

**“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT”**

Matthew 5:3

**Intro:** I am not asking for a show of hands today, but I wonder how many of you have read the Sermon on the Mount at least once this week. I hope all of you have. If not, please make it a part of your schedule for this coming week. Going through it each Sunday morning will be a greater blessing for all of us if we will do this. I am doing it, and I trust you will, too.

I want to spend a few moments refreshing all of our minds and hearts on the divisions of these three great chapters, and several of you reminded me that I did not give you the key verse, or verses, for the fifth and last section according to the outline that I have you. So I want to give you that this morning as well.

Now for the outline:

- I. The Character of a Christian (Matt. 5:1-16).  
The key verse: Matt. 5:16.
- II. The Christian and the Word of God (Matt. 5:17-48).  
The key verse: Matt. 5:48.
- III. The Personal Life of the Christian (Matt. 6:1-34).  
The key verse: Matt. 6:33.
- IV. Some Special Instructions for the Christian (Matt. 7:1-12).  
The key verse: Matt. 7:12.
- V. The Christian’s Need for Assurance (Matt. 7:13-29).  
The key verses: Matt. 7:13-14.

Now today I want to begin with the first section, and especially with the first of the Beatitudes:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3).

What is a beatitude? It is a statement which declares for us where true happiness is to be found. Man, in his spiritually corrupted condition, is more inclined to pursue mistaken ideas of happiness than he is the truth. Man’s idea of happiness is usually focused on things outside of himself. And most of the time money is involved in one way or another. Man thinks in terms of position and possessions—a beautiful home, a fine car, the latest in clothing fashions, the ability to go where you want to go, and to do what you want to do. People are inclined to think along the lines of the Epicurean philosophy which says, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for

tomorrow you die.”

Such thoughts had to have been in the hearts of the disciples by nature because they were men of like passions with others. And so one of the first things that the Lord did with them was to correct their ideas of what true happiness is. Christians can be deceived along this line as well as people who are not Christians. But that is where having the Bible makes the difference, and we should get our direction for happiness, not from our own hearts, nor from what other people say, but from God in His Word.

I think that I can truthfully say that the word that the Lord used nine times in this first part of the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed,” is a word which speaks not only of being happy, but of being *supremely happy!* There is enough in the Bible to indicate to us without any question that God wants and expects His people to be happy—happier than anyone can possibly be if all he has is this world. We are bombarded every day with commercials telling us how our lives can be better than they are. But rarely do you hear anyone talk about God and His Word as the place to go, or what to do, to find true happiness. It is obvious from what our Lord said here, as well as from teaching that we have elsewhere in Scripture, that the possibility of being truly happy is not limited to a certain class of people, but it crosses all social and economic lines. The fundamental issue is in a person’s relationship with the Lord. Matthew Henry was right when he said that the Beatitudes constitute an invitation for people to come to Christ, not just to get good advice, but to have their hearts cleansed and changed through the Gospel so that they will be enabled to live the kind of a life that our Lord was describing in these verses. The Beatitudes give us such a different way of happiness that only people with changed hearts will be interested in such a life, and only they will be capable, by the grace of God, of living such a life.

In speaking of the characteristics which are given in the Beatitudes, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones made the following observations:

- 1) The Beatitudes describe what all Christians are to be like. In other words, they describe Christian character.
- 2) We as Christians are to manifest all of these characteristics. It is not the case that some are “poor in spirit,” and that others are “meek,” etc. But we all are to show all of these characteristics.
- 3) These characteristics are not natural tendencies we have, but are produced by grace and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. There are some human traits which appear to be like these, but in a Christian they are totally different.
- 4) These characteristics point out the essential differences between a

Christian and a non-Christian.

