

## Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

From the series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"

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### Introduction

We've all heard the nursery rhyme, "Humpty Dumpty".

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.  
All the king's horses, and all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again.



This nursery rhyme is one of those things in life that's a bit mysterious. Here's why I say that: We hear it as children. So many people have heard it that lots of folks can repeat it. But no one knows exactly where it came from or what it means. So, you don't want to think about it too much. However, it does appear to have one big point. Here it is: Sometimes in life, things break. And sometimes, when they break, you can never get them back. No matter how hard you try.

Here's a question: ***What do you do at those times?***

The image we get in this four-line nursery rhyme is striking. The star of the poem (let's just call him "humpty" to keep things short), is thought to be an egg. The text doesn't say that, but we'll stick with common wisdom on that. Apparently, there was someone who thought Humpty was very important. That someone was a king.

Way back when the poem was written, kings were the most powerful people on the earth. The king, who seems to have valued Humpty a lot, used all his resources. Everything he could call up. We're told he used all his horses and all his men. But even a king who was willing to use all the power he had couldn't rescue poor Humpty.

What do you do when you've lost something that you think is valuable? Something you love. Something precious. And, there's no way to get it back? When this happens, we feel a sense of loss. The lightest word we have for that is sad. Depending on how precious the thing was, the words get stronger. ***We use words like grief or mourning.***

We're in our series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells us About the King of the Universe." We learned in our last session that we're at a pivotal point in Matthew's book. The first four chapters of Matthew's book talk about the following things: They talk about the things that

happened to establish the credentials of the great King, Jesus Christ. They talk about what happened to prepare him for his earthly ministry.

In chapter five, the King is ready to speak. He's gathered his disciples, his closest and most dedicated followers, he went up on a mountainside, and He is ready to share with them his Manifesto, his plan for life.

In our last session, we looked at the first sentence of this Christian Manifesto, found in Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven". We learned that this is talking about a state of mind. The person who is poor in spirit has realized that they are **spiritually poor** before God. They have sinned. There is nothing that they can do to make up for their sins. There is nothing they can do to repay the debt that their sin has created. They realize that they are more than poor, they are bankrupt.

Some people say the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty" may come from a Christian perspective. If this is so, the poem draws a mental image of a human life broken by sin. Maybe it looks at the whole of mankind that is tarnished by sin. We humans have had a "great fall". And our lives and our world have become shattered.

The poem also portrays the first response of humans when they see sin. They try to fix it, using human effort. They try make up for it. But humans are like the earthly king who brought in all his horses and all his men, and still failed to save Humpty.

We as humans cannot fix what we have broken through our sin. No matter how hard we try.

The person who is spiritually poor knows this. And more: They are open to the idea that because they can't fix their problem, they need God's help. And when they ask for God's help, he gives it. In fact, he does far more - He opens his kingdom to them. And so, the first line of the Christian Manifesto: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

Now, what I'm calling the "Christian Manifesto" is much longer than one line. In fact, it covers three chapters of Mathew's book, chapters 5 through 7.

The first nine ideas in this manifesto can each be stated in one or two sentences. They all begin with the word, "blessed". We said in our last session that the Greek word involves a complex concept that contains ideas like "having received a good thing", "Happy", "To be congratulated", "To be envied", or "to have arrived in a good place". We'll settle for "blessed". Incidentally, the Latin word for this is "beati", which is why some people call this section "The Beatitudes".

So, now that we've learned the first step for a disciple of Jesus, let's move on to the next.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

We said a moment ago that when we lose something that's special to us, we might feel something. We might feel sadness or even grief. We may mourn. Jesus appears to be saying that this is a good thing. People who mourn are blessed. Remember, we said in our last session that the Christian manifesto is radical. To understand why this is a radical idea, let's look at some other ways that people deal with mourning.

### **Different ways to approach mourning**

We don't like to mourn. We don't like to feel sad. We really don't like *any* negative feelings or sensations. So, we've come up with lots of ways to deal with them.

