



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do
Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network **Spiritual Guidelines**

Teaching on the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount (iii)

***'Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.'***

(Matthew 5.3)

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This Beatitude appears twice in the Gospels. Matthew gives the longer version of eight 'blessings' but 'mourning' is one of the four that Luke emphasises. In fact it is thought this particular teaching was said by Jesus not just to the crowds but especially to those who were closest to him and it indicated the grief they would go through in the times ahead when he had to leave them on their own. Luke encourages all his hearers to apply them to themselves by using the second person 'you' rather than the third person 'he' or 'they'. He even follows it with a woe *'woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep'* indicating that mourning is almost a virtue.

Looking Towards the New Kingdom

As with all the Beatitudes, there is an emphasis upon looking forward to the other heavenly world which is yet to come described in more detail in Revelation 21. *'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'* (Revelation 21.4). Jeremiah also predicts this time *'Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow'*. (Jeremiah 31:13). Isaiah rejoices that God will *'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. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour'* (61: 3).

What about Today?

As well as looking forward to the comfort that is to come in the life hereafter, there is also a message for today. We are promised peace in the midst of many kinds of troubles. But it does show that we need to look at things differently and allow our inner being to be transformed.

We are often plunged into mourning at times when we feel helpless, or are in despair and can often have a sense of loss. In many ways true mourning is a cry for help. We think of Rachel weeping for her children (Jeremiah 31:15), of the Exiles grieving *'By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion'* (Psalm 137.1) and of Jesus grieving over Jerusalem (Matthew 28.37). We feel their sorrow and sadness and we too grieve with them.

Jesus praises those who can see the failures and pain in the world and identify with them - and who do not think 'this is nothing to do with me'. Sharing in the grief of others is part of our humanity. We are encouraged to grieve for others. Ezekiel in his vision sees a man being told to '*Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.*' (Ezekiel 9.4). We are called to empathise and share the grief of others.

Looking at Ourselves

One of the great lessons to be learnt is that it is the humble who will be blessed - not the arrogant. Those who no longer believe in doing things in their own strength and know they need help will receive it. We need to recognise that some of the most important reasons for mourning are our own failures - our own sins - as it is only when we are deeply sorry for them that God can intervene. When we place our hope in God then he can forgive us, take away our mourning and bring us into a right relationship with him. '*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret*' (2 Corinthians 7:10). If we are mourning because of our own failures we also recognise this feeling of spiritual poverty in our own lives and this too becomes a move to being nearer God. Psalm 34 tells us '*the righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit*' (17, 18)

Can We be Happy in This World?

The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us '*The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure*' (7:4). Mourning is not something we desire - we would much rather be joyful and happy: And yet we are told in Luke's version '*Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh*'. How can this be?

Mourning is a necessary emotion for all human beings - it is an outlet which restores us. If we are not able to mourn and show our feelings we are not really human! The British are not well known for showing their emotions: they are encouraged to 'keep a stiff upper lip' as the trembling of the upper lip is seen as a sign of weakness showing that the person is scared or shaken by experiencing deep emotion. We are often encouraged to show fortitude in the face of adversity, and exercise great self-restraint of our emotions. But we need to remember that Jesus showed his feelings - and he wept! Perhaps we British need to revisit this and get things into a right perspective!

Happiness is often thought to be the opposite of mourning and to have little connection with it. But true happiness can only be experienced following grief. We all need someone to comfort us and strengthen us when we are grieving. Jeremiah knew this '*You who are my Comforter in sorrow*' (Jeremiah 8:18) and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as a Comforter '*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever*' (John 14:16 Authorised King James Version). We too ask with the Psalmist '*My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word*' (Psalm 119:28). True joy is the fruit of sorrow.

Peace and Confidence in God

The Gospel writers had been with Jesus and already knew the peace of the Lord in all circumstances '*Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.*' (John 16: 20). The confidence of knowing the presence of God in the most difficult times is portrayed in the 19th Century hymn made popular through the Billy Graham crusades. It was written by Horatio Spafford who went through many family losses but still praised the Lord:

'When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot thou hast taught me to know
It is well, it is well, with my soul'.

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