And then Dr. Lloyd-Jones made this significant comment:

As I see things at the present time, the first need in the Church is a clear understanding of this difference {i.e., the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. It has become blurred; the world has come into the Church and the Church has become worldly... There were certain popular padres [chaplains] during the first world war who mixed with their men, and smoked with them, and did this, that, and the other with them, in order to encourage them. Some people thought that, as a result, when the war was over, the ex-service men would be crowding into the churches. Yet it did not happen, and it never has happened that way. The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first. That is how revival comes. Thus must also be true of us as individuals. It should not be our ambition to be as much like everybody else as we can, though we happen to be Christian, but rather to be as different from everybody who is not a Christian as we can be. Our ambition should be to be like Christ, the more like Him the better, and the more like Him we become, the more we shall be unlike everybody who is not a Christian (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Volume One, pp. 36, 37).

So you can see how extremely important it is that we understand the Beatitudes, and, in fact, that we understand and practice the whole Sermon on the Mount.

And so let me reemphasize what I have been saying in order that the meaning of the word "blessed" it might be more firmly established in our minds and hearts.

It is a word which has long been associated with *happiness*, but not just happiness in the world's interpretation of the word. In Nelson's Bible Dictionary we find this definition:

The Greek word translated blessed means "spiritual well-being and prosperity," the deep joy of the soul. The blessed have a share in salvation, and have entered the kingdom of God, experiencing a foretaste of heaven. Some scholars render each beatitude as an exclamation: "O the bliss [or blessedness] of..."

It is a deep, true, and abiding joy that is in one's heart. It is a joy which does not come from the world, nor from earthly things, but that which has

to do with one's relationship with the Lord.

It is a word which is found many times in the OT, *e.g.*, Psa. 1:1, "Blessed is the man that..." This is a joy which only a child of God can experience. It is a joy which is the fruit of a right relationship with the Lord, when the Lord is pleased, and we are the recipients of His blessing. As with all of the Beatitudes, God's blessing comes to us in the form of great joy on His terms, and not our own.

A reading of the Scriptures clearly indicates that the Lord expects His people to be a joyful people, a joy that is centered in the Lord, and not in ourselves.

To whom does this blessedness belong?

### **I. "THE POOR IN SPIRIT."**

The words "in spirit" refer to the inner man, and what we are in ourselves.

Thomas Watson, in his book *The Beatitudes*, mentioned that the Greek word for "poor" speaks of a person who lives on alms. He has nothing in himself, and so he is dependent upon others for his very survival. This is the insight which God gives us of ourselves, which results in humility. We are conscious of our sins, of the way they have defiled us beyond what we have in our very nature, and how they have shown that we have no goodness in ourselves, nothing that would commend us to God, but everything that would cause a holy God to turn from us *if it were not for His grace*.

The publican in our Lord's story of the two men who went up to the temple to pray—one a Pharisee, and the other a publican—gives us an excellent illustration of one who is "poor in spirit." The story is recorded for us in Luke 18:10-14:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

The Greek say, *the sinner*. And then the Lord continued:

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Justification is a part, a major part, of the blessedness that one who is “poor in spirit” receives.

The Apostle Paul was expressing what it is to be “poor in spirit” when he wrote, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing...” (Rom. 7:18a).

Many who call themselves Christians today have taken up the language of unregenerate people which they speak of self-worth, and self-love, and manifest that they are filled with self-confidence. These terms, and all others that are like them, speak of pride, not poverty of spirit. They are a part of the psychology of the world.

The beatitudes are paradoxical in their appearance. And poverty of spirit is despised by the world. And they often appear to be so in the eyes of believers. But the point that the Lord was making was that to be “poor in spirit” is that which prepares the way for the blessing of God.. And it is this attitude which keeps the door open for the continued blessing of God. Until a person is “poor in spirit,” his heart will never be open to the Gospel. And it is only to the “poor in spirit” that Christ becomes the delight of our souls.

