

Title: Upside Down – Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Text: Matthew 5:3

Date: Sept 20, 2020 at FBCW

INTRO.

Solomon said in Prov 13:7, *One person pretends to be rich but has nothing; another pretends to be poor but has abundant wealth.*

I've met people who are rich – but they act poor (my longtime friend ____).

I've met people who are poor – but they act rich (my longtime friend ____).

But this is not what Matthew 5:3 is getting at in Beatitude Number 1.

Instead, Matthew records that Jesus is pronouncing his blessing upon people who *know* they are poor...and they are willing to *admit* their poverty.

First, what does Jesus mean by the word “blessed”? (v 3).

The word *blessed* is from the original word Makarios. It means to be fortunate, or happy because of your personal circumstances.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says this →

1. The Ancient Greeks said: the gods are blessed; they are above the earth; they don't have the common problems of ordinary people.
2. Greco Roman society said: deceased people are blessed. They were called “blessed” on the anniversary of their death, they no longer had to struggle on the earth.
3. The elite, wealthy, upper crust of society are blessed. Their riches/power protect them.
4. Old Testament writings, “blessed” took on a new meaning. “Blessings” were the results of righteousness, right living: good wife, many kids, abundant crops, health, favor.

In ALL of these meanings from the ancient world – the “blessed ones” lived on a higher plane than the rest of society (goods, dead people, the rich, the religious).

- However...the common man had very little hope.
- Could the common man ever be blessed?

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus flips the word “blessed” on its head.

- Blessing is no longer out of the reach of the common man.
- Blessing isn't beyond you – it's not restricted to the gods, success, or possessions.

Jesus was counter-cultural. Jesus used an upside-down meaning of the word “blessed”!

The Sermon on the Mount begins with → the number one way to receive God's blessing and to ensure your place in God's Kingdom is to admit your spiritual poverty!

- Spiritual poverty = we are bankrupt without God's grace.

So blessing, by Jesus's standard → is more about God's truth, and less about your current circumstances.

- Negative feelings...numb feelings.
- Adverse conditions.
- These cannot take away the blessedness of those who exist in the correct relationship with God.

In the world – you are blessed by what you have!

But in God's Kingdom – you are blessed by who/what has you!

Note, the word “blessed” is used as a plural adjective in Matt 5:3.

- It means, you are all blessed.
- You are satisfied from experiencing the fullness of something.

FACT. The blessings you have...are not what you can earn/achieve on your own strengths.

FACT. The blessings that are yours today...the blessings that are coming to you tomorrow...are based solely upon God's Word, God's Truth, and God's Promise through the Person of Jesus Christ!

Second, what does it mean to be poor in spirit? What is poverty of spirit?

When the word “**poor**” is used in the Bible: usually speaks of those who have encountered unfortunate circumstances from an economic standpoint.

- Widows and orphans.
- The harsh side of life: homeless, hungry.
- The deprived: a physical handicap, the elderly, or one defeated by an enemy.

They are called “**poor**” – because they have no resources to make any positive change. They are fully dependent on the resources of someone else.

- Not only poor...but stuck in their poverty.

Poor in Matt 5:3 = beggarly poor. It means to cower and cringe like a beggar.

It's a poverty that is so deep, one can get by only by depending on the mercy of another.

Psalm 40:17, *I am oppressed and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my helper and my deliverer; my God, do not delay.*

Mark 10:47 – Blind Bartimaeus, a blind beggar on the side of the road in Jericho.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Poverty of spirit = Recognizing that God is everything, and I am nothing.

- When I admit my nothingness (powerlessness) to God, He graciously shares the fullness of heaven with me.

Poverty of spirit = this attitude:

- *I am responsible for my sin. I make no excuses.*
- *I'm not able to save myself.*
- *I admit I am guilty of breaking God's law. I agree with God about my sin.*
- *My only hope is Jesus!*
- *If anything good is happening in me – it's Jesus's grace, and not me.*

Poverty of spirit is → *I'm sorry...please help me...I'm unable...I trust you, Lord. I need you, Lord.*

FACT. I know people who are materially rich...but they are spiritually poor. I know people who are materially poor...and they will also be eternally poor.

- But ALL who are spiritually poor...will be eternally rich!

I have nothing to offer God except my humility and faith!

Nothing material/physical in this world will make me happy – I'm finished seeking earthly treasures!

FACT. Not many of us would ever desire/choose to feel poor.

- In America, we are proud of our democracy...government of the people...economy...military...education...technology...transportation...healthcare...film/arts.

