

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN

By
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BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF
MERCIES, AND GOD OF ALL COMFORT; WHO COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR AFFLICTION, SO
THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO COMFORT THOSE WHO ARE IN ANY AFFLICTION, WITH THE
COMFORT WITH WHICH WE OURSELVES ARE COMFORTED BY GOD.

II CORINTHIANS 1:3-5

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BLESSED ARE THE FATHERLESS

BLESSED ARE THE MOTHERLESS

BLESSED ARE THE WIDOWS

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO CLING NOT TO LIFE IN THE FACE OF DEATH

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN

The scriptures lead us to believe that there are certain groups of people which the Lord treats in a special manner. The purpose of this booklet is to discuss one of those groups, and how we bless our children and future generations with the benefits of being a part of this group.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is a sourcebook of blessings. The sermon begins with a list of several categories of people who receive special blessings. One of those groups ("*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*") is our chief concern.

What does it mean to be a member of this group? How does one gain membership? What benefits does one receive? It is my belief that the answer to these questions will bring a great deal of joy to many people.

This special group is actually composed of four distinct subgroups. Each has its own distinct membership requirements. Some of the benefits are common with each, and others are not. The names I will be assigning these groups reflect to some degree admission requirements. The names for these groups are as follows: Fatherless, Motherless, Widows, and those who forfeit their lives for the Kingdom of God.

BLESSED ARE THE FATHERLESS

If one considers all of the tragedies that may befall a person, it is unlikely that we would consider being fatherless the worst. However, from the Lord's point of view this is the sole greatest harm that can befall a child. In our time we might place losing one's mother as the most tragic. Yet, that is because we do not place the same emphasis and importance on authority as the Lord does.

The Lord sees losing one's chief source of authority in childhood as a great loss. Because of the severity of this loss, God compensates the child. Who fits into this group? It would seem that whenever a person loses his father, regardless of age, then he becomes a part of this group. It would also appear that the age of loss determines the severity and level of compensation.

What does it mean to lose? How is loss to be interpreted, by death only? I believe the group includes not only death of the father, but abandonment and or rejection by the father as well. If the father abandons the family, divorces his wife, and marries another, then the children become fatherless. Unless of course they are living with the father, and it is the mother who abandons the family.

No one can take the place of the father. This has considerable ramifications in the area of adoptions. Even if a child is put into the arms of its new guardians straight from the womb, it is my belief that from God's perspective the child is an orphan, and He treats the child as such. I believe this explains somewhat the uniformity of the problems experienced with adopted children, no matter how kindly they are treated by the guardians.

I realize this is a very hard statement for those who have adopted children. The desire is to accept the child as one's own. After all that is frequently why people go to such lengths to adopt, and that is fine—the child needs a home. However, if one's relationship with the Lord is important, it is best to consider the child as the Lord's, raising the child with the knowledge of how the Lord protects, provides and cares for him in extra special ways.

When a child is conceived, that child is part of both parents. The child has genetic ties, and ties to family heritage that can not be broken. The touch, taste, and smell of the child's mother linger forever in that child's being.

It is instructive to see what happens in nature with adoption. One may observe how a cow, for instance, refuses to take orphaned calves. On occasion they will, but for the most part, the orphan is unacceptable. The point is that the bond between parent and child goes far beyond our normal view. It is much more detrimental to a child than we like to think. So much so that God intervenes.

It is my belief that adopted parents make a great mistake when they act towards the child and God as if they are birth parents. They are not. From God's perspective they are guardians. Just as a guardian angel is not a parent nor responsible as a parent. Neither is the guardian a parent.

The responsibility for one's own child and the adopted child are similar yet there is a vast difference in the positions. The blessings and benefits to the guardian are far greater than to the parent. To take care of one of the Lord's children should be considered a great honor. Jesus says that even if a cup of water is given to a child in His name, a reward is due. It is so much more to take one of His children and invest time money, great effort, and love. Yet one must pay attention to ownership; the child is the Lord's, and we are the caretakers. What are the benefits of being fatherless?

God The Father

First, when the Lord declares the child fatherless, He takes up the role of father. At some point the Lord queries the child's desire about the relationship. Here is how it occurred with me.