#### ***Numb the feelings***

The first is to numb the pain. We've discussed these in the past, so I won't spend a lot of time here. You take a drink. You take a puff. You swallow a pill. I should give the standard caveat, if you're working with a medical professional, it may be appropriate to treat some painful conditions with properly controlled drugs. But we all know that doing this on your own is a bad idea.

Of course, there are the less obvious ways of doing this. There's something about all that stuff in the refrigerator that can make negative feelings go away, at least for a little while. For some, it's the sweets, for some it's other kinds of flavors and sensations. And of course, the caveat: eating and eating tasty food is perfectly fine. However, sometimes these activities are a way to numb the pain we otherwise feel. Then they become bad.

#### ***Substitution***

Some people deal with pain by substituting other feelings. Here's how this works.

##### ***Anger/Control***

There are people who hurt, and their hurt brings a sense of powerlessness. Losing things makes you feel like you're not in control. So, some people take control. They start ordering people around. Maybe they get angry. When they do this, they're saying, "Something over in this area of my life is out of my control, so I'll take control over in this area."

This brings all kinds of problems. We'll talk about this more in coming sessions. For now, let's just say that people who behave this way are hard to be around.

##### ***Entertainment***

Other people substitute positive emotions. They do this through entertainment. Some turn on the comedy channel. I love to laugh as much as anyone, but sometimes our laughter is an attempt to hide our grief and pain.

Some people go for action movies. In action movies, people get into fights, they blow things up. Note: **Other** people get into fights and blow things up. Maybe we wouldn't mind being in those fights and blowing things up ourselves? But, that's not very safe. So, action movies are a safe way for us to avoid our emotions. Other people feel the emotions that we would like to feel. This goes for all kinds of entertainment.

Again, is it wrong to laugh or watch a movie? None of these things are bad by themselves, but we have to ask: Are we getting involved in these things because deep down, we mourn, and we don't want to deal with it?

### **Stuffing Down Negative Emotions**

Now, one popular method of avoiding negative emotions is to stuff them and pretend they don't exist. There's an old song from WW1, "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile." Have you got things to grieve about? Are there things in your life that makes you mourn? Stuff them away somewhere. Put a smile on your face. Everything will work out. However, people who do this often find it doesn't work out that way in real life.

### **The Solution Given by Jesus**

All of these approaches have the same basic assumption: Emotional pain is a bad thing. Grief and mourning are bad. They are to be avoided in some way.

But Jesus shares a radical idea. People who mourn are blessed. Why? How does that work?

### **The Reward**

It's especially important to start with the "why". "Blessed are those who mourn..." Why? "...for they will be comforted."

Here's why this is important: Jesus isn't saying that mourning is good all by itself. Pain and suffering aren't good things. If mourning was a good thing all by itself, then we should work to cause it. Are you feeling OK? Go over the wall and kick it a few times so your foot will start to hurt. Then you're blessed because you're hurting. If your neighbor feeling OK? Well, you'd better do something about that. It's time to cause some pain and grief.

No! That's not what Jesus is saying. So, what *is* he saying?

## The Explanation

First, let's remember that this is step two in a long series of statements. Step one is to understand spiritual poverty. The world is broken because of sin. We're broken because of sin. That puts us in danger. We can't fix it or make up for it ourselves. We have to ask God for help.

But, let's ask a question. What if a person recognizes that they've sinned, but they don't see sin as a big problem? In our last session, I mentioned that some of the things Jesus says in his manifesto sound new. But some are old - very old.

## An Example: Adam and Eve in the Garden

Let's look at an old story so we can understand this. In our series, "Life Answers in Genesis", we talked about the fall of mankind. We talked about Adam and Eve. Let's revisit just a part of that story. Because we've spent a lot of time there in another study, we won't read the whole thing. I'll just encourage you to review by reading Genesis, chapter 3.

