

Mourning in an Evil Age

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This beatitude is timely and intriguing. *Timely* for obvious reasons: there's no shortage of things to mourn in 2020; *intriguing* because there are two ways to take the beatitude. 1) God blesses those who mourn the evil *around* them or 2) Blessed are those who mourn the evil *within* them? The Greek word here is actually used in the NT to refer to mourning both inner and outer evil. We should grieve both: personal *and* circumstantial evil. Some of us passionately lament social evil but tolerate personal evil; others are attuned to personal sin but quite indifferent to social evil. Where do you need to refine your mourning? And how do we find *comfort*? Let's take a look at mourning outer evil, inner evil, eternal comfort.

Mourning Outer Evil

Do you know the shortest verse in the Bible? Yes, Jesus wept. But do you know what it tells us about mourning our greatest enemy? In one of the most touching scenes in the Bible, sisters Mary and Martha send for Jesus because Lazarus, "he whom you love is ill" (11:3). Jesus delays two days allowing his friend to die. His life snuffed out. His body wrapped and laid in tomb. The grievers gather. When Jesus finally arrives Mary says to him, **Lord had you been here my brother would not have died.** The grief palpable. She breaks down right in front of Jesus, weeping along with her friends. Grief can cripple you in an instant. Jesus is **deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled** (33) and also weeps, levelled by loss. Yet, just a few verses earlier Jesus confidently proclaimed **I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will never die** pointedly asking, **Do you believe this** (25-26)? But here he is crippled by grief. Jesus *wept*. What does this tell us? **Jesus cares not only about our beliefs but also about our tears.** He chooses to be compassionate when it would have been easier to remain distant; he is emotionally close. *Jesus* wept. The resurrection and the life cried at the death of his friend. So when you suffer you don't have to be tough; you don't have to hold it together, be strong for everyone else. Even Jesus had his moments. Real evil, injustice, and loss deserve real lament. If you're indifferent to social evil, ask Christ to give you his heart for the oppressed and suffering. Mourn by reaching out to one struggling person. If you're suffering consider this Christ who **cares not just about your beliefs but your sorrows.** He is emotionally close. Now, notice how people respond to Jesus. One

group says, “See how he loved him!” But some said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” (37). The first group responds to what Jesus *did*. He *loved* Lazarus. They stand in awe of a man of his stature and power giving of himself so freely. They *enjoy* his love. The second group responds to what Jesus *did not do*. They criticize him for not preventing injustice. “If I was Jesus...” in awe of their own wisdom, judging instead of marveling. They *criticize* Christ. My friend Sarah has debilitating migraines, can’t get out of bed, take her kids to school, or do anything fun, 10+ pain headaches. When she has a bad day she pulls out a desk calendar and shades in half or all of the day’s rectangle to mark a bad day. And when she looks back over her calendar and sees mostly blackened out days, it’s easy for her to feel cheated, angry, and resentful. *To criticize God*. But she is learning to lean not on her own understanding but on God’s. To trust what God *is doing* not criticize him for what *he is not* doing. She’s become poor in spirit, the gateway to seeing Jesus a *good Shepherd who does good even when it doesn’t feel good, who has purposes beyond our understanding.*” When evil strikes, mourn with Christ not apart from Christ. Trust him don’t judge him, stand in awe of his wisdom not your own.

Mourning Inner Evil

Perhaps these observations have been a comfort, and perhaps, they have been a conviction. Who among us has not judged Jesus rather than marvel at him? This is the greater evil: replacing God *with ourselves*. The essence of sin: *I know better than God*. It’s what the crowds did with Christ; it’s what Adam and Eve did: *I know better than God*. When you say it out loud, it sounds absurd, but the problem is we believe it *silently*. When you refuse to speak the truth to a friend: *I know better*. When you click on that porn, you believe God is wrong about sex. *I know better*. When you drift away from Scripture, church, and prayer you’re saying: *I know better*. I can handle life on my own. I know better than God. How do we escape this destructive belief? Paul says of the Corinthians, *you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief...* (2 Cor 7:10). *Grieving into repenting*. What’s the difference between godly grief and ordinary grief? When kids make a fake apology, they can’t look their sibling in the face. Staring at the ground they let out a reluctant, I’m sorry. Why? They can’t let go of the belief: *I know better*. They grieve the circumstances but not their sin, their belief. They can’t take their eyes off being right. *Aren’t we similar? We often*



grieve the circumstances but not our sin. To enjoy comfort, we must grieve into repentance. Stop looking at the consequences, start looking at Christ. When Jesus approached the tomb of Lazarus he said, “[Father...I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me, Lazarus, come out.](#)” (Jn 11:41–42). Lazarus’ resurrection wasn’t just about overthrowing circumstantial evil; it was ultimately about opening up true belief and true repentance—that they may believe that you sent me. **Jesus cares not just about our tears; he also about our beliefs.** He knew I know better leads to not just to outer death but inner, eternal death. He wasn’t content to show compassion just on the outside; he took the harder path to bring comfort to the inside. You see, the real challenge of this beatitude is to be the kind of person who mourns both evils. If you just mourn the evil outside you, you’ll never get down to its true source or comfort. You won’t know the comfort of Christ for your own sin and will settle for a manufactured comfort in being a social crusader. But if you only mourn the evil inside, you’ll neglect the impact of your sin on those around you. You won’t join God’s plan to bring shalom to the world because you’re so focused seeking comforts for your own problems. The only way to be the person who mourns both evils, without being miserable, is to find a comfort outside yourself that buffer and buoys you.

Eternal Comfort

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. We have to mourn; grieve into repentance; *believe differently* to obtain the greater comfort. Here’s a belief: [Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction](#) (2 Co 1:3–4). This promise if we believe it give us two things. 1) Where comfort comes from. God the Father *is* the God of **all comfort**. All true comfort is found in him. Not in ignoring evil, excusing evil, or even fighting evil *but turning to the Comforter*. When I was grieving my grandfather’s recent death, I received several unexpected emails that brought me real comfort. Do this. But after an hour or so their comfort faded. You know what didn’t? God’s comfort. How does he give it? 2) God comforts *from his mercies*. Sometimes that mercy *relieves* pain (my grandfather was welcomed by this God when he died); other times mercy *allows* pain. Sometimes pain is required for comfort. A friend just had back surgery. Slipped disks out, titanium ones in. Woke up with



no back pain! But guess what, those surgical scars sure do hurt. To enjoy the deeper comfort sometimes we have to embrace a temporal pain. God takes us through pain to give us the deeper comfort. Jesus imposed the pain of grief on Mary and Martha to open up the deeper comfort of resurrection life. *Isn't that cruel?* Not if it's impossible to obtain that depth of comfort any other way. We're told [Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him](#) 11:45. Deeper comfort. And at the cross he imposed *the pain of death on himself* to bring us not just deeper but eternal comfort. To give us the greatest comfort—himself—*the Resurrection and the Life!* When you take this in, it motivates and comforts mourning outer and inner evil. If Jesus has conquered our greatest enemy, we should be laying it out for the sufferer. If Jesus is the life, we ought turn to him for everything. Jesus brings deeper, eternal comfort to those who mourn.