

The Heavenly Citizens Charter 2

Blessed are those who mourn

Amos 5:18-24 & Luke 19: 41-44

The first time I mourned was when I was nine. I went downstairs one morning and found my best friend flat in her back at the side of her hutch. Pebbles was only five and my parents had told me that guinea-pigs live for seven years. I was inconsolable for weeks and felt robbed of her friendship.

The second time I mourned was when I was seventeen. My friend of a few months had been killed in a house fire. The pain, grief, bewilderment was total and I retreated into my shell. Thankfully, however looking back, I can see how God used that experience as a catalyst to bring me 18 months later to a point of faith and belief in Christ.

On these and other occasions when I've mourned I've felt many different emotions but I've never felt happy or blessed or fortunate!! Yet this second attitude in the Heavenly Citizens Charter (Jesus' list of 8 attitudes) says: "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted" (5:4). Like the first attitude, this clearly shows the central attitude of Christianity is strikingly different from the normal attitude of most people today.

Western Society shuns mourning. We no longer wear black for several weeks after a death or hold wakes around the dead body. Hearses are driven much faster, and nobody pauses in respect when they pass by. Instead we organise our lives to avoid mourning. We encourage each other to forget our troubles, to put them behind us, to do everything we can not to face them. Leisure Centres have mushroomed. Home Entertainment has become the fashion. Canned laughter provides the background for so much television. And Jesus contradicts all this with a whispered "Blessed are those who mourn...".

The Church has been affected by society's attitude. If Jesus walked into many modern Churches and urged the congregation to mourn, its leaders would probably correct Him and tell Him to rejoice and be glad, to smile and be happy, to be joyful and praise

God. The Television programme 'Spitting Image' once cruelly caricatured an Archbishop of Canterbury as a jovial buffoon, as a happy clappy, as a tambourine-shaking, hallelujah singing nutcase. George Carey was not like that. But his puppet was used to symbolise what so many people think about modern Christianity. However, Jesus said that the Citizens of the Kingdom should be characterised by an attitude which values mourning, not laughter. Just like the first attitude, Poverty of Spirit was not about something financial but rather something essentially spiritual, so this second attitude is more about spiritual mourning than natural mourning. All 8 Attitudes refer to a spiritual condition and a spiritual attitude. This means that the people who are highly commended are those who mourn in Spirit; they are the fortunate ones who will be comforted by God.

Everyone mourns when they lose their job or their home is repossessed, or a close friend dies. Evil people and good people, wise people and foolish people, men, women, rich, poor, black, white, young and old - they all naturally know what it means to mourn at the sad moments of life. ***But few people mourn in spirit.*** And very few followers of Jesus are characterised by a depth of mourning which imitates the way he mourned for Jerusalem, for the religious leaders of His day, and for His closest friends when they argued among themselves. The Bible offers several examples of Jesus mourning but it never once mentions him laughing....

This is the second stage of spiritual blessing. It is one thing to be spiritually poor and acknowledge it; it is another to grieve and to mourn over it. Or, in more theological language, confession is one thing, contrition is another.

We need then to observe that the Christian Life, according to Jesus, is not all joy and laughter. Some Christians seem to imagine that, especially if they are filled with the spirit, they must wear a perpetual grin on their face and be continually boisterous and bubbly. How unbiblical can one become?! No, in Luke's version of the Sermon, Jesus added to this beatitude a

solemn: 'woe to you that laugh now' (Luke 6:25). The truth is that there are such things as Christian tears, and too few of us weep them.

Jesus wept over the sins of others, over their bitter consequences in judgement and death, and over the impenitent City which would not receive Him. We too should weep more over the evil in the world, as did the godly men and women of biblical times. 'My eyes shed streams of tears' the psalmist could say to God, 'because men do not keep the law' (Psalm 119:136). Ezekiel heard Gods faithful people described as those 'who sigh and groan over the abominations that are committed in Jerusalem' (9:4). And Paul wrote of the false teachers troubling the Church of his day: 'Many of whom I ...now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the Cross of Christ' (Phil 3:8). It is not only the sins of others, however, which should cause us tears; for we have our own sins to weep over as well. Have they never caused us grief? Was Cranmer exaggerating when in his 1662 communion service he put into the lips of Christians the words: 'We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness'? Was Ezra mistaken to pray and make confession 'weeping and casting himself down before the House of God'? (Ezra 10:1). Was Paul wrong to groan, 'wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' And to write to the sinful Church of Corinth: 'Ought you not rather to mourn?' (Romans 7:24, 1 Corinthians 5:2, 2 Corinthians 12:21.)

