

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

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[0:00] Selfies, seriously. Selfies are amazing. It's changed kind of our culture, the selfie culture that we are.

The camera on your phone has brought new dimensions to our life together. We are a selfie people living in a selfie culture. It's a snapshot, no pun intended, of where our hearts tend to lie.

Is it not true that we tend to be the center of our own little world? Standing in sharp contrast to the selfie kingdom is the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven works according to a different value system and a different ethic. It stands in sharp contrast to the culture we live in.

The kingdom of heaven is the active reign of Jesus. And you can't be thinking about the kingdom of heaven as Jesus reigning over geographic territories of the earth.

[1:20] At least not yet. When he comes back, he's taken over the planet. But right now, to be thinking about the present and active reign of Jesus is to think about his interest in the territory of individual hearts.

And he's winning and gaining a kingdom by winning, saving one sinner's heart at a time. He's gathering a kingdom of radically changed followers for himself.

In Matthew 3.1, John the Baptist starts his ministry with these words, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. In Matthew 4.17, Jesus begins his ministry.

He's been inaugurated king at his baptism. This is my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased.

Matthew talks about Isaiah and Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah.

A light has dawned. His ministry begins in the very first words of Jesus in Matthew, or the same words of John the Baptist, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

[2:35] Is at hand. And in Matthew 4.23, we read that Jesus was traveling through Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, and proclaiming the good news, the gospel of the kingdom.

You see, what Jesus was talking about was good. It was good news. It was blessed. Blessed news. From the beginning, the proclaiming of the good news of the kingdom included a call to repentance. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. To experience the goodness of the kingdom, in order to experience the blessedness of being under the reign of Jesus, one must repent first.

Repentance is a word that means to change your mind. And I'm not sure if this morning you opened up the cupboard and you're like, am I going to eat Lucky Charms?

Or am I going to eat Captain Crunch? And you reach for the Captain Crunch and you're like, no, I changed my mind. I repent of eating Captain Crunch and I'm going to eat Lucky Charms. That's one way to talk about repentance.

[3:55] When you get into the Bible, the Bible talks about repentance on a whole different scale. And so when Jesus calls people to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, what He's talking about is forsaking the kingdom of darkness in order to devote yourself to being His follower as part of the kingdom of heaven.

We forsake the selfie kingdom in order to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And in so doing, we come under the gracious reign of King Jesus.

This is all going somewhere. To become a Christian, to become a kingdom citizen, a citizen of heaven, it requires a radical shift of devotion.

The values and ethics of the kingdom of heaven stand in sharp contrast to the values and ethics of the kingdom of darkness.

And so when someone becomes a citizen of heaven, when they become a Christian, they have walked into a counter-cultural kingdom. And to be part of this counter-cultural kingdom, you are going to have some ramifications that ripple through your life.

[5:28] To be a follower of Jesus means that you're going to be thinking differently about yourself, about who you are. You're going to believe what our King says about you, not about what this culture says about you.

And not only that, you're going to think differently. You're going to live differently here. Your life's going to look different because you are different because the grace of God has radically changed you.

And so for us citizens of heaven living on earth right now, and we live in between the comings of the King. So Jesus has come the first time and He's coming back a second time.

And as citizens of His kingdom, we live now on this planet for Him. And just to be up front with you, it's counter-cultural. If you are a follower of Jesus, your life will stand out.

That's what Jesus is getting at when He speaks this manifesto that we're calling the Sermon on the Mount. In this manifesto, He tells us who we are and how we are to live.

[6:52] We are citizens of heaven and we live on this planet for Jesus. And so Jesus starts His manifesto with eight beatitudes.

They all have to do with who we are as Christians. They address our character. What goes on on the inside. What we're going to see is that the character traits of the citizens of heaven are radically different than the world's.

What God values in us is completely different than what the world values in us. We've been radically changed.

We've been bought at a price. We've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son. We've been given new natures. We are new people living for a new king.

We don't live for ourselves anymore. We're citizens of the kingdom with a new king. King Jesus. And so this morning after that huge run up we're just going to focus on the first beatitude.

[8:13] Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And to serve you this morning I thought we could ask three questions of this first beatitude. Ask three questions get three answers and Lord willing walk out of this building with the freshly stirred desire to follow our king.

