

Matthew 5:3 The 'Be' Attitudes "Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"

8.16.15

Turn in your Bibles this morning to Matthew, chapter 5.

Last week began our study of what are called the Beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I have chosen to call these 9 wonderful truths the "BE-Attitudes." And today we will begin with the first one: Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Now let's do a quick review from last week. When Jesus preached this wonderful Sermon, He went up on a mountainside near Capernaum at the north end of the Sea of Galilee.



Envision all of those banana trees as people. Matthew records...

Matthew 5:1-3

1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. **2** And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: **3** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Now do you remember what the word "blessed" means? The Greek word is:

Blessed (Makarios):

bestowed with divine happiness or joy; perfect bliss

Remember, divine happiness or joy doesn't come from within you; instead it's bestowed upon you...it's given to you by God. The emphasis is on the fact that we can't manufacture true happiness inside of us or from our circumstances because it's divine...the emphasis is on God as the "Bestower" or "Giver" of this divine happiness. It's an inner satisfaction and sufficiency that doesn't depend on ourselves, or our circumstances.

You see, the world says happiness is found in riches, abundance, leisure and fun, but that's not divine happiness. That's worldly, fleeting, temporary happiness, based upon circumstances. And we all know that can change in heartbeat and we can burn the toast and we're not happy again. What Jesus is talking about is the absolute opposite.

On that mountainside Jesus came offering a new standard for living. And His emphasis was not on externals...it was on the internals. He was telling them a new way to think and live. He was

saying, “**Divine joy will come to the one who thinks this way.**” He was not talking about behavior only (as the Pharisees did); instead, He talked about the attitude of the heart. In essence, Jesus was countering everything the Pharisees and the rulers of the synagogue had been teaching and this was flipping the understanding of those people on its ear.

I believe the great Welsh Protestant preacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, gives us a great illustration in summing up what Jesus was teaching on that mountainside. This is brilliant. See what you think. He says:

“Take, for example, the realm of music. A man may play a piece of great music quite accurately. He may make no mistakes at all, and yet it may be true to say of him that he did not really play Beethoven’s ‘Moonlight Sonata.’ He played the notes correctly, but it was not the sonata. What was he doing? He was mechanically striking the right notes, but missing the soul and the real interpretation. He wasn’t doing what Beethoven intended and meant. That, I think, is the relationship between the whole and the parts. The artist, the true artist, is always correct. Even the greatest artist cannot afford to neglect rules and regulations, but that is not what makes him the great artist. It is this something extra, the expression. It is the spirit. It is the life. It is the whole that he is able to convey.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Preacher, Minister, Doctor

I believe Jones described the essence of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and here it is: The follower of Jesus Christ must be concerned about the letter of the Law (which the Pharisees majored in...the external appearance) and the Spirit of the Law (the heart in which you live it). You can’t separate the two. You can’t divorce the two. In other words, you CAN play the right notes, but if there is no heart in which you play the notes, no feeling...no passion...then, you haven’t really played the note. You see the Letter and the Spirit of the Law must go together. The spirit is the right attitude and the letter is the obedience that comes as a result of the right attitude. It can be said this way: True spirituality starts on the inside and then touches everything on the outside.

Church family, if we don’t understand what Jesus is teaching here in these BE-Attitudes, we’ll never truly understand the rest of His sermon. It won’t make sense, because what Jesus shares in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 will make no sense if we can’t understand these (what Bible scholars) call “sacred paradoxes.” What does that mean? It means when you first hear what Jesus is saying, they don’t seem to make any sense.

Think about it. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, those who hunger and thirst, the meek, the persecuted, the reviled. That makes no sense. We would say, “No...no...no...Jesus...you’ve got it wrong!!!” Blessed are the rich, the wealthy, the famous...

Well...no...we’ve got it all wrong, because all of those things are fleeting and has nothing to do with Makarios...divine happiness...divine joy.

Look at verse 3 again. I want you to see and understand that there is a sequence or a progression to these BE-Attitudes. Here’s the first one...

Matthew 5:3

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

The “poor in spirit.” What does that mean? It means having the right attitude toward our sin. You see, if our attitude is right toward our sin, it will lead us to verse 4, which says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” What does that mean? It means we have the right attitude toward our sin and we mourn over our sinfulness, which leads to what? Verse 5. It leads to a meekness, a sense of humility, which leads to a hunger and thirst for righteousness, verse 6. Can you see the progression?

That hunger and thirst for righteousness manifests itself into being merciful, verse 7, which leads to a pure heart, verse 8; which leads to a peacemaking spirit – verse 9. And what is the result of being merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker? It likely means you are going to be persecuted and reviled...and falsely accused. Why? Because by the time you have been poor in spirit, mourned over it, become humble, sought righteousness, lived a merciful, pure, and peacemaking life, you have sufficiently irritated the world to the point that they are going to react negatively against you. Can you see that?

