

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

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Date: 22 September 2024

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[0 : 00] If you'd open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, we're going to be looking at the Beatitudes for the next two months.

And so I'd like to read for you Matthew 5. We'll just go 1 through 16. Hear God's Word. Seeing the crowds, He, Jesus, went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[1 : 10] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

Lord, it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand.

And it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. May God bless the hearing of his word.

This morning, we begin a sermon series in the Beatitudes. So we're going to be in here for the next couple months. And the Beatitudes are at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. In the Gospel of Matthew, if you're not familiar with it, it's basically a biography about Jesus, God with us, the King. And so we learn early, like in chapter 3, Jesus is baptized by J.T.B., John the Baptist. And then in chapter 4, Jesus is tempted by the devil.

[2 : 21] And he responds every time by quoting God's word. He starts his public ministry. He starts gathering his disciples. And here he sits on a mountainside and preaches what is likely the greatest sermon ever preached.

It is his inaugural address as Emmanuel, the King. It is his kingdom manifesto.

And in this sermon, he moves from the character of his citizens to the conduct of his citizens. And we're going to be focusing for the next two months on the character of his citizens right out of the Beatitudes.

He's very interested in helping us think about who we are as his citizens. And from there, we live out kingdom conduct.

You can ask the question, why? Why are we doing this? Why are we going to focus two months of our lives as a church on the Beatitudes, focusing on the character of Christ's kingdom citizens at this time?

[3 : 45] Well, there's something else going on in our nation at this time. We're going to be in the middle of a contentious presidential election. And the likelihood of you being influenced by that election is high.

That you would form your identity functionally from what you're hearing day in and day out through the election. That you will be affected emotionally, internally by what you're seeing and hearing. So, I want to love you through this election cycle. And I want to not just remind you that you are a citizen of the kingdom, brother, sister.

But citizens of the kingdom have a particular posture of heart. A character that is spelt out by Jesus, our King, here in the Beatitudes.

Now, when you read, blessed are the poor in spirit, I'm guessing you're thinking something.

[4 : 55] You're like, well, that sounds interesting. I'm not wanting to really sign up for poor or poverty, though. What I want to help you to see is this poverty of spirit.

It's not something so much you do. It's something you are. It's a spiritual bankruptcy that we all need to declare on a daily basis.

And there is great blessing in that. And so this morning, we're going to tackle the first of these eight Beatitudes.

And there's a reason why this is the first one. Jesus is brilliant in leading off with this. We're going to get into not just blessed are the poor, but we're going to look next week.

Blessed are those who mourn, who are meek, hunger, and thirst after righteousness, who are merciful, pure in heart. They're peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted. And it all depends on this first one.

[6 : 05] Blessed are the poor in spirit. These are eight distinct character traits of every citizen of the kingdom.

So here's how we're going to proceed this morning with this first one. I'm going to ask four questions and answer them. Question number one is, hey, what's the biblical landscape that we're in right now?

Just kind of a general framing to get your bearings. And then we're going to kind of dig into 5.3, this actual Beatitude. Who are the poor in spirit? What does that mean?

The third question is going to be, why is being poor in spirit first? And then fourth, how do we do the poor in spirit thing?

What does that look like on a daily basis? How do we do that? So in light of that, let's turn to this first question.

[7 : 06] What is this biblical landscape of the Sermon on the Mount? If you're showing up to a city for the first time, you want to get your bearings, right? You want to know where you are.

And so when we turn to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, I just want to give you an overall flow of the sermon. Jesus isn't preaching an enumerated sermon.

In other words, he's not making four points, and we don't see him saying, point one, and then moving on to point two, point three, point four. But there is this definitive movement in the sermon. Let me help you see it. In chapter 5, 3 through 16, Jesus talks about character through the Beatitudes. This is who we are as citizens of the kingdom.

This is what marks us. And then in chapter 5, verses 17 through chapter 7, verse 27, he focuses on the conduct of citizens of his kingdom.