When I was four years old, my parents divorced. For me, this involved both abandonment and rejection. When I was twelve, my father died. Here is what occurred six weeks after his death. I was walking home from school by myself. Suddenly the thought entered my mind: "Do you want me to be your father?" I immediately knew the source was God, and I affirmed that I did.

How the Lord approaches the child varies. Although each experiences God's approach individually in manner, the results seem to be similar. The child senses closeness with the father, a sense of presence. As he gets older, this presence is renewed most often when one would normally want or usually need a father's presence. Such as marriage, the birth of a child, graduation, or other special events when one's parents are present to share the occasion. It is at these times that His presence is experienced most strongly.

Someone may ask, "How do you know if you are in this group?" The children in this group, as well as the motherless group, have a unique experience, which uniformly is referred to as a curse. They experience from the moment of loss a sense of emptiness.

This emptiness is really the first indicator of the blessing. You see the Lord empties out an area of the person's soul. It is left untouched for many years. We who experience it usually try to fill it with something or someone. One may try assuaging the empty feelings with sex, money, power, material things, or people. However nothing fits. That is because God created it for Himself, and the only thing that "fits" is God.

Pierre Rentchnick makes this statement about that feeling of emptiness. "The one characteristic of the childhood of leaders throughout history seems to me to be an agonizing sensation of 'nothing,' of 'nothingness' against which the orphan or the abandoned child has to struggle."

Many who are writers or leaders have written of these feelings. Hitler, for example in *Mein Kampf*, speaks of his distress with the death of his mother when he was thirteen. Tournier, a religious writer of our time, discusses at length the black solitude as he calls it, precipitated by the deaths of his father at three months and his mother when he was six. Jean-Paul Sartre, orphaned at a very young age, describes his anguish in his book *The Words* (1964). The list goes on, biography by biography, of those orphaned and the subsequent emptiness. All consider it a curse.

However, this curse becomes a blessing of immense magnitude when the emptiness is filled with the Lord because it is a call from the Lord to a close, personal, and intimate relationship with Him. Those who fill the emptiness with God discover glorious things in their lives. For those who have not filled the emptiness, one often sees depression, addiction, and despair.

Emotional Maturity

The second part of the gift that the Lord gives the fatherless and motherless is related to maturity. It takes longer for one of these children to develop emotional maturity. I remember the moment in time when I made the transition from childhood to adulthood. I did not call it maturity at the time. But I was aware of emotional barriers in my life and particularly my learning processes. I asked the Lord to remove those barriers, and the results were dramatic. I have seen the same kind of emotional barriers in those whom I have counseled who have also suffered the loss of a parent.

Desire of One's Heart

The third gift, and one that is common with all four subgroups, is what I call the desire of one's heart. All those in all four groups: fatherless, motherless, widows, and those who surrender their lives for the kingdom of God, may receive this gift.

The nature of this gift? My heart fills with joy just speaking of it! It is actually the desire of one's heart. Because of its great value, one should choose most wisely this gift. Let us examine some biblical examples of those receiving this gift. Remember Solomon? In II Chronicles, a detailed description is given of the whole process of obtaining the gift. Let us look closely at the passage.

(2 Chr 1:7 RSV) In that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said to God, "Thou hast shown great and steadfast love to David my father, and hast made me king in his stead. O LORD GOD let thy promise to David my father now be fulfilled, for thou hast made me king over a people as many as the dust of the earth. Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this thy people, that is so great?" God answered Solomon, "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked long life, but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may rule my people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like." So Solomon came from the high place at Gibeon, from before the tent of meeting, to Jerusalem. And he reigned over Israel.

Have you ever wondered why God asks Solomon what he wanted? I would submit to you that it was because his father had just died. David, his father, had died when Solomon was about nineteen years old. The Lord asked him, "What do you want and what is the desire of your heart?" This is not an isolated incident. Let us see how many occurrences we can find.

