most terrible, most consequential thing our sin does is unravel our relationship with God. it is open defiance of him.

SO GO BACK TO OUR BEATITUDE - Blessed are those who MOURN. Listen is that your reaction to your sin. I've found we usually are more likely to EXCUSE our sin. OR...listen to this...we mourn the CONSEQUENCES of our sin. Like...oh I hurt that person and so therefore I feel bad. THAT IS GUILT, not mourning. BUT true blessedness...the promised favor of God...comes only to those who recognize their sin is FIRST against the Lord. And that your relationship with GOD is destroyed because of it. That DEATH has entered the world through sin, and you now have lost the loving relationship with God you are meant for.

When you get THERE, THEN, you are ready to receive COMFORT. What is the comfort to those who grieve their sin? The apostle Paul tells us...

10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death. -- 2 Corinthians 7:10 (CSB)

Here's the way we can talk about the comfort of grieving our own sin:



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When we repent of our sin, we find comfort in the salvation won for us in Christ.

Blessed are those who practice Godly grief. Who don't just know they are a sinner but see their sin and grieve it. And then that grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret. In other words, ... AMAZING GRACE.... HOW SWEET THE SOUND...THAT SAVED A WRETCH...like me.

Do you grieve your sin? This is Christian growth. Becoming at the same time more aware of the depths of your sin & aware of the holiness of God. seeing the chasm that separates you from him and then seeing just how POWERFUL and AMAZING the work of Christ really is.

And you have to understand that in order to be able to swim in the third stream of spiritual mourning. Here we go.

We mourn the sins of others.

Ok let's talk about this for just a minute. Since you are a human living in a broken world, and we've made it clear everyone is a sinner. And we just spent all that time talking about your sin. It should come as no surprise that others are going to sin against you. Now, the world around us will say when someone sins against you that is just cause for you to seek revenge. For you to exact justice. OR you can sort of ignore it. Excuse it. Eh, it wasn't a big deal. Eh, I won't deal with

that I will just distance myself from that person. I find a lot of Christian friendships fizzle because they don't have this tool that God has given for making it through sinning against one another which WILL happen. But it starts with recognizing that your friend or spouse or coworker or whoever...IS A SINNER! And the appropriate response to sin is FIRST to grieve it. To mourn it. To LAMENT it.

40% of the psalms are lament. It's just crying out to God grieving it. It's not pretending it didn't happen. It's not stuffing it down inside. It's mourning. It's Psalm 42:3 where David is being sinned against by his own people and it HURTS so he takes it TO GOD  
3 My tears have been my food day and night, while all day long people say to me, "Where is your God?" --  
Psalms 42:3 (CSB)

So instead of raging against your fellow sinner...thinking HOW COULD they...or pretending like the sin didn't hurt you at all...which it did. The Christian is BLESSED because they can mourn the sins committed against them to God. YOU can take those wounds to him, and HE has the power to bring true comfort to you.

And what will happen as you grieve to him the sins of others you will be reminded of the gospel. That tells you...listen this is hard but healing truth. You are a sinner first and sinned against second.





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You will recognize you are a fellow sinner just like the person who sinned against you. This perspective is everything y'all. Sinner first. Sinned against second. And when you remember that you'll find comfort in extending the forgiveness to another sinner that Christ gave you.

**32 And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. -- Ephesians 4:32**

There is no comfort in mourning the sin of others UNTIL you are able to give it to Jesus. You can't give it back in vengeance, or hold it yourself, and find comfort. Only by giving it to Christ and extending forgiveness to the one who sinned against you, will you find comfort. **We mourn the sins of others and find comfort through forgiving them as Christ forgave us.**

Only one deeply familiar with that second stream will be able to find comfort in the third. But now briefly I want to touch on the last stream of spiritual mourning. Of mourning sins and its effects.

**We mourn the lostness of the world.**

When the Christian looks at the great hope he or she has in Christ. That amazing grace. Saved a wretch like me. Without Jesus I'm destined for eternity apart from God...but God saved me. God in his kindness brought a friend or family member or coworker or total stranger...somebody had the LOVE for me that God had for them, and they shared the gospel with me, and

I believed. Man, that undeserved grace extended to me...when I sit in that long enough, I start to think Oh but for the grace of God I would be lost. And then I look at those who don't yet know the love of Jesus and my heart should not be proud "Thank you Lord that I'm not like them." No that's the heart of the religious elite we saw last week. No instead my heart should love what God loves. And one thing abundantly clear in scripture is that God loves sinners. In fact, if I had to shorthand or subtitle the story of scripture it would be something to the effect of "**God saves sinners he loves.**"

And that stirs something in us. We want them to know what we know. We want them to know the God we know. That's our impetus behind little blue. We cannot know what we know. It should GRIEVE our souls and call us to action. The way the great British preacher Charles Spurgeon said it:

**If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms around their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for. - Charles Spurgeon**

Is this you? Is this me? Is this Mercy Church? Do we grieve the lostness of the world? I do not believe we can rightly say we do and not be urgently praying for & proclaiming to the lost.





When I announce to you there are

- 3.5 billion Unreached People in the world
- 8,400 unreached people groups
- One of our staff members was sharing the gospel at UNCC the other day with a Japanese student who had NEVER HEARD of JESUS. What emotion does that stir up in you? Do we grieve the lostness of the world? And if so, where is the comfort for us as we do?

There's actually quite a bit. First there's comfort in knowing God loves and knows every person on this world. There's comfort in knowing he's called us not just to grieve lostness but to DO SOMETHING about it. In fact, Jesus sends us with his power to tell the gospel to the lost. We are SENT.

And the final comfort is in knowing that one day in heaven every tribe will gather around the throne in worship of Jesus.

After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb! -- Revelation 7:9-10 (CSB)

When we mourn the lostness of the world, we find comfort in the great commission and in the hope of the great reunion.

These are the four streams that flow out of mourning sin and its effects. We mourn the brokenness of the world, we mourn our own sin, we mourn the sin of others, and we mourn the lostness of the world. And as we do, the Lord offers comfort.

I love the ESV translation of Isaiah 53.3 because it captures the emotion behind who Jesus came to us as [3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isaiah 53.3(ESV)

God announced who Jesus would come as. Not the man of laughter or the man of Strength or wisdom though he had all these things. But he came as the man of sorrows. The man deeply acquainted with grief. Jesus himself said he was gentle and lowly of heart. He was despised and not esteemed at all. Which is why you can go to him with whatever pain or sorrow you are carrying. Because he knows you. Do you need comfort in grief, he knows that pain and is there to comfort you. Do you need to repent of your sin? He knows the pain of the penalty of your sin and chose to bear it. He loves you. Go to him. Do you need to the power to forgive? Go to the one who forgave you. Do you need your heart warmed to the lost? Go to the one



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who loved you enough to leave his home and come to you.

The man of sorrows willingly took on the greatest sorrow so that sorrow would only ever be temporary for his people and would one day be rendered incomparable to the glory that will be revealed in them.

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

CLOSE - I'm going to pray and then our campus pastors are going to lead a time of response where we are going to invite you to come to the altar and pray.