

Now You're Getting It: Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

Psalm 51



A family had just bought a new Ferrari, and they were so excited about their purchase that they decided to get a clergyman to bless it.

First, they called a Roman Catholic priest. "Father," they asked him, "would you please come say a blessing over our new Ferrari?"

"I'd be honored, but what's a Ferrari?" asked the priest. The family wasn't thrilled with his response, so they decided to pass on the Roman Catholic priest.

Next, they approached a Jewish rabbi. "Rabbi, would you bless our new Ferrari?"

"How can I do that?" he asked. "I've never heard of a Ferrari!" Another dead end.

Finally, they called a Protestant minister. He was the pastor of a huge church, with many obviously wealthy parishioners. "Pastor, we just bought a new Ferrari. We were hoping you'd bless it for us. Can you do that?"

"Wow! A Ferrari!" he answered. "I can't wait to see it! With the powerful engine and the great handling, and that sleek body! But tell me, what's a blessing?"



Today, we are starting a series that will carry us through most of the rest of the summer. We are going to be looking at the opening lines of perhaps the greatest sermon ever delivered, the Sermon on the Mount.

The opening verses, the ones we'll be focusing on, are commonly known as the Beatitudes. I told that joke about the Ferrari and the blessing because there is one word that occurs repeatedly throughout the Beatitudes – and that word is "blessed."

And while that joke was somewhat humorous, I don't think that pastor is alone in not truly knowing what it means to be blessed. When we hear that word, we think of riches or good fortune or having plenty.

We toss that word around so much. We get emails and Facebook posts encouraging us to pass this along to ten friends so we can be blessed. We pray for God's blessings on us and on our friends and family. When someone sneezes we say, "Bless you!"

So when we see Jesus say over and over again "Blessed are those..." we may think we're in for a big reward. We may think the Beatitudes are a checklist of things, and if we do them everything is going to be great for us.

But that's not the message here at all. And as we get into them, even today's Beatitude, we're going to see that not all of them are fun. But they all have a point.

First, we need to understand what Jesus was thinking when he said "Blessed are those..."

To do that, we're going to have to dive into some Greek language. I love going back and seeing what these ancient words were saying, because they are so often so much richer and fuller than our English words convey. We can miss so much in translation.

μακάριος
makarios / blessed; happy

Erasmian Pronunciation

LOGOS

In this case, the Greek word we need to look at is *makarios*. Besides being fun to say, it carries with it some very meaningful context.

Makarios can indeed be translated as blessed. It can also be translated as happy. So you'll see some Bibles, some translations, say "Happy are those..." I think that gets a little closer to the real idea behind these words, but I also think it leaves a little room for improvement.

Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary perhaps gets closest to what I think Jesus is really saying throughout the Beatitudes. Mounce's describes *makarios* as "feelings associated with receiving God's favor."

Here's why I think that definition strikes at the heart of what Jesus is telling us.

Have you ever tried to learn something complicated, something with a number of steps to get right? Or maybe you've taught someone – a child, a grandchild, a friend – something of the same nature. And it takes time after time of practice and repetition.

But then, suddenly, sometimes out of thin air, it catches on. You – or whoever you are teaching – suddenly understand! It's a moment of epiphany, a eureka moment! And there's a phrase that goes with that moment that we love to hear or to say:



“Now you’re getting it!”

That is the blessing or happiness we’re talking about. That’s the feeling of receiving God’s favor. That moment when you’ve tried so long just to do the right thing, and then it suddenly dawns on you what God has been trying to say to you all along.

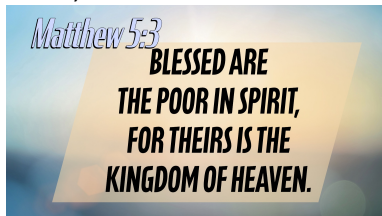
It feels like God is saying to you, “Now you understand. Now you’re getting it!”

And that’s exactly what I’m calling this series – Now You’re Getting It! Because each week, we’re going to look at Jesus telling us that when these attitudes become part of your character, you’re starting to get it. You’re starting to understand.

