



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“The Beatitudes II – Blessed Grief,” Matthew 5:1-12 – TRANSCRIPT

We are studying in the Beatitudes of Matthew chapter 5, and for today I want to read, beginning with the first verse through the 12th verse, all of the Beatitudes. Matthew chapter 5 verse 1 through verse 12:

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all

manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so
persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

May God bless this reading from his inspired word.

The text for our study this morning is the second of the Beatitudes, which is found in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 4: “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” What a strange saying. It seems to be paradoxical. It has an odd sound when it falls upon our ears. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. It even creates a sense of bewilderment: mourning, blessedness.

It seems to lend itself to two different interpretations of Christianity. There is the interpretation that Christianity is the happy life, that if we believe in the Lord Jesus, then everything should be nice and sweet and lovely, and we should always walk about with a perpetual smile upon our face, and with a lilt, and with a grace to our walk.

This beatitude lends itself to another interpretation of Christianity, too. That is, that is a kind of call to cloistered dolefulness. And we all know the types of Christians who wander around with that sad look upon their faces. But I am sure that the Lord Jesus did not really intend, by the beatitude, to support the gloomy creed of those who find joy among the draperies of the dead, nor did he intend to put a perpetual smile of celestial joy upon the faces of the bonny brethren.

This text does not really lend itself to either one of those interpretations, as we, I hope, shall see in a few moments. We’ve discussed the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. I have made the claim – I hope it is supportable – that it is not for the world, not for the salvation of society, or the salvation of the individual. If we expect by the reading of the Sermon on the Mount to have an effective presentation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, we shall be greatly disappointed, because, as we read verse after verse,

section after section of it, it’s quite evident that there is no true New Testament, or Old Testament for that matter, gospel.

There is no unfolding here of the saving work of a crucified Savior. We do not find any reference to the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus for the sins of men. We do not find any reference to, or at least clear references to the doctrines of justification by faith. We do not find any references, clearly, to the forgiveness that comes when we exercise faith in the Lord Jesus. There is a reference to forgiveness, but it is not the kind of reference that suggests the gospel of Christ. In other words, all of the terminology of salvation is missing from the Sermon on the Mount. It was never intended to be the means of salvation, either for the society or of the individual. It is not for the world.

There are others who have felt that the Sermon on the Mount is therefore for the church. And that since there are many of the texts that have direct application to us – and many of them are repeated in various forms in the epistles of the New Testament – that it must be for the church of the Lord Jesus. It has been called by some the way of blessing for the church.

Now we should guard against that interpretation immediately when we discover that there is no reference to the church of the Lord Jesus in the entire discourse. Now someone might counter and say, there are not many references to the church in the gospels at all. That’s very true, and there’s also a purpose in that. In fact, the only three references to the term “church” in all of the gospels are found in the Gospel of Matthew, but we do not have any reference to the church in the Sermon on the Mount.

If we will remember that this great message was given to disciples who lived under the law by a person who himself lived under law, then that would help us a great deal in interpreting it. Why, right at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, in the 8th chapter when the Lord Jesus cleanses the leper, he asks the leper, after the cleansing has taken place, to go and show himself to the priest, and to offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.

It’s evident that the Lord Jesus regarded himself as living under law, just as the Apostle Paul puts it. He came, born of a woman, born under law, that he might redeem those under law, so the Sermon on the Mount was given to individuals who lived under law. It is not for the church.

In order to escape these two alternatives which do not seem to fit the context of the Gospel of Matthew – that is, that it is for the world, for the church – some of our brethren have said, then it must be for the kingdom. So they have sought to interpret the Sermon on the Mount as a reference to the Messianic kingdom which is to come, and have it unfold the laws of that kingdom that is to come, and to find its fulfillment in the reign of the Lord Jesus upon the earth.

Now I respect, again, the attempts of interpreters to interpret this passage, and I would certainly want to give full consideration to an interpretation such as that. But again, I do not think it fits the context of the Sermon on the Mount. When the Lord Jesus gives instruction to the disciples in the Lord’s Prayer, found in the 6th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, one of those petitions is, “Thy kingdom come.” And I commented upon this already, and it seems a strange kind of petition to give to individuals who are already, ideally, in the kingdom. For them to pray, “Thy kingdom come” when they are already in the kingdom does not, I must confess, make a great deal of sense to me.

