

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Kingdom Comfort For Those Who Mourn

by Dan Trygg

“Happy are the ones mourning, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4

“The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and an opening of eyesight; ² to proclaim the year of Yahweh's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion, to give them glory instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a spirit of apathy/dullness/fainting; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that He may be glorified. ⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. ⁵ Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; ⁶ but you shall be called the priests of Yahweh; they shall speak of you as the servants of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. ⁷ Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their portion; therefore in their land they shall possess a double inheritance; they shall have everlasting joy.”

Isaiah 61:1-7

Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with ten “declarations of happiness”. These were meant to be in contrast to the ten commandments of the old covenant revelation on Mount Sinai. Like Moses, Jesus went “up on the mountain”. The Mount Sinai experience was the forming of a kingdom covenant with the nation of Israel in 1450 B.C. Matthew presents this extended teaching by Jesus to the multitudes as a parallel event, a call to a deeper commitment and experience of the Kingdom of God. **Moses was only acting the part of a mediator to receive the revelation from God and bring it to the people. By contrast, Jesus was Himself God in the flesh and Messianic King. He not only spoke for God, but also spoke authoritatively as King.** The authoritative tenor of His message will become more evident as we go through it, but it was quite noticeable to those who heard Him (Matt. 7:28,29). It is important for us to keep in mind the echoes of OT revelation which Jesus purposefully expanded upon. **What Jesus has to say here cannot be correctly understood apart from seeing the OT foundations upon which He builds.**

As we attempt to interpret this second beatitude, there are two levels of understanding which must coincide: (1.) the immediate sentence itself; and then, (2.) the larger picture of how this sentence is to fit into this context.

First, let us look at the sentence itself: “Happy are the ones mourning, for they will be comforted.” Again, **the paradoxical contrast between the “declaration of happiness” and the condition of those being described is striking!** How can it be *fortunate* for one to be mourning? The activity of mourning is *not* a pleasant business. It is descriptive of a person in emotional pain. Clearly, it is not the *activity* of mourning or grieving *itself* that calls for the pronouncement of happiness from Jesus. Rather, **the happy situation of those who mourn comes from the promise, the assurance, of being comforted.**

There are 25 Greek words used in the NT for grief, sorrow, sadness, mourning, etc. Of these, 16 are descriptive of the *emotional experience* of the person, ...that is, they describe the emotion of *feeling sad* or *being in mental/emotional distress* or anxiety. The other 9 Greek words are descriptive of people *expressing* mourning or pain. These range from loud wailing, screams and of beating one's breast when in deep sorrow or extreme grief, ...to the more commonplace tears, weeping or talk of those who are dealing with the hurts, pains and disappointments of their lives. **The word Jesus uses here in Matthew 5:4 is one of the most common words for expressing emotion.** It is *not* one of those used for the extreme displays of grief. It does not necessarily refer to something dramatic or theatrical, but **it is somehow the expression of sadness or grief, not just the feelings themselves, which is conveyed by this word.** In other words, Jesus did not just say, “Happy are those who *are sad*.” He said, “Happy are those who *mourn*.” **Those who mourn are those who are outwardly expressing their inner hurts. They will be comforted.** This much is just a *commonsense observation about life* and healthy human relationships. If you are hurting, and want or need help, it is necessary to let others know of your hurt. (Yes, it is true, that most of us are *not* mind readers!) Generally, if you are around healthy, compassionate, “safe” people, any expressions of pain, ...whether they are in the form of *talking* or *tears*..., will be met with concern and care. **Jesus is saying that those who are crying out and expressing their grief to God will be heard and comforted.**

Many of us grew up in families that were unhealthy, ...or we have been in traumatic, abusive relationships..., where we were *not* encouraged to express our “heavy emotions” openly. To show signs of sorrow, or to cry was ridiculed or punished. **We learned to hide those emotions inside, and either put on a “tough” exterior, or retreated to places by ourselves where we could nurse our hurts.** Either of these methods of dealing with emotional hurt are *unhealthy* and *destructive* to us and our relationships. **Part of growing up as Christians is**

overcoming these old self-protective patterns, and learning to get in touch with our feelings and express them in healthy and appropriate ways. Only then can we fulfill God's design for our humanness. **God wants us to become whole and holy persons,** skilled and mature in living life. Growing up is a process that continues on and on in our earthly pilgrimage. Part of that is learning to deal with emotional pain in healthy ways. Jesus *wept* (Jn. 11:35), and He *felt* heavy sorrow, and *expressed it outwardly* to His closest friends and His Father (Mk. 14:32-36).

