

# ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

## BIBLE STUDY, 23/01/2008

### STUDY 2

## THE PENITENT SPIRIT

Matthew 5:4

*Blessed are they that mourn.* This is another strange blessing, and fitly follows the former. The poor are accustomed to mourn, the graciously poor mourn graciously. We are apt to think, Blessed are the *merry*; but Christ, who was himself a great mourner, says, Blessed are the *mourners*. There is a sinful mourning, which is an enemy to blessedness—the *sorrow of the world*; despairing melancholy upon a spiritual account, and disconsolate grief upon a temporal account. There is a natural mourning, which may prove a friend to blessedness, by the grace of God working with it, and sanctifying the afflictions to us, for which we mourn. But there is a gracious mourning, which qualifies for blessedness, an habitual seriousness, the mind mortified to mirth, and an actual sorrow. This could be a penitential mourning for our own sins; that is, *godly sorrow*, a sorrow according to God; sorrow for sin, with an eye to Christ, Zechariah 12:10. Those are God's mourners, who live a life of repentance, who lament the corruption of their nature, and their many actual transgressions, and God's withdrawals from them; and who, out of regard to God's honour, mourn also for the sins of others, and *sigh and cry for their abominations*, Ezekiel 9:4. 2. This is also a sympathising mourning for the afflictions of others; the mourning of those who *weep with them that weep*, are sorrowful *for the solemn assemblies, for the desolations of Zion* (Zephaniah. 3:18; Psalm 137:1), especially who look with compassion on perishing souls, and *weep over* them, as Christ *over Jerusalem*.

### 1. Mourning: a characteristic of the normal Christian state

Matthew 5:4; Luke 18:9–14; Psalm 40:12 Romans 7:24; Isaiah 61:3; Luke 2:25; II Corinthians 1:3,5; John 14:16,26, Revelation 21:4; Hebrews 12:1; II Timothy 3:5; Psalm 119:53; Jeremiah 13:17; 14:17; Ezekiel 9:4; II Corinthians 7:10; Psalm 119:53; 13:17

"Those who mourn" are comforted within the kingdom Jesus came to bring in Himself. Judaic religion of the first century mourned with self-pity that they could not have what they wanted in self-rule and self-direction. Religion through the centuries has often mourned that it did not have all the wealth that it wanted in order to do what it wanted in the guise of benevolent service to mankind. It is obvious then that it is not every species of mourning that is here referred to. There is a "sorrow of the world [that] worketh death". The mourning for which Christ promises comfort must be restricted to that which is spiritual. The comfort of God is only available in the kingdom for those who mourn over their own sinfulness and wretchedness, as well as the sinfulness of others with a godly sorrow. Those who mourn that people are going to hell without spiritual and everlasting life; those who mourn the cynicism and lack of integrity in society; those who mourn that people with real needs are not being ministered to by religion which despises and rejects certain types of people, like tax-collectors and "sinners" and lepers; these mourners will be comforted by the fact that the character of Christ in the kingdom of grace does indeed respond with compassion

and deal with sin and evil. The Messiah grants to "those who mourn in Zion, the oil of gladness instead of mourning", for He is "the consolation of Israel". The "God of all comfort"; "comforts us in abundance through Christ", for the Spirit of Christ serves as the "Comforter". There is a present comfort in Christ for our mourning, and we look forward in hope to the experience of the kingdom wherein there is "no death or mourning" for any therein.

## **2. Removal of guilt that burdens the conscience**

Matthew 5:4; Philippians 4:7; Ephesians 1:6; I John 1:7; II Peter 3:13; Hebrews 12:11; II Corinthians 4:17; 6:10; Psalm 30:5; Romans 8:17

"They shall be comforted." By these words Christ refers primarily to the removal of the guilt that burdens the conscience. This is accomplished by the Spirit's application of the Gospel of God's grace to one whom He has convicted of his dire need of a Saviour. The result is a sense of free and full forgiveness through the merits of the atoning blood of Christ. This Divine comfort is "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding", filling the heart of the one who is now assured that he is "accepted in the Beloved". God wounds before healing, and abases before He exalts. First there is a revelation of His justice and holiness, then the making known of His mercy and grace.

The words "they shall be comforted" also receive a constant fulfilment in the experience of the Christian. Though he mourns his excuseless failures and confesses them to God, yet he is comforted by the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses him from all sin. Though he groans over the dishonour done to God on every side, yet is he comforted by the knowledge that the day is rapidly approaching when Satan shall be cast into hell forever and when the saints shall reign with the Lord Jesus in "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness". Though the chastening hand of the Lord is often laid upon him and though "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous", nevertheless, he is consoled by the realisation that this is all working out for him "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory". Like the Apostle Paul, the believer who is in communion with his Lord can say, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing". He may often be called upon to drink of the bitter waters of Marah, but God has planted nearby a tree to sweeten them. Yes, *mourning* Christians are comforted even now by the Divine Comforter: by the ministrations of His servants, by encouraging words from fellow Christians, and by the precious promises of the Word being brought home in power by the Spirit to their hearts out of the storehouse of their memories.

## **3. Fulfilment of the gracious promise**

Matthew 5:4; 11:28; I John 1:9; Hebrews 12:11; Luke 16:25; Isaiah 61:2-3; Revelation 21:4

"They shall be comforted." This gracious promise receives its fulfilment, first, in that Divine consolation which immediately follows a sound conversion (i.e. one that is preceded by conviction and contrition), namely the removal of that conscious load of guilt which lies as an intolerable burden on the conscience. It finds its accomplishment in the Spirit's application of the gospel of God's grace to the one whom He has convicted of his dire need of a Saviour. Then it is that Christ speaks the word of power, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give

you rest". This "comfort" issues in a sense of a free and full forgiveness through the merits of the atoning blood of Christ. This Divine comfort is the peace of God which passeth all understanding, filling the heart of one who is now assured that he is "accepted in the Beloved." First God wounds and then heals.

Second, there is a *continual* "comforting" of the mourning saint by the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter. The one who sorrows over his departures from Christ is comforted by the assurance that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". The one who mourns under the chastening rod of God is comforted by the promise, "afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". The one who grieves over the awful dishonour done to his Lord in the religious world is comforted by the fact that Satan's time is short, and soon Christ will bruise him beneath His feet. Third, the *final* "comfort" is when we leave this world and are done with sin for ever. Then shall "sorrow and sighing flee away." To the rich man in hell, Abraham said of the one who had begged at his gate, "now he is *comforted*". The best wine is reserved for the last. The "comfort" of heaven will more than compensate for all the "mourning" of earth.