But listen, when it’s all said and done, verse 12 says you can “Rejoice, and be glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven.” And what is more...get this...follow this now...when you have these BE-Attitudes and you are poor in spirit, and you are meek, you seek righteousness with a merciful, pure heart, it will lead you to being a peacemaker, and you can be sure that THEN...verse 13 will be true in your life... You will have become the salt of the earth and verse 14, you will be the light of the world. But listen, you will never be salt and light, you’ll get to verse 14 without starting in verse 3. It all starts with verse 3. What is it again?

Matthew 5:3

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

You say, “Why does Jesus begin here?” Why do you think He starts out His sermon with being poor in spirit? When he’s talking about a new kind of living, a new standard, a new way of thinking, why does He begin here? Why is THIS the starting place for true, divine happiness?

Well, I believe being poor in spirit is THE fundamental, most basic characteristic of a Christian. It is the very first thing that must happen in the life of any person who desires to enter the Kingdom of God. Nobody has ever entered God’s kingdom without first humbling themselves and swallowing their pride. Poverty of spirit is the only way in. Poverty of spirit is the door to the kingdom and that door is a very low door...a door in which people who come...must come in via a crawl.



Jesus is teaching WHAT every person must understand in order to follow Him. You must die to yourself. You have to realize you are incapable of saving yourself. In other words, He’s saying you can’t be filled until you’re empty. You can’t be worthwhile until you realize that in your own self, you’re worthless.

You know, it amazes me that in modern Christianity today there is so little understanding of this. I see a lot of books on how to be filled with joy and how to be filled with happiness and how to be filled self-worth, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen a book on how to empty yourself of yourself. Can

you imagine a book titled: “How to be Nothing”? I doubt that book would be a best seller in our day. “How to be a Nobody.”

But this is exactly what Jesus is teaching. A person cannot receive Him until they are poor in spirit and realize they have no hope of reaching heaven in and of themselves.

True happiness, divine happiness can only come to the humble. You see, until we are poor in spirit, Jesus will not be precious to us. Until we know how doomed we are in our sin, we can't appreciate how glorious He is. Until we comprehend how destitute we are, we can't understand how wondrous and merciful Jesus is to love us enough to give His life to save us. Until we see our poverty, we cannot understand His riches.

And so out of the carcass comes the honey. It is in our deadness that we come alive. And no man...no woman...no boy or girl will ever come to Jesus Christ and be able to enter His kingdom who doesn't first crawl through the doorway of repentance in humility being poor in spirit. James tells us: **“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”**

And so this has to be the beginning. This is why this BE-Attitude comes first. Listen, the only way to come to God's kingdom is to confess your own unrighteousness, to confess your inability to meet God's standards, to confess that you can't do it on your own and then in humility call on Jesus in repentance to save you.

Now let's look more closely at the verse. It's just one verse, but it's so rich and so deep. Do you see the word “poor.” I want to show you now what this word does NOT mean.

Matthew 5:3

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

There are a lot of people who have tried to take this verse and say, “Blessed are the poor.” The people without money... So, let's just all take a vow of poverty. Let's just all be poor. Well that's obviously not right. You have to finish the rest of the verse: “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” not “Blessed are the penniless.”

Let me show you the word for poor. It's the word Toe-KASS. The “p” is silent:

Poor (ptōchos)

reduced to beggary, begging, asking alms; helpless, powerless

In the classical Greek usage, this word refers to someone who is literally reduced to begging...



Literally someone who is so desperately ashamed, they don't even want their identity to be known. *Ptōchos* means you're so poor you have to beg. You're totally dependent on the gift of somebody else to survive. You have nothing. In many cases you would be considered a person with no skills, and in most cases, you would be crippled, deaf, dumb and blind. Literally, the only way you can function in society is to sit in shame on a street corner with your hand in the air,

pleading for grace and mercy from somebody else. You have no resources in yourself...you're totally dependent on somebody else.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. You are thinking: "Now just wait a minute! You've got to be kidding me! Are you saying we've got to look like this person on the street corner in order to be blessed?"



Pastor Kevin, I thought you said this BE-attitude wasn't talking about taking a vow a poverty? It's not! Jesus is not talking about physical begging, or physical poverty. No. He's talking about poverty of spirit. Blessed are the beggars of spirit!

Listen. Here's the idea: Mankind is empty, poor, helpless! We can't work or earn our salvation. We are helpless beggars. Our works are as filthy rags. We are absolutely incapable of salvation and we're totally dependent on the grace and mercy of someone to come along and help us. Who is that someone? JESUS! Jesus Christ! The Savior of the world!