If you remember, Moses was placed on the river Nile at three months of age. His parents did place him in the river for the noble purpose of saving his life. The reason for separation is not relevant, however. The consequences are the same regardless the circumstances. God became his father. Some may say, yes but Moses' mother was called to nurse him; she was only separated for a short time. However, it makes no difference, for in the Lord's terms, Moses was adopted. Please note the woman was never again referred to as Moses' mother rather his nurse.

What was the desire of Moses? Was it not to rescue his people from the Egyptians? Did not the Lord honor that desire? Do other examples exist?

Josiah at the age of eight years old was made king over Judah. His father had died, and he was king. What was the desire of his heart? Reformation. He wanted to turn the hearts of the people back to the Lord. During his tenure as king, for thirty-one years he did just that.

Joash is another example. His father died when he was one year old. When he was eight years old, he became king. With guidance from a very Godly counselor, he followed the Lord all of his days. What was his desire? For the kingdom to prosper, and it did as long as he worshipped God.

I am not saying the Lord gives us everything we want. However, when we ask for this blessing in accordance with His will, He does grant it. It is a part of our heritage. Time and space fail me to recount the full stories of Moses, Samuel, David, Abraham, Joash, Josiah, Daniel, Timothy, and so many more, and yes even Jesus. God's word recounts the stories of many blessed in this manner. There is even a circumstance where the gift is blatantly refused! Listen to this conversation!

(Isaiah 7:10-14) Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign..."

Note again, the occasion for the Lord saying to Ahaz, "Ask what you want." Ahaz's father had died; he was now king, and he had been thrown into a major threat of war. Usually when we read the text, we emphasize that it was at this specific occasion that God chose to reveal that His own son would be born of a virgin which indicates the adoptive nature of the role of Joseph. Thus, the gift that is promised to all of mankind is not only the establishment of a kingdom, His church, but also a kingdom especially instructed to care for the orphans and widows.

Something else needs to be seen as well. God's care for the fatherless is not limited to those who are defined as His people. There are seven priceless gifts that God has made accessible to all mankind. The compensation for parental loss affects all those in this elite group.

The Lord's instructions to Solomon when wisdom was given to him imply that one may make unwise choices with the gifts. History reveals not only positive but negative use of the extraordinary gift that God bestows.

First, let us show the universal nature of the gift. There have been multitudes of studies that consider the plight of the orphan and its effect later in life. Two distinct trends are apparent. There are an above average number of orphans who suffer mental disorders. Furthermore, there is a far greater than average number who excel both as leaders and in their professional life. Pierre Rentchnick published a groundbreaking book in this area in 1976 called *Ces Malades Qui Nours Gouvernement*. He was later awarded the Littré Prize for his work. Rentchnick, in this book and later material, examined historical persons and discovered some three thousand orphans who had ruled the world throughout history. That is important because the study represents a rather large group of people from one segment of society. Apparently, the Lord does not restrict His special treatment for the orphan just to godly people.

My own experience with the Lord granting the desire of my heart was a process that began when I was twenty-one. Now the desire of my heart had always been for wisdom. People told me their problems, and I desired to help.

I left the military and wanted to go on to college. However, throughout all of my earlier education I had been a marginal student making C's, D's, and a few failures. I had hoped that it would now be different. But it was not. I began college, and again I made marginal grades. Finally, I told the Lord that I just could not do this. If He would remove the emotional barriers to learning, grant me wisdom and insight, then whatever degree I earned would be used in His service. The next semester and every semester thereafter, I took seventeen to twenty credit hours. I was either on the honor roll or Dean's list every semester. I had never been on an honor roll before. In fact, when I received my diploma with a gold seal indicating that it was with honor, I had no idea what it meant. The courses were upper level and included Greek and Hebrew. Concurrently I was working forty hours per week at an airport, and my first child was born. I graduated with honors from a four-year course of study in two years and ten

months. The Lord granted the desire of my heart. It was only much later that I realized what had happened. Nearly ten years later, the Lord revealed the things I am sharing here about the gifts. He has taken the terrible loss in childhood of the parent's abandonment and abuse and turned them into blessings for others, as well as for myself.

BLESSED ARE THE MOTHERLESS

Admission into this group requires the death or loss of one's mother. Others in the group include, the abandoned, rejected, and abused. The difference in the benefits afforded this group is related to the loss. With the fatherless one loses an authority figure, and that is what makes the loss so severe. In the group composed of the abused and motherless, the emphasis is on comfort. Thus, God takes the unique place of comforter.

