

Cross flows God's love, forgiveness, welcome... What comfort for those who mourn loved ones and for those who mourn their sins!

But to those who know God's peace within, there will be the kind of grief Jesus expressed when he saw Jerusalem – grief that so many care so little for God and his ways, that so many are prepared to risk judgment rather than receive the good news. That is a call to strong action to get the message out into our community as we look forward to the time when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2.10,11).

Reflect:

- How does Christian faith bring us solid comfort in human loss?
- What real comfort does the gospel offer to those who mourn over their sins?
- If we are sad about the state of our society, how do we turn our “mourning” into strong caring action?
- In what new directions has the Lord been speaking to us through this study? What are we going to do about it?

Study 4 – ... the Meek. Reading: John 2.13-22; Matthew 6.24-34

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Ten Studies on the Beatitudes

by Peter J Blackburn

3. ... those who Mourn

**Reading: John 11.33-37; Luke 19.41-44;
Romans 8.28-39**

Many people seem to think, “Happy are those who gloss over their mistakes – they will have inner peace!”

We may be inclined to disagree. After all, sooner or later mistakes are revealed, either to us or to others. The result is worse than if the problem had been dealt with at once.

However, the idea is abroad in society that the worst that can happen to you is to be found out. In a criminal trial, there is a great deal of attention on whether the accused is guilty or not. When the sentence is being given, the judge may note whether the convicted person shows any signs of remorse for their actions. Even so, the person may not be truly repentant – only deeply regretful that they have been caught!

Dick Keyes, in his book, *True Heroism*, notes the difference between “guilt” and “shame”. “Shame” is what we feel when we don't come up to our “models”. “Guilt” is our failure to live up to our “morals”.

Perhaps the main aim is to avoid “shame” – to evade exposure. If so, this represents a dulling of conscience, a lowering of our “models”. Peace and happiness are achieved by being “left alone” so that we are free to “do our own thing”.

Reflect:

- “The idea is abroad in our society that the worst thing is to be found out”. Do you agree? In what ways do people seek to hide their mistakes from others – and from themselves – in the effort to find peace and happiness?
- To what extent do we see a dulling of conscience in people's quest for happiness? Why won't this work in the long term?

Mourning

What does it mean to mourn? We live in a superficial age – not always comfortable with deep feelings. When Jesus speaks of “those who mourn”, he is referring to those who are sensitive, sympathetic, tender-hearted and alert to the needs of others and the world about us.

The sorrow of true mourning always goes beyond ourselves. It isn't to be confused with self-pity.

We think of mourning almost exclusively with reference to bereavement. This is the sorrow of love, now separated from the loved one. True mourning can only exist where there has been true love – otherwise it becomes just self-pity.

Perhaps it is because we all face bereavement at various times of our lives that this becomes the one occasion when we “mourn”. Yet in the Bible there is a much wider reference.

Read: John 11.33-37; Luke 19.41-44.

“Jesus wept”. These aren't the only places where the gospel writers record Jesus' deep emotion. They give us two different examples of Jesus himself mourning.

Jesus had a close relationship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethany was quite close to Jerusalem and it would appear that he stayed with them whenever he visited Jerusalem. For the moment he had gone across the Jordan and was ministering to the people there – his time had not yet come for what he knew would be the final days in Jerusalem (Jn 10.40-42).

The message came to him, “Lord, the one you love is sick” (11.3). His response was “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it” (v. 4).

After two days it was time to go back to Judaea – “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up... Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him” (vv. 11,14).

He comforted Martha with the words, “Your brother will rise again... I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (vv. 23,25).

Jesus knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead. That was clearly his solid expectation, and yet – “Jesus wept” (v. 35). We are told that Jesus was “deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (v. 33, also v. 38). The particular Greek expression suggests a “strong feeling of concern” either at the unbelief expressed by their weeping (or the hypocrisy of the professional mourners) or because this was a confrontation with death itself.

In the second reading we read of Jesus' grief over the city that hadn't responded to him in its time of opportunity, the city whose “ruling fathers”

would conspire to put him to death. He foresaw the terrible destruction that would befall it some forty years later. He was mourning for sins that were not his own.

His compassionate love was soon expressed in a different way as he drove out those who were selling in the Temple – “It is written, ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers’.” (v. 46)

Reflect:

- Think of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus had a confident expectation in a “good outcome”, yet he “wept”. Why? What does this say to us about our own mourning for a loved one and yet confidence of life beyond death?
- Jesus wept over Jerusalem. That's rather different from Jonah's attitude to the repentant Ninevites (Jonah 4)! Why did Jesus weep? and why did he then move into strong action? In what ways should we weep over our own society – and move into strong action?

Comfort

Read: Romans 8.28-39.

The English word “comfort” has a root meaning “strengthen together”. The Greek word is literally “call alongside” and includes the sense of “help” and “encourage”, as well as “console”. True comfort isn't a denial of grief and pain. It strengthens us with courage and hope.

In Rom. 8.28, Paul sets out a very important spiritual principle, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”. “In all things” – yes, even in mourning!

Human sorrow asks some questions for which we won't know a final or complete answer in this life. But we can know God's love for us in Christ from which nothing can separate us (v. 39). We can find the “good” that God is working in the midst of our disaster. The Cross itself speaks of suffering too – and of God's love and generosity (v. 32).

God has worked that Cross for our good. Cruel means of execution, expressing human hatred and rejection of God's Son, God speaks through it of his love – of his desire to accept us back if we will turn back to him (5.8).

If God can do that with the worst we could do to his Son Jesus, there are no limits on what he can do with our own tragic circumstances. From that