FACT. I love America. I want to live here forever...but America is at her best when she is humble...and not seeking complete gratification and security from all these other things.

- Perhaps God knew we'd struggle with "poverty of spirit" (humility) – which is precisely why he placed it first!
- Similar to commandment one (*have no other gods before Me*).
- If we get this Beatitude wrong, it's impossible to get any of the others right.

Most today – believe in money, fame, power, athletics, skill, self.

ILLUS: Kent Hughes says, when historians study the culture of 20/21st centuries...an artist should sculpt a statue of a man holding the view of himself in a mirror. We are obsessed with ourselves!

Teenager – *Lord, the only way I can make a difference at my school/friends is through you, so help me Lord.*

Parents – *Lord, only way I can parent these kids/teens is through you, help me Lord.*

Singles – *Lord, only way I will be whole/complete is finding security in you. Lord Jesus, you define my life, and not someone else.*

Business man – *Lord Jesus, my future is in you – not my money/success.*

The nation – *Lord, the only way our nation is made new is through you; please rescue us!*

LESSONS.

Poor in spirit does NOT equal –

- Being shy. Being an introvert.
- Not a self-esteem complex, “I’m nothing...I’m just nothing...woe is me, poor me”

No! You are valuable to God! You were created, redeemed, valued at the blood of Christ.

Poor in spirit does NOT necessarily equal financial poverty.

- Jesus had friends that were rich.
- But the Bible does give a strong warning to the rich: don’t trust in your riches.
- Be forewarned: material prosperity can weaken our sensitivity to our spiritual poverty.

Poor in spirit does mean – you know that you cannot fill your spiritual/eternal emptiness with anything physical, material, or financial within this world.

You know this is true!

- 1) Spiritual needs cannot fulfill our immediate physical needs.
 - a. If a man is hungry...he needs food, not a lecture about vegetables.
 - b. If a man is sick...he needs medical attention...not some theory about hospitals.
- 2) Therefore, your spiritual needs cannot be fulfilled by physical/material things of this world.
 - a. What your soul craves...what your heart desires...only God can meet this!

Third, notice, the poor in spirit are blessed – the kingdom of heaven is theirs!

Only Beatitudes 1 and 9 speak of the Kingdom of Heaven in the present tense!

- It’s a present possession. It’s operating now!

The kingdom of heaven is promised to those who know they have no personal resources to “help themselves” before God.

Predominant worldview: if you are materially wealthy – you are blessed!

Pharisees worldview: religious people are spiritually elite; pride in their self-sufficiency.

But the Christian worldview – I am broken in my sin...I am made whole/new by repenting of my sin...and trusting in Jesus, who has come to bring heaven to my soul!

FACT. Our most complete personal fulfillment → drawing on the truth of Jesus! I am who Jesus says I am...I have what Jesus came to bring me!

- I am saved. I am secure!

*O what a wonderful, wonderful day – Day I will never forget
After I'd wondered in darkness away, Jesus my Saviour I met
O what a tender, compassionate friend – He met the need of my heart.
Shadows dispelling, with joy I am telling, He made all the darkness depart*

*Heaven came down and glory filled my soul
When at the cross my Savior made me whole
My sins were washed away...and my night was turned to day
Heaven came down and glory filled my soul*

LESSON. Heaven is promised! Heaven comes down → to the spiritually poor...to the needy!
To those willing to admit their guilt/brokenness to the Lord.

*I need Thee every hour, Most gracious Lord
No tender voice like Thine, can peace afford
I need Thee, O I need Thee; Every hour I need Thee
O bless me now, My Savior, I come to Thee*

APPLICATION

1. We must always remember: Humility is the foundation of all grace and growth. Pride has no part in Jesus's kingdom! When self is exalted...Jesus is not exalted.
2. Ask God to make you humble. Perhaps pray:
 - a. James 4:10, *Humble yourselves before the Lord...and he will exalt you.*
 - b. 1 Peter 5:5, *All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*
3. Ask your loved ones if you are humble. Give them freedom to be honest.
4. When's the last time you got lost in the wonder/worship of Jesus Christ? Have you been overwhelmed with gratitude and thanksgiving at the "Goodness of God?" (song)
5. Stop complaining about your present situation. Stop comparing it to other people. Say *Lord – you know where I am...you know what I need...I trust in you.*

*Not the labors of my hands, Can fulfill Thy law's demands.
These for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone:
In my hand no price I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling.*