

Matthew 5:1-12

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[0 : 00] Amen. I wonder who it is that you most envy in the world. If you were to press the reset button on your life and start again, what sort of a person would you create for yourself? How would you do it? Well, at the beginning of probably what is the most famous sermon ever preached, it's called the Sermon on the Mount. It's this section in Matthew's Gospel from chapter 5 to the end of chapter 7.

Then Jesus deals out the definitive answer, the definitive reality on who it is that we should envy in the world. They are the blessed people, he says. They are the people who've got life right. You look at them and you think, how I envy them.

It is a hard word to translate in the English, the word blessed. I quite like the Welsh paraphrase, forgive me on the pronunciation on this. Gwynny big I think it is. I'm sorry about that. But that means white is their world.

White is their world. Everything is in its right place. Everything is where it should be. Happy, blessed, enviable. White is their world. That is the kind of feel of this passage.

So we imagine, don't we, perhaps the kind of people who end up on the front of magazines. They work hard, they play hard, they retire early, they've got money in the bank, they've got holiday homes, maybe in a couple of other places around the world.

[1 : 36] They've got great family life, they've got great social standing, maybe they give to charity. And you look at them and you think, they have done it. They have made it in life. Look at him, look at her. How I envy them. How white is their world.

So who do you envy? So who do you envy? I don't know what it is for you. Maybe you envy someone at the end of the summer who gets straight A's. Maybe you look at somebody with a freehold of a detached London property. How I envy them. How I would like to be them. They have made it in life.

That's the kind of feel to what Jesus is saying here. The blessed people. The people that we envy. And you'll notice the audience that Jesus speaks to here. If you look at verse 1, seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and as he sat down his disciples came to him. That's interesting, isn't it?

You've got a gathering of the disciples with Jesus, but then the crowds are there as well, aren't they? This is a double-barrelled sermon that Jesus preaches here. One barrel is for the Christians, isn't it? For the disciples, those who belong to Jesus.

These eight or nine blessed statements at the beginning of the sermon are meant for them, for the disciples. And the whole content of this scintillating sermon, with all of its captivating ethical teaching, is meant for the disciples.

[3 : 16] So don't mistake Jesus. This isn't a sermon on rules, on how to get into the kingdom of God. No, it's the behaviour that the citizens of Jesus' kingdom, the disciples, who've already trusted in him, are to live by.

But then, if you flick to the end of this great sermon in chapter 7, verse 28, we read, When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching.

You see, there is the second barrel of the sermon. It is for those who are listening in, isn't it? For those who are outsiders. It's as if he's saying to the world outside, If you want to know who is truly blessed, who is truly happy, who you should envy in the world, Just look at my disciples. Just listen to what I tell them, and how they are going to live.

Now maybe you're here this morning, and that describes you a little bit. You're here, you're surrounded with Jesus' disciples in church, But actually, if you're honest, you're not one of those disciples, and you're looking in from the outside.

You're one of the people in the crowds. You're eavesdropping on what Jesus is saying to his disciples. I want to say to you, that that is exactly what church is for, for you.

[4 : 49] It is for the crowds to come in and eavesdrop on Jesus' teaching to his church.

Eavesdropping is allowed in church. This is not a private members' club, or a private members' meeting.

It is for the crowds of the world to come in and hear Jesus teaching to his disciples. And this is absolutely golden here, isn't it? Because I don't know about you, but the search for happiness and blessing is so elusive.

Isn't it? One person said, the search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness. So true, isn't it? Happiness and blessing is such a slippery thing, but here Jesus claims to be able to end that search.

It's absolute gold dust. So what we've got at the beginning of this great sermon on the map is in these blessed statements. It's a kind of prologue, really.

It's the essence of the sermon up front, before he gets into the real content. This is the pocket guide to what it is to be blessed. Who do I envy?

[6 : 02] Who do I crave to be? Well, Jesus says you've got to be careful who you envy in this world. And actually when we come to Jesus, it is as if he steps into the shop window at night, and he switches around all of the price tags, and all of the labels, and all of the items.

All of our categories of happiness and good fortune are switched around, aren't they? And he presents a completely radical view on what it is to be blessed.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are the meek, verse 5. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. If you flick over to verse 10, blessed are the persecuted.