[8 : 11] And he spells that out through obeying particular commands he issues. And so the movement on the Sermon on the Mount starts with character and moves to conduct.

And what I want to help you to see, it's all about God's grace. All of these blessings, blessed be, blessed, blessed, that is declarations of God's grace on this particular citizen of the kingdom.

God's grace changing character. And as a result, God's grace changing conduct. So first and foremost, I want to help you to see this feature of this landscape, this sermon.

It's really about grace. Changing our characters and changing our conduct. We're going to be focusing on character. Now there's some other features about this sermon.

What Martin Lloyd-Jones talks about, the spiritually logical sequence of this particular sermon. First, there's an order.

[9 : 21] There's a reason why he starts in pouring the Spirit and ends in, blessed are the persecuted. But there's some other things I want you to notice. All eight of these Beatitudes, all eight are to characterize each of us.

It's like the fruit of the Spirit, where all nine fruit of the Spirit are to characterize each Christian. All eight of these character traits in the Beatitudes are to mark every one of us. Furthermore, there is this already not yet aspect to the Beatitudes.

You can see it. In chapter 5, verse 3, you see, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And you look down at verse 10, it says, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

That same phrase, that same promise is used at the beginning and the end of the Beatitudes, and it bookends it. It's an inclusio. It helps you to think it's being framed by that. So, all of these Beatitudes are, there's this like now component to it.

It's now. The kingdom is ours now. But as you look at the six Beatitudes inside those, all the promises are future. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

[10:36] Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. And so there is this future orientation. There's this already and not yet, which means this. Yes, we're going to experience blessings of the kingdom now, but in part.

We're going to experience the fullness of God's blessing then, when Jesus comes back. There's an already not yet dimension to the Beatitudes.

One last thing. I just want you to see the significance of chapter 5, verse 1 and 2. Seeing the crowns, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught.

This is Emmanuel. This God-man would die and be raised from the dead. He's reigning on high right now. He's the Psalm 2 son on the throne.

And here he sat down. It's the posture of a rabbi. And his disciples come around him. Here's how I want you to think about the next two months.

[11:45] Think about Jesus sitting down. And we, his disciples, Sunday after Sunday, are coming around him to hear what he says. And not just hear it so we can hear it, but we hear it so we can live it.

So there's some biblical landscape for you to get your bearings as we now head into the first Beatitude. So let's ask this next question.

Who are these poor in spirit people? What does that mean? Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Well, before I tell you what poor in spirit means, whatever that means, they're blessed. And that word blessed shows up in this passage nine times in short space, which means Jesus is wanting to get your attention.

Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed. Now there's some other spots of blessed in your Bible. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

[13:11] We just heard Les read it in Psalm 2. The first one was Psalm 1-1, by the way. Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Psalm 119, 1 and 2. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole hearts.

Blessed, blessed, blessed. Blessed. And then you get into Jeremiah 17, 5, that says, Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who makes flesh his strength. And then verse 7.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. The word blessed gets used in your Bible in a variety of ways.

People bless God, but God blesses people. It's a way of talking about approval. So when we hear Jesus say blessed repeatedly, he's talking about people in whom God has blessed.

[14:17] God has graced. God has approved, not by any merit on their own, but by a sheer act of grace.

All this blessedness, all this blessedness, at the heart of it is God's grace. Undeserved, unmerited grace.

These kingdom citizens are citizens who've been delivered out of the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son, the saving reign of Jesus, by the grace of God.

This is not some blessing that we earn. This is not some blessing that happens as a result of our obedience.

It's by God's grace and God's grace alone. And so when we read blessed are the poor in spirit, do you know what's being said? Graced are those who've declared spiritual bankruptcy.

[15:30] Graced of God. Happy are those who've experienced the undeserved approval of God in their spiritual bankruptcy.

So let's talk about what this poor in spirit means. The poverty here is not a material poverty. We know that because we see very clearly it's a poor in spirit.

Not in checking account. And then we read this poor in spirit. It's not the Holy Spirit being referenced here.

