

HAPPY MOURNERS

"Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4.

It was said of Christ during the days of His earthly ministry, "Never man spake like this man." That statement has never been disproved. His conversations, teachings and interpretations have never been equaled. A careful reading of His words is necessary if we are to discover the beauty, the graciousness and the uniqueness of His diction and the intensiveness of His teaching. What evoked that verdict, "Never man spake like this man"? It was the note of authority with which He spoke and the startling things which He said.

Some of Christ's sayings are easy to understand, but others are difficult. One wonders if any of His sayings was harder to understand than this, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

Christ had gone up on the mountain and there seated Himself. When His disciples came to Him He proceeded to teach them. What He taught them there is known as the Sermon on the Mount. In that Sermon Christ was speaking primarily to His disciples, but in the presence of the multitudes who had assembled there also. Thus He spoke to the multitudes secondarily as He taught His disciples primarily. In the eight Beatitudes He enumerated the characteristic of the subjects of the kingdom and the blessings possessed by them.

There are three universal languages. In watching a company of people whose language you do not speak or understand, you can observe this fact. When they become amused at anything, they all laugh. You can understand that language without an interpreter. When they are vexed or abused, they become angry, and you can understand that language without an interpreter. When they are afflicted or sad, they mourn. These three universal languages of happiness, anger and sorrow are understood by all of us.

Our text is the second Beatitude. If "Blessed are the poor in spirit" sounded strange to the assembled multitude, we may be sure that this verse seemed even more strange. These words are quite contradictory to the popular view then and now. Those people on that mountain had experienced trouble, but few of them, if any, had discovered the blessing hidden in it. It is even so today. We do not welcome trouble or sorrow.

From whatever angle the word "mourn" is approached today by the average person, there is the suggestion of sadness, sorrow and grief. Such a condition is far removed from blessedness, according to the thinking of the masses. The average person includes "mourning" among the undesirable things of life, and he does so because he cannot visualize any good coming out of it. Christ challenges this attitude and conclusion. In fact, He opens the minds of many to the fallacy of so much of their thinking. Therefore, the statement, "Blessed are they that mourn," is a real challenge to our modern habit of extolling the pleasant and of declaring that blessedness comes from the easy way of life.

This text, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted," is a paradox. It starts from an entirely different conception from the common one of what is man's chief good. Mourning is irksome and hateful to human nature. From suffering and sadness our spirits instinctively shrink. It is only natural for people to seek the society of the cheerful and joyous. However, there are some who make a luxury of grief. Their favorite indulgence is self-pity. They make the most of every opportunity to recount their woes, until, with all charity, we cannot help but think that they really enjoy it.

This Beatitude brings us face to face with a problem of this world—pain, sorrow and grief. The world is full of pain and sorrow. It is not even necessary to prove that statement. Who is there who does not know it to be a fact? What home is there into which sorrow has not come? What heart is there that does not bear upon it wounds still fresh and bleeding, or at any rate, the scars of ancient griefs? Some things have to be proved or demonstrated to us. Except for what others tell us, we would not know anything about some matters. But

there is not any need for anybody to prove to us the reality of pain, sorrow and grief. These things are not matters of hearsay or vain rumor to us. They have visited our own families. We have experienced them in our own lives. Life is not a comedy. It is not all smiles, fun and laughter. With its funerals and graves, its tears and broken hearts, it is much more of a tragedy than a comedy.

To whom did Christ refer in this Beatitude? Most people find it hard to accept their sorrows, even to admit the right of sorrow to enter their world at all. To the average person sorrow appears as sheer tragedy, unlit, save for those who have faith enough, by the faintest rainbow of hope.

"Blessed are they that mourn." "Happy" with heavenly happiness is the meaning of the word "Blessed." It means to be blessed with happiness from within rather than from without. The term which is translated "mourn" is very interesting. It signifies the manifestation of a grief which is too deep for concealment. It does not mean a slight sorrow, but rather a great grief.

