

Come To God On His Terms

Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 2

HBC 6/14/20

Matthew 5:3

The Sermon on the Mount is full of the kind of spiritual material that can offend many people. The first two beatitudes start the process with a bold presentation of the essential basis for spiritual life.

What is a *beatitude*? It comes from the French *beatitude* or the Latin *beatitudo*, which in turn comes from the Latin root word *beatus*, which means *happy* or *blessed*. For our purposes, all we need to know is that Matthew 3:3-12 is called The Beatitudes because they involve Jesus declaring certain kinds of people ***blessed***.

What does it mean to be *blessed*? The word translated ***blessed*** in each of these sayings is *makarioi*, which literally means *happy, blissful or blessed*. The historical use of the word designates an *inner state or condition of being* which is neither the result of external circumstances nor subject to change produced by outside forces. That's the way it's used in the New Testament. All 47 uses of it in the NASB are translated ***blessed***.

*The word thus describes that state of happiness and bliss, well-being and blessedness, in which all true believers stand. It denotes that blest condition of soul possessed by those whose sins are forgiven, from whose consciences the burden of guilt has been removed, and who have thus been reconciled to God.*¹

Notice that every beatitude says Blessed ***are*** . . . to denote that this is a state or condition enjoyed ***right now***. For you who check this out in Greek, you will find that in every case up until verse 11, *there is no verb are*. It literally says *Blessed the poor in spirit*, etc. That is a literary device of the Greek language in which we are required to supply the implied verb, ***and*** to say that Jesus put emphasis on the fact that this is ***not some blessing reserved for the future***.

Blessed is a description of the very nature of God:

Psalm 68:35: . . . *Blessed be God!*

Psalm 72:18: *Blessed be the Lord God . . .*

Psalm 119:12: *Blessed are You, O Lord . . .*

1 Timothy 1:11, 6:15: *the blessed God and the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.*

¹Lawlor, George, *The Beatitudes Are For Today*, p. 23.

Here is a remarkable statement about the blessedness of believers:

2 Peter 1:4: *For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*

Paul teaches the same thing in different words:

Ephesians 1:3: ***Blessed** be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places in Christ, . . .*

This passage (The Beatitudes) is all at once the **definition of a Christian**, the blueprint of **God's plan for shaping your character**, and the **outline of the attitudes of those who enter into Heaven**. These are the ingredients of discipleship, the marks of discipleship, and the ideals of character.

I. Who Is Blessed?

Matthew 5:3: *Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Poor is the key word. It is a strong word that means *a shrinking from something, or somebody; to cover and cringe like a beggar*. It describes a person reduced to begging. The New Testament uses two words for **poor**. Both are opposites of *rich*, but with an important difference between the two. The one may have **nothing extra**, but the one who is poor as this word describes has **nothing at all**. It is the depth of destitution.²

Those who are **blessed** are those who recognize they are **totally dependent upon the grace and mercy of God**. That's what it means to be **poor in spirit**. It means realizing that you have absolutely nothing to offer that can help you spiritually. **In spirit** tells us what kind of poverty Jesus is talking about. It is not in the realm of possessions or external things that it matters. It has to do with the **spirit**—the inner man. See also Isaiah 66:1-2.

II. What Does The Blessing Include?

Matthew 5:3: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for **theirs is the kingdom of heaven**.*

Theirs is an emphatic pronoun. Greek has a way of using unnecessary pronouns to make a strong point by way of emphasis—this is such a case. **Theirs and theirs alone** is the idea. **No one else** will ever take part in the kingdom of heaven. No one enters any other way than as a beggar.

²See R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 121 for the difference.

Is is also significant. It is a **present possession and a continuing reality**. It is not only in the future. Yes, the Kingdom itself as a physical rule on earth is yet future, but for a Christian, there is not one single moment that the kingdom is not ours.

Remember the message of both John the Baptist and Jesus? See Matthew 3:1-2 and Matthew 4:17. The way Matthew arranged his gospel makes it clear that this is Jesus expounding on what it means to **repent**. From the days of John the Baptist, through the ministry of Jesus, and through nearly two millennia of the church, the call is always **repent**, in light of the good news of salvation.

Peter preached repentance on every occasion that his sermons are recorded in Acts. Paul preached repentance to the Gentiles on Mars Hill (Acts 17:30). He reminded the elders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 19) that he constantly called both Jews and Greeks to repentance. In his testimony to King Agrippa, Paul said he preached **repentance** in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, and to the Gentiles that all should **repent** and perform deeds appropriate to **repentance**.

In Romans 2:4, Paul wrote that the Gospel leads to **repentance**. In 2 Corinthians 7:9-10, he commends the believers in Corinth for **genuine repentance**. In 2 Timothy 2:25 he says that the goal of teaching is that God may grant **repentance**. To the unbelievers in the seven churches of Revelation, Jesus calls them all to **repent**. Since the invitation of the Gospel is always to **repent**, this passage is crucial for us to understand, so we know what God wants from us and what we should say to unbelievers.

The Kingdom of Heaven is coming to earth when Jesus returns. But those who **now—in this age**—are **poor in spirit** are those who will partake with Christ in the rule of His kingdom. *Theirs IS the kingdom*. They are possessors of it. They are co-regents with Jesus. Among other things it is said of Christians now:

Revelation 1:6: . . . and He has **made us to be a kingdom**, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 5:10: You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and **they will reign upon the earth**.

Revelation 3:21: He who overcomes, I will grant to him to **sit down with Me on My throne**, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Colossians 3:4: When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be **revealed with Him in glory**.

2 Timothy 2:12: If we endure, **we shall also reign with Him**;

Revelation 20:6: Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and **will reign with Him** for a thousand years.

A powerful illustration of the concept of **poor in spirit** is from a parable of Jesus. See Luke 18:9-14 (The rich man and the Pharisee).

What will make you live out the concept of poor in spirit?

First, realize that it *isn't something you can do by yourself*. What you need to do is focus on God. Read His word; learn about Him. The only accurate and helpful view of yourself you will ever discover comes from seeing yourself in light of who God is.

Second, starve the flesh. Teach yourself to say no to meaningless things and yes to things that enhance your understanding of God.

Third, ask God to help you. Remember the parable? The tax-gatherer cried out God, *Be merciful to me, the sinner!* We are far better off when we stop asking God to bless our plans and start seeking His guidance.

Here are some evidences of the one who is poor in spirit:³

1. You are weaned from yourself. Your focus is on God and His glory, others and their needs instead of how things affect you.
2. You are lost in the wonder of Christ. The greater your awareness of your need, the greater your thankfulness for your Savior.
3. You are not complaining about your situation. When you understand that you don't deserve anything, whatever God provides is seen as His grace, sufficient for each day. Complaining about a situation insults God's sovereignty.
4. You see the best in others. To be poor in spirit does not mean putting yourself down, but it does see others as those to be served.
5. You spend more time in prayer. A beggar is always begging. The poor in spirit knock at heaven's gate for their every blessing. When you're poor in spirit, you want what your Father wants for you.
6. You take Christ on His terms, not yours. You don't want Christ **and** your old pleasures, or Christ **and** your old morality, or Christ **and** a dose of self-sufficiency. There are no other terms for being a Christian. *Poor in spirit* is at the foundation of this relationship.
7. You praise and thank God for His grace. The one who begins with nothing is overwhelmed with gratitude for every good thing he gets. Every single thing you have is a gift from God.

Come to God on His terms!

³John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now*, pp. 51-53.