Further, as you read through the Sermon on the Mount, there are references to want, divorces, persecution and other types of circumstances in life which suggest that the Sermon on the Mount does not have as its context a Messianic kingdom. If it does have as its context a Messianic kingdom, then we must change our ideas of the Messianic kingdom, and we must no longer speak of it as a golden age. Or else, we must say we, too, are living in a golden age, for the kind of life that seems to be presupposed there is the kind of life that we know ourselves, here.

So we have come to the interpretation – I’ve suggested this – that this Sermon on the Mount is for the disciples of John the Baptist who have now become attached to the

Lord Jesus. And for the disciples of the Lord Jesus who have responded to the message which he and John preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand” – and it is designed to set forth for them the kind of life that they are to live as they await the kingdom which the King has promised. So it is a kind of interim ethic. It is designed to guide them, it is designed to support them while they are with the King and as they wait for the kingdom that is to come. It is a way of life, then, for disciples who are on the way to the kingdom but who still live under law.

Albert Schweitzer, the great philanthropist and missionary and also biblical student, who was an outstanding liberal, called this an “interim ethic.” And I don’t know of many good things he has said about the Bible, but that was one. And I think that that interpretation in that sense, and in that sense only, was true. The Sermon on the Mount is an interim ethic.

Now there are many applications of the Sermon on the Mount to the church, and we should never forget that. Such as, or as, in all Scripture, it is applicable to us. But there is a great difference in the parts of the word of God that are written to us, and those that are written for us. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work. All of the Bible – from Genesis 1:1 through the Book of Revelation – all of it is for us. Some of it, however, is directed to us who live in the church of Jesus Christ.

This passage is for us, and we are to learn from the principles contained in it. Things about the great triune God, for he does not change. And his dealings with men, so far as they relate to his being and attributes, do not change. And we are profit from them. But that is far different from saying that this passage of the word of God is directed to us as its intended recipients directly.

The first beatitude we studied last week. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.” We sought to show that this is a beatitude of spiritual

poverty. It has to do with those who are rich in faith but poor in spirit. It is a blessedness that the Lord Jesus pronounces upon those who realize exactly what they are in the sight of God. That is, that they possess a depravity that has come to them as a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden; that they are unable, of themselves, to please God; that they do not have a free will by which they can turn to God; that they are totally dependent on a sovereign God for salvation.

And I want to say to you that this should by no means discourage the desire to be saved. If it is true that we are totally unable to come to God of ourselves, how much more ought that to produce in the heart of an individual the desire that God save him? If I should read, I cannot come to God of myself, then I must say the first thing I would want to do is fall upon my knees and cry out to God and say, “O God, since I cannot save myself, save me!” And the sense of our unworthiness, the sense of our inability, the sense of our depravity is a tremendous call to respond to the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My daughter has just moved from Atlanta, Georgia to Birmingham, Alabama. And in the course of the move, she has been interested in looking around for another fellowship of the saints with which she may meet. Tell in gaffe, publish it not in Ashkelon, lest the uncircumcised Philistines of another seminary hear, but she was in a church pastored by several of our graduates of Dallas Theological Seminary. And she wrote me, “Daddy, I am rejoicing with a group of saints with whom I am meeting, because in Atlanta we kept hearing over and over again sermons on the dignity of man. But now I find it a tremendously rewarding and edifying change to be in an atmosphere in which our teachers in Sunday School and our preachers from the pulpit speak of (and these are her words) our vile sinful nature.” She went on to say she was tired of hearing sermons on the dignity of man, and she was delighted again to hear some sermons which gave the other side of human nature.

Now there’s a sense in which, of course, we speak of the dignity of man. If we say that man has been created in the image of God, and that that image, while marred by the fall, is still present in man. But that is the limit by which we shall speak of the dignity of man as man. It will not help us to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ if we stress the dignity of man. It will help us a great deal if we bring home to the hearts of man – and if in the pew, we listen to the ministry of the word and read the Scriptures – if we see what the Scriptures say about the nature of man. Namely, that we are depraved, that we are unable to come of ourselves unto God, that we are hopelessly bound up in sin and need the sovereign activity of a saving God who through Jesus Christ delivers us from the pit to which we are going.

Samuel Rutherford said, “Stoop, man, stoop. The door into the kingdom is low.” That’s what is meant, I think, by the statement, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” There can be no entrance into the Kingdom of God, into relationship with the Lord Jesus, if there is not realization of what we are in the sight of a holy and righteous God.

Well, we come now to this paradoxical second beatitude, “Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” We ponder now the strange claim that the Lord Jesus seems to be making, that the way to a jubilant heart is through tears. What a strange saying for the Lord Jesus to make. It seems to be even more paradoxical in the Gospel of Luke. And in the Lucan form we read, “Blessed are ye who hunger now, for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh.”