Recall that God placed Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden of Eden. He gives them clear instructions: They could eat fruit from any tree, just not the one in the middle - the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent tempted them to eat the fruit, and they did. This was the first sin.

Adam and Eve realized right away that they did something bad. The way they discovered this was the realization that they were naked. They began to feel the first negative emotion: shame. So, what did they do? They made themselves garments out of leaves.

So, they recognized they had a problem. But they tried to use human effort to fix the problem. They grabbed a few leaves off a nearby tree and voila, the stain of sin was hidden. So, sin was a problem – just not a big problem.

However, then they heard God coming. When they heard God coming, they realized their clever solution wasn't going to be enough. So, Adam and Eve hid behind some nearby trees. Apparently, Adam and Eve still liked the idea of leaves, they just realized the paltry few they grabbed weren't sufficient. Surely, the amount of leaves in a tree would work. So, once again, human effort comes in. And once again, human effort was insufficient.

At this point, we'll read:

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"  
(Genesis 3:8)

God is all-knowing and all-seeing. God knew exactly what happened. He knew exactly where Adam and Eve were. So, he calls to Adam.

Here's how Adam answers:

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (v. 10)

So now, Adam is experiencing another negative emotion: fear. His sense of what he's done is growing. He senses that God may be angry. What God does next is very interesting:

And he (God) said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (v. 11)

This is a simple question. It only requires a "yes" or "no" answer. And, the answer should be, "yes". God is giving Adam a chance to admit what he's done. Is that what Adam does? Let's see.

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." (v. 12)

So, Adam realizes he's done something wrong. He has a growing sense of how serious it is. So how does he react? He blames somebody else. This is all the woman's fault. He was doing just fine before she showed up. The woman put that fruit into Adam's hand. What was he supposed to do?

But then, just as the words of blame start coming out of Adam's mouth, he has a new realization. "The woman – who **you** gave to be with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." The finger that was once pointed at another human is now pointed straight at God. This, in Adam's mind, is now all God's fault.

God then spoke with Eve. Let's say she didn't do any better.

We'll talk more about this in our next session. For now, we'll say that Adam and Eve had a problem with taking responsibility for their actions.

There's something else they could have done. **They could have been sorry.** They could have stopped, taken a breath, and realized that God had shown them nothing but kindness and generosity. They answered his generosity with disobedience. If they had responded by taking responsibility for their sin, they might have felt sad. **They might have mourned.**

And this is the key to the second statement of the beatitudes. You can realize that you have a problem of sin. You can realize that sin places you in a bad place. But it's another thing to take responsibility for your sin. **It's another thing to mourn over your sinfulness.**

If you blame others for your sin, you aren't taking responsibility. You aren't mourning. Worse, if you blame God, you certainly aren't mourning.

Now recall, when we looked at spiritual poverty, we had to look at the relationship between physical poverty and spiritual poverty. Something similar happens here. Let's continue to look at Adam and Eve for an example. In Genesis 4, we learn about Cain and Abel. Again, we'll summarize and encourage you to look at that chapter on your own.

Adam and Eve only started in a small way to see the problem of sin when they were in the Garden. They saw the problem grow when God told them that they had cursed themselves and the earth. They began to see a much greater effect when they had to leave the beautiful garden and start living in the world that they had broken. Previously beautiful fruit hung from trees and required no more work than reaching up. Now, thorns and thistles grew from the ground. Eve was given two sons, Cain and Abel. One of those sons, Cain, became jealous of the other one. Because of that, we're told that Cain murdered his brother Abel. After doing that, Cain ran.

What was it like when Adam and Eve discovered this? What was it like when they had to look at the bloody body of their son Abel? Surely, they mourned. Surely, they wept.

Previously, sin had resulted in personal pain. Problem emotions like shame and fear. Problems like fights and quarrels that married couples often see. Problems like the sting of thorns as Adam worked the ground. Problems like the pain of childbirth for Eve.