Remember what I just said there, too. These are attitudes. They are who we are meant to be. They are not things we are supposed to do. These are descriptors of the people we become when we truly let Jesus dwell in our hearts and lead us in our lives.

And the first of these descriptors tells us that we’re blessed, that we’re happy, that we’re finally starting to get it when we are poor in spirit.

Let’s read from the Gospel of Matthew, the first three verses of the fifth chapter:



5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

He said:

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

In many ways, this doesn’t seem to make sense. We associate poverty, at least financially or socially, with a condition that can be helped and that we should seek to right in our world.

To take that a step further, for a people who are supposed to be indwelt and filled by the Holy Spirit, it makes even less sense for us to be poor in spirit.

And yet, here is Jesus saying that we're finally getting it when we're spiritually poor.

So what does that mean? What does it mean to be spiritually poor?



Somebody once asked Billy Graham the very same question, and here was his response:

"What did [Jesus] mean? Simply this: We must be humble in our spirits. If you put the word "humble" in place of the word "poor," you will understand what He meant.

"In other words, when we come to God, we must realize our own sin and our spiritual emptiness and poverty. We must not be self-satisfied or proud in our hearts, thinking we don't really need God. If we are, God cannot bless us. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."



As usual, Billy Graham gives us something important to take out of scripture.

You see, Jesus isn't talking about our social standing and is most definitely talking about our pocketbooks when he mentions this type of poverty.

Instead, he's talking about our realization that left on our own, we are hopeless in sin. He's talking about our realization that without God's grace and mercy and love, we are surely doomed. He's talking about our realization that we desperately and totally need our Savior.

Now, I realize that if you came here this morning looking for something reassuring, something to help the old self-esteem, this ain't it so far.

Our world loves to hear that we are enough on our own. We like to hear that we're not really all that bad, after all. We like to hear about self-sufficiency and self-esteem and self-reliance. But all those really have in common is that one word: self.

But yet, when we realize all of this, up to and including that we cannot go through this life on our own, that's finally when we're getting it.

When we have to fall on our knees because we finally realize we can't stand on our own anymore, that's when we're getting it.

When we go to our Lord and Savior weeping because we just can't do all of this anymore, that's when we're getting it.

Because that's when we realize that Jesus Christ has been standing in front of us all along, extending his hand and all of God's amazing grace that comes with it. And he's been waiting for us to take what's been offered to us this whole time. He's been waiting for us to finally get it.

That sounds pretty good in itself, right? But that's not all we get when we acknowledge that we are poor in spirit. We also get to experience the kingdom of heaven.



Right now! Today!

Jesus doesn't say the kingdom of heaven *will be* ours. He says ours *IS* the kingdom of heaven. We get to experience the kingdom that God has brought to earth right now! This Good News of salvation and fullness in the Holy Spirit can be ours to experience today!

We often wonder what it will be like to finally reach those gates on that distant shore, to finally walk alongside our Creator, to finally sing His praises for all eternity.

But we get a taste of what that will be like before we get to fully inherit that kingdom. And we get that by first realizing just how much we need God for everything in our lives.



Realizing our spiritual poverty is vital for our walk with Christ, but it's also a necessary first step for everything else we'll be talking about as we go through the Beatitudes. It's the basis for everything to come.

We cannot mourn without appreciating how insufficient we are to handle life in our own strength.

We cannot be meek unless we know we have needed gentleness ourselves.

We cannot hunger and thirst for righteousness if we think of ourselves as already righteous.

We cannot be merciful without recognizing our own need for mercy.

We cannot be pure in heart if our heart is full of pride.

We cannot be peacemakers if we believe that we are always right.

We cannot identify with Christ in the face of persecution without dying to ourselves and renouncing our own rights.

All of these Beatitudes are rooted in humility, being poor in spirit.

I'm looking forward to this journey we're going to go on together throughout the rest of the summer. I think there will be things we cover here that will open our eyes to what God is trying to mold us into, to what people He is trying to create within us.

And while our journey has started with realizing that we are in fact spiritually poor, I pray that it ends – both today and eight weeks from now – with us hearing God say, “Now you're getting it!”

And all of God's people said...