So the three questions are what does it mean to be poor in spirit? That's number one. The second question is what gets in the way of being poor in spirit?

I'm going to point to one thing. And the third question is what is the good news for the poor in spirit? What's the good news? So let's tackle this first question.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Well if you're looking at your Bible Matthew 5:3 you're going to notice that the first word is blessed are the poor in spirit.

[9:25] So right out of the gate you've got to realize that to be poor in spirit is not a bad thing in God's economy. It's a good thing in God's economy. He says it's blessed.

Happy are the poor in spirit. Joyful are the poor in spirit. Fortunate are the poor in spirit. Blessed of God are the poor in spirit.

But to our ears when you hear the word poor typically you don't think in terms of blessing. It seems a little paradoxical. So even though we're seeing that this poor in spirit is a good thing we still got to ask the question what does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Do you see that word poor? P-O-O-R Poor. That word needs a little explaining. There are different kinds of poor and there is a category of poor people in which and maybe you've been there.

I know I've been there. You're just barely getting by. There's no fat in the budget to save or to spend on anything. You just barely have enough to survive.

[10:41] Basic food, simple clothes, basic shelter. It reminds me of that poor widow. Remember Luke 21? Jesus is standing, watches this poor widow come and she gives her last two copper coins and putting in the offering box at the temple.

Do you remember that? She was poor. She had just enough kind of poor. she was poor but she was not a beggar.

She had two copper coins to give. The word poor here is not just getting by poor.

The word poor is beggar poor. Destitute poor. Completely and utterly dependent on the generosity of others poor.

The only way you can survive is from the generosity of someone else. That's the poor we're talking about. That's the kind of poor. So it's not just getting by poor.

[12:00] This is beggar poor. No room for self reliance. No room for self confidence. This is the kind of poverty that's like you've got to do anything you've got can do in order just to eat.

And what you notice is that Jesus links this kind of poor to the two words in spirit. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

And so what Jesus is doing is helping us to understand the kind of poverty he's talking about. What sphere we are poor in to be poor in. And so what's important to notice is that this destitute in spirit Jesus locates within us poor in spirit.

It's a character trait. It's a posture of heart. A posture of heart of complete and utter dependence on the generosity of God.

that's what it means to be poor in spirit. Let me read that again. It's a posture of heart of complete and utter dependence on the generosity of God for your survival.

[13:19] In the words of Augustus Toplady in Rock of Ages nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling. I got nothing. So to be poor is to be a beggar and it's a poor in spirit within me.

I've got nothing. I've got nothing. And so what you need to realize is like oh that sounds good Mike let me help you bring this home. For you to be poor in spirit is for you to humbly declare to God spiritual bankruptcy.

That's what you're doing. That's what the poor in spirit do. They say I am spiritually bankrupt. I've got nothing. Nothing.

And at the heart of being poor in spirit is the recognition of our profound sinfulness. Our sin puts us in debt to God and we can't pay.

You know what bankruptcy is. You've got huge debts and you've got no assets and there's no way to pay. You've got to declare bankruptcy. Now what the Bible is clear in saying is that every human being apart from Jesus of course every human being is spiritually bankrupt for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[14:55] What makes the poor in spirit different is that the poor in spirit actually admit that they are spiritually bankrupt. They declare to God their spiritual bankruptcy.

To be poor in spirit is to humbly admit our sorry state of sinful spiritual affairs. We're spiritual debtors.

we have dug ourselves into debt so deep against God that we can never ever repay it.

And when we sin against God it's like incurring debt with compounding interest. Maybe you have one of those kinds of credit cards with a super high interest rate and you put something on it and you don't pay it for a month and it comes back and you're like whoa how did it become a million dollars I don't know it's compounding interest.

Well when we sin against God it's like incurring debt not with a compounding interest but with a compounding judgment. We're adding up wrath over our heads.

[16:10] Again Romans 3 23 for the wages of sin is death. I sin and earn judgment. And so as we sin we are racking up this huge compounding debt of judgment and wrath and death from God.

At this point you might be saying well Pastor Salvati I thought that this whole thing was good news. Can we get to the good of the good news?

Not yet. for those of us who have been given eyes to see their spiritual bankruptcy we realize our greatest need is the forgiveness of God for all of our sin against him.