Are you when you're persecuted? It's just ludicrous, this, isn't it? It's just completely upside down to the teaching of our world.

[7 : 18] On a couple more Sunday mornings, I want to look at some of these blessed statements a bit more closely. And perhaps one of the most striking is in verse 4, if you look there.

Blessed are those who mourn. For they shall be comforted. Could you have two words in the same sentence that are more opposite than that?

Blessed. Mourn. Who do I envy? Jesus says, envy those who mourn. For they will be comforted, he says.

He says that the mourning people are blessed. Because somehow the comfort they receive will be far better. It will outweigh their grief.

There is something worth it. In the kingdom of Jesus, it is not the grief that is the blessing in and of itself. Is it? He's saying, no, they are blessed because of the comfort they will feel.

[8 : 27] They will feel Jesus' comfort. They will feel his welcome. And his special help. So I want us to see a few things about this particular verse.

Number one. These blessed people are spiritually mourning. Not generally mourning. These blessed people are spiritually mourning.

Not generally mourning. You know, as we look at the world today, it is a cliché, isn't it? But every time you turn the radio on, every time you click the TV on or you look at the front pages, there is a new reason to mourn.

Have you heard about Munich? Have you heard about Nice? Have you heard about Kabul? Have you heard about this person that we love?

Who is going through this? This is a world that mourns daily. And the word Jesus uses here is the same word that is described of the disciples when they are bereaved of Jesus later in the Gospels.

[9 : 42] It is a deep grief. It is a hollow, empty, dark hole of emotion and of grief and of pain.

And so this is the kind of promise that you might hear at a funeral. It is maybe a good verse to memorise and share with folk who are grieving, isn't it?

But I want to say that actually this promise does not cover all grief as a blanket rule. Now of course, God does comfort people, doesn't he?

God wants to comfort people in various trials of course, but there is no promise in the Bible of blessing every time suffering strikes.

There is no universal human right of comfort whenever death strikes. There is no automatic blessing whenever anyone anywhere mourns about anything.

[10:43] And that just makes sense, doesn't it? Death. Death is not a blessing. Death is a curse. It is a curse on life. This is not just about any situation, however awful it may be, regardless of the person's relationship to God.

No, this is spiritual mourning. Let me read a few other verses from the Bible to help us on this. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, he says, Godly sorrow leads to salvation and no regret.

He's talking about sin there. In the famous psalm, Psalm 51, where David, he confesses his sins, doesn't he? After adultery and murder, he says, The broken and contrite heart, O God, you won't despise.

God says to the people of God through Joel, Joel chapter 2, Tear your heart and not your garments. It's like a Jewish phrase.

It means, be broken hearted about your sin. Don't just put on a show. Be broken hearted about your behaviour. He says, for he is gracious and compassionate.

[12:08] It's a theme that runs throughout the whole Bible. Jesus is speaking about the mourning of a person who grieves. Not about their situation necessarily, but about their sin.

Their sin. The way that they've offended God. They've turned their backs on him. That is what upsets them. That's what frustrates them in life.

That's what disturbs them. It is knowing how awful sin is. It's a spiritual mourning, not a natural, general mourning. This comfort promise is not going to come to anyone who suffers with anything for any reason.

Please, please, don't use this verse for friends who are grieving and yet they couldn't care less about their relationship with God. If sin is a light thing to them. Jesus is not saying here, anyone who's unhappy, you want to envy him.

It's not it, is it? I wonder, Christians, we can often be like that, can't we? We can think, you know, the more miserable we are, the more God blesses us, kind of thing.

[13:17] The more miserable I am about life, the more God loves me. That's not what he's saying here. This is a grief over our spiritual state. Without Jesus' help.

This is a grief over sin. As the Puritan Thomas Watson said, sin must have tears. Maybe you know the story of the woman in Luke chapter 7, one of the other Gospels.

She's a sinful woman, we're told. Everyone knows it. She goes to a house party at the Pharisees. The Pharisees knows. She's called the woman of the street.

I'll leave you to fill in the gaps. The Pharisees know it. Jesus knows it. She certainly knows it. And she comes into this party weeping. She's distraught.

She's so shamed. Her sin is right in front of her face. And she feels it. She comes to Jesus and washes his feet with ointment. Jesus says to them, she loved much because she was forgiven much.

