

When Christmas Brings Mourning for Lost Loved Ones

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).

The most unforgettable Christmas Eve in my life is when Diana died.

She was 29.

For six months she fought leukemia, wanting not only life for herself, but to continue as wife to her husband and mother to her two daughters. In the midst of dealing with chemotherapy and blood transfusions, she kept an attitude of joy—leading every nurse on her floor to the Lord, except one.

Diana’s oncologist was the leukemia specialist in our region. Well-known for his steely reserve, he maintained emotional distance from his patients and professional detachment from their pain. Diana witnessed Christ’s love to him as well.

Then came the last moments, Diana’s husband, doctor and I as pastor and friend, stood around Diana’s bed in ICU. No more transfusions— blood had been running through her like water. Diana wanted the matter now left in God’s hands entirely. We prayed. At the door, I turned back for one last good-bye to Diana and, with all her strength, she raised her head off the pillow and gave me a final wave of benediction.

My steps fell in with the doctor’s. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. Decades later, the memory of that night brands my understanding of this beatitude, “Blessed are those who mourn.”

Call to Brokenness

Jesus never faced illness with clinical detachment. For the

lepers, the blind, the paralyzed, the deaf and those with diseases, He was moved with compassion. The shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35), comes right at the end of His three-year ministry. No one could have faulted Him if at the news of His friend's death, He registered no reaction. After all, illness and death were old hat to Him. Besides, we know now He planned to raise Lazarus. But Jesus never permitted himself to become indifferent to pain and suffering or callously professional in His ministry.

This second beatitude summons you to two kinds of sensitivity: brokenness within yourself and sensitivity to others.

The eight beatitudes together describe progression in your development as a disciple of Jesus. You enter the Christian life by acknowledging you are destitute—poor, you have no resources of your own for salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life. You are totally dependent upon the grace of God.

Acknowledgment of poverty is then followed by "mourning." Entrance into the kingdom of God involves much more than a detached statement of spiritual bankruptcy; it's accompanied by sorrow over sin as in the intensity of the prodigal son's brokenness: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21).

Brokenness as a Lifestyle

The word "mourning" in the New Testament Greek text is the strongest word possible to describe sorrow. Such godly sorrow, like poverty in spirit, is meant not only as an entry requirement, but as an enduring qualification for those in the kingdom. We are never to let the sacred become a matter of routine. The Scottish minister and novelist, George MacDonald, warned that "Nothing is so deadening to the divine as an habitual dealing with the outsides of holy things."

Sensitivity to God then necessarily carries over into

sensitivity toward others.

It's this quality of tenderness which makes it possible for us to forgive easily, to bear another's burden, to grant grace rather than judgment and concern rather than criticism. Jesus demonstrates these same qualities toward us (Heb. 4:15, 5:2).

The Pharisees lacked this. They were so busy lecturing everyone that they became hardened finger-pointers rather than compassionate spiritual people with open hands and hearts.

Too often believers may walk through life as Diana's doctor used to. "Gospel medicine" is given out in liberal doses of lecture, political action, and impersonal evangelism without ever feeling the pain of the spiritually ill. The witness of the church or the individual Christian is only effective when it is accompanied by brokenheartedness.

Jesus says those who feel their own pain and the pain of others will themselves receive His comfort.

The word Jesus uses for comfort involves far more than a pat on the shoulder. God's comfort is that He comes to your aid and changes your situation: Forgiveness follows confession, reconciliation replaces bitterness, and deep joy supplants sorrow.

Having received His comfort, we then reach out to comfort others.

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