

AM Matthew 5:1-12

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[0 : 00] We're going to read this first section of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. It's on page 976 in the Church Bible. Matthew 5 and verses 1 to 12.

Seeing the crowds, he 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.

[1 : 29] Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Amen. May God bless his word to us all. Let us pray. We give thanks, O God, that in your love you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

We thank you for the light and the liberty of your glorious gospel, made known in all the earth and precious to many generations before us.

We thank you for your Holy Spirit's work in bringing us into the knowledge of the gospel for all heavenly blessings, such as election and sanctification and assurance and the hope of glory.

We give you thanks too, O Lord, that you have not only provided for our spiritual and immortal souls, but you have provided for our mortal bodies too.

[2 : 57] We can say with the psalmist that you have opened your hand and supplied our every need. And so we thank you for the wonderful world that you have made and for this fair land in which you have placed us.

We thank you for the material comforts which are our daily portion. We thank you for the gift of human love and for the fellowship of others.

We thank you for the innocent pleasures of this life. We praise you for opportunities to serve you and to serve one another.

We thank you also for those times of adversity in which we can learn so much. We thank you for the comfort that we've received in sorrow.

And so for all your bountiful provision, O Lord, accept our thanksgiving through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Guide us, Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit as we remember the obligation that you have put upon us as kings and priests with Christ to pray and intercede for all sorts and conditions of men and women.

- [4 : 32] And so we pray for your church. We pray for the ministers that you have placed in your church and to whom you have given the dispensation of the ministry of the word.
- Lord, we pray that they would be faithful in their life as well as in their doctrine.
- That they might feed the flock of God and that they would gather and bring back those sheep that have wandered far from the fold.
- We pray that your saints, your redeemed ones may love and humbly serve Jesus Christ in their homes and in their work and in their recreations and amongst their neighbours and that in all things they will rejoice to do your will.
- We pray for our government. We pray for our king and for all who are in authority. And we ask that you the king of kings and lord of lords would govern their hearts and minds that they might so fulfil their duties and responsibilities in office that the Christian faith might be purely maintained in our land.
- [6 : 09] We pray for the reformation of morals and ethics. We pray that work would be respected and honoured. We pray that crime in all its shape and forms would be punished in accordance with your word.
- We remember the nations of this world in all their turmoil. and we commend to you those who are suffering. Remember all who suffer O Lord through afflictions such as war or terrorism or natural disasters or persecution or ignorance or enslavement.
- we pray that you would strengthen the hands of all who seek by honest and righteous means to help such.
- and to those who are utterly destitute of all human help we pray that you would give them the comfort of your presence and where the darkness is deepest and the need is greatest we pray that you would uphold all those who take your message of light into such places.
- Remember this town of Dumfries remember this congregation of the Free Church of Scotland remember our families and friends our neighbours remember the visitors or strangers within our gates we pray that the fruit of the Holy Spirit that love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control might increase and abound in and among us and we bring before you the sick and the suffering the dying the mourning remember also the widow and the orphan the lonely the poor the outcast the depressed those who are worried the heartbroken the despairing especially such as may be known to ourselves we pray that you would give them patience and faith and consolation and hope in Jesus Christ and we pray that your divine assistance would be given to all those who seek to serve and minister to such friends and we pray oh Lord for the propagation of the gospel we remember the camp at Oswestry to take place in the summer we would pray that your spirit would be at work in the hearts of those who will attend and that you will be with the leaders
- [9 : 38] Andrew and Kirsteen we pray that their colleagues might also know your help wisdom strength blessing but on a wider scale we would pray for the propagation of the gospel across the nations of this world we pray for the conversion of the Jewish people and we pray for the increase of your kingdom among all nations tribes languages peoples and oh Lord since your Holy Spirit assures us that you are our merciful father who so loves us as his children through Jesus Christ that you will not deny us anything that we ask for in his name which is according to your will therefore to you oh father with the son and the holy spirit we would say be all honor and glory world without end forever and ever amen before we because the

Lord is just and good he shows his paths to all who stray he guides the meek in what is right and teaches them his holy way may those words be the prayer and attitude of our hearts as we come now to consider God's word from Matthew's gospel chapter 5 the passage that we read a few moments ago I want to draw your attention to the Lord's sermon on the mount and particularly to the first three verses of this well-known passage this passage that contains the beatitudes these words or statements of divine blessing the Bible is a book of blessing it's good to take a backward step and take a long large view of scripture this is what the

