

**Valley View Chapel**  
**June 3, 2012**  
***Credibility 101, Part 3***  
***Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.***

**Introduction**

This is the third session in the Valley View Chapel summer school class called *Credibility 101*. Christians have received a lot of bad publicity and sadly, much of it has been earned. We've got some work to do if we're going to regain the trust of a skeptical world. The world expects Christians to act like Christians and many Christians don't. Those Christians whose walk doesn't match their talk splash mud on those who are trying to represent Christ well in the secular marketplace.

The need for Christian credibility was driven home to me a few weeks ago when I read a true story told by Pastor James Emery White about visiting the *Eagle and Child Pub* in Oxford where C. S. Lewis and his friends used to meet.

"One day, as I sat at my favorite little table, and another stream of tourists entered—and left—I heard the manager muttering, "Those *Christians!*" I was enough of a regular to feel comfortable asking him what he meant.

"Take a look at this," he said, holding up a menu.

"They cost me two pounds each. Two pounds! I ordered hundreds of them, and now I only have ten because they keep getting nicked."

"You mean people are stealing them?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah, it's the *Christians* who take the menus, while the thieving students take the spoons and ashtrays."

I couldn't help but ask, "Why the menus?"

"I don't know, it's what they can get their hands on, I suppose," he answered. "It got so bad I started making copies of the menu that they could take—for free—but they still take the good ones."

"I'm surprised they don't try and take what's on the walls, then," I mused, looking at the pictures, plaque, and particularly the framed handwritten letters from Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

"Oh, those aren't real," he said, "just copies. They still get taken. I'd never put the real ones up."

He paused a moment, and then said, "What gets me is that all these people who come in for Lewis *are supposed to be Christians*, right?"

I rather doubt that the pub owner would be open to accepting an invitation to church because those who are identified with Jesus Christ have represented him poorly.

We're taking a close look at the Beatitudes for ten weeks because the Beatitudes paint a lovely and comprehensive portrait of what a Christian should look like. If the Christians who visited the *Eagle and the Child Pub* conducted themselves according to the principles set forth in the Beatitudes, I'm convinced that the pub owner would be open to hearing about Jesus.

### **The common understanding of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Beatitude**

This is the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II of England, marking 60 years on the throne. Only one British monarch reigned longer and that was Queen Victoria who ruled for 63 years. It's a record that most people never thought would be surpassed. If I were a betting man I wouldn't bet against Elizabeth breaking Victoria's record for longevity.

What comes to mind for many of us when we think of Queen Victoria is her 20-year marriage and love affair with Prince Albert. When Albert died on December 14, 1861 at the age of 42 Queen Victoria was devastated.

Members of the royal household could not appear in public without wearing all-black clothes for a year. Victoria herself wore black mourning clothes for the remaining 40 years of her life. For the first three years after Albert's death, the queen did not appear in public.

Could Queen Victoria, in the throes of her grief, claim the promised blessing of the second Beatitude to bring comfort and consolation to her broken heart? Strangely the answer would be "No." She couldn't have turned to this verse for comfort in the loss of her husband. There are many passages in Scripture to which she could have turned but Matthew 5:4 would not have been one of them for Jesus wasn't talking about the sorrow of *bereavement* but the sorrow of *repentance*.

The great London preacher of the last century, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, declared some 60 years ago: "The Church has a defective doctrine of sin."

John Stott observed: "I feel that we evangelical Christians, by making much of grace, sometimes thereby make light of sin."

Yet Jesus didn't make light of sin. In fact *sin* was the theme of his first two Beatitudes.

Let's see if you did your homework. Would as many of you who can recite the first beatitude with me? "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

We saw last week that Jesus was really saying: “Blessed are those who understand that they are spiritually bankrupt and can’t offer one thing to God that will merit his forgiveness and acceptance.”

The first beatitude instructs us to *acknowledge* our sin. The second beatitude tells us to *mourn* over our sin. It’s one thing to *confess* our sins – to agree with God that we have sinned. It’s another thing to *repent* of our sins – to turn from them and follow the way of obedience to the laws of God.

