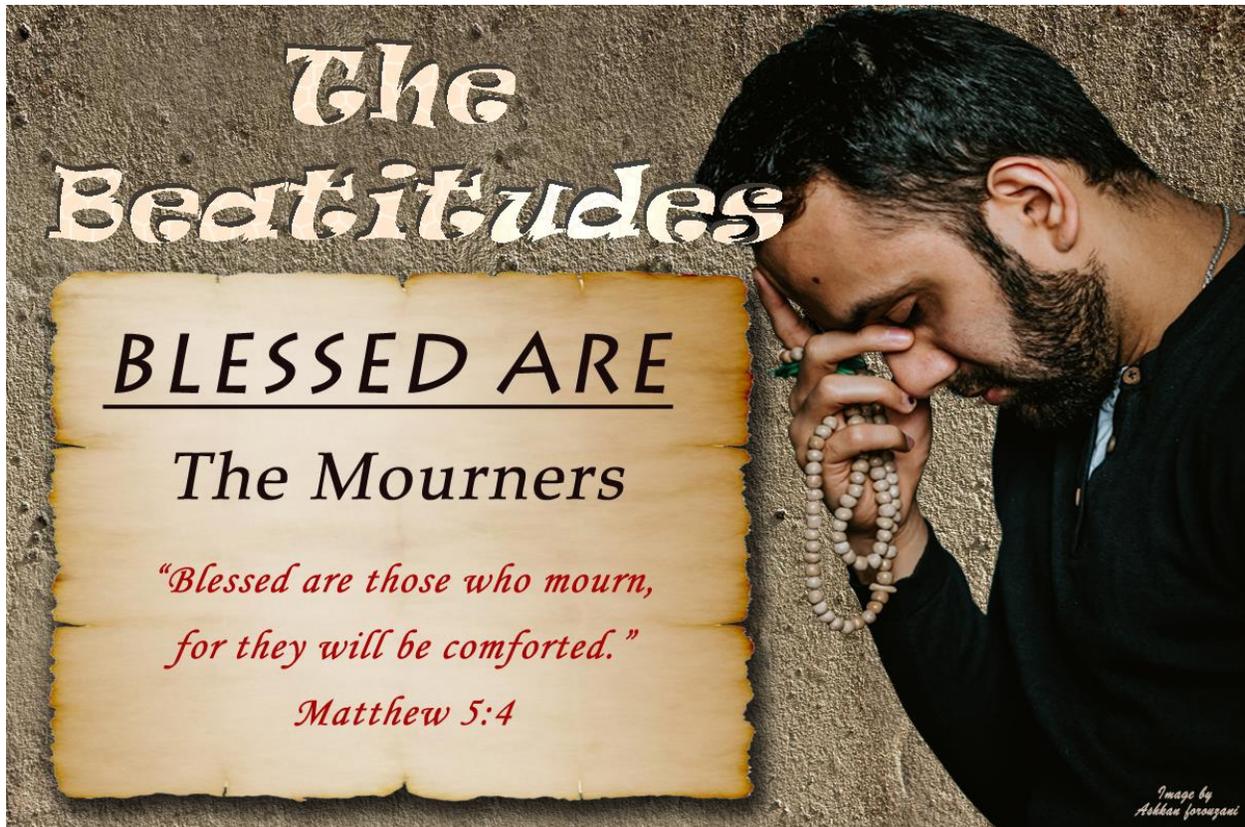


July 10 “Blessed are the Mourners”

Matthew 5:4

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



Special Music: “Memories” Bellanova – One Voice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfPaYdIJaGE>

SOUL CANDLES

The candlelit eyes
And gracious hands
Give light to the room
In which I stand
The warming light
Of those I love
Give sight to me
And then dispose
Of the night.
Without those candles,
I fear the dread
Of darkness might
O'er take me,
Make me
As if dead.
When those far-off candles
Die to the dark
A sphere appears
And devours the light
Of those who rested
Within its glow.
We cannot hear
Their voices
Or feel their breath.
A thread of smoke
Ascends from the candle melt

As if a soul rising
With fragrant scent.
It pricks our hearts
Our tears lament.

Those candles close
Entwined with ours,
Burn brighter
With greater Luminous.
Heart flame
And graciousness
Glow within our spirits
Warm our souls.
And together the world
Is a better place
Awhirl with love and grace.

But our hearts turn dark
When death impends
And takes the breath
Of dearest friends,
The light goes out
The dark descends
And absorbs
The light around us.
Making us blind
Within our tears.
Sorrow bound.

We mourn.

