

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 the Sermon on the Mount as the perfect standard of the Christian life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer based his classic book *The Cost of Discipleship* on the Sermon on the Mount.

After Jesus left Judaea, He began his teaching ministry in Galilee when 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 from Galilee, Decapolis, Judea, Jerusalem, and even Syria began following him. Until then, 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 to his teachings.

Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7 summarize the complete teachings of Jesus. Other passages of the gospels expand on these subjects, but we get the outline of his teachings in these chapters. Let's read his introductory remarks about blessings from Matthew Chapter 5:

"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. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (Matthew 5:1-12 NKJV)

Most believers would agree that the highest authority on character would have to be God. Jesus came to reveal to us what God looks for in His people. Did you know God is more interested in our character than our conduct? Proverbs 4:23 says, "Out of the heart flow the issues of life." In Matthew 7:17, Jesus says, "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.

One day, shortly after Jesus had set out to begin His public ministry, he climbed a mountain slope and gave his disciples a new perspective on some ancient teachings. It's interesting that years earlier, on another mount called Sinai, God

gave Moses the Law that would govern his people. That was a frightful and intimidating experience for the people. But now God comes as a servant and a gentle and humble teacher and offers to the people the blessing of God.

So Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and the similar Sermon in Luke 6 summarize Jesus's teachings concerning how a person should live. Jesus was speaking to His disciples and the crowds as well.

One of the main subjects of Jesus' teachings is the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven, He talks in both future and present terms. He speaks about the character of those who are in the kingdom of God by faith, and He talks about the character of those who truly believe Jesus is the Christ. These teachings of Jesus are called the Beatitudes.

The word 'Beatitude' is not found in the English bible. It comes from the Latin word '*Beatus*,' meaning 'Happy' or 'Blessed,' a meaning that is very close to the original Greek word that Jesus used. The Greek word for 'Blessed' is '*Makarioi*,' which means 'happy, supremely favored, and fortunate.'

The happiest and most fortunate people on earth are those who discover the blessings of God's kingdom.

I. Recognizing the Blessing

The motto of Crossroads Chapel is "Blessed to be a blessing." Jesus begins his teaching ministry with blessing. The first word of his Sermon is "blessed." It was not only Christ's message; it was His mission! He came into this world as God's blessing to bless the world.

The really good news is that Jesus came to bring God's blessing to you! He came to deliver you from your sins and iniquities and bring you to peace with God as your Father. 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 feeling but of commitment.

When Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," he does not mean everybody. He means those who know it. This blessing is reserved for those who recognize their inadequacies, guilt, failures, helplessness, unworthiness, and emptiness. It belongs to those who don't try to hide these things under a cloak of self-sufficiency but are honest about them and grieved and driven to the grace of God.

The biblical solution for a person paralyzed by guilt or unworthiness is not a lesson on improving your self-esteem. God did not say to Moses, "Stop putting yourself down. You are a somebody. You are eloquent. You're not a worm." What God did say was, "Moses, stop looking at your own unworthiness and uselessness and look at me. I made the mouth. I will be with you. I will help you. I will teach you what to say. Look to me and live!" The bible's answer to low self-esteem is not a course in

developing high self-esteem; it is tapping into God's sovereign grace. The great Creator has come down to touch us with special meaning and purpose, and when we recognize that, he applauds us with, "Congratulations!"

Recognizing God's supernatural and personal involvement in your life is an incredible blessing! Whether you're young or old, it produces a joy that is always with us – in sorrow, pain, loss, and grief. 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 with the inner satisfaction and confidence that we are truly blessed! Having told us that His will for our life is that we are blessed, He proceeds to tell us the condition through which that blessing is received. He tells us that we must realize the poverty of our spirit.

II. The Poverty of Spirit

Spiritual poverty is a poverty of complete desperation. 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 not only being destitute but also indicate oppression, humility, being defenseless, afflicted, in want, needy, weak, thin, 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 have 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 cower as one who is helpless - like a beggar, or a pauper, or one in abject poverty, totally dependent on others for help. It's someone destitute of even the necessities of life. In Galatians 4:9, it is translated "beggarly."

Many think being poor simply means being in material need or having far less than others. But to be poor covers a much greater range of things. It indicates weakness, feebleness, dependence, subservience, defenselessness, affliction, and distress. The spiritually poor are people who recognize their utter helplessness with what life has dealt them. They realize that nothing within their power can solve their dilemma. They know they must desperately reach out to others for help if there is any hope of ever rising out of their situation.

When Jesus talks about the poverty of spirit, He's talking about spiritual bankruptcy. Theologically, we call this the depravity of man. It is the fact 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 is completely unmanageable. It is a sense of moral uncleanness and personal unworthiness. The

fact is everybody is poor in spirit. Everyone, whether they know it or not, is powerless without God. Unfortunately, not everyone knows 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. It is stepping away from the rule of fear in one's life, fear being the great force that restrains us from acts of love. 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'; sadly, far too many fit into 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 strength of our lives, we deserve nothing but God's judgment. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy His favor. But based upon the profession of our faith with genuine repentance, God accepts us by His grace because the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for the sins of the world, covers our sins, justifying us and providing us with access to His presence.

The proud, arrogant, self-assured, and self-satisfied feel they do not need God. The Kingdom of Heaven is reserved for those who know they are the poor in spirit. 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 the benefits of the Kingdom of Heaven to the poor in spirit.

'Kingdom of Heaven' is a title you find only in the gospel of Matthew. However, the term is used interchangeably with 'Kingdom of God' in other gospels. The Kingdom of Heaven is the messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament. It would be established by Messiah. (Daniel 2:44) Matthew represents Jesus as the savior and king prophesied in the Old Testament. He is the true King of the Messianic Kingdom.

Jesus describes the Kingdom of God in Luke 17:20-21. When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "Now 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. The Kingdom of Heaven is reflected through the inner peace and control of our attitudes and actions by the Holy Spirit. 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.

The truly poor in spirit gratefully receive kingdom benefits because they realize, as James 1: 17 says, 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 when Jesus is crowned King and Lord. It 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 a major teaching of Jesus. At the close of his 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, 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 does not mean everybody. He means those who 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 will fade away, but the promise of God's heavenly benefits will never fade away.

James 4:4-6 says, "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Do you think the Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 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. Focus on what's going right, not what's going wrong. If you're having trouble remembering, write them down!
- **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. Realize you are a channel through which the benefits of the kingdom flow. Don't horde the blessing!
- **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 entirely because of His hand of blessing upon you. (I may not be the person I want to be in Christ, but thank God I'm not the person I used to be!)
- **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 will become 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 beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." ([Philippians 2:12-16 NKJV](#))

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