The whole world seems to oppose the idea that the Lord Jesus presents, blessed are they that mourn. The world says, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” This Greek word, incidentally, is one of the strongest of the Greek words for mourning or lamentation. Blessed are they that lament, blessed are they that mourn deeply, for they shall be comforted. It’s the word that used of Jacob, when he thought that Joseph had

been found dead or was dead. It’s the kind of lamentation that a father would make over a lost son. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

There are three types of sorrow that we might think of when we ponder a clause like that. First of all, we might think of the sorrow of bereavement. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Now, of course, the triune God is able to comfort us in this, and it’s certainly true that such sorrow does edify us as we meet and face it in the light of the enablement that God gives. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. That’s one of the great promises of the word of God in that sense. And I think that all of Scripture testifies to the fact that our God is able to meet our needs in times of bereavement.

The Arabs have a saying, “All sunshine makes a desert.” I think I understand exactly what they mean. And it’s true. If all of our lives were sunshine and sweetness and gladness, the chances are that our lives would be like a desert. And I’m afraid, as I referred to that interpretation of Christianity which stresses the teeth, that that’s the kind of spiritual life that many people do have who find the Christian life nothing more than sweetness and lightness and gaiety. There is nothing but a desert, really, underneath.

Now while it is true that the Lord Jesus is well-able to undertake for us in times of bereavement, in times of trial, in times of tragedy, it is very doubtful that that is what the Lord Jesus has in mind here. You’ll notice that the context is not the context of the bereavement of one lost, but the context rests very strongly at this point upon the true understanding of what we are.

But could this not mean sorrow over the world’s social sins? Blessed are they that mourn, mourn over the injustices of our society; mourn over the tyrannies of our society; mourn over the violence that is manifested in our society; mourn over racism as it exists in our society; and all of the other evils that seem to be present in our society. Blessed are they that mourn over the evils of capitalism – is that what the Lord means by this statement?

Now I think that we must admit there is a strain of this in our Lord’s teaching. I do not think, incidentally, you should not misunderstand me. I do not think there is any strain in our Lord’s teaching on mourning over the evils of capitalism. As a matter of fact, one of these days I want to try to show that capitalism has far greater support from Scripture than any other economic system. But that’s for another day.

It’s evident that this strain is in our Lord’s teaching. There is a sense in which the Christian, the true Christian, should be very much concerned about the evils of the society in which he lives. We should not, of course, fail to realize that in the Old Testament, when we have great passages that have to do with social injustices, to remember that they were about a theocratic society in which God was the acknowledged head of that society, and the God was the God who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who is to come. We do not have any such situation as that in our society.

As a matter of fact, our society is not a Christian society at all as you well know, and from the standpoint of our society itself, we do not have the right to impose upon it the principles of the word of God according to their statements. But it is true, nevertheless, that our Lord Jesus does say, even in this sermon, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for them who do spitefully use you and persecute you. And so I think it is fair to say there is a strain of teaching in our Lord’s teaching, as well as in the apostles’ which suggests that a Christian should always stand on the side of justice. He certainly should stand on the side of opposition to tyranny, of opposition to racism. He should stand on that side.

But that’s far different from saying that’s what the Lord Jesus meant when he said, blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. I think if one were to make an honest investigation of the contribution of the church of Jesus Christ to the world’s social life, it would be startling for many in the world and very startling for some in evangelicalism who would have us engage wholeheartedly in this – and de-emphasize the

gospel of Jesus Christ in the process – that the church has led in the matter of social betterment of the world in the past.

And it might startle you to know that John Calvin, himself, was one of the leaders in this. But there are many men down through the years—the fact that we have hospitals in the 20th Century has been attributed to the influence of the Christian church. And if we were to begin and list the great Christian men who had to do with the betterment of the societies of the world, we wouldn’t stop in time to close this message, for there would be men like Calvin and Oberlin and Kerry and Kerrhardy in modern times, and many other outstanding Christians who have given themselves to the betterment of the society of this world.

I know there are some who say, well, the church as been slackening lately; they haven’t been doing anything about the world’s injustice, the world’s tyranny, the world’s violence—and that’s probably true. But one of the reasons the church has not done that is because we haven’t had time to do it. We’ve been fighting the apostasy of the liberals in the citadels of orthodoxy. And it is far more important for us to be concerned with the preservation of the faith of the Lord Jesus. And apostasy has been so encroaching upon places of influence in the work of Jesus Christ in the church of Jesus Christ, that faithful men have had to give themselves to the preservation of the faith. They’ve had to defend the Bible as the word of God. We’ve had to defend the doctrines of the grace of God in salvation. And we have had to spend so much time in the preaching of these truths, it’s true some of these things may have been neglected.