Bible is about it is about the blessing of God and so as we think of such a statement and such a grand theme that covers the whole of scripture from start to finish it would be wrong I suppose to think that a beatitude is something that was invented or coined by the Lord Jesus here in this portion of the Bible in the Sermon on the Mount which is at the beginning of the New Testament scriptures the beatitude isn't a new thing that Jesus in a moment of inspiration thought of and included at the beginning of the sermon but if we think of the rich background to the Lord's statements of blessedness we will see that this is a theme that runs right through the

Old Testament scriptures if we turn to the book of Psalms for example we shall see that many of them begin with a beatitude think of the first Psalm which is like the gateway to the whole of the book of the Psalms how does it begin with a statement of blessedness with a beatitude 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 again if we turn a few pages to Psalm 32 we shall see that it begins not with one beatitude but with two beatitudes blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven whose sin is covered blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit so the beatitude this statement of blessedness is something which would have been very familiar to any reader of the

Old Testament and therefore we can assume to many of those who were in that great multitude to whom the Lord preached this sermon on the mount recorded in Matthew chapter 5 but what does it mean to be blessed who is the blessed man well let's think about blessing let's also think about the opposite cursing for a few moments because these two words blessing and cursing are closely connected to God's covenant in the Old Testament in Old Testament times God entered into a covenant with his people and according to the Lord's promise and the commitment that he made in that covenant those who were faithful to him would experience his blessing his divine blessing upon their lives but also those who turned away from him would experience his curse in various forms of judgment let me illustrate the point by directing you to

[15 : 51] God's covenant that he made with Abram in Genesis chapter 12 and verses 2 to 3 when God called Abram he promised to bless Abram to make him a blessing to others to bless those who blessed him and to bring blessing to the whole earth through Abram and then fast forward a few hundred years of Old Testament history to the period after the exodus from Egypt and to the covenant that God made with his people through Moses at Mount Sinai in the wilderness there God's blessing is even more clear and if you turn to Deuteronomy chapter 28 and verses 1 to 14 you will see that in this passage of the

Old Testament law given by Moses all of God's promises to bless his people in their obedience to his covenant word are set out for us in these first 14 verses of chapter 28 of Deuteronomy and then in verses 15 to 68 we are given a very detailed record of the curses and the judgments that would follow upon the people's disobedience to God's covenant demands and by the way you might find it helpful if I say that this chapter of the Bible chapter 28 of Deuteronomy is a most important chapter of scripture because it's like a key that unlocks the understanding and the interpretation of virtually the whole of the

Old Testament scriptures so as you read through the various books of Samuel and Kings and Chronicles and then as you go through the various prophets the major prophets the minor prophets of the Old Testament you may at times find it puzzling what's going on and why are things the way they are described in these historical or prophetic books why are there times of blessing why are there times of judgment judgments that led to the exile first of the northern kingdom to Assyria and then of the southern kingdom to Babylon and then the return of the remnant from Babylon back to the land of Judah and the rebuilding of the how do you make sense of all of this keep your thumb keep your finger in Deuteronomy chapter 28 and you will see that God is faithful to his word his word of promise in the covenant and his word of judgment in the covenant but what is the blessing well to boil it down and put it in a nutshell it is fellowship with God that is at the very heart of the blessing fellowship with God is the fulfillment and the experience of the covenant promise which says

I will be your God and you will be my people the blessing in summary form is having a right relationship with God and enjoying God as we should yes enjoying God as we should think of the opening chapters of the Bible think of how they speak about God giving his blessing upon everything that he had created upon every creature he made he blessed it and pronounced it to be good God made us to glorify and to enjoy him now and forever and sometimes that word blessed has been translated as divinely happy it is knowing

God not only as our creator who made us for his glory that we might enjoy him but as our redeemer who has saved us delivered us and recreated us in his image that we might have that relationship restored and even improved upon what Adam knew in the garden of Eden so now let's ask what is Jesus doing here at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount well what he is doing is taking up the scriptures and he's opening up the scriptures to the people he's expounding them and especially he's taking up some of the themes of the Psalms and the prophecy of Isaiah and he is applying them afresh to his disciples Jesus here in the Sermon on the

[21 : 56] Mount is pointing out what God's word tells us about the blessed life the blessed life so what was new or different about this teaching was not that he spoke beatitudes as we've seen beatitudes form part of the Old Testament scriptures but what the Lord Jesus Christ spoke in this sermon has to be understood against a very dark background in which for centuries the true meaning of God's word had become lost lost in a dark thick cloud of ignorance and confusion and that was because of the false teaching and the corrupt practices on the part of the clergy of that day think of the

Pharisees think of the scribes think of the teachers of the law who interacted with the Lord Jesus Christ who tried to trap him in his words who ultimately handed him over to Pilate to be crucified because of their false teaching because of their corrupt religious practices the people did not know where true happiness was to be found but before we go any further let me ask you at this point do you know where true happiness true blessedness is to be found let me put it like this what is your heart set upon what eight things do you most want to see developed in your life that you believe will bring you blessedness and true happiness if you were to make a list of the things that you believe would bring you true blessedness and happiness in your life how would your list compare with the list of the

