

## Teachings of Christ

### The Beatitudes

### Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

#### Introduction

Matthew records the teachings of Jesus in a series of statements called Beatitudes. We find this Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter five. It is probably one of the most famous texts of the New Testament. Augustine described it as the perfect standard of the Christian life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer based his classic book *The Cost of Discipleship* on an exposition on it. The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most profound texts of the Bible.

Jesus decides to begin his teaching ministry in Galilee after He heard the news about the arrest of John the Baptist. When he arrived in Galilee, he healed all kinds of diseases, and large crowds of people began following him from Decapolis, Judea, Jerusalem, and even Syria. Up to this time, Jesus had been teaching and preaching mainly in the synagogues. But in Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus goes public with his teaching ministry. It opened the door for Jews and Gentiles alike to listen in on his teachings.

Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7 summarize for us the teachings of Jesus. The other gospels expand on these subjects, but we get the complete outline of Jesus' teachings in these chapters of Matthew. Let's begin by reading the introductory remarks Jesus makes about blessings from Matthew Chapter 5.

Verse 1 says, "And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:1-3 NKJV)

Most believers would probably agree that the highest authority on the subject of character is God. And Jesus was sent to reveal to us what God looks for in His people. God is more interested in our character than our conduct. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Out of the heart flow the issues of life." If your character is right, your conduct will be too! Jesus says in Matthew 7:17, "Every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit."

The teachings in Matthew 5 are about ethics and holy living. Shortly after Jesus began His public ministry, He climbs a mountain slope (more like a big hill) and teaches his disciples some very new perspectives on some very old teachings. Some years earlier, on another mount called Sinai, God gave Moses the Law to govern his people. That encounter was a frightful and intimidating experience for the people. But now, God comes as a servant. He comes as a humble teacher and offers the people the blessing of God.

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and the similar verses in Luke 6 summarize the teachings of Jesus about how a person should live. Jesus directed his teachings

to his disciples, but the crowds came to listen as well. The main subject of His teachings was about the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus speaks about the kingdom of heaven, He talks both in future and present terms. He talks about the character of those already in the kingdom of God by faith and about the character of those who will come to believe in Him as the Son of God.

Of course, you won't find the word 'Beatitude' in the English Bible. It comes from the Latin word '*Beatus*' meaning 'Happy' or 'Blessed,' which is very close to the original Greek word that Jesus used. The happiest and most fortunate people on earth are those who discover the blessings of God's kingdom.

## **I. Recognizing the Blessing**

It's important to recognize the blessing of God. The first word of Jesus' Sermon is "blessed." He begins his teaching ministry with blessing. It would characterize His message and His mission! Jesus came into the world as God's blessing to bless the world. He came to bring God's blessing to you; to deliver you from your sins and bring you to peace with God's purpose and plan for your life.

To be blessed is to be approved by God. The word "bless" is used 55 times in the New Testament and never refers to outward prosperity. It always refers to an inward condition of the heart. The Christian life is not a product of your feelings. It is a life of commitment. When Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He's speaking to those who recognize they are poor in spirit.

God has chosen to bless those who turn to him for help and are willing to acknowledge their inadequacies. Those who admit their sinfulness and failures can experience the blessing of life transformation when they receive Jesus. The blessing of God will drive out your sense of helplessness and emptiness. Those who don't hide behind a cloak of self-sufficiency but honestly seek God's help will receive God's grace.

The biblical solution for a person paralyzed by a sense of guilt or unworthiness is to meet Jesus, not a seminar on improving your self-esteem. God did not say, "Moses, don't put yourself down. Believe in yourself! Tell yourself you are a somebody." What God really said was, "Moses, stop looking at your own unworthiness and look at me. I made the mouth. I will be with you. I will help you. I will teach you what to say. Put your trust in me!"

The Bible's answer to low self-esteem is sovereign grace. The great Creator himself has come down to touch your life with special meaning and purpose, and when you recognize that, he applauds you with, "Congratulations!" It is an incredible blessing to recognize God's supernatural and personal involvement in your life!

Building a relationship with Jesus produces a joy that is always with you – in sorrow, pain, loss, grief – whether you're young or old, Jesus has promised to be there. God's promise of blessing is that he will never leave you or forsake you; he will be with you always – even to the end of your days!

God wants us to live every day of our life with the inner satisfaction and confidence that we are truly blessed! Then, having told us that His will for us is to be blessed, He tells us the condition through which that blessing is received. The road to God's blessing begins with realizing the poverty of our spirit.

## **II. The Poverty of Spirit**

Spiritual poverty is a poverty of complete desperation. It is knowing that without God, you are totally helpless to do anything of enduring value. The word "poor" has a variety of meanings and applications in scripture.

The Old Testament uses five different words from the Hebrew language, and the New Testament uses two from Greek. They describe being destitute and indicate oppression, humility, being defenseless, afflicted, in want, needy, weak, low, dependent, and socially inferior. The two Greek words translated as "poor" in the New Testament suggest the working poor - those who own little or no property. They describe people who possess very little in material goods and earn what they have through their daily labor.

The word that Jesus uses to describe the "poor" literally means to crouch or cover - as an utterly helpless person - like a beggar, or a pauper, someone totally dependent on others for help. In Galatians 4:9, it is translated as "beggarly."

Some think being poor means to be in material need - to have far less than others do. That may be true, but to be poor covers a much greater range of things. It includes weakness, feebleness, dependence, subservience, defenselessness, affliction, and distress. The spiritually poor are those who recognize the utter helplessness of living in a world marred by sin. They recognize that no human power can solve the problems we face. They know they must receive strength from God to reach out to others.