It looks something like this...



Jesus reaching out His nail-scarred hand to us as beggars...Can you see that?

Do you remember the account of the Rich Young Ruler? Matthew described the scene with this young man in Matthew chapter 19. **Please turn to Matthew 19.**

As you are turning, I'll set the scene. This young man is described as a ruler in Luke's Gospel comes to Jesus to ask how to get into heaven. Now here's what's interesting. He's described as a ruler. What would he be a ruler of? Well, we learned last week, that the title "ruler" was given to three men in a synagogue to lead the synagogue. So, apparently this young man was deeply religious and well respected to be elevated to the role of ruler as a young man.

Here's an artist's depiction of that encounter...



Do you have this scene in your mind? Look at Matthew 19:16 with me.

Matthew 19:16-22

16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" **17** And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." **18** He said to him, "Which

ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, **19** Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **20** The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" **21** Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." **22** When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The Rich Young Ruler left sorrowful? Why? Because he refused to acknowledge his spiritual bankruptcy. His god was his money and he refused to give it up. He refused to surrender and give allegiance to Jesus. Truthfully, the young man didn't need Jesus. He had his money. And because of that, he would remain outside the kingdom because he refused to become poor in spirit. And he went away as a very religious young man, yet who was as lost as when he showed up.

I suppose somebody might say, "Well, you know, Jesus really should have never lost that guy." After all, He had to have that guy do was pray a five-sentence prayer, raise your hand, walk an aisle. But folks, that's not what saves a person. The doorway to salvation is brokenness, which leads to repentance. Being totally broken over your sin. That's the issue.

Let's now consider two other men by way of example. **Turn in your Bibles to Luke, chapter 18.** Here is a Pharisee and a Tax Collector.



I want you to have this image emblazoned in your mind... The Pharisee is smug, proud, self-righteous and this tax collector is humble, modest and meek.

In Luke 18, Jesus was telling parables (which are earthly stories with heavenly meanings) and Luke records the parable Jesus told about a Pharisee and a hated tax collector.

Luke 18:9-14

9 He 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. **11** 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. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' **13** 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!' **14** 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."

Listen, when you admit your weakness, when you admit your nothingness, that's the first step of salvation and you are now in a place where you can seek entrance to the Kingdom. This is what that Tax Collector did...



He humbled himself and went down. The Rich Young Ruler wouldn't do it and the Pharisee wouldn't do it. But, the Tax Collector did. And so, he is the expression of what it means to be poor in spirit.

You see the hardest thing a person will ever do is to come to the place that they swallow their pride and surrender their life in humility. Where they finally recognize they are totally bankrupt and nothing but a spiritual pauper.

But if they will ever come to that place, they'll get something. Do you know what you get?

Matthew 5:3

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

We get heaven and we get it now! You say, "What are you talking about?" Listen carefully, the verb "is" that's used here in verse 3 is a present tense verb. The kingdom of heaven IS theirs, right now!

Ephesians 2:4-6

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Listen, when you give your life to Christ, the reign of Christ begins in your heart at that moment. The tense of what we just read is in the immediate! It's now! The kingdom of heaven is the rule of Christ...in the human heart...right now. As a born again follower of Jesus Christ, you are as certain to have heaven as if you were already there. Oh that's powerful and majestic!

Listen, I want to tell you my heart. This old world might try to tamper with my superficial, circumstantial happiness but it can't touch my divine happiness...my deep-down contentment because everything that matters eternally is already settled at this very moment! **I'm in the kingdom of God right now.** It's already mine... You see, the point of what Jesus was saying is this... When you are poor in spirit, you can come into the kingdom, right here...right now...on earth and you get His peace now. You get His grace now. You get His mercy now. You get His power now and one day you'll experience the glory. Do you see? You get the peace, the grace, the mercy and power now (here on earth) and you get the glory later (in heaven).

So, the question begs to be asked as we close: Do you want to be poor in spirit so you can have the kingdom of heaven? If the answer is yes, then you're going to have to look like this...



You're going to have to come as a beggar and reach up your hand to Jesus in humble brokenness. Because if there's one thing that we all know about a beggar, the only thing they can do to survive is to ASK. You've got to be like the Tax Collector and say: **"Lord, would you be merciful to me, because I'm a sinner."**

Do you remember what happened to the man? Jesus said, **"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified."**

What does it mean to be justified? *JUST-AS-IF-I'D* never sinned. He humbled himself and was saved.

Jesus gave Him the kingdom...

...And the same thing can happen to you today, if you will allow yourself to have the BE-Attitude of being poor in spirit.