

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

The Foundational Mark of the Christian

Introduction

The Beatitudes describe the mark of the believer, i.e., blessedness, happiness, and joy. God is excited to fill the hearts of His sons and daughters with genuine happiness and peace ... true blessedness. His kingdom is the only place where this is found. To enter the kingdom, we must be willing to subject ourselves to God's rule and authority and acknowledge Him as Lord. Only when we do this will we discover true happiness. Once we are inside, we begin to discover how we have been brought to a place where God eagerly disperses His blessings ... even as we labor here on earth. Paul said:

Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ, Ephesians 1.3.

As Christians, we are already receiving blessings by being in God's family ... and we place our faith in the Word of God who promises that they will continually be delivered to us throughout all eternity. Part of Paul's teaching in the magnificent passage of Ephesians 2 is to convey the message that those who have been made alive with Christ by being raised up with Him will *display the immeasurable riches of His grace through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus*, Ephesians 2.5-7. So, the moment we were made new, God began to lead us to true happiness, contentment, joy, and peace. One day in the world to come, we will experience these blessings in totality.

Meanwhile, how do we get there?

The beatitudes point the way. It begins by having the right attitude toward God. We are poor in spirit, mourn, exhibit meekness, and hunger and thirst for righteousness. Our right attitude toward God impacts the way we treat others. We respond in mercy, purity, and the desire for peace. The world will not react kindly as it will lash out at us with reviling and persecution. The net result of our right relationship with God and our fellowman is that we will be the world's preservative (salt) and reflect the true light of the Son of God, Matthew 5.13-16.

This is the opposite of what the world tells us. Media and the prevailing cultural philosophy of the day champion wealth, pride, self-confidence, fame, and power are all keys to happiness. For the kingdom citizen however, it is exactly the opposite. Learning what it means to be *poor in spirit* is the first step.

The Beatitude

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

We must not miss the imagery of the word Jesus chose for *poor*. This person is not like the poor widow mentioned in Luke 21.27 who had at least some small resources, this is the beggar in a miserable condition. They are completely indigent. One dictionary describes the word as “to rove about in wretchedness.”⁸ Jesus is not advocating that Christians be physically poor, he is describing the kingdom citizen’s awareness of their complete spiritual poverty before God. Apart from Jesus we bring nothing to the table. Those in the kingdom understand they are there by grace ... they are devoid of all pride ... and stand before God in total dependence.

It is the person who moves with humility and contriteness, trembling at God’s word, Isaiah 66.2. It is the person who is brokenhearted and crushed in spirit, Psalm 34.18. It is the broken and contrite heart of Psalm 51.17. It is the tax collector of Luke 18.13 crying out for mercy because of his own sin. It is like David who confessed his total helplessness before God and plead for mercy, Psalm 51.1-3.

It is ... the true possession of humility.

Why This is Foundational

In another place in Matthew’s gospel we read:

“Truly I tell you,” he said, “unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 18.3-4.

If one approaches God with pride, he or she will never enter the kingdom.

The door into His kingdom is low, and no one who stands tall will ever go through it. We cannot be filled until we are empty; we cannot be made worthy until we recognize our unworthiness; we cannot live until we admit we are dead. We might as well expect fruit to grow without a tree as to expect the other graces of the Christian life to grow without humility. We cannot begin the Christian life without humility, and we cannot live the Christian life with pride.⁹

Pride is an absolute barrier to the relationship with God. It must be continually dealt with as it lies as the root of our sin. It prohibits our seeing the ever-present reality of the human condition. In and of ourselves we are wretched, worthless, and sinful. In Ezekiel 16, the prophet looks forward to a future time of blessing after the nation endures the *consequences of their depravity and detestable practices*, 16.58. One day God would establish a permanent covenant with them, and note the heart and disposition of the men and women who entered it:

⁷ The word for “poor” in Luke 21.2 references what might be described as ordinary poverty, where a person is in need of things relating to livelihood, but not destitute.

⁸ Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti*. New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889, p. 557.

⁹ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985, Vol. 1, p. 148.

I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the Lord, so that when I make atonement for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth again because of your disgrace. This is the declaration of the Lord God," Ezekiel 16.62-63.

When a person begins to understand his or her own spiritual poverty, the certainty of eternal doom, and sees the reality of spiritual deadness apart from Christ, he or she will see the true magnificence of the salvation God provides. This understanding will not happen without humility. *Everyone with a proud heart is detestable to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished*, Proverbs 16.5.

Pride was *the* issue behind all others in Laodicea. Those in the church believed they were rich, wealth, and in need of nothing, Revelation 3.17. Pride blinded them to reality. Jesus says they were *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked*. Until they divested themselves of their pride, they had no chance of being conformed to the image of Christ.

How to Become Poor in Spirit

Focus on Christ

The emphasis on our selfish wants and desires must end. Christ now rules over our heart, Colossians 3.15. We see who Christ is through the Word, Colossians 3.16, experience God's care and concern through our active prayer life, 1 Peter 5.6-7; and worship through private and public devotion, we can open our heart to His power. Jesus is the perfect example of humility, Philippians 2.5-8.

Declare War on the Flesh

The natural man craves honor and recognition that come through his/her own works. Pride goes right along with our old self. We must kill it. We have nothing to boast about. Our entire existence is due to Christ, Colossians 3.3-4. We must come to realize everything we have has been given to us. *What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it*, 1 Corinthians 4.7.

Ask God for Help

Just like David, we should pray: *God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me*, Psalm 51.10. We should desire *integrity of heart*, Ezekiel 11.19. Jesus promised:

"Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened, Matthew 7.7-9.

The Poor in Spirit Inherit the Kingdom

It is God's good pleasure to give the kingdom to those who come to Him in humility:

Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights to give you the kingdom, Luke 12.32.

God wants us to recognize our poverty so that He can make us rich. He wants us to recognize our lowliness so that He can raise us up.

For the High and Exalted One, who lives forever, whose name is holy, says this: “I live in a high and holy place, and with the oppressed and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the oppressed, Isaiah 57.15.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you, James 4.10.