I think not; I fear that we evangelical Christians, by making much of grace, sometimes thereby make light of sin. There is not enough sorrow for sin amongst us. We should experience more 'godly grief' of Christian penitence (2 Corinthians 7:10), like that sensitive and Christ-like 18th century missionary to the American Indians David Brainerd, who wrote in his journal (18/10/1740): 'in my morning devotions my soul was exceedingly melted and, bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness.' Tears like this are the holy water which God is said to store in a bottle (Psalm 56:9). 'Dominus Flavit'.

Those who mourn in spirit are those who weep with God about the things that make Him cry. They mourn for themselves: for their pride and selfishness; for the good they want to do but don't do, and for the bad they do that they don't want to do but can't stop themselves doing. They recognise that they're like a cracked egg or a dented tin or a bruised fruit or a pizza that's just past its sell by date - still useful, but not as good as they should be.

They mourn for their unwillingness to love their enemies, to give to everyone who asks them, to turn the other cheek and to go the extra mile. They mourn for their lack of embarrassment at collecting clothes, cars and electronic gadgets when they follow the one who told them to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. They recognise that they're like a packet of cheapo cornflakes or a DIY Superstore Van Gogh print, or a pair of Taiwan trousers, or an imitation Rolex - useful but not as good as the item they're modelled on.

They mourn for God's polluted planet: for the human greed that destroys rain forests; poisons the atmosphere; imprisons hens in battery cages; sells cigarettes and bullets; fills rivers with pesticides; and chokes people with exhaust fumes.

They mourn for God's tainted Church: for the ambition and mistrust which keeps congregations apart; for the arrogant stupidity which believes that God prefers my style of worship to somebody else's; for the lack of love in a community which is meant to be characterised by God's love; for the enslavement to old and new traditions; and for the Church Leaders who serve someone who promised to set them free from all rules, yet go on creating new rules for their people to keep.

They mourn for human injustice: for the debt that shackles developing world nations; for the trade practices which impoverish Africans and enrich Europeans; for the false imprisonment of so many in Britain in the last few decades; for ordinary people who can never leave the Gaza's, Somali's & Syria's of this world because they were born there; for the Refugees and Amputees; for the families in Bed & Breakfast

accommodation and Christians who own several houses; and for capital punishment, abortion and old people's 'rest homes' that exploit people at their most vulnerable. They recognise what breaks God's heart, and they let the same thing break their own. They mourn about social unrest: social fragmentation, and the materialistic society, which has created the conditions that cause all the trouble. They mourn about their neighbour's apathy towards their creator and for their own apathy towards the destiny of most of their friends.

They mourn and their mourning - just like their poverty of spirit - is never depressing or paralysing or morbid. It's not a false mourning, or a publicity seeking mourning, or the hypocritical seriousness that ruined the Victorians. Instead their mourning is liberating, envisioning, and a spur to social prophetic action - for it's the most honest and the most accurate assessment of the people we are and the world that we live in: it is the truly Christian way of thinking.

And Jesus promises that those who mourn now will one day be comforted. That's why He calls them blessed. Not comforted by a bereavement counsellor who's paid to perk them up. Not comforted in a way that doesn't understand their individual quirks. Not comforted by someone who doesn't appreciate his or her personal concerns and interests. But comforted by the comforter, by God.

Jesus often calls God's spirit 'the comforter'. This surely means that those who mourn with God are those who will be personally consoled by God. They will be comforted by the supreme comforter, by the one who's been given the divine nickname: 'The Comforter'.

So, mourners, who bewail their own sinfulness, will be comforted by the only comfort which can relieve their distress, namely the free forgiveness of God. Consolation according to the OT prophets was to be one of the offices of the messiah. He was to be the "Comforter" who would 'bind up the broken hearted' (Is 61:1, 40:1). That is why godly men like Simeon were said to be

looking and longing for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25). And Jesus does pour oils into our wounds and speak peace to our sore, scarred consciences. Yet still we mourn over the havoc of suffering and death which sin spreads through out the world. For only in the final state of glory will Christ's comfort be complete, for only then will sin be no more and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' (Revelation 7:17)

So, Happy Clappies don't need God's special comfort, for they have their own synthetic comfort. Secular Humanists don't want God's comfort, for they prefer to comfort themselves. Smiling superstars won't get God's comfort, for they have chosen the comfort of their own adulation. Harassed commuters can't be comforted by God, because more of them are pre-occupied with themselves to mourn for others. Tired mums long for God's comfort yet too many of them have been taught not to mourn. But how blessed are the poor in spirit - for those who mourn spiritually - because they will be comforted. They will be cuddled and comforted, counselled and encouraged, cared for and consoled. By God Himself! And what a comfort that will be.

Pastor David

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