So let’s unwrap this second beatitude and see what Jesus meant by “Blessed are those who mourn.”

### **What Spiritual Mourning Is *Not***

We have witnessed too many public confessions over the past few years concerning everything from adultery to embezzlement. I wonder how sincere the confessions are and how genuine the tears that flow on national television? More often than not, these public figures are mourning the fact that *they got caught* rather than mourning the sin that they committed. Or maybe they lost their job or their marriage or the respect of their children.

Mourning over the *consequences* of sin is not the same thing as mourning over sin.

I’m reading the book of Jeremiah in my devotions. Recently I came to the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter. The people of Judah had worshiped idols, engaged in gross immorality, treated the poor with contempt, looked to pagan neighbors for help instead of to Jehovah and even sacrificed their children to false gods. God had had enough and sent a famine to the land.

The people mourned: “Our wickedness has caught up with us, Lord, but help us for the sake of your own reputation. We have turned away from you and sinned against you again and again.” Jeremiah 14:7 (NLT)

God knew that they were not mourning for their sins. They were mourning because they were reaping the consequences of their sins. God knew that if he sent them relief, they would return to their old ways.

That’s why he said to them in Jeremiah 14:10, “You love to wander far from me and do not restrain yourselves. Therefore, I will no longer accept you as my people. Now I will remember all your wickedness and will punish you for your sins.” (NLT)

Mourning because we got caught with our hand in the cookie jar or mourning because we’re on the receiving end of the just consequences of our sinful choices is not the kind of mourning Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5:4.

## The Meaning of Mourning

There are nine Greek words in the New Testament for “mourn.” The word Jesus chose for the second beatitude – *pentheo* – is the most graphic and intense. It was usually reserved for the sorrow associated with the death of a loved one. It is a depth of sorrow that pierces the heart. It is pain that goes to the center of our identity. That is how Jesus said that we should “mourn” over our sins. The Church doesn’t mourn that way over sin very much today. But she used to.

Thomas Cranmer in the 1552 Communion Service for the Anglican Church wrote: “We acknowledge and *bewail* our manifold sins and wickedness.”

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer, used in the Anglican Church until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expressed this kind of mourning in the *Prayer of Confession*:

*Almighty and most merciful Father,  
we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep.  
We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.  
We have offended against your holy laws.  
We have left undone what we ought to have done,  
and we have done what we ought not to have done,  
and there is no health in us.  
Yet, good Lord, have mercy on us: restore those who are penitent,  
according to your promises declared to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
And grant, merciful Father, for his sake,  
That we may live a godly, righteous, and obedient life,  
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.*

The godly missionary to the Native Americans of our region, David Brainerd, wrote in his *Journal* on October 18, 1740, “In my morning devotions my soul was exceedingly melted, and bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness.”

When was the last time any of us grieved over our sins like that?

## **Charles Colson' Story**

Charles Colson was on President Nixon's staff and was the brains behind "the dirty tricks" wing of the administration.

He was hired thugs to beat up anti-war demonstrators. He plotted to firebomb the liberal Brookings Institution. Colson organized the "burglary" of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in Beverly Hills in September 1971. Ellsberg had leaked the so-called "Pentagon papers" about the Vietnam War which had increased public opposition to the conflict, and Colson hoped to find dirt on Ellsberg that could be used to discredit the anti-war activist.

It was Colson who employed Howard Hunt, a maverick former CIA man, to orchestrate the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex that led to President Nixon's resignation in 1974.

"Chuck could never play anything straight," one of his former underlings was quoted as saying. "Everything had to be contrived, a set-up. Chuck always had to stuff the ballot box." Charles Colson was not a nice man.

In 1974 Colson pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice in the Ellsberg case. He served seven months for his crime.