But I must confess, I can only – after looking at the Bible – come to the conviction that the primary task of the church of Jesus Christ has been, is, and always will be the salvation of the souls of men. Now I do know that if we are active in a social way, it must also be with tears. And I’m afraid that a great deal of the call for the church to be in social reform and social activities is not done with tears at all, but with a kind of indignation that does not produce any results. But I am sure that the Lord Jesus did not

mean that when he said, blessed are they that mourn. He did not mean, blessed are they that mourn over the world’s social sins.

What did he mean? Well now, if we recognize that the first beatitude has had to do with the recognition of my nature: “Blessed are the poor in spirit”—that is, that I am depraved, that I am unable to please God of myself, that I am a sinful being. If we recognize that this first beatitude has to do with the recognition of my nature, then it follows very naturally that we should, in the second beatitude, read that it has to do with the feeling that follows the recognition of my nature.

Blessed are the poor in spirit and then, blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. So it seems to me that the context demands that what we have here is a mourning over the fact of my sin. It is a sorrow over my sin that the Lord Jesus is speaking about. Now he is not talking about a mourning over my sin that takes place at my salvation, simply. It is true that when a person comes to know Jesus as Savior, it is not necessary, incidentally, for us to mourn and weep with tears upon our faces.

It is, however, absolutely necessary and essential that we recognize that we are, before God, sinful, and that we are condemned. If we do not recognize our need, then, of course, we shall have no desire for salvation. Every person who has ever been saved has had a consciousness of need. And there are many who have been saved in remarkably deep ways who have had deep consciousness of their sins. So it is absolutely essential that we recognize our need when we come to Christ at salvation.

But this Beatitude does not touch, simply, the time of salvation. It does not say, simply, blessed are they who have mourned, but the tense of this verb is present. Blessed are they who mourn – this is characteristic – blessed are they who are mourners, for they shall be comforted. So the mourning over our inability, the mourning over our sin, the mourning over our way in which we displease God is a constant thing in the Christian life. Blessed are they that mourn, who sorrow over their sin.

Now what is this? Well, I can think of a number of things that I would mourn over. I would mourn over my easily besetting sins that the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of. I would mourn over my indifference in the things of Jesus Christ. I would mourn over the meager zeal that I have to proclaim the Lord Jesus. I would mourn over the weakness of faith that I can read holy Scripture given to me by a sovereign God, given to me by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the very word of God, and I can read this and not respond to it. There’s a great deal of mourning within my spirit that should take place over that.

And while I’m not contending for the happy life, there is a sense in which all Christians should be joyful in all experiences of life. And it’s very difficult when we face a certain experience to be joyful, and I could mourn over my joyful-less-ness.

I can certainly mourn over my inconsistency. One day, I seem in my spirit to be very zealous; the next day, it seems as if a good sleep at night can make my faith leave me. I can mourn a great deal over that.

Now I know that someone is thinking at the present time, well Dr. Johnson, what are you saying? Are you saying that we should all become legalists? No, I’m not saying that. It’s true legalists do look as they’ve been mourning [laughter], but that kind of mourning is not the kind of mourning I’m speaking about.

I do believe that one of the weaknesses of our evangelicalism today is that there is no mourning over our sin. Now in the old days, they used to have a little bench up here in the front of the churches, and believe it or not, when I was converted in the insurance business in Birmingham, Alabama, preachers still mentioned this particular piece of furniture in the auditorium of our churches. But I haven’t heard it for years, I must confess. I haven’t heard it for years; I’m sure somebody is still mentioning it. But the first pew in the churches used to be reserved for individuals who were under deep conviction because of their sin. And it was called, “the mourner’s bench.” You’ve heard of it.

Now the mourner’s bench—I’m not, by the way, candidating for the [laughter] institution of the mourner’s bench, and have Pat Booth as the first member of the society because he’s sitting on the first row this morning—not contending for that at all. But I’m contending for what really lay back of that when it was started. Because there is a sense in which we have lost a deep sense of conviction for sin in evangelicalism. And we have entirely too much of this celestial joy which does not have any reality in it, because it is not solidly grounded in the doctrines of the word of God. And we cannot possibly have the true Christian joy that is found in the word of God if we do not have with it the great doctrines of the Christian faith.