When Jesus talks about the poverty of spirit, He's talking spiritual bankruptcy. Theologically, we call it the depravity of man. The fact is that we have nothing to offer God that will equal, earn, or merit God's righteousness.

Spiritual poverty is a sense of complete powerlessness. It is a sense of total helplessness before God. It is a realization that your life would be completely unmanageable if it weren't for God. It is a sense of moral uncleanness and personal unworthiness. It is a sense that if there is to be any life or joy or usefulness, it will have to be all God and all grace. The fact is without God everyone is poor in spirit. It's just that so many don't even realize it.

Jim Forest writes this in his book "The Ladder of the Beatitudes," "Without poverty of spirit, none of us can begin to follow Christ. What does poverty of spirit mean? It is my awareness that I cannot save myself, that I am defenseless, that neither money nor power will spare me from suffering and death. It is my awareness that I desperately need God's help and mercy. Being poor in spirit means becoming free

of the myth that possessing many things will make me a happier person. It is an attitude expressed in a French proverb: 'When you die, you carry in your clutched hand only that which you have given away.'" -- from The Ladder of the Beatitudes - by Jim Forest

The opposite of 'Poor in Spirit' is 'proud in spirit,' and sadly, there are far too many who fit in this category. According to 1 John 2:16, the pride of life is one of the three root sins of independence from God. (1 John 2:16) So while the pride of life is the root of self-destruction, poverty of spirit is the root of all virtues.

To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge honestly and with understanding our deep need for God. We are all sinners, and on the merit of how we have lived our lives, we deserve nothing but God's judgment. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to bargain or buy His favor.

Based upon the profession of our faith in Jesus and a heart of genuine repentance, God, accepts us by His grace. The blood of Jesus Christ covers our sins, justifying us and providing us with access into His presence. The proud, the arrogant, the self-assured, and the self-satisfied feel no need for God. The Kingdom of Heaven is for those who know they are the poor in spirit and need God in their life to be whole.

To them belong the benefits of the kingdom.

### **III. Receive Kingdom Benefits**

When we realize how desperately impoverished we are spiritually, we know it is only God's grace and concern for us that gives us hope for recovery. Jesus promises to the poor in spirit the benefits of the Kingdom of Heaven.

'Kingdom of Heaven' is a title you find only in the gospel of Matthew. The term is used interchangeably with 'Kingdom of God' in other gospels. The Kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom promised in Old Testament to be established by Messiah. (Daniel 2:44)

Matthew represents Jesus as the savior and King prophesied in Old Testament. Jesus is the true King of the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus describes the Kingdom of God in Luke 17:20-21, "when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21 NKJV)

The reality of the Kingdom of Heaven will be fully realized and established when Christ returns to the earth as King and Ruler over all earth. (Daniel 7:13, 14, 27) But the kingdom Jesus is talking about begins with the government of God in a person's life. It is letting Jesus be the Master and Lord of your life. The King of the Kingdom of Heaven produces inner peace and Spirit-controlled living. And the Holy Spirit guards and guides our attitudes and actions.

Those who know they are “poor in spirit” are happy to respond to the call of God. They see even the simplest things in life as the blessing and benefits of God. They gratefully receive the kingdom benefits because they know “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17 NKJV)

The benefits of God’s Kingdom flourish within you when you make Jesus the King of your life. The Kingdom of Heaven is a kingdom of the heart, not a geographical one. It is a kingdom where Jesus reigns over sickness, disease, demons, and death. The kingdom of heaven was the very heart of Jesus’ teachings.

At the close of his earthly ministry, Jesus told the disciples, “All authority and power is given unto me in heaven and earth, Go ye, therefore....” Our strength does not come from our education, or contacts, or material possessions – it comes from the divine favor of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

## **Conclusion**

When Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” he’s talking about those who know that life is meaningless without God. Only the poor in spirit know it. Psalm 34:18 says, The Lord is near to them that are of a humble heart, and saves those who have a contrite spirit. Wealth, health, position, prestige, success, and friends fade away, but the promise of God’s heavenly benefits will never fade away.

James 4:4-6 says, Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “GOD RESISTS THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” (James 4:4-6 NKJV)

If you know you need God in your life and want to see his power and love work through you – there are several simple things you can do:

- **Meditate on the greatness of God.** Take time each day to think about the majesty and glory of God. See your problem as nothing more than an opportunity for God to declare his glory.
- **Be thankful.** Express your genuine gratitude to God for every good thing in your life. If you’re having trouble remembering, write them down! Focus on what’s going right, not what’s going wrong.
- **Remember God’s faithfulness.** Be consistent and establish some spiritual disciplines in your life. Go to church. Read your Bible. Talk to God. Get in a small group.
- **Be Generous.** Don’t ignore a need when God reveals it to you. Don’t hoard the blessing! Realize you are a channel through which the benefits of the kingdom flow.
- **Be forgiving.** If you understand the cost of your eternal redemption, how can you deny pardoning those who have offended you?

- **Credit God with any Progress.** Tell God you know that any success or progress you make is completely because of His hand of blessing upon you.
- **Remember God has a plan for your life.** You are not aimless. You have a purpose and destiny to fulfill. God always acts with your best interest in mind and can bring the best out of even your worst mistakes.

If you practice these simple guidelines, you will become a truly humble servant of Christ, the King of the Heavenly Kingdom. Your life will be His life, and His life will become your life. His will becomes your will. His work will become your work. And your life will make an eternal impact upon this world.

Philippians 2:12-16 says, Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe <sup>16</sup>as you hold out the word of life.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”