The only option we have for our sin is for God to forgive us. There's nothing else that we can do. We don't have any assets. We don't have anything that we can do to work it off.

We are completely and utterly dependent on the generosity of God in whom we are indebted. He's the only one who can pay off our debt.

[17:36] And so here's what the poor in spirit say. I see my debt against you God. I cannot pay this debt. I have accrued against you.

I have no assets. I have no collateral. I can offer you nothing. Nothing in my hands I bring. I got nothing. I just got this debt.

And I can't pay it off. The only option is to go to the one you owe and say, will you forgive me my debt? Will you pay off your judgment on me?

Will you pay off the holy lien that you've put on me for my sin? You pay it off. And so the poor in spirit are beggars.

We recognize our spiritual condition, our bankruptcy. And there's no way out. And so we go to the one, the only one, and we humbly ask, we beg in one sense for forgiveness to pay off this debt.

[18:46] To be poor in spirit is in one word to be humble. Isn't that interesting where Jesus starts this manifesto?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the humble. Blessed are those who really see their actual condition before God. And so we started by asking what does it mean to be poor in spirit?

The answer is to be humble in light of your spiritual bankruptcy before God. To admit it. I've accrued a debt that I can't pay and it's a debt against God.

I am completely and utterly dependent on the generosity of God utterly to pay off the sin debt. It's not easy to talk about debts is it?

Not easy. Especially this debt. The second question what gets in the way of you humbly declaring your spiritual bankruptcy what gets in the way of that?

[20:02] Well something gets in the way of that. And I just want to point to this one thing. It's failing to use the true measure of what spiritual poverty is.

We tend to prop ourselves up by our own self righteousness. You know what I'm talking about. In order to keep us from seeing how sinful we really are, what we do is measure ourselves against people that we know are worse sinners than us.

We prop ourselves by comparing ourselves measuring ourselves against those who are in more dire straits than we are or that we think are. Kind of goes like this.

Hey, you know, I know I'm not perfect, but at least I didn't go cheating on my wife like that guy did. Seriously. Just propping yourself up. Or remember you know who?

At least I wasn't skimming off my company's bottom line like he was. I'm not that bad. I mean, I get angry from one at a time, but man, I don't light my kids up verbally like that person does.

[21:23] It's classic self-righteousness. Classic. It's pride incarnate. It's pride in us. It's the opposite of spiritual poverty.

It's the opposite of being poor in spirit. It's propping yourself up with your own self-righteousness. Making you feel yourself better in light of this person's problems.

Now, what you need to realize is that when we do this, we actually rack up more debt. because when we sinfully judge in our pride like that, trying to cover over our spiritual debt, we're just taking on more spiritual debt.

We're just proving the point that we are spiritually bankrupt. You guys feeling this? I've been living with this all week.

Oh, and it gets good. Hang on. when we measure ourselves against others, we're using the wrong measuring line.

[22:39] What you need to do, you do need to measure yourself, but you need to use the right measuring line. And the right measuring line to compare yourself to is the objective, unchanging standard of God's holiness as he's revealed in his law, the Bible.

That's our measuring line. And Jesus goes right there. In Matthew 5, 21 through 22, in this section where Jesus talks about, you've heard it said this way, but I say, let's just clarify what the intent of the law is.

In Matthew 5, 21 through 22, we read this. You've heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder and whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.

And those of us are like, whoo, oh man, I haven't murdered. I'm not liable to judgment. Whoo. And then we read the but. But I say to you that everyone who's angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

There's the measuring line. There it is. It's not measuring against each other. Jesus is squaring us against his word. And look what he says.

[23:58] Whoever insults his brother will be liable to care. Do you know how many times I've insulted my brother, Scott? I don't, I can't, I don't know where to start. And then we read, and whoever says you fool to someone else will be liable to the hell of fire.

Are you feeling the measuring line of God's holy law? And what it exposes in us is our bankruptcy. It proves that I am a lawbreaker. Jesus goes on, if you're walking clean there, no problems with murder or getting angry, next thing that Jesus talks about is lust.

You've heard that it was said, you shall not commit murder, but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. What a measuring line is that?