What we’re talking about is the spirit of the publican. Our Lord Jesus refers to him in the 18th Chapter of the Gospel of Luke, in that very interesting little story of the Pharisee. He said that a certain Pharisee and a certain publican went up into the Temple to pray – the one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, I thank thee that I am not as other men are; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all I possess. And the publican, standing afar off would not lift up so much of his eyes into heaven, but smote on his breast saying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Well you notice that statement, “he smote upon his breast, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’”? Well that’s the kind of spirit that the Lord Jesus is referring to when he says blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. And of course, the publican was comforted.

Now we’re not contending that this mourning should stop with our salvation. And evidently, that was the time when the publican came to the understanding of what it means to be justified. I think that what is referred to is what is referred to in the 6th chapter of the Book of Isaiah. Now Isaiah went into the Temple at the time of the death of King Uzziah. Isaiah thought that everything was lost. Uzziah was gone, the great Uzziah, who had been responsible for many decades of prosperous and settled living for

the Children of Israel. And as the king died there came over the spirit, evidently, of Isaiah the feeling that we are lost. Uzziah is gone. All of the great things that the king has done have now gone, and we’re at the mercy of the world.

He went into the Temple, and he saw the Lord, the true King. And when he saw the true King and heard the Seraphim, saying one to another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory,” Isaiah responded as all true prophets and all true Christians should have at a sight of the glory of the great God: “Woe is me, I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.”

And when the mourning took place, then the comforting followed. Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken from the tongs from off the altar, and he laid it upon my mouth and said, “Lo, this hath touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged.”

You may remember that twice the Lord Jesus wept in the gospel records. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. And when he came to the tomb of Lazarus and looked full into the skeleton of face of death itself, and pondered the reign of sin and death, the Scriptures say that he was troubled in his spirit. Now he knew exactly what he was going to do. He knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. What need was there for any kind of troubling of himself? In a moment we read, he burst into tears – for that’s the meaning of that great text, “Jesus wept.” All of the modern translators in all of their skills cannot recreate the force of that one verse, Jesus wept. Jesus burst into tears.

Why did he cry? Why he cried over the fact that as he faced the reign of sin and the reign of death, it troubled him in his inmost man. And every true Christian responds in the same way to the reign of sin and the reign of death. Blessed are they that mourn, mourn over sin. Mourn over the condemnation that sin has produced.

And then the Lord Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. “How often,” he said, “would I have gathered you under my wings, as a hen her young?” Again, weeping, over the effects of sin in the lives of the children of Israel.

There is one other time that our Lord wept, which is not recorded in one of the gospels but in one of the epistles. The Epistle to the Hebrews says that in the Garden of Gethsemane, his agony was accompanied by strong crying and tears. And again, the strong crying and tears was over the curse of sin. That’s the only way you can explain our Lord’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was not because he was losing his friends. It was not because it was the time in which Satan was at his peak of power. It was not because he was going to die on a Roman gibbet. It was because now he must face the curse, the divine judgment upon sin. And so he writhed upon the ground as a worm and cried out in agony, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done”—the Lord Jesus hated sin and feared its consequences as a man.

Blessed are they that mourn, mourn over their sin, mourn over the consequences of human sin. There is no greater sensitivity than the sensitivity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We’re not talking about introspection. We’re not talking about the kind of introspection that leads to this dolefulness that I referred to in the beginning. We’re talking about a true analysis of what we are.

It is not self-pity. We are not talking about the chirpings of what someone has called, the pity-me bird. We’re not trying to build up a dismal castle. It does not read, blessed are they that moan. It’s blessed are they that mourn. There’s a great difference.

Now the Lord Jesus also speaks of the comforting. The comfort, of course, is the Messianic provision. Over in the 4th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, the 18th and 19th verses, we read that when he began his public ministry he stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth, and there was delivered to him the Book of the Prophet Isaiah to read, and he

opened the book, and he opened it to Isaiah chapter 61 verse 1, 2 and 3. For in that passage there was an account of his ministry which he would accomplish.

And so he stood up and said, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor – the poor in spirit, primarily. He has anointed me to heal the broken-hearted – those that mourn; to preach deliverance to the captives – spiritually unable to save themselves, afflicted by the inability of man; the recovering of sight to the blind – to those who cannot see spiritually; to set at liberty those that are bruised – disturbed by the experiences of life, shattered by the tragedies and trials through which they’ve passed; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord – that’s the Messianic ministry. That’s the ministry of our great Savior; it is to do this.

