

Teachings of Christ

The Beatitudes

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Introduction

The teachings of Jesus are recorded in what we commonly call the 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 an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount.

It is in Galilee that Jesus begins his teaching ministry. He had left Judea 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 began following him not only from Galilee, but 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. This opened the door for Jew and Gentile alike to listen in on his teachings. Matthew Chapter 5, 6 and 7 summarize for us the complete teachings of Jesus. While in other passages of the gospels he expands on these subjects, it is in these chapters that we get the complete outline of his teachings. Let's read his introductory remarks about blessings from Matthew Chapter 5.

I think believers would agree the highest authority on the subject of character would have to be God. Jesus came to reveal to us what God looks for in His people. God is more interested in our character than our conduct. For Proverbs 4:23 says, "Out of the heart flow the issues of life." The New Testament truth is that if your character is right, your conduct will be right 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.

One day, shortly after Jesus had set out to begin His public ministry, he climbs a mountain slope and gives his disciples some very new perspective on some very old teachings. I think its interesting that years earlier on another mount called Sinai, God gave Moses the Law that would govern his people. That was a frightful and inti. midating experience for the people. But now God comes as a servant and as a gentle and humble teacher and

offers to the people the blessing of God. So the Sermon on the Mount recorded by Matthew, and the similar sermon in Luke 6 seems to summarize the teachings of Jesus concerning how a person should live. He was speaking to His disciples and to the crowds as well.

One of the main subjects of Jesus teachings is about the kingdom of heaven. In fact, you will notice that when Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven, He talks both in future and present terms. He talks about the character of all those who are in the kingdom of God by faith, and He is talking about the character of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word 'Beatitude' is not found in the English bible. It comes from Latin word '*Beatus*' meaning 'Happy' or 'Blessed', a meaning which is very close to 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 his message is was His mission! His came into this world as God's blessing to bless the world. Do you realize 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 but 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. Blessed are those people who recognize their inadequacies and their guilt and their failures and their helplessness and their unworthiness and their emptiness—who don't try to hide these things under a cloak of self-sufficiency, but who are honest about them and grieved and driven to the grace of God.

The biblical solution for a person paralyzed by a sense of guilt or unworthiness or uselessness is not a lesson on improving your self-esteem. God did not say to Moses, "Stop putting yourself down. Tell yourself you are a somebody. You are eloquent. You're not a worm." What God said was, "Moses, stop looking at your own unworthiness and uselessness and start looking at me. I made your 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 better self-esteem; it is accepting sovereign grace. The great Creator himself has come down to touch our life with special meaning and purpose, and when we recognize that, he applauds us with, "Congratulations!" It is an awesome blessing to recognize God's supernatural and personal involvement in your life! It produces a joy that is always with us – in sorrow, in pain, in loss, in grief – whether you're young or old. God's promise of blessing is that he will never leave you or forsake you; he will be with 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 clear will for our lives is that we be 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 are used to 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 "poor" in the New Testament suggest the working poor - those who own little or no property. They describe people who possess very little in the way of 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 and destitute of even the necessities of life. In Galatians 4:9, it is translated "beggarly."

Many people think being poor simply means to be in material need – to have far less than others do. But to be poor covers a much larger range of things. It indicates weakness, feebleness, dependence, subservience, defenselessness, affliction and distress. The spiritually poor are people who recognized their utter helplessness with what life has dealt them. They recognized 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 spiritual bankruptcy. Theologically, we call it the depravity of man. 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. 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 everybody is poor in spirit. Everyone, whether they sense 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' 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. So while the pride of life is a 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 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 by His grace, the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for the sins of the world, to cover our sins, justifying us and providing us with access into His presence. The proud, the arrogant, the self-assured, the self-satisfied feel no need for 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 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 messianic 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. 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, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

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 by the Holy Spirit of 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. The truly poor in spirit gratefully receive kingdom benefits because they realize as James 1:14 says, that every good and perfect gift is from above and comes from the Father of Lights with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning. The benefits of God's Kingdom flourish wherever 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, 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 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 really 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 completely 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 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, ¹³for it is God

who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so 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 ¹⁶as you hold out the word of life.

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