We were not made to continually bear a load of distress. That is why the scriptures tell us to "Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you..." (Psa. 55:22). **If we do not expel the heavy emotions, and get some momentary relief, emotional dis-ease begins to set in,** and we find ourselves becoming more and more buried in our pain. **This inner hurt begins to drive and distort other things in our lives** (e.g., Eph. 4:17-19), **and we will find it difficult to walk in the victory of the Holy Spirit.** Part of this is that the Spirit will lead us in ways that are healthy and honest (Jn. 4:24; Eph. 4:15-32). If we are unwilling to listen to Him *there*, we become unable to hear Him clearly in *other* parts of our lives. **Becoming "one who mourns" requires taking risks and learning new skills. "Mourning" is a verb, which means we have to choose to do it.** It also usually requires vulnerability on our part, which means developing some wisdom as to when, how and with whom we choose to "get real" about our inner pain. Not everyone is a safe person (cf. Matt. 7:6). Jesus Himself did not share *everything* with *everyone* (Jn. 2:24,25).

Regarding the larger context, **Jesus is talking about a whole lot more than just the healthy management of our emotions. This phrase is clearly a reference to Isaiah 61:2.** The Greek words in the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the OT, the version most widely read by Jews outside of Judea, are the same vocabulary that Jesus used here. Isa. 61:1,2a had already been used by Jesus in Luke 4 to describe His call to ministry. He said that *He* was the fulfillment of these verses. **What is the context of Isa. 61? After describing the sorry state of Israel in her sin (Isa. 59), and that there was no person to intercede for the people, God said He would intervene Himself** and bring salvation to His people. **He will repay the wicked for their evil deeds, but will also bring a Redeemer to His people to turn them back from their sins.** For those who respond to Him, He offers as a covenant promise that the Spirit of God will never depart from their mouths again (59:21). **God's glory will come and shine upon Israel, causing the other nations from around the world to "come to [their] light".** Although they had been forsaken and desolated, God would again restore them. **They would become a glory and praise to God, because their restoration and exaltation among the nations would be so marvelous** (60:1-17). There will be no more violence, destruction or devastation in their land anymore, because the Lord Himself will deliver them and dwell among them. "And the days of your mourning will be finished. Then all of your people will be righteous; they will possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified" (60:20b,21).

At this juncture, chapter 61 begins, describing a person who had the Holy Spirit come upon him to begin the process of healing, restoring and comforting God's people. (Incidentally, the word "afflicted" in vs. 1 in the LXX is the same word as "poor" in Mt. 5:3.) "Those who mourn" are specifically focused on in vss. 2,3. **The scriptures plainly state that this person will comfort "all who mourn". Thus, Jesus could confidently say, "Happy are the ones who mourn, for they will be comforted."** Isaiah 61 had long been understood to be referring to the Messiah, the anointed-king whom God would raise up in the last days. **By referring to this passage so directly in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is suggesting that this is the time when the promised restoration would begin, and He Himself is the Messiah who came to redeem Israel.**

Note, too, that **the passage does not end here. It is not simply about hurting-people being restored and comforted.** True, they will exchange their mourning for gladness, and be filled with praise. Beyond that, however, **they will become "oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord"** (vs. 3). *They*, then, will become the ones who will rebuild the ancient ruins, and repair the devastation. **They will become the priests and servants of the Lord.** *They* will become active, powerful participants in the expansion and rebuilding of God's kingdom, and will become a people of renown. **Instead of being a people of shame and humiliation (a source of their mourning), they will shout triumphantly with joy over what God does through them.** (Thus it is that they will be comforted.) So, **implicit in Jesus' declaration of happiness for the ones who mourn is a call to action, ...a call to shake off the heavy spirit of sorrow and shame, ...a call to rise up to the hope and promise of comfort, ...a call to become rebuilders of the ancient ruins, "the desolations of many generations".**

Jesus was not only presenting Himself as the promised Messianic-King,

He was calling out those who had ears to hear to join Him in the fight of the Kingdom of heaven, to become warriors, healers and builders for God in this broken-down world.

It matters not that they were broken down, wounded, and in pain. Like Gideon of old (Judg. 6-8), **their dissatisfaction, their mourning over sin and injustice, their crying out to God in their pain and heartache, becomes their strength. God hears and acts. He heals, restores, and enables them to share His comfort with others** (II Cor. 1:1).