**Our grief
Transcends our space
Dragging us down
Weighing us down
Drowning in agony
Gasping for air
As we seek solace
And reason
In this place
Of weights and chains.**

**No light breaches
The shadows
That surround us.
As we beg for air
In our despair
Feeling certain
That none will come
And our pain
Will end us soon,
Rend our soul asunder.**

**And then,
When eons of grief
Have passed,
Our souls held fast,**

**The chains slip
And disengage.
The fog begins to lift
As we shift our hearts
Towards acceptance
And allow God
To let us heal,
The candles closest to us
Revealed.
Even in the blindness
Of our torment,
They never left our side.**

Not one of us has escaped the clouds that come with mourning. Just as we cannot escape death, we also cannot escape grief. Throughout our lives we will experience the loss of many of those that we know. There is a sadness that comes even when we lose someone that we are only acquainted with. There is a deeper sadness with the loss of those we have a relationship with. There is a profound grief that comes with the loss of souls who are entwined with ours, whether it be a spouse, parent, child, relative, or close friend.

But at the same time, we are all aware that the level of loss for even those that are a significant part of our lives is still relative to our shared experiences. The loss we feel for an absentee parent is not the same as the one we feel for the parent that has never missed a ball game or piano recital; the one who fixed our bumps and bruises, rushed us to the doctor when we got sick, or allowed us to cry on their shoulder after our first breakup or other painful moment. Sometimes, we can be far closer to a stepparent than a biological parent. The same is true with our children, stepchildren, and adopted children. The bond that forms between soldiers on the battlefield can often be stronger than the bond we have with own siblings.

The stronger that bond, the harder the loss when that bond is broken. When that bond is severed, whether it be by death or disagreement, we feel like the wind is knocked out of us and we cannot catch our breath. We feel a hole open up in our heart that defies being filled or repaired. But that is because we don't want to repair it. We want to hold on to the good memories of the relationship. Whether we accept it or not, we remain hopeful that something will

occur that will cause relationship in question will be mended, that whatever caused the disillusion of the entwinement would be restored to its original nature. That is true even in death when we would give our very souls to have one more day with our mother, father, spouse, child, or friend.

The inability to let go of the relationship during this period is known as mourning. It is the time that it takes for us to come to acceptance that the bond has been severed and may never be regained. This could take weeks. Or months. Or years. Or decades. Or we might never get to that point of acceptance at all. Unless we can find a way to let go of the relationship, at least to the point that it allows us to breathe, the grief will continue to define who we are. We need to find a way to navigate our mourning to the point that we can continue to function. As Christians, we need to return to a point where we can allow God to heal our hearts and use us to move his Kingdom forward.

And that can be very difficult. Especially if we are blaming God for the loss. “Why did you take my spouse? Why did you take my child? Why did you take my sibling? Why did to you take my friend? What purpose could it serve? I am in pain!”

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

35 Jesus wept.

John 11:32-35

The shortest verse in the Bible. “Jesus wept.”

Jesus was so very close to Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. They were like family to him. Mary had poured the oil from the alabaster jar on his feet and wiped them with her hair. When Jesus comes to Bethany, he already knows that Lazarus is dead. He even waited an extra two days before coming because he was aware of the situation and what was what was about to happen. Jesus does not weep because Lazarus is dead. Jesus weeps because of all the pain that he is surrounded with, family, and friends mourning the passing of somebody that they held dear. Someone they thought Jesus held dear as well. But Jesus showed up late and now Lazarus is dead. They all believed that Jesus could easily have healed him if he had only come when he had been asked to.

I’m sure that they must have felt betrayed to some extent. Jesus healed strangers all the time. Why didn’t he make time to come and heal Lazarus, his friend? He could even have done it from a distance if he had wanted to. “Why did you let my brother die? Why did you let my friend die? I am in pain!”

“Jesus Wept”

Jesus weeps for his friends who are in mourning, partly because of their hurt and partly because they do not understand death in the way that Jesus understands death. There is a lesson to be learned here and Jesus weeps because the lesson is so very painful.

What do you think about that? Do you view this as some kind of cruel purpose on the part of our Savior? What if you had been one of his disciples and it had been your brother or sister that had died because Jesus was too late. Or how do you think you would feel when your brother or sister is brought back to life knowing that the death was allowed to happen intentionally so that Christ could teach a lesson? Do you think that God toys with our emotions like that, that he allows us to get hurt just to show us how wonderful he is when he fixes it? Is this a total contradiction to the servanthood that Jesus is constantly teaching?

Do you see what mourning can do to us if we let it control us rather than turning it over to God? We can find ourselves sitting in the judge's seat putting God on trial, questioning his motives. Instead of being grateful for the grace that God offers, we question the cost of that grace with the assumption God has ulterior motives when he helps us. We decide that God isn't being fair in the way he treats us so that gives us the right to question these moments in our lives. **"I see no purpose that is served by letting this person die. Why should I worship a God that thinks so little of humanity?" And in our blindness and our pain, those questions make sense to us as we yell at the Master of Creation shaking our balled-up fist at the God who loves us so much, he allowed his Son to die for us.**

While we are in this state, it is easy to see God as a callous manipulator who simply doesn't care.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

“Jesus wept.”

