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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN”**  
**Matthew 5:1-4; Second Corinthians 7:8-11**

☑ In March 2007, a group of U.S. soldiers stationed in Baghdad blindfolded and bound four Iraqi detainees, took them to a remote area and shot each one in the head. The killings were in {*Tribune*, 6/18/2009} **“retaliation for the deaths of two soldiers from their unit who were killed ... weeks earlier,”** though there is no indication that these particular Iraqis were involved in that attack.

An eye-for-an-eye (and then some): is this how it is supposed to be? Is that what Jesus calls us to?

☑ In recent months we have been inundated with sickening revelations of **political corruption at every level, from the city council to the governor’s mansion.**

**“Where’s mine?”** and the public be damned: is this how it is supposed to be? Is that what Jesus calls us to?

☑ On Wednesday, June 24<sup>th</sup> a man walked into the high school weight room in Parkersburg, Iowa. He shot and killed Ed Thomas (the NFL’s 2005 High School Coach of the Year). It was our 39<sup>th</sup> school shooting since Columbine. (And who can forget the NIU massacre in February, 2008?)

Violence as our ultimate problem solver: is this how it is supposed to be? Is that what Jesus calls us to?

☑ On May 15, 2008 a 13-year-old South Side boy named Jaylen Brown died. The {*Tribune*, 6/23/2009} **“autopsy found that the severely malnourished child died of sepsis”** even though he lived with his mother, *and* doctors, school officials and DCFS authorities were supposed to

monitor his condition, *and* his home healthcare nurse **“knew the boy was left alone in his own excrement, had serious bedsores and was malnourished.”**

Cold indifference toward the weak: is this how it is supposed to be? Is that what Jesus calls us to?

☑ In 2004 we learned that American soldiers were torturing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. One soldier quoted the ringleader as saying, {Graner} **“The Christian in me says it’s wrong, but the correction officer in me says, ‘I love to make a grown man piss himself.’”**

These were the actions of a few. But consider: an April 2009 survey about torture asked, **“Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?”** Forty-nine of all respondents replied that torture is **“often”** or **“sometimes justified,”** and 60% of *white evangelical Protestants* agreed.

National security at all costs: is this how it is supposed to be? Is that what Jesus calls us to?

☑ A 2005 Duke University study reveals that 75% of high school students nationwide admit to academic cheating. That figure skyrockets to 90% when copying another person’s work is included. Groups most likely to cheat are young people in honors or Advanced Placement classes, and those on athletic teams.

Integrity exchanged for false success: is this how it is supposed to be? Is that what Jesus calls us to?

☑ It goes on and on: governments around the world make war against their own people; 1-in-4 women are the victims of domestic violence; sexual immorality of all kinds is celebrated; nearly half of all marriages end in divorce; millions of unborn babies are aborted; education, allegedly the great equalizer in our society, is nearly as corrupt as politics (and not only at the U of I); etc., etc., etc.

Is this how it is supposed to be? Is that what Jesus calls us to?

There is goodness and beauty and truth in North American culture. But too often our light is shadowed by darkness, our gold adulterated by dross.

What is a follower of Jesus to do?

■ Matthew 5:4 ~ **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”** {Wright} **“Wonderful news for the mourners! You’re going to be comforted.”**

◆ The verb translated **“mourn”** is  $\pi\epsilon\nu\theta\epsilon\omicron$ . This is sorrow at its most intense -- the kind of anguish people feel as they grieve the death of a close loved one. It conjures images of inward agony, loud wailing, copious tears, sackcloth, ashes, and a disheveled appearance.

**“Blessed are those who  $\pi\epsilon\nu\theta\epsilon\omicron$ ,”** says the Lord, **“for they will be comforted.”**

Only those who grieve often go un comforted now, and God’s Word offers no guarantee that *all* people will be consoled in *eternity*. Either Jesus was dead wrong, or He was talking about something more than the universal grief of mortality.

How, then, shall we decipher the original meaning and contemporary application of this verse?

🔗 The key to unlocking Matthew 5:4 is the nature of the Beatitudes as a group. Many interpret them as law, ethical ideals, motivational strategies, sociology, or prophecy. I suggest that these teachings are much more radical and powerful than any of those forms.

They are:

⊛ An announcement of an alternate reality called the Kingdom of Heaven (or the Kingdom of God).

⊛ {Wright}, **“A summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God’s promised future; [for] the future has arrived in the present in Jesus.”**

So, **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”** has its fullest impact when we read and experience it through the lens of the Kingdom.

† But what is this Kingdom? It is the reality in which we: are reconciled to God through Jesus; transfer allegiance to Him; embrace resurrection hope, faith, and love; are given new values, priorities, and gifts; and who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to extend God’s influence. Kingdom reality is marked by abundant life,  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\epsilon$  love, divine truth, and right relationship.

🔗 In this context, **“those who mourn”** are people who grieve all human rejection of life, love, truth, beauty and right relationship. To put it another way, they are those whose hearts break over the same things that break the heart of God.

What breaks God's heart? Everything that is anti-life, anti-*αγαπε* love, anti-truth, anti-beauty or anti-right relationship. The *πενθεο* God blesses is:

- ◆ The mourning of repentance.
- In Second Corinthians 7:8-10 Paul writes:

**Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.**

“**To repent**” is, literally, *to turn away*. To repent of sin means coming to a stop, turning our back on it, and heading in the right direction.

The church in Corinth had been fractured by quarrels, infected with pride, hindered by self-reliance, and polluted by sexual immorality. Paul confronted them. His words stung, but God used that pain to transform the Corinthians. They did not just feel bad; they changed. That is the mourning of repentance.

- ◆ And God blesses the mourning of humble kingdom activism.

- In Second Corinthians 7:11 Paul continues: “**See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.**”

Healthy *πενθεο* inspires us to work for life, love, truth, beauty and right relationship at home, church, school and even in the public square. On the flip side, it energizes us to stand against all that is contrary to God's Kingdom.

- Not because we are better than the sinners around us, but because God wants better for them.
- Not because we have all the answers, but because Christ Jesus is the answer.
- Not in pride, but in poverty of spirit.

{Wright} “**Wonderful news for the mourners!**

**You're going to be comforted.**”

How?

The {Rev 19:16; 21:2-4} “**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**” will return. Heaven and earth will be integrated as “**the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,**” descends and “**God's dwelling place [will be] among the people.**”

He will bind up his brokenhearted. The injustice and corruption and death that caused them to *πενθεο* will be vanquished. That litany of woes I spewed at the beginning of this message will utterly pass away.

Abundant life, *αγαπε* love, pure truth, dazzling beauty and right relationship will overflow. “**The old order of things**” will be abolished, as the Kingdom of Heaven comes in all of its fullness.

“**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**” {Wright} “**Wonderful news for the mourners! You're going to be comforted.**”