It shows that every one of us comes up way short. We're all living under the poverty line. What keeps us from declaring our spiritual bankruptcy is our self-righteous pride.

[25:16] That's what it is. what keeps us from seeing us as we really are is our pride. And what God uses his word for is to expose it, expose our sin.

We learn at different places in the Bible, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

And so when we measure ourselves against other people, do you know what?

There's no blessing there. There's no blessing there. There's only curse there. But when we measure ourselves up against God's holy word, his law, we start to see ourselves for who we are. We start to humble ourselves and say, oh yeah, that's true. Help me! There's where we meet grace. The poor in spirit humbly declare that their spiritual bankruptcy bankruptcy be.

They are spiritually bankrupt. Because they've honestly come to God's law and come to the conclusion that they need to come to and say, yes, I'm a sinner. I get angry, sinfully angry.

[26:31] I've lusted and it's wrong. The law exposes us as law breakers, as sinners. sinners. It's all by design.

Just kind of on a side note, the Apostle Paul spends some time in Galatians 3 and Romans 7 talking about the role of the law. And he says, the law of God is good.

But he also says, the law doesn't save you. It can't. And so we ask, well, what's it for? And then he says to us, it's to expose your sin.

It's to make your sin utterly sinful. It's to show you how sinful you are so that you realize your need for the Savior. The law leads us by the hand to the Savior.

It shows us our spiritual bankruptcy. It exposes our need to benefit from God's generosity that he has provided for us in Jesus. Jesus.

[27:43] Jesus is God's debt relief program for the spiritually bankrupt. Which brings us to the third question.

So what gets in the way of declaring spiritual bankruptcy? Our pride. Our pride. But we need good news, don't we? We need good news.

What's the good news for the poor in spirit? What's the good news for those who declared spiritual bankruptcy? What is the good news? Because you know what? I know I want to hear it again.

Does anybody in the room want to hear it? Do you know what I was lying in my bed last night doing? I was praising my God for forgiving me my debt in Jesus.

Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. The promised blessing for the spiritually bankrupt is right here in Matthew 5.3.

[28:50] Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. God promises the kingdom to the poor in spirit.

God promises to those who humble themselves and declare spiritual bankruptcy He promises blessing. We have a generous God.

The God of the Bible is a generous God. We read it I started this service in Psalm 103. He is a God who forgives. He loves to forgive.

He loves to cancel debts. The theirs of Matthew 5.3 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Talking about the poor in spirit. For theirs blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Theirs and only theirs.

[29:52] Check this out. You ready? If we gathered all of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven in Kenosha and brought them right here to library square do you know what would be true of everyone?

They're poor in spirit. They've declared spiritual bankruptcy. It's required. You can't get into the kingdom of heaven without it. You've got to recognize first and foremost your need your spiritual debt that you owe and cannot pay.

To them belong the citizens of heaven. But those who populate the kingdom of heaven are not just spiritual beggars. They are those who have been forgiven of their great debt.

What is God's debt relief program? It's not a program. It's a person. It's Jesus. Man, Jesus is awesome!

So, here we are at the beginning of Matthew and he's just starting on his manifesto. If we fast forward through the book of Matthew, go right ahead. Matthew chapter 20 if you want to turn there.

[31:05] Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and he's cruising with his disciples and his disciples are freaks. It's going to be really encouraging. They don't get it. They make mistakes. It's like that's me. I get it. They're kind of in an argument of who's the greatest.

Actually, James and John's mama goes to Jesus and say, hey, Jesus, can you reserve the best spots next to you in the kingdom for my sons? Can you do that for me?

The other disciples hear about it and they freak out. And so Jesus takes the opportunity. He takes the opportunity to talk about greatness in the kingdom. In chapter 20, verse 26, he says this, whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

The kingdom is upside down. It turns everything upside down. But what I want you to see is what he says in verse 28. whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

26. And then he says, the son of man, referring to himself, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve. How?

[32:14] To give his life as a ransom for many. There it is. There's your good news, debtor. There's the payment.

Ransom is a payment. Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for the poor in spirit, for the spiritually bankrupt.

He came to pay that which none of us could pay. He took on and paid our years of sin debt that have accumulated against us.

He paid it all. And that's the good news. He gave his life as a full payment for the sin debt of the poor in spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Colossians 2, 13 and 14, get at it this way. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son, which is awesome.

