



BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Pastor Mike Fields

Bible Texts: Matthew 5:1–12ⁱ (especially verse 3); Psalm 51:17ⁱⁱ; Luke 18:9–14ⁱⁱⁱ; John 3:3–5^{iv}; Philippians 3:4–9^v; 2 Peter 1:4^{vi}

Big Idea

God's kingdom belongs to those who humbly recognize their spiritual need and depend entirely upon Jesus. Being "poor in spirit" does not mean having low self-esteem. It means admitting that we cannot earn God's approval, erase our own sin, or save ourselves. We come to God empty-handed, trusting Christ's finished work rather than our goodness or religious accomplishments. In short: God's approval is received by grace, not earned by performance.

1. The Beatitudes Describe Kingdom People

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes—eight beautiful attitudes that describe people who belong to the kingdom of God. They are not eight steps by which we earn salvation, nor are they a checklist for proving that we are Christians. Instead, they are a portrait of the inward transformation Christ produces in those who follow Him. The kingdom often appears “upside down” when compared with the world: greatness comes through humility, strength through dependence, and life through surrender. As we grow closer to Jesus, these qualities increasingly become visible in our character. They are fruit of grace, not the price of admission.

Reflection: Do I view the Beatitudes as demands I must achieve, or as qualities Christ desires to form within me?

2. God's Approval Is the Meaning of a Blessed Life

The world often defines blessing as comfort, success, possessions, health, or freedom from problems. Jesus gives the word a deeper meaning. To be blessed is to be favored and approved by God—to hear the Creator say, “You are Mine.” Human admiration is fragile; people who applaud us today may reject us tomorrow. God's approval, however, is secure for everyone who belongs to Christ. This does not mean life will always be easy. A believer may endure sorrow, opposition, or severe trials and still possess deep joy because God's presence and promise remain. The world's applause can never replace the peace of knowing that we belong to Him.



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Reflection: Whose approval most shapes my choices—God’s approval or the changing opinions of others?

3. Poverty of Spirit Is Honest Dependence on God

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Being poor in spirit does not mean having low self-esteem or continually declaring that we are worthless. It means seeing ourselves truthfully before a holy God. Sin has left us spiritually bankrupt: we cannot save ourselves, repair our hearts, erase even one sin, or purchase God’s favor. Religious activity, morality, Bible study, prayer, and fasting are valuable, but none can become payment for salvation. The poor in spirit stop presenting credentials and come empty-handed, saying, “Lord, I need mercy.” This humble confession is the doorway to the kingdom because before we can receive grace, we must admit our need for it.

Reflection: Where am I still tempted to rely on my goodness, ability, or religious activity instead of God’s mercy?

4. Grace Is Received, Not Earned

Jesus illustrated poverty of spirit through the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18. The Pharisee rehearsed his religious achievements and compared himself favorably with others. The tax collector would not even lift his eyes; he simply pleaded, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus said that the humble man went home justified - declared right with God. Paul learned the same lesson. Once proud of his training, discipline, and reputation, he came to count those advantages as loss compared with receiving the righteousness of Christ. We do not purchase grace or impress God into accepting us. Jesus lived the life we should have lived, died the death we deserved, and rose again. Salvation is freely received through repentance and faith in His finished work.

Reflection: Have I truly come to Jesus empty-handed, trusting His finished work rather than my spiritual résumé?



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5. We Continue as We Began—Dependent on Christ

Poverty of spirit is not only how we enter God's kingdom; it is how we continue to live there. Every day we may pray, "Lord, I am utterly dependent upon You." The Lord's Supper beautifully expresses this dependence. In the bread and cup, believers remember Christ's broken body and shed blood, examine their hearts, confess sin, and receive fresh strength to follow Him. Our deepest need is not minor improvement but a new heart—and then the continuing grace to become more like Jesus. The good news is that Christ never turns away a broken and repentant heart. We bring Him our need, sin, emptiness, and weakness; He gives forgiveness, a new nature, and a place in His kingdom.

Reflection: What need, weakness, or sin do I need to bring honestly before Christ today?

Closing Thought

The first Beatitude brings us to the end of self-sufficiency and the beginning of grace. God does not ask us to arrive with an impressive record; He invites us to come with honest hearts and empty hands. When we confess our poverty of spirit, we discover that Jesus is more than enough. His mercy opens the kingdom, His righteousness gives us God's approval, and His Spirit patiently forms the character of Christ within us. "A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

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The Sermon on the Mount

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

The Beatitudes

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons^[a] of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.



The Upside-Down Kingdom • Sermon Recap

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Psalms 51:17 - English Standard Version

¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

iii

Luke 18:9-14 - English Standard Version

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed^[a] thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But 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!’ ¹⁴I 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.”

iv

John 3:3-5 - English Standard Version

³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

v

Philippians 3:4-9 - English Standard Version

⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law,^[a] blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

vi

2 Peter 1:4 - English Standard Version

⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.