Lord Jesus Christ here in Matthew chapter 5 and the Sermon on the Mount would they be the same or would they be very different would your list include poverty of spirit mourning for sin meekness a hunger and thirst for righteousness mercy purity of heart a peacemaking spirit a willingness to be persecuted and reviled for the sake of Jesus Christ or do you think that real blessing real happiness is to be found somewhere else oh how the word of God searches our hearts my friends it is the teaching of the

Lord Jesus Christ that all other supposed blessings things are like mirages in the desert they may appear real the sight of them may cause us to leave all and to pursue them but they are not real they promise much but they supply nothing but disappointment discontentment and frustration you see the only life that God blesses is the one that is marked by the characteristics of the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 in these eight statements of blessing we see the hallmarks of those who belong to the kingdom of

God now what do the citizens of God's kingdom look like well Christians come in a wide range of shapes and sizes they vary greatly in almost every way possible think of the personalities even in a small church like this there will be various different personalities think of our interests they differ greatly think of our social backgrounds think of the schools that we attended and the length of time that we attended those schools think of our intellectual abilities and so forth and yet according to the teaching of the New Testament in spite of all these differences we all belong to the same family and that means that we all share the same basic family likeness and family traits and these family traits are outlined for us in the

[27 : 50] Beatitudes so let's turn our attention a bit more closely to what we read in these opening Beatitudes we won't have time to look at any of them in depth except for the first one but the opening three are kind of connected together there is a logical order and flow from one to the other to the next the Lord Jesus says 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 poor in spirit mourn meek these are three of the family likenesses traits characteristics of the members of God's kingdom of the members of God's family and what's the common thread that runs through these first beatitudes in Matthew 5 surely it is this it is the realization that what a person is before God that and that alone is what he or she truly is is before God a Christian a believer is poor in spirit before God a Christian a believer mourns over his sin before God a Christian a true believer is meek the very opposite of proud and arrogant for he knows who he truly is in the sight of

God so let's look at the first which says blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven and let's be clear what Jesus is not saying he's not talking about financial poverty and he's not talking about some kind of poor or depressive condition and sometimes this beatitude is mistaken for such things and so somebody reads this blessed are the poor in spirit oh I must give up all my possessions and live a life of poverty person can give away all their wealth and yet not be poor in spirit or a person can have a bad self image or low self esteem or be introverted and suffer from a morbid outlook and yet know nothing about the poverty of spirit of which Jesus speaks here so what is being poor in spirit remember

Jesus is taking the Old Testament scriptures and like a preacher he's expounding the text he's preaching from the word so we have to use the Old Testament scriptures as our guide to help us understand what Jesus is saying and meaning here and when we do that we see that in the Old Testament the poor is almost a technical term for a particular group of people I want you to think of Psalm 34 verse 6 this poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him from all his troubles so we ask who is the poor man the poor man is someone who called upon the Lord and who was heard and saved and delivered think again of Psalm 40 verse 17 which reads as for me I am poor and needy but the

Lord takes thought for me who is speaking it is David well materially financially he wasn't without financial means and resources but yet he describes himself as poor and needy and he prays that God would remember him and come to deliver him and if we search through the scriptures we would find many many similar statements they all emphasize the point that to be poor is to be weak and helpless to be dispossessed and to lack the resources to defend and save oneself another example would be Psalm 69 verses 32 and 33 and here in this Psalm the poor or humble are the needy and the prisoners who seek God as their only refuge and salvation the verses read when the humble the poor see it see what see God saving David and delivering

David they will be glad the psalmist says you who seek God let your hearts revive for the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners who are captives so the picture in those verses and it is a metaphor the picture is of a people who could be described as the bankrupt of the world but what is really important is that's just not a description of the people they know themselves that they are in that condition before God and that's the key we are all in that condition before God but there are some who know it who know it who know that they are bankrupt before God and who therefore trust in the Lord as their only hope of protection and deliverance so much then for the Old

[34 : 34] Testament background but what does Jesus mean by poor in spirit by speaking about being poor in spirit Jesus is making it clear that he's not speaking about a lack of money or material wealth lack of money or material wealth as I said before and poverty of spirit are not to be confused although they may be related but they are not the same thing in fact material poverty may harden our hearts in pride not soften them in humility now what Jesus is speaking about here is of a person who sees his spiritual bondage and he's aware of the debt that he owes to God what's one of the petitions in the Lord's prayer forgive us our debts he knows that he is dispossessed before God and so all he can do is plead for mercy and depend upon the

