



Week Two

blessed are the poor in spirit

The Blessedness of Bankruptcy
Emily Jennings

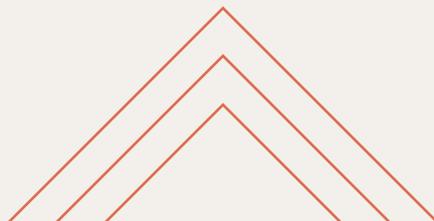
If you had total control, would you choose to live in riches or poverty?

Choosing poverty seems absurd. Added to the daily task of securing bread and shelter is the weight of grief, stigma, and fear. Financial wealth eliminates those burdens, but poverty is not always a debit. Spiritual poverty is a credit.

Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily to convince Jews that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah. Israel was finally getting their King, but not the kind they expected. In this sermon, Jesus described for disciples, crowds, and religious leaders the rhythm and texture of life in His kingdom. Before the 106-verse sermon, Jesus opened with this strange statement:

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

Matthew 5:3



Would the new King, the Lion of Judah, who commands His people to face enemies with courageous hope, prize discouragement? "Poor in spirit" does not mean to be discouraged. Rather, it means to be void of all spiritual resources; in and of yourself, you have no way of getting to God or making yourself acceptable to Him. The doctrine of sin says every human being is spiritually bankrupt. If that is true, then shouldn't every person inherit God's kingdom? Yet, it's not enough to be spiritually bankrupt, you must believe you are.

Before Christ, law-keeping was man's attempt to be acceptable to God. But this same law contained not just rules, but prophecies of the coming King. In the New Testament's opening chapter, He arrived! Now, man would come to God through King Jesus, not through law-keeping. This Beatitude totally undermined the enterprise of the Pharisees... their profession was spiritual wealth: clean behavior, Bible knowledge, and discipling others in their ways. Jesus' declaration as Messiah and his teaching put a piercing light on the spiritual self-sufficiency of the Pharisees.

Why this Beatitude first? If people didn't think they needed Jesus to get to God, His sermon wouldn't matter to them. The opening Beatitude relieved the spiritually poor and warned the righteous: "If you need me, my kingdom is yours! If you don't, this isn't your kingdom." As long as I'm a faithful spouse, pray, give money, and avoid bad language, does the source of my righteousness matter? Yes. Ignoring our spiritual neediness demotes God to the role of cheerleader for our righteousness instead of exalting him as its source. The gospel remains good news, but not necessary news. Resumes thick with moral and religious success can cause forgetfulness. We forget that before Christ, our souls were dead in the dirt of sin (Eph. 2:1) and every ounce of our righteousness is His (Phil. 3:9). We forget we need the Son to get to the Father. Those confident in their own spiritual riches will find eternal companionship with the Pharisees, outside God's kingdom.

Questions:

- What spiritual growth or good deeds am I tempted to credit to myself?
- Jesus said in John 15:5, "apart from me, you can do nothing." Do I merely affirm this truth, or do I functionally believe it?

Reflection