[14:20] She turns around and says to her, you are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven. And that is the kind of brokenness and hopelessness and grief at your own wayful inability to please God by yourself.

It is knowing how much God will have to forgive you. When he does. And the feeling you get when he looks at you like he did with a woman and he says, your sins are forgiven.

It is all gone. It is all clean. Your guilt is wiped away. All of your regrets, they are gone. That is what it is to be blessed.

Jesus says. And Psalm 34 says, the Lord is close to those who are humble, who are broken hearted and crushed in spirits.

And it is the best feeling in the world. Let me tell you, what a comfort God says to me in Jesus. Your sins are forgiven. And I belong to him.

[15:26] You know, the word comfort that Jesus uses, you could use it for an invitation to a party actually. It is a statement of acceptance and of welcome.

Jesus says to us, I will forgive you this once, but I don't know if I can trust you in the future. It isn't that. He says, no, you're an honoured guest now. We're allies.

We're friends. You're forgiven. And then in that moment, when we hear that, the whole world is white. Isn't it? Things are right between me and the God of the universe.

What more do I need? What a burden lifted. The world is white. So these are the blessed people. They are the people who've mourned about their relationship with God.

It's been catchy at best. It's been non-existent, actually, most of the time. They've ignored him. They've quietly hated him and treated him like some sort of spiritual butler.

[16:26] It is people who mourn over that. And they are blessed because they will be comforted. You are forgiven. Jesus says, you want to envy them in this world.

So it's not just a general mourning, but it's a spiritual mourning. Secondly, though, it's not just tears, but it's trust. It's not just tears, but it's trust.

There is a mourning for your situation, your circumstances, isn't there? And there is a mourning for sin. We've seen that difference. But actually, you can mourn and you can grieve about your sin and your guilt in a godly way or in a godless way, can't you?

Sometimes when we're sorry for things, actually, it's because we've been caught, if we're honest, isn't it? And it is possible to mourn over things that you've done wrong and actually to be sorry, to grieve about the consequences or about the punishment that is going to head you away.

That feeling of guilt and regret, actually, sometimes, rather than mourning about the personal aspect of offending God, it leaves us away from God, doesn't it?

[17:50] That kind of mourning, it turns you away from him. And into yourself. So you kind of feel sorry for yourself for a while. I'm sure we all know the story of Judas Iscariot.

He was one of the disciples, wasn't he? He was a missionary with the disciples. He evangelised. And he joined Jesus. But famously, he betrayed Jesus for some money.

Later in Matthew, in chapter 27, he realises what he's done as Jesus is carried off to be killed. And he says, I've sinned by betraying innocent blood.

So he throws his payment, his silver, into the temple. But then, he leaves and he hangs himself. You see, the problem for Judas was his tears weren't enough, were they, to wash away his sin. However much he mourned about what he'd done, his sorrow could not take away his guilt. One writer said, his self-reproach led to despair, which left no room for God's forgiving grace.

[18:58] That just hit the nail on the head, hasn't it? He could have swam in a river of his own tears, and it wouldn't have washed the guilt of what he'd done away. It wouldn't have washed the memory of the things that he'd done to Jesus.

What he'd done was, actually, he'd stayed with his tears, and trusted in his tears to deal with his guilt, when he should have gone to Jesus' blood. But it's not just tears, it is trust in God's grace through Jesus' death.

Because there would have been another one who hung in his stead, wouldn't there? But his grief led him from Jesus, away from Jesus.

I don't know if you remember, just after Jesus rises from the dead, and in Acts chapter 2, it's a glorious new age, isn't it, when the Holy Spirit comes down.

And the people that crucified Jesus a few days earlier, they are cut to the heart. They are grieved over what they've done.

[20:06] They say, what should we do? And Peter says, repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus, every one of you, for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that's what they do, isn't it? You see, that is godly grief. It leads them back to the Lord Jesus, to trust in him.

So don't let tears over your guilt fill your eyes so much that you can't see Jesus on the cross there for you instead. It is there that your guilt is taken, that all of the regrets are nailed to the cross and killed off once and for all.

Don't trust your tears to sort it out. Go to Jesus' blood to wash away your guilt. You know, the scary thing about godless grief is that actually it leads to eternal grief.