[33:19] We're under the reign of Jesus, right? But then you read 14 and then it like glows in awesomeness. Transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom the son, Jesus, in whom we have redemption.

That's payment language. Purchase language. In whom we have redemption. The forgiveness of our sins. Do you know what's amazing about a kingdom citizen?

We go through life with all of our debt paid. Done. Past. Done. Present debt.

Done. Future debt. Paid in full. Do you know how it's paid in full? Paid with Jesus' blood. It's paid that way.

I didn't pay my debt. You can't pay your debt. God paid your debt. Our generous God. And he paid it through the blood of Jesus.

[34:29] All morning long I've been like, I don't have a good memory. So like I remember the first couple kind of words of a song and then I'm done. But I've been singing Jesus paid it all.

All to him I owe. Then I forget the rest of it. So I just start again. Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe.

Sin had left a bitter stain. He, what? I remember, washed it white as snow. Oh man. Forgiven. Paid it all.

That's the blessedness of being poor in spirit. Your debt is paid. You're a citizen of the kingdom.

Done. Jesus paid it all. So what is the good news to the spiritually bankrupt?

[35:42] God is a generous God. And in Jesus he pays it all. I'm going to wrap up by asking a question and then making, calling you to something.

Okay. have you declared spiritual bankruptcy to God?

Have you? Have you recognized that all that sin that's piled up against you is piled up like debt and you can't pay it yourself?

You don't got it. Your only option is bankruptcy. Have you gone to God with that? Have you? Have you? If you haven't, go.

Tell him, I don't got it. Will you be generous and forgive me? And the God of the Bible always says yes. He always says yes.

[36:49] In Christ Jesus, he says yes. Humble yourself. Admit you're spiritually bankrupt. The second thing I want to say is for those of us who have already declared spiritual bankruptcy, bankruptcy is something you never forget.

Never forget yours. Never forget the generous God who paid it in full through the blood of Jesus. Never forget it. Rejoice in it. Sometimes it's hard to rejoice in.

Because to rejoice in it you've got to remember the debtor you were. But it always leads to the generous God we have. It always leads to the blood that was spent for you.

And you are fully forgiven. Fully forgiven. Rejoice. Do what I did last night. Lie in your bed rejoicing. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

I'm one. I'm one. third thing I want to say are to my brothers and sisters in Christ who regularly experience what I experience and that is a past creditor who comes knocking.

[38:06] Past sin. Past debt. Comes knocking on your door and they're like remember what you did 15 years ago? Do you remember that? Do you know what happens?

You know when the creditor comes knocking. Christian. And they want to remind you of past sin. Do you know what you do when you open the door? Jesus paid it all.

All to him. I slammed the door in his face. Man. Get out of here. That's what you do. The last thing I want to say is this.

The last thing I want to say is this. Fellow beggars. Fellow declarers of bankruptcy.

Whether you are loaded with the world's goods now or whether you are broke. You got nothing. Maybe you got letters of overdraft statements on your kitchen counter.

[39:16] Regardless of what you got. We're all spiritual debtors. It's an even playing ground for us.

So look around. We're all debtors to God. We're all debtors and we've all had it paid in full. There is no room for pride in this room.

None. No room to think you're better than someone else because you've got piles of money. No room. And if you don't have any money, don't think less of yourself.

Because we're all, we're all forgiven much. We're all forgiven much. God. God. God. God. God. The prized character trait of the kingdom of heaven is where Jesus starts.

To be poor in spirit. To be humble. God delights in that. He doesn't call us to self-centered pride.

The selfie kingdom. What He does call us to is a God dependent humility.

[40:24] We will always be completely and utterly dependent on the generosity of God. And he's made it known in Jesus. Paid in full, brothers and sisters.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Let me pray. Lord Jesus, we are so grateful. We know you're at the right hand of the Father right now. We know it.

You are a risen King. Thank you for shedding your blood for us. Thank you for paying it in full.

Thank you, God, that we are blessed, that we are citizens of your kingdom. God, we thank you so much.

Lord, would you do a work in us as a people where we just rejoice again and again in the generosity of our God through the payment of our sin debt through the blood of Jesus.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Jesus, you paid it all. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen.