

## **Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit**

Matthew 5: 1-3

April 16, 2023

Pastor Francis Bezzam

Starting this Sunday, we are going to begin a series on The Beatitudes. These are teachings by our Lord Jesus Christ from his Sermon on the Mount. What is a Beatitude? The word *beatitude* is a Latin word that literally means ‘happy’, ‘blessed’, ‘blissful’, or ‘glad’.

<sup>1</sup> *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.*

<sup>2</sup> *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:* <sup>3</sup> *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Do you know that God desires that you be happy?*

*God desires that you know what true prosperity is.*

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a doctor turned preacher from London said this about happiness – *“Happiness is the great question confronting mankind. The whole world is longing for happiness and it is tragic to observe the ways in which people are seeking it. The vast majority, alas, are doing so in a way that is bound to produce misery. Anything which, by evading the difficulties, merely makes people happy for the time being, is ultimately going to add to their misery and problems. That is where the utter deceitfulness of sin comes in; it is always offering happiness, and it always leads to unhappiness and to final misery and wretchedness. The Sermon on the Mount says, however, that if you really want to be happy, here is the way. This is and this alone is the type of person who is truly happy, who is truly blessed”.*

To that I say amen!

True blessedness or true happiness is to be joyful like Jesus. Jesus was a man of joy and delight. Yes, Jesus is known as a man of sorrows but Jesus was a man of joy. Jesus is the source and fountain of joy. And Jesus had an attractional gladness about him.

There was a time during the days of Jesus when he sent out seventy-two men to preach the Gospel. And they come and report to Jesus these words, *“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”*

Luke 10:17. And hear what Jesus tells these men. *“do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”* <sup>21</sup> *In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will”.* Luke 10:20-21. Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus came to make His disciples happy and glad. He came to make his followers joyful. He came to give them true blessedness.

If you look into the Old Testament, God commanded the people of Israel to be happy in God. God even told them that if they would be not glad and joyful, He would give them over to their enemies. (Deuteronomy 28:47-48). That's how serious God was about their happiness. It would be not be stretch to say that God *desires* and *commands* you to be happy.

Before we get into the text, I would like to share a few observations about the Sermon on the Mount in general.

1. There have been people outside of a Biblical worldview who have taken the Sermon on the Mount and have made it a teaching about morals only at the expense of person of Christ. In doing this, they have rejected the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have made the Sermon on the Mount a sort of a teaching to say 'here is how you live a principled life'. One such author was Leo Tolstoy. Following morals or principles may produce some good but it is not what discipleship means and that is not what Jesus taught.
2. Others, within a Christian worldview have distorted the Beatitudes to say this teaching is not for the disciples of Jesus today. It is for the future when the kingdom of God arrives Jesus returns. That form of teaching is dispensationalism and is to be rejected. It is true that the kingdom of God will arrive when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. Jesus came and will return. But to say that the Beatitudes is for a different time is false teaching.
3. Another form of teaching that is incorrect is that you have to do these things in order to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Live like this and then you will become a Christian. Jesus teaches that because you are disciple of Jesus Christ, live this way. This is the *indicative*. It is a *descriptive* of Christian character. Jesus is teaching what a disciple of Jesus looks like. When Jesus says "blessed *are*", his disciples are characterized by a certain gladness, happiness and joyfulness. Jesus doesn't say, "they will *be*". They simply are.
4. Last but not the least, this *descriptive* is for all Christians. There are no Christians with a special status. Some circles have this notion that a believer has reached sainthood because they did certain things. Every believer ought to live like this. That is why Paul addresses believers as saints in some of his letters.

With this introduction, let me circle back to the definition of blessed. Being blessed means *happy*. And if this happiness found is not found in this world, in the stuff of this world, or in the gurus or the self-help strategies of this world, where is this found?

This is happiness found in the quality of the human heart. This bliss is found in the *disposition* or *attitude* of the soul.

*“It is not how much you have, it is how much you enjoy is true happiness”* - Charles Spurgeon

Everyone longs for true happiness but few find it. *Why?*

Because it requires the *hardest* quality to possess.

This is a foundational attitude of heart and soul that is not *natural* but ought to be indicative of all believers. Nevertheless, the first disciples lived with this particular joy and happiness.

What is this quality?

Let's begin at verse one.

Matthew 5:1

*“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ saw great crowds. His heart moved for the people. He had great compassion because he saw them as sheep without a shepherd. If you read the previous chapter, you'll see that Jesus met the needs of anyone and everyone who came to him. He healed sick people – lepers, paralyzed people, blind people. He raised dead people. He fed hungry people. But he also *knew* what was in the heart of man. Many of them were looking to fill their stomachs. They were looking for a miracle. But Jesus didn't come just to fill hungry hearts. Jesus came to fill hungry souls with the word of God. Jesus came to give new life. Many times, he would leave the crowds to be in prayer. So Jesus sees the crowds and goes up to the mountain. This is not healing time, not serving time, not feeding time. This is teaching time. Jesus came to teach the way of God. And there he sat down to teach. Everything that Jesus taught here, the early disciples would learn it, live it and teach other disciples. And there you see, who goes to Jesus. His disciples. This is it!. You have to willing to hear and learn from the Master himself first. A disciple is first and foremost a learner a student of Jesus.

In Matthew 13:16-17, Jesus commended his disciples that they were the blessed ones. Why?

*“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.<sup>17</sup> For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”* Matthew 13:16-17

The powerful, the noble people of this world wanted to seek wisdom but they have not found it. And here these disciples are hearing from the mouth of God himself. And by extension you and I are hearing from the Son of God himself. God himself in human flesh is teaching those who are willing to hear him. What a privilege!

And what is first thing Jesus teaches? Verse *three*:

*And he opened his mouth and taught them saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”*

Happy are the humble, happy are the spiritually needy for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*So what quality do the followers of Jesus have?*

It is the poverty of spirit.

It is being spiritually needy.

It is being lowly in temperament.

It is being conscious of your spiritual need.

It is having the attitude of denying yourself.

It is humbling yourself.

It is having a sober evaluation of yourself before God.

There are *two* ways we ought to consider what poverty of spirit is. First in understanding what it is not. Second, what it really is.

What poverty of spirit is not:

1. Being poor in spirit is not thinking low or less of yourself. It is not being low in confidence. “True humility is not thinking less or cheaply of yourself; it is thinking of yourself *less*” CS Lewis.
2. Being poor in spirit is also not putting efforts to show how humble you are. Some call this humble-bragging. That would be a form of pride not humility. Let’s say you know someone prominent or even work for someone prominent. And you begin to tell everyone that you have a servant-like attitude because you carried the president’s bag or something like that. That would not be poverty of spirit.
3. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount says that being poor in spirit is also not suppressing your natural personality to look like someone else.
4. Being poor in spirit is not making great sacrifices or give up certain things with the goal to look humble and ultimately to crave for the applause and affirmation of others. This is not being poor in spirit.

*What is being poor in spirit then?*

Let me give an illustration from Jesus:

<sup>10</sup> “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners,

*unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get. ' <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

One man was comparing himself with others. And then he was telling and reminding God what he does. The tax collector forgot about himself and turned to God.

*Poverty in spirit is your attitude towards yourself.*

*It is to have a right estimate of one self.*

This is the temperament of those who are truly happy in God.

This is poverty in spirit.

Being poor in spirit is the opposite of having a prideful heart.

An English preacher once said *"I don't know if a good man has pride, but I do know that a proud man had no good in him"*

"As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you" – CS Lewis

"Here is the path to the higher life: down, lower down! Just as water always seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds men abased and empty, His glory and power flow in to exalt and to bless." Andrew Murray

Here are a few of men and women in the Bible who displayed humility worthy of imitation:

God tells Gideon to save Israel. What was Gideon's response? *"I am the least in my father's house"*. (Judges 6:15).

King David is told to build a temple and his response *"Who am I and what is my people?"* (1 Chronicles 29:4).

Isaiah sees the holiness of God and says *"Woe to me, I am man of unclean lips"* (Isaiah 6:5)

Mary said to God *"I am a servant of the Lord"*. (Luke 1:38)

Peter tells our Lord Jesus *"depart from me, I am sinner"*. (Luke 5:8)

Paul says before his death *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* (1 Timothy 1:15)

*To be poor in spirit is to let go of spiritual self-reliance.*

*To be poor in spirit is to turn from self and look to the person of Jesus Christ.*

*And what do humble people have? What do they inherit?*

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found..”*

The one who finds Jesus as his or her treasure belongs to the kingdom of heaven. The king takes care of all your needs. He knows all your needs. This king will also return one day to take his disciples to His eternal kingdom. He will separate his true disciples from those who did not *humble* themselves. *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”*

But to the those who did not humble themselves before God, he will say *“depart from me”*.

How do you know you are in the kingdom of heaven?

1) Those who are *forgiven* of their sin. Romans 4:7 *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*. God not only blots our sins from His record, He also remembers them no more. This expression means He no longer holds them against us. The blotting out of our transgressions is a legal act. The remembering them no more is a relational act. —Jerry Bridges

2) Those who have a mindset of dependence on God not self-reliance not self-dependence.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Blessed are the poor in spirit. Matthew 5:1-3

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What is poverty of spirit that Jesus taught and why is this *the* foundational quality for a disciple Jesus Christ?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe that this quality, being poor in spirit, is a constant necessity if you are to be described as a disciple Jesus Christ? What are some ways you can live this way – with humble dependence on God? What are ways that are not indicative of true humility? Feeling low, humble-bragging etc.
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: What habits do you need to develop or continue to grow in to be “poor in spirit”?