The unique characteristic about those who are God's consolers is the gentle kindness, which touches the spirits of others. In II Corinthians 1:3-7 Paul addresses the issue of comfort. The section I wish to emphasize is verses 3 and 4. "Who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." To me, this means that there are two classes of people. One group is composed of those who have been comforted by God, and the second group is made up of those who are comforted by those comforted by God. I suspect that those comforted by God are those who fall into the group we are calling motherless.

Differences between the two are most discernable when talking to these groups about how they are comforted. Those comforted by the Lord seem to have lived with an intimacy that is familiar and expected. They desire the Lord's comfort. They obtain much consolation from reading God's Word. In contrast they receive little consolation from people.

The second group is just the reverse. They prefer to talk to others about their problems and turn to others for comfort. When being comforted by the person who has been comforted by the Lord, they feel great relief. However, they are not at home with intense closeness with the Lord. It may be frightening and disturbing.

What is closeness with the Father like? Shortly after my mother died I expressed the feeling in the following way:

The two walked the forest path, the twilight of the deepening indigo sky painting darkening shadows midst the evening dew. "Why Father," said the child, "Why must I suffer so." The question was met by silence. The Father clasped the hand a little tighter. The two, Father and child, hand in hand walked the winding path. The stillness of the evening interrupted once again, "Why Father, Why?" A tear trickled down the Father's cheek as He whispered, "Greatly beloved," but the words ceased with a sigh, as if explanation was just not possible.

It was time for parting the journey would be continued later. As the child sadly watched the departing Father, the longing for His presence again swept over and engulfed him. With a sigh, the forest path beckoning, the journey renewed. A little lighter, somewhat stronger. He had said almost nothing, yet nothing more was needed—simply hand in hand with the Father was enough.

As an infant, my mother would rock me during the early morning hours when my physical distress was the greatest. The doctors had warned her there was no hope, "He is two months premature, a twin, and survival is impossible." It is as if I can still hear her alternately singing and praying softly, "I come to the garden alone, while dew is still on the roses . . . and He walks with me and He talks and me with me...." Yes, even now

some fifty years later I hear those words. I can personally attest to the comfort afforded by the Father, both by my mother and then later from Him. He indeed does walk and talk with His children.

But I have known many others, deeply religious, for whom such comfort is too close. They preferred a little distance. The Father sends them comforters who have been comforted by Him.

Also they are blessed with the desire of their heart. Have you read the story of Joseph? In Genesis 37 scripture begins the story of this man. He was seventeen years old when his brothers sold him into slavery. Why did they do that? Because they were jealous and wearied with Joseph's dreams about ruling over them. Remember what had just preceded this change in Joseph's life, which was to lead to the fulfillment of the desire of his heart? Was it not the death of his mother as she was giving birth to his brother Benjamin?

Are there more examples, one may ask? The first book of Samuel in the first chapter relates the events surrounding the life of Samuel, how his mother brought him to the temple at the age of two and of his dedication to God, leaving him with Eli the High Priest. It was for a godly reason, yet it no doubt broke her heart and the child obviously now had a new guardian. What was the desire of Samuel's heart? To be a servant of the Lord. What did he become? A judge over God's people.

It must be emphasized here that these gifts from the Lord must be chosen. The Lord initiates the process, but the person chooses. As was shown with king Ahaz, the choice was his, and he refused the gift. Others may demand a replacement parent; though honored, it is hardly the wise choice.

BLESSED ARE THE WIDOWS

I wonder, what did Naomi and Ruth want? What was the desire of these widows' hearts? There is no doubt about the answer: they wanted children and grandchildren. What did they receive?

(Ruth 4:13-17 RSV) So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

"Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy mountain." This is a quote from Psalms 68. All through the Bible God's special concern for widows is referenced. The high point of the Lord's concern for them is summed up in James 1:27. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: To visit the orphans and widows in their affliction..."