This is your inner man being referenced. Who you are on the inside. Your nature. Blessed are those who are unresourced in the whole in their inner beings.

Do you know what the opposite of the poor in spirit is? You may say, well, it's being rich in spirit.

Well, that's getting at it. The English phrase that would get at it is being full of yourself.

[16:42] That's what the opposite of being poor in spirit is. It's pride. It's arrogance. It's putting yourself first. It's living as if you're the controlling center of your own kingdom.

And so when we talk about poor in spirit, we're talking about humility. There's this passage in Luke 18.

In Jesus' teaching. I'm going to read it to you. There's two people in this parable. In your mind as I'm reading it, think which one is full of themselves and which one is poor in spirit.

You ready? Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. This is Jesus speaking.

Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee was a religious professional. The tax collector would have been seen as a Jewish sellout.

[17:51] The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus. God, I thank you that I am not like other men. Extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. Amen. Amen. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Which one? Who's full of himself? Who's poor in spirit? Jesus says this. I tell you, this man, this tax collector, went down to his house justified.

Declared righteous in his sight. Rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, Pharisee. But the one who humbles himself will be exalted, tax collector.

What we're talking about when it comes to poor in spirit, what does it mean to be poor in spirit? It means to be humble towards God. To be able to say at any given time, oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

[19:13] It's a posture. It's who we are. It's a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy to God.

If you've ever been through bankruptcy, it's humiliating. You've got to admit that you have just far exceeded anything that you could afford.

You've built up all this debt and you have no resources to get, even come close to paying it off. So you need financial legal protection. It's desperation.

It's like, this is the only thing I can do. That's what it means to be poor in spirit in relationship to God. When you consider your own sins, when you consider your sin debt that you're carrying, of all the sins that you've committed for all of your life, and you realize you've dug yourself into a sin debt hole that there's no getting out of.

[20:22] You can't obey your way out of that. And then when you realize, too, in addition to, I can't get out of this, all of that carries a consequence.

Eternal punishment. Because it's against God. Then you start feeling the weight. You start feeling the weight of your debt.

Your need. That's why the tax collector said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. They understood. In that parable, they were spiritually bankrupt.

There's this song. It's a hymn. Rock of Ages. Stanza three. Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling.

Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for grace. Foul, I too, the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die.

[21:26] Do you know what that is? That's a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy. That's sung. We sing it together. Declaring our spiritual bankruptcy.

There's nothing that we bring to this salvation. We have no spiritual resources before a living God, holy God.

We're in huge spiritual debt. Romans 3.23 says it this way. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Do you know what this means?

What, is there 8 billion people on the planet right now? Everybody is spiritually bankrupt. Everyone. They are spiritually indebted.

They can't get their way out. Find their way out. Do you know what separates citizens of the kingdom from everybody else? We declare it. We acknowledge before God that we are spiritually indebted to Him and we can't pay it.

[22 : 39] Blessed are the poor in spirit. Give me that promise. Tell me the promise. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed.

Blessed. Graced of God. Are those who have declared spiritual bankruptcy. For. Promise. Theirs is. Promise. The kingdom of heaven.

The saving reign of God. Those who have been brought under the kingship. Saving, gracious kingship of Jesus. Tell me about it. Here's what that means.

If you have acknowledged your spiritual bankruptcy, your depravity to Him, to God. Do you know what He does? Welcome to the kingdom.

You're the one I was looking for. Come on in. In fact, anyone who confesses their spiritual bankruptcy to Jesus will be completely forgiven of all of their sin debt.

[23 : 54] Can I just read you two passages? Listen to this. This is Ephesians 1, verse 7. In Him, Jesus, we have redemption through His blood.

We've been purchased from slavery, from debt. In Him, we have redemption through His blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace.

The riches of His grace. And then there's this. 2 Corinthians 8, 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor. He took on your sin penalty. So that you, who were poor, under the condemnation of sin, by His poverty might become rich.

What a Savior. What a King. This one speaking these words would go to His death willingly, innocently, to die for your sin and my sin so that He could forgive us.

[25 : 08] And then He was raised so that we could live for Him. Debt free! Do you know what being freed of all of your sin debt, do you know what kind of state that is?

That's a blessed state. That's a by God's grace state. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed, happy are the spiritually bankrupt who've declared it, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. By the way, no one can enter the kingdom of the beloved Son without first declaring spiritual bankruptcy.

There's no one in the kingdom who's full of themselves. Only those who declare this spiritual bankruptcy.

Those who are living in reality. Question three. Why is poor in spirit the first on the list? Why is this the first beatitude?

[26 : 29] I mean, it's not like Jesus just threw these beatitudes together. He purposefully placed poor in spirit in pole position.

Why did He do it? Well, as I just mentioned, you cannot enter Christ's kingdom without first declaring spiritual bankruptcy. So, if you want to come into the kingdom, you need to declare that to Jesus.

And He says, Oh, you're the one I've been looking for. Come on in. I've paid for your sin. Here's the riches of my grace. But this is first in another way as well.

Do you think Do you think He will mourn your sin if you're not first poor in spirit? You won't.

You won't mourn your sin if you're not first poor in spirit. If you don't think you've got an eternal nature problem, you're not going to mourn your sin. You think you're going to be meek and gentle towards others if you're not poor in spirit?

[27 : 43] Hunger and thirst after righteousness, mercy, pure in heart. Do you think you're going to want to make peace with others if you're not first poor in spirit?

People who are full of themselves aren't going to make peace with others. Do you think you'll actually be willing to suffer for Jesus if you're not first poor in spirit?

So this is first for a reason. This is humility. This is acknowledging the reality that Jesus Christ is the controlling center of all things and my rightful place is orbiting him.

sin. James 4.6 and 1 Peter 5.5.

They both quote Proverbs chapter 3. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. God opposes those who are full of themselves but boy does he give grace to those who declare spiritual

bankruptcy.

[29 : 19] I don't know about you but I am convinced of my spiritual bankruptcy.

You may not want to see yourself as poor. The reality is you are. You are. You are.

You are. You are. You are. Spiritually bankrupt. There is a verse that I was introduced to maybe 25 years ago by a mentor and it's one of those verses that once you hide it in your heart it becomes one of those verses that help you again and again.

Do you know who catches God's eye? Isaiah 66 verse 2 the second half of it we read this.

This is God speaking. This is the one to whom I will look. This is the one who catches my gracious eye. He who is humble contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

[30 : 38] Do you know what is of highest value in the kingdom? Poverty of spirit. It's not like the world we live in is it?

Why does God delight in poverty of spirit? Why does he put this first? Why is he putting such a premium on it? I mean is is God just a control freak?

Is he just power hungry? Or maybe on the other side maybe maybe he has a self-esteem problem and he commands people to humble themselves so that they can build up his self-esteem.

It's utterly ridiculous. He doesn't require our humility because of some weakness on his part. John Piper makes this argument.

He asks it this way. Do you know who the greatest worshiper of God is? God is the greatest worshiper of God. He's fully convinced and delights in his own unmatched worth and he wants even requires us to know and delight in his unsurpassed worth and you know how you get there?

[32 : 02] He declares spiritual bankruptcy. Why does God delight in our humility towards him? Because it's right!

You've heard me use this illustration 12 million times but it's so helpful let me use it again. Prior to Nicholas Copernicus in the 16th century most people thought that the sun orbited the earth in some kind of geocentric solar system but we all know now that they were mistaken because what Nicholas Copernicus realized through observation is that we live in a heliocentric solar system. All the planets orbit the sun not the other way around. So before Mr. Copernicus everybody thought they were living in reality but they weren't! Humility poverty of spirit is realizing that the world does not orbit you.

God does not exist for you but you exist for God. He's at the glorious center of all things and that's why he prioritizes being poor in spirit.

It's living in reality. Humility is living in reality the way things really are. Now if you think that being a Christian means giving Jesus parts and pieces of your life you're probably full of yourself.