As we take our fists and beat on the breast of our savior, he takes us in his arms and holds us close to comfort us. He isn't angry at us. He understands us. God sent Jesus to show us that he understands how we can find it all confusing, especially in a time of mourning. Jesus does not push us away or stop us from beating on him. NO! He pulls us close, hugs us tight, and weeps with us. He engages with our pain. He brings comfort to our soul. He takes us by the hand and leads us through that dark time, proving to us that we are not alone in our grief.

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

Did you know that God can take anything that you can throw at him? Insults, furniture, expletives, punches, anger, indifference, hate. You name it. He can handle it. He's not afraid to embrace you when you are oozing gallons of emotions and looking for someone, anyone, to blame. I'm not talking about crying on his shoulders. I'm talking about falling is to a limp heap of boneless meat at his feet. What he has for you is not pity. It's love. Love so great that it defies understanding and comprehension. He will pick you up, pull you close and comfort you as he leads you away from your darkness.

Mourning is not limited to the passing of family and friends. Ponder the loss of a relationship through divorce or disagreement. The loss is still very real. One can also mourn a job loss, a financial loss, the loss of a home, or the destruction caused by a natural disaster. A person can mourn the loss of a limb for years. I have a friend that recently lost the contents of a storage unit to the fires in New Mexico. That included all of the family photos and keepsakes. There is a variant of mourning that comes with such a loss. I have a number of tools that belonged to my dad. Many have survived to the point of no longer being useful. But when one breaks or is lost, I have a sense of loss that I can't fix. "I think, it's only a screwdriver or a hammer?" But in truth, it isn't. I feel a closeness with my dad when I use one of his tools and I can't get that same closeness when I replace it with a newer tool. To hold a tool used by my dad keeps his memory fresh for me. In all these cases, we still ask the same questions, "Why did this happen? What did I do wrong to cause this?"

The loss is never trivial to the one who experiences the loss. We might not understand or appreciate the depth of the loss, but that does not mean that the person experiencing the loss doesn't need comfort to move through the event and find a way back to wholeness. Jesus is right there through those losses allowing us to lean into him and find solace.

Every last one of us has been the victim of some type of insufferable loss in our life. The thought occurs in our mind of turning away from God during those times because we could not see his purpose and feel you were owed an

explanation. I also know that you are still here, listening to this message and thinking back to those times.

I have known similar losses. I know the confusion, the pain, the emptiness that doesn't seem to have an end. I won't try to diminish those moments for you by telling you that it is simply the cycle of life. To break it down and call it a process is to take away the meaning. I won't tell you that you will eventually find joy in the loss. That may never be true.

But we can find joy in the knowledge that Jesus never leaves our side. That he comforts us in those dark moments that drive so many others away from us. He sends others into our lives to comfort us as well. He reaches into our misery and calms our spirits. It may take a very long time to heal, and we will have the scars to show for it, but he is with us every second of every minute to see us through, even if we feel as if he has deserted us. Even when we we're pushing him away, Jesus is pulling us closer and weeping with us. And on the other side of our mourning, when we once again feel the presence of our soul, we find the memories; the memories that keep the evidence of each person's impact on our spirits alive in our hearts.

That's what Jesus does. He comforts us. He is our strength and our rock. He is our example in a world filled with mourners. Jesus shows us how we are to be his hands and feet by stepping into that place of mourning and weeping with those around us.

For those who feel that shedding tears at a time of loss is unmanly:

“Jesus wept.”

For those who feel that such emotion is best kept in check:

“Jesus wept in public with his friends.”

For those who feel that someone needs to be strong in the moment:

“Jesus wept and was a source of strength for those close to him suffering the loss. He met them where they were, and wept with them because he loved them.”

There has never been a man who walked the face of this earth that was more manly, more emotional, stronger in character, and provided more comfort to those experiencing a loss than Jesus of Nazareth.

“Jesus wept.”

By weeping, Jesus shows us how very much he feels our pain. He shows us how much he loves us. He mourns with us through the time of our loss.

I want us all to ponder that fact this week. God doesn't hide from us when we have a loss. He doesn't lurk in the shadows. And neither should we. When the people around us are mourning their losses, we need to pull them close and weep with them letting them know that we feel their pain, that we love them, and we are there to help get them through the loss. It is what Jesus does. And that is always our goal, to be more like Jesus in everything that we do.

God bless you all!

AMEN

Copyright © 2022 Rev. Walt Wellborn

Scripture references provided under copyright by:

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.