But now, something alarming had taken place. ***Sin had taken an innocent life.*** Abel was a righteous man. He was brutally murdered, not because of anything he had done, but because of his brother's bad choices; his brother's sin. His brother's bad choices and sin had come as a result of Adam and Eve's bad choices and sin.

Adam and Eve now saw a much darker world. They saw the world that they had broken. And they mourned.

### **An important topic: Why is there pain in the world?**

This brings up an important topic. Why is there pain in the world? To understand this, we need to see that there are two kinds of pain.

Here's the first. Sometimes, there is pain because we have sinned, and we receive the results. If the speed limit sign says 30 and we do 60, we increase the chance that we'll be in automobile accident. It may happen, or it may not. But, if it does, it's our own fault. We understand that. We may not like it, but we understand.

The second type of pain though, is random. Sometimes we are hurt for reasons that have nothing to do with our own behavior. But we have to say something hard here: We all sin.

When we sin, we all contribute to the brokenness of the world.

After Cain killed his brother, God spoke with him. Here's what God said:

The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." (Genesis 4:10)

The implication here is that sin has a cosmic effect. The earth and the universe feel the effects and the weight of our sins. Sometimes, because the world is broken, it erupts. When that happens, we see terrible events like storms or earthquakes or plagues.

Sometimes it's smaller, but still serious. Sometimes we're doing the speed limit, but we get hit by the guy who's going too fast. Those things, whether large or small, are almost always random.

### **Our reaction**

Whether we are hurt by our own sin, or whether we are hurt by the cumulative effects of sin on our world, we can react in different ways.

We can use human effort. We can do all the things we talked about earlier. We can try to fix it, like the earthly king in Humpty Dumpty. Let's bring in a side note that we'll discuss in later sessions. It's always wrong to try. Sometimes we can make the world a better place by our efforts. Later, as we study Matthew's book, we'll get some suggestions on that. But because of sin, there are some things we will never fix. As we continue to dump sin into a broken world, it continues to break more and more. Sometimes, all the king's horses and all the king's men, can't put Humpty together again.

We can try other things: We can try to numb the pain. We can try substitute other feelings. We can try to point our fingers somewhere else.

But to the extent that we face our sin and the sin of the world with human effort, we will be cursed.

Or, we can admit that our problems and the problems of the world are caused by sin. We can admit our spiritual poverty. And then, we can take responsibility for our sin. We can realize that the God who created the Universe has shown us and the rest of the human race nothing but kindness, generosity, and love. We have responded with rebellion and sin.

We can allow ourselves to mourn over our sin and the sin of our broken world. If we do that, rather than be cursed, God says we are blessed. God says he'll do something when we mourn.  
**- He will comfort us.**



Remember, Matthew had the privilege of meeting the King of the Universe, Jesus Christ. Matthew wants his friends to know that Jesus was the Messiah, the great king who was predicted by prophets centuries before. That's happening here. The prophet Isaiah spoke of things the Messiah would do.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.  
(Isaiah, chapter 61:1-3)

These are the things that Jesus did. In these first two sentences of the Beatitudes, he is fulfilling the words of Isaiah.

## **Conclusion**

So, we've made it just a little further into the Christian Manifesto. Words for disciples of Jesus Christ.

We start by admitting our spiritual poverty. Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. That's a vital starting place. There is nothing we've discussed so far and nothing we'll discuss in the rest of the Manifesto that can be done under our own power. We can't do this ourselves. If we try, we'll just break down in despair. We need to ask God for help. We need his grace.

With God's help, with his grace, we accept responsibility for our sin. When we feel deep loss, we can let ourselves mourn. We can let ourselves feel the pain of a broken world.

Sometimes the pain has an explanation – it is our sin. At those times we confess and take responsibility.

Sometimes, the pain seems random. Others have hurt us, and we may never know exactly why. Sometimes we lose things that are dear to us. That's most difficult when we lose the people we love. On those days, we trust that a sovereign, loving God is in control. We know that we can let ourselves mourn.

Because Jesus told us: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.