[33 : 53] Jesus doesn't want parts and pieces to your life. Who he is demands requires all of it. All of it.

And the way to respond to Jesus is to deny yourself take up your cross and follow him. another way of declaring spiritual bankruptcy. Why is this first?

Because it all starts with humility. It is the first and foremost characteristic of being a citizen of the kingdom and man does it fly in the face of our culture.

Last question and I'm going to hustle through it. How do we do this poor in spirit thing? How does that what do I need to do today to do that?

Well I hope at this point you're realizing that being poor in spirit is not so much what you do it's acknowledging who you are. Your real state of being before God.

[35 : 03] It's seeing yourself as God sees you in desperate need of the riches of his grace on a daily basis. let me just remind you once again of this 2nd Corinthians 8-9 passage for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Jesus who is sinless took on sin so that you who are sinful can become rich in the grace of salvation. It is beautiful.

people if you're a non-Christian in the room you're very aware of your sin you don't like talking about or thinking about what you've done in your past and you've never declared your spiritual bankruptcy to Jesus himself the risen king who's alive today do you know how you enter the kingdom?

You tell him Lord Jesus I am incredibly indebted and worthy of hell have mercy on me a sinner and that catches his eye and at that moment if that is meant you are justified in his sight forgiven of all your sin and declared righteous with the righteousness he achieved on earth you're delivered from

the domain of darkness and you're transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son welcome to the kingdom if you haven't done that today's the day no need to wait you go to the risen king and you just tell him you're spiritually bankrupt hey will you pour out your riches of grace on me and he'd be like yes welcome but what happens if you're a

Christian what happens if you declared your spiritual bankruptcy to Jesus ten years ago you've already been welcomed into his kingdom what do you do you declare spiritual bankruptcy daily that's what you do you acknowledge that in and of yourself you are powerless to live for Jesus on any given day that's how you start your day with a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy to the king of grace who is loaded with the riches of grace we are in continual need of God's grace hey if you're a Christian in the room are you comparing yourself to other people and thinking yourself pretty cool you're more like the Pharisee in Luke 18 than the tax collector in Luke 18 we want to be like the tax collector in Luke 18 oh God have mercy on us sinners saved by grace in constant need of God's grace one of the important things you need to know

[38 : 44] Christian citizen of the kingdom you will never outgrow this you never outgrow the need to be humble we never outgrow our poverty of spirit it's who we are dependent creatures on our creator let me give you two suggestions though to help pray every morning before the day starts a declaration of spiritual poverty to your king just tell him start the day that way Lord I can't start without acknowledging my huge need for you you're the vine I'm the branch apart from you I can do nothing and learn to depend on his word tremble at his word feast on his word be given strength by his word on a daily basis because no one can live on bread alone but only on the word of

God if you are full of yourself being poor in spirit and the seven following beatitudes they will have no interest to you you won't want it you can't grow in God's grace without seeing your own spiritual poverty in admitting it but when you do God opposes the proud but boy does he give grace to the humble we looked at four questions I've tried to give you four answers whether you're brand new to the kingdom or have been a citizen for years we never outgrow our poverty of spirit it is the thing that we all share in common a deep deep ongoing need for our king this is the way of his kingdom this is kingdom normal to be poor in spirit it's what catches

God's eye one more note this poverty of spirit is going to come across weak weak to the world and you know why because it is we're not full of ourselves no we want to be full of the grace that's poured out daily by our risen king and so we're glad to declare spiritual poverty day after day night after night we're glad to live in the reality of Jesus being the controlling center of our lives when was the last time you declared to your risen king that you are spiritual pauper let me let me pray risen Lord Jesus we gather around to you in your words and we receive this blessed are the poor in spirit for yours is the kingdom of heaven oh God we receive that and say thank you thank you for reminding us of who we are we won't buck that we won't arch underneath that but rather we will humble ourselves to that and confess to you once again we need you we need only what you give we ask that once again you will give us the grace today to be faithful to you to your name we pray amen