So we’re not surprised then when they say, blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; for that’s what he has come to do. That comfort is threefold. He comforts us from the deliverance of the penalty of sin. He has saved us and called us with a holy calling. It is comfort by salvation from the power of sin, and as a result of what the Lord Jesus has done, the Scriptures say, that sin shall not have dominion over us because we are not under law but under grace. It is salvation from the presence of sin, for the time shall come when we shall be out of the reign of sin and out of the reign of death in the presence of the Lord.

And he even told stories and gave true incidents which illustrated this. He spoke about Lazarus, the poor man, and he spoke about the rich man. And he spoke about how Abraham had some words with the rich man. And how Abraham said, “Now Lazarus suffered while he was here, but now he’s in heaven.” And then he added, “And now he is comforted,” for the ultimate comfort comes when we pass into the presence of the Lord.

And so although our hearts are a cage of unclean birds at the present time, he, the great comforter, through the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, carries on his comforting ministry. Comfort means, incidentally, “with strength.” So to be comforted is to be strengthened in

the experiences that are referred to in the mourning. And this is constantly going on in the Christian’s life. It never stops. For you see, having come to faith in the Lord Jesus, and having come to possession of an indwelling Spirit, he never ceases to do his work, and he shall ultimately sanctify every one of his saints. Isn’t that a glorious promise?

Every saint is going to be sanctified perfectly. Now there’s going to be great transformation in the coming of the Lord in the lives of some of the saints, for their growth has been meager, but he shall accomplish that. Blessed are they that mourn for their sin – realize exactly what they are, lean upon him – for they shall be comforted.

Now the blessedness is the blessedness of the gods, remember, for that’s the meaning of the word. There is unique spiritual joy for the repentant mourners. What’s the blessing of the world? The blessing of the world is sorrow-less-ness. The blessing of the world comes upon the joyous. The blessing of the world comes upon the gay. But the world has no beatitude whatsoever for the broken and contrite. The world is totally inadequate for the experiences of life that we really, all of us, ultimately face.

May I conclude? The mourning of our sin is primary in this passage. The mourning over trials, mourning over tragedies, mourning over the experiences of life is certainly included. I love Mr. Bunyan’s description of Valiant for Truth’s entry into heaven. He said, “So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.” That’s the way a Christian goes home.

The Heidelberg Catechism, which is one of the great expressions of faith, historically, says, in one of its questions, “What is your only comfort in life and death?” And the answer is, “That I, with body and soul, in both life and death, and not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins and delivered me from all of the power of the devil, and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head. Yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, wherefore by his Holy

Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.”

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. The unsolvable enigma is now seen as the blessed source of ecstasy. Happy is the mourner; how then can he mourn? Or if he mourns, how can he be happy? Well the solution is in a God who pours in oil in the wounds of a tender sense of the sinfulness of sin, and bathes the believer in the forgiveness that flows from eternal love and distinguishing grace.

Blessed are they that mourn – mourn over their sins, sorrow over what they are – they shall be comforted, and their comfort is not a temporal comfort. It is eternal. May God help us to see ourselves as we really are.

May I take one more minute? Robert Murray McShane was one of the great preachers of the last century. He ministered in Dundee in Scotland. Sometime after his death – and Mr. McShane died at the age of 30, having moved the whole country of Scotland – a young preacher who was disturbed over his own lack of effectiveness, visited Mr. McShane’s church in Dundee. There was present, the custodian, and he was showing the young preacher around the historic church.

And the young man exhibited a great deal of interest in McShane. He thought that perhaps there was some secret in McShane’s ministry that might be fruitful in his own ministry, and so he asked the custodian, what did Mr. McShane do in having such an effective ministry? He said that the custodian took him into the vestry where there was a desk, and some of the books of Mr. McShane were still there. And he said, I want you to sit down at the desk. And the young man sat down at the desk. “Now bend over and put your head in your hands,” and he bent over and put his head in his hands. And he said, “Now let the tears flow.” And then he said, come on outside.

He showed him the pulpit. He said, “Stand in the pulpit. Now put your head in your hands.” And then he said, “Now let the tears flow.” Now of course, the mourning of Mr. McShane was the mourning over the sins of his congregation, but it also included

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the sins of himself. And the sense of what we are may be one of the secrets that we’ve lost in evangelicalism. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Let’s bow in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these great Beatitudes that have come from our Lord Jesus Christ. May they come home to our hearts in power.

And now may grace, mercy and peace go with us. For Christ’s sake. Amen.