Is there such a thing as good grief? Christ taught that there is. He said, "Happy are the mourners, for they will be consoled." Imagine congratulating a person who has been bereaved! This strange paradox of the Master does not mean that every sorrowing heart is blessed or happy. Sorrow hardens some hearts. Bereavements causes many to grow embittered. Tears do not always water the garden of the soul to make flowers of tenderness and hope blossom in beauty. Grief is real to pagan and Christian, but the Christian is "calm in grief because rich in trust."

Our text does not mean that it is better to weep than it is to laugh. Neither does it mean that all those who mourn are blessed. Men may mourn and weep and not be blessed. Not every sorrow brings a benediction. Not every tear brings a blessing. Many in this world nurse old wounds and hug old sorrows to their breasts whose lives will be embittered to the end. Many are the men who grieve over their circumstances, mourn over their losses, weep over their troubles, but without blessing.

If experience teaches anything, surely it is the fact that sorrow is not always a blessing. It may embitter and harden. Nor is sorrow always sure of comfort. Many men and women have died of a broken heart, or nursed their grief to the end of life. Here, as is so often true with the teaching of Christ, we must probe beneath the surface meaning to understand what He is really saying to us. He put His teachings in such arresting statements as to startle us and make us think.

Blessing and comfort do not come to every mourner. No condition of life is necessarily and universally blessed. Perhaps as many people are made worse by sorrow as are made better, in spite of all that poets and religious teachers have written about its purifying and sweetening influences.

It is quite obvious that it is not every type of mourning which is included in this verse. There are thousands of mourners in the world today who do not come within the scope of our text. There are different kinds of mourning referred to in the Bible—a natural, such as that caused by blighted hopes, thwarted ambitions, financial reverses or the loss of loved ones; a sinful, which is a disconsolate and inordinate grief, refusing to be comforted, or a hopeless remorse like that of Judas; and a gracious, a "godly sorrow," of which the Holy Spirit is the Author.

Mourning is a characteristic of the normal Christian state. There is much that the believer in Christ has to mourn over. The sin of his own heart makes him cry, "O wretched man that I am." The sins which he commits are a source of great grief. The barrenness of the life, the tendency to drift away from Christ, and the shallowness of love to Him cause a Christian to mourn. Christians should mourn over their sins because they are an evidence of ingratitude to God, of hostility to Him, an injury to self by keeping so many good things from them, and hinders their communion with God.

There is considerable mourning on account of the sins of others, also. The dishonor done to Christ by professed Christians, the divisions among the Lord's people, and the strife between brethren occasion great sorrow. The closer that one lives to Christ the more will he mourn over all that dishonors his Lord. There are few things which the so-called Christianity of our day needs more than a more intense realization of the fact and gravity of personal sinfulness. Children of God should mourn over anything by which His name is dishonored, or His cause is injured or impeded.

Christ defines the blessing by saying, "They shall be comforted." The word which is translated "comforted" means more than "soothing." It means that those of us who are Christians have One to Whom we can go for help and One from Whom we can get help. We are grieved but glad, for we shall receive help. We are sorrowful but happy, for we shall have company and comfort.

"They shall be comforted" is a promise that receives constant fulfilment in the experience of the Christian. Though he mourns his excuseless failures and confesses them to God, yet he is comforted by the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses him from all sin. Though he groans over the dishonor done to God on every side, yet he is comforted by the knowledge that the day is rapidly approaching when Satan shall be removed from these scenes, and when the Lord Jesus shall sit upon the throne of His glory and rule in perfect righteousness and peace. "Comforted" is a very strong word, giving the promise of wonderful confidence and security, and a joyful assurance that all is well. When we meet with hardship, pain and grief, it is wonderful to know that we shall be comforted. Christ brings consolation to those who mourn for sin by granting forgiveness. He consoles those who weep for the dead by shedding light on the life beyond the grave.