But one night just concluding a conversation with Tom Phillips, a friend and the president of the Raytheon Corporation who shared with him the gospel, Charles Colson's spiritual eyes were opened. I'll let Colson finish the story in his own words: "That night when I...sat alone in my car, my own sin – not just the dirty politics, but the hatred and evil, so deep within me – was thrust before my eyes, forcefully and painfully. For the first time in my life, I felt unclean, and worst of all, I could not escape. In those moments of clarity I found myself driven into the arms of the living God." There while sitting in his car, Charles Colson not only acknowledged his sins, he "mourned" for them. He truly repented.

Until we see our sin for what it is and for what it has done – to us, to those closest to us, and to God – we cannot receive the gift of God's forgiveness.

Professor F. Dale Bruner brilliantly paraphrased the second Beatitude: "Blessed are those who know they are in trouble and have the sense to admit it."

We mourn spiritually when we know that our sins have gotten us into trouble with God and we have the sense to admit it and do something about it.

## **The Meaning of Comfort**

Jesus said that those who truly “mourn” over their sin will be “comforted.” What kind of “comfort” was Jesus talking about?

The word for “comfort” in Greek is *parakaleo*. It is closely related to the word – *parakletos* – that Jesus used in John 14:16 to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another *Comforter*, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth....” John 14:16-17a (KJV)

We are the beneficiaries of a two-part comfort when we ‘mourn’ for our sins. We have the “comfort” of knowing that our sins are forgiven, that we have a right standing with God, and that we will go to heaven when we die. But we also have the comfort of knowing that the Holy Spirit is always with us to strengthen, encourage, provide, counsel, and support us through every situation of life.

### **Conclusion**

Commentators have suggested that the genuine believer not only mourns over his own sins but over the sins of others as well.

Listen once again to the cry of Jeremiah to the people of his day who refused to repent: “Listen and pay attention! Do not be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before it is too late. Acknowledge him before he brings darkness upon you, causing you to stumble and fall on the darkening mountains. For then, when you look for light, you will find only terrible darkness and gloom. And if you still refuse to listen, I will weep alone because of your pride. My eyes will overflow with tears, because the Lord's flock will be led away into exile.” Jeremiah 13:15-17 (NIV)

The sins of the nation drove the prophet to uncontrollable anguish.

We’re told in Luke 13:34 that Jesus from a vantage point high above the holy city looked at and wailed over the unresponsiveness of the people: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (NIV)

Read Jeremiah 14:17 and you will be confronted with a shockingly graphic picture: “Now, Jeremiah, say this to them: ‘Night and day my eyes overflow with tears. I cannot stop weeping, for my virgin daughter—my precious people—has been struck down and lies mortally wounded.’” (NLT)

Here is *God* weeping over his people who have turned their backs on him like a virgin daughter who has inexplicably turned her back on her kind and generous father. God’s people left the love and security of their father’s house and gave themselves to sinful pursuits and unworthy lovers.

We weep over a lot of things in life.

- Have we wept over the endorsement of same sex marriages at the highest level of government?
- Have we wept over the murder of 1.5 million babies every year in America's "killing fields" euphemistically called "abortion clinics"?
- Do we mourn because 95% of all adults in America have had pre-marital sex?
- Do we weep over the related fact that 40% of all births in the United States are to unwed mothers?
- Are we grieved because more children are born into homes without a father than with a father, and in the Afro-American community that figure approaches 80%?
- Do we weep because 10,839 people lost their lives in 2009 because of alcohol related accidents?

After we have wept, what then? What is our response to a world that has lost its way and is rushing headlong to judgment?

In his book *Christian Counter-Culture* John Stott challenged the church: "Fallen human beings need more than barricades to stop them from being as bad as they could be. They need regeneration, new life through the gospel....We are called both to spread the gospel and to frame our manner of life in a way that is worthy of the gospel."

In other words, the only cure for a sin-sick society is a church that has the credibility of her Lord and his passion to see lost people found and transformed by the power of the gospel.

May we truly mourn over our sin and shortcomings. May we weep for the sins of our nation. And may we be comforted in the knowledge that the same gospel that brought us from darkness into light is able to do the same when shared by a credible Christian!

So let's start to memorize our Beatitude of the week: "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted."