Watson raises the question, “How may we know whether we are ‘poor in spirit?’” And he gives the following answers:

- 1) We no longer trust in ourselves, but trust in the Lord.
- 2) We have the highest regard for Christ. We see that we cannot live without Him.
- 3) We are never satisfied with ourselves, but always regret that we are not more thankful to the Lord, not more conscious of our own lack of brokenness before the Lord. We regret that our faith is so small, and our love so fickle.
- 4) The “poor in spirit” are lowly in heart, like our Lord was. We don’t do what we do to be seen of men, but are very anxious that what we do is pleasing to the Lord.
- 5) We are “poor in spirit” when prayer becomes a major priority in our lives. We know that we have no right to come before the Lord, and yet realize at the same time how utterly dependent we are upon the Lord for His blessing in every way.
- 6) We are “poor in spirit” when we sincerely want the will of Christ instead of always insisting on our will.

Augustus Toplady described what it means to be “poor in spirit” in the second and third stanzas of his well-loved hymn, “Rock of Ages.” Let me read those two verses to you. It is #421 in our Hymnal if you want to follow the words.

Not the labors of my hands can fulfil they law’s demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to Thy Cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the Fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.

And we can add to Toplady’s words, those words of Robert Murray McCheyne in his hymn, *When this passing world is done*:

Chosen not for good in me, wakened up from wrath to flee,  
Hidden in the Saviour’s side, by the Spirit sanctified,--  
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show, by my love, how much I owe.

This is why I took our Scripture reading today from Rev. 3:14-22. The church at Laodicea had forgotten what it means to be “poor in spirit.” Listen again to Rev. 3:17,

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

But we need to realize that we can be hypocritical about any of the above points. Our hearts so easily deceive us, and we need to ask the Lord to be continually searching our hearts and rooting out those things which are displeasing to Him. Remember that you and I are “poor in spirit” whether we realize it or not, but our Lord wants us to know what we are, and then always to remember it and to live as people who have nothing that would commend us to God except what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what is the reward that the Lord mentioned as belonging to those who are “poor in spirit”?

## II. “THEIR’S IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.”

What is “the kingdom of heaven”?

This term is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. Neither Mark nor Luke nor John ever used it—at least in their writings. This was the subject of

John the Baptist's preaching. See Matt. 3:2. It was also the subject of our Lord's preaching. See Matt. 4:17.

But what does it mean here?

Isn't it the equivalent of saying, "For their's is the true salvation." Whether we speak of entering into the kingdom of heaven, or entering into the kingdom of God, isn't that the same as being saved?

In my outline of this part of the Sermon on the Mount, I said that the Beatitudes were, *The Character of a Christian*. We are all spiritually "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" in ourselves. It is only in Christ that we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ so "that the shame of or nakedness" does "not appear" (Rev. 3:18). But the point that our Lord was making both in the Sermon on the Mount, and in His letter to the church at Laodicea, was that we are to manifest in our lives from day to day the humility which is rightfully ours.

How could we possibly compare what we are by nature with what we have become by grace? This is what the Lord was talking about. How pathetic it is to hear a child of God boasting in what he is, or in what he has, or in what he has done! To do so is to glory in our shame. The words of the Apostle Paul should be engraved upon all of our hearts, those words which he wrote to the churches of Galatia,

14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (Gal. 6:14-15).

**Concl:** A proud person is never a truly happy person, and especially is that true if you have a proud person who professes to be a child of God. It is inconsistent with our profession as Christians, and certainly most unlike our precious Lord Who was always "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). The Scriptures make it very clear that some day the Lord is going to reign upon the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. But now He reigns within the hearts of His people. All of the recent discussion about whether the Lord can be our Savior without being our Lord, is ridiculous. He is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We may not be as submissive to Him as we should be. We may not be as humble as we should be. We may have forgotten that there was not a single merit in us that made the Lord choose us or draw us to Himself. But, if that is the case, then we can be sure that the Lord in His most gracious ways will be

working in our hearts to remind us, that we are “poor in spirit,” and that we need to live that way, drawing the true riches from our precious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What will be the result? And it will always be so without exception. “Blessed is the poor in spirit: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.”

This is the first step to happiness—not trying to build up our self-esteem. It is too big already. That is our problem. What we need to do is to see that our sufficiency is not in ourselves, but in Christ! And the more we submit ourselves to Him, and the more we draw upon Him for the supply of our needs, the greater will be our joy.

Closing verses: Col. 3:1-4.