Later on, after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is in a conversation with a centurion and some others about faith. He's amazed at the faith of this Gentile centurion.

[21:19] And he says, listen, the ones with no faith, even if you look really religious, if you have no faith, if you have no trust in Jesus, you will be thrown into the outer darkness.

It's staggering, isn't it? He goes on, in that place there will be weak and gnashing of teeth. This is a place where mourning, where grief never ends.

The Bible calls it hell. it's a place where the rivers of regret flow freely and there is no blood to wash away your guilt.

And blessedness, though, is given to those who have tears in their eyes, yes, about their sin, but they go to Jesus' blood for cleansing and forgiveness.

They go to Jesus. You are forgiven, he says to them. It's a godly grief. It's not a natural grief, this promise. And it's not just swimming in tears, that would be the hellish thing to do, like Judas did. [22 : 27] But it's trust, trusting in Jesus. Thirdly and lastly, though, this is an ongoing grief, and not just a one-off grief.

It's an ongoing grief, not just a one-off grief. And you may want to know, how often do I have to do this mourning thing? How often do I have to grieve about my sin?

Maybe when I become a Christian, I do it then. Maybe once a year at Easter. Maybe once a week on a Sunday as we do the confession of sin.

That is right, isn't it? All of those things are appropriate. But if you look at verse 4, if I read that, blessed are those who mourn, literally that reads, blessed are the mourning ones.

Blessed are the grieving ones. There is a sense here of a sort of continual state of grief. It's not just a one-off conversion experience.

[23 : 32] It's a continual state. You wouldn't be blamed here for thinking, well, Jesus, he's a bit of a killjoy, isn't he? Is he advocating a kind of life of grief, of sort of hitting myself with metals?

And eating bread and water? That sort of thing. Is he saying that Christians should just be perpetually sad all of the time? Well, I don't think so.

If you look at verse 12, a few verses later, he says, rejoice and be glad. So he's not saying you've got to be sad all the time. That's not what it is.

It's not about being negative or always looking on the dark side of life. Always having a sense of loathing of yourself. But there is a sense here that the disciples of Jesus are having an ongoing state of sadness about their sins.

Something specific. One person said it's as if their hearts have been tenderised. It's really helpful. Whenever sin rears its head, they grieve, they wince, their hearts are tenderised.

[24 : 43] It's having a conscience, isn't it, to how God sees us, how we behave. The opposite is to treat guilt lightly, to not really care, to remember our guilt and our sin cheerfully.

This is to have an ongoing tenderness and sensitivity to our wrongdoing, to grieve when we grieve God. There's always having that sense of, but for the grace of God go I.

If it wasn't for the grace of God, where would I be? As Martin Luther says, always a justified man, always a sinner. It seems so odd in our world that though, doesn't it?

Bertrand Russell, the famous atheist, wrote in his book, *Why I'm Not a Christian*, when you hear people in church debasing themselves, and saying that they're miserable sinners, it seems contemptible, unworthy of self-respecting human beings.

You know, maybe he's right. There is no blessing in knowing you're a sinner, actually. The devil knows that.

[26 : 01] Judas knew that, didn't he knew that he had offended God, that he turned his back on God. But it's not just about the tears. It's about trust.

And Bertrand Russell, he's missed the second half, hasn't he? Of this great promise. They are blessed because they will be comforted.

Comforted, it's how Jesus describes the Holy Spirit, as a comforter, as somebody who comes alongside you, somebody who puts their arm around you.

It is to have God come to you and say, you are forgiven, to welcome you, to say, I am with you. And all of that regret is dealt with.

It means turning over a new leaf, doesn't it? It means getting a new courage and a new stimulation for life, a new sense of adventure of what could be.

[27 : 03] The past and the present and the future are all dealt with. And it's when no matter what your situation is, the world is right, because you are comforted.

So who is it that you envy in the world? I hope you, in the sense of your luck in the end, I hope you envy us, if I can put it that way, Jesus' disciples, those who have grieved over sin and who are comforted.

As you saw the baptism earlier, I hope you envied Nina. Some of us mourn about many things, don't we?

But all of us actually should mourn for our sin. And we should be comforted. If we don't mourn about our sin, we should mourn about that.

And truly, Jesus says, you will be blessed. You are forgiven. Let's pray. Thank you.