This matter of widows was so important to the Son of God that He could not die until He had settled the matter for His own mother. When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to his mother, "*Woman, behold, your son!*" Then He said to the disciple, "*Behold, your mother!*" *And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*" (John 19:26-27)

The widows, like the fatherless lose a significant authority figure in their lives and therefore the Lord singles them out for special treatment. Also, the widow experiences the comfort aspect just as the motherless. Remember how Naomi proclaimed her bitterness when she returned home to Bethlehem? She had left the land with a husband and sons and returned with nothing, but another widow in the same predicament that she was in. Read her story and read about the Lord's method of comforting her.

Scripture points out that He expects others to provide special treatment to widows. He also proclaims that He will take up their cause. This should be a fearful thought to the dregs of society that prey on widows. The Lord God will call to account the cruel people, the bible suggests, in a manner which will break them.

It should be pointed out that remarriage cancels the special treatment afforded the widow. This however, is not the case with orphans. From the day they meet the requirements for admission into the Lord's care, orphans remain there for life. Part of the reason for this is that the loss will be a shadow over them for the rest of their lives. There is no cure for orphanhood.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO CLING NOT TO LIFE IN THE FACE OF DEATH

One of the most inspiring verses in the bible to me, comes from Revelation 12: 11. Here, John is speaking of those who have withstood the accuser, how they withstood, and what they were willing to give. *“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”* (RSV) I really appreciate the (NRSV) way of expressing that clause, *“they clung not to life even in the face of death.”*

There is no doubt that the disciples of Jesus, that is those who forsake brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, land and wealth for Him, are treated in a very special manner. Matthew 19:29 *“And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”*

It is apparent that the Lord has always treated those who have surrendered everything for Him in special ways. Most of us are aware that when we have difficult problems, that these are the people we ask to pray on our behalf. It is not as if God does not hear my prayer. He does hear. But faith affects the prayer and building faith in ourselves takes time. For those who have it, their prayers are special. James pinpoints this when he says, *“the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”* (James 5:16)

In addition to the other benefits (The Lord as father and the desire of one's heart) those in this group should know that their prayers carry great weight in heaven. I offer three examples of this influence suggested in scripture. The first incident is found in Genesis 18:16-19. *“Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, (18) seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”* The Lord was mindful of Abraham. Because of his faithfulness, God allowed Abraham input before He acted.

Another incident appears in Jeremiah 15:1. *“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people.’”* Again, this suggest that in some circumstances He would listen. Again, in Ezekiel 14:20 *“even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live says the Lord God they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.”* I believe the passages interpret for us what God means when He says the fervent prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

If the gifts that God gives us are to be used properly, if they are to build faith in us and our children, then we need to tell about the results of these gifts in a format that causes others to glorify the Lord. What I have in mind is a prayer journal. In the last section I quoted the verse from Revelation 11:12. It is that little phrase that is so important to us, *“here, by the word of their testimony...”* The prayer journal is seen as a way of communication to your children and their children, the glories of the Father and

Son, and to give in some small measure knowledge of the bountiful treasures that the Lord has bestowed upon you.

POSTSCRIPT

It is now some five years later with an additional thought on the subject. One other major awareness of these groups that stand out so clearly now. Each of these biblical characters submitted as examples had something else in common: all had dysfunctional families...even Jesus.

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It is Dr. Stettheimer's belief that God's Word provides the answers to life's problems and that difficult family problems provide an opportunity to acquire discipline and develop character. Regular participation in church and home devotionals is strongly encouraged in order to provide a firm foundation upon which character is built. It is through this process that enduring solutions are discovered and strong marriages created.

In addition to the production of this booklet, Dr. Stettheimer has authored the following Character Building Booklets (\$3.00/each):

PUTTING ASIDE ANGER

A STUDY OF AUTHORITY, RESPECT, OBEDIENCE, AND CORRECTION

ADDICTION: CAUSES AND CURES

CHRONICLING GOD'S BLESSINGS

AQUIRING AND USING WISDOM

SEX

ADULTERY: CAUSES, CURES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Aside from these booklets, Dr. Stettheimer has created a series on The Motivational Gifts which is available on Cassette Tapes (\$25.00) and Video Tape (\$60.00).