Lord and on him alone and my friends let me make it ever so clear to you this morning you cannot be a Christian without this family trait being evident in your life you cannot be a Christian without poverty of spirit blessed are the poor in spirit says our Lord Jesus Christ and if you want a picture of what it means to be poor in spirit then think of the beautiful depiction of it in the parable of the prodigal son in shocking pride he left his father so self confident he was in his newfound wealth his share of the inheritance you remember the story but then when he had spent all he had he was reduced to utter poverty he would have been happy to feed his stomach with the pods that the pigs did eat but no one gave him anything and in that state we read he came to himself and in humility of spirit emptied of all self centeredness selfishness pride he came home to his father empty handed no longer full of himself but only looking for whatever the father might be pleased to give him that's what it means to be poor in spirit and that is how it is with the

Christian nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross I cling naked come to thee for dress helpless look to thee for grace foul eye to the fountain fly wash me saviour or I die so this is what it means to be poor in spirit this is what it looks like but how is this born within us I want you to turn to another passage of scripture as we draw to a close from Romans the early chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans and in those early chapters we discover that instead of being self sufficient and acceptable before God we as a human race fallen human race are by nature rebels rebels against

God we have broken God's commandments and all that we have done on the assumption that what we do will earn favour with God all that we have done simply disqualifies us for his presence and in Romans chapter 3 verse 20 it says for by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight we are guilty every part of us is sinful do you see verses 3 to 17 of Romans chapter 3 from the tongue in our head which speaks deceit all the way down to our feet which do not know the way of peace and whose paths are marked by ruin and misery our whole being is sinful and the conclusion in chapter 3 verses 10 and 12 is this none is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for

God all have turned aside together they have become worthless no one does good not even one and this isn't just Paul speaking this is the Holy Spirit speaking through his instrument the Apostle Paul this is the verdict of God this is God's indictment upon the whole human race fallen in Adam and if we take God's indictment seriously as we should and if we apply it to ourselves in the light of the coming day of judgment as we ought what will the result be well the Apostle Paul doesn't leave us in any doubt the result of taking God's indictment seriously to ourselves will be this every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be accountable to God every mouth will be shut silenced no excuses no mitigating pleas silenced guilty as charged and the whole world including ourselves stands condemned as guilty before God and we who boasted once of our sufficiency and of our achievements we who like the Pharisee and the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who stood before God and prayed thanking him that we were not like other sinners we stand there with our mouths shut silent utterly condemned ashamed and when

[41 : 54] God leads us by his spirit to see this as true of ourselves that this is the real condition that we are in before him then and only then is poverty of spirit born within our souls it's as if the scales on our eyes that once blinded us to the truth fall off and we see ourselves as God sees us as if the spell under which Satan had held us captive is broken at last and we see that our only hope is in the Lord who saves in ourselves we confess I am a poor man I am a poor woman I have no righteousness of my own to plead before the Lord I am bankrupt

I stand as a debtor before him in his court and what is our only plea mercy God have mercy upon me the sinner now you know as well as I do that this teaching isn't popular today we live in an age when we are urged on almost every hand to develop every other kind of spirit imaginable except poverty of spirit but not to have poverty of spirit will lead to spiritual ruination if you turn to the letter to the book of revelation and to the letter that John was told to write to the church in Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3 you would read some very awful words where

Jesus says to this church for you say I am rich I have prospered and I need nothing not realizing that you are wretched pitiful poor blind and naked the professing Christians in that church were in danger of being vomited out of the Lord's mouth like a drink that was neither hot nor cold having poverty of spirit is that important I should also perhaps say that for the last 50 years or so one of the big emphases in evangelical teaching has been on how to be filled with the Holy Spirit and this has been a preoccupation of many and the insistence of false teaching in connection with that subject has led to deep and bitter divisions within the

Christian church but where I ask is the emphasis on how to be spiritually emptied because our greatest need is not to be emptied our greatest need is to be emptied of self confidence self importance and self righteousness blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God is it not the sad truth that we know so little of this blessing which Christ speaks of here and which he alone gives because all too often we are so full of ourselves and of our own plans for what we believe blessing to be and where blessing is to be had and the world and its world and its guru stand up and they shout with loud voices this is the way to blessing this is the path to be divinely happy this is the secret follow me but the person who is poor in spirit is the person who has been silenced by

God and when he does speak again it is only to speak what he has learned in humility from God in Jesus Christ and so my friend if you would be rich and come into the possession of the kingdom of heaven and what a blessing that must be you must first lose all and that includes yourself your self and your self centeredness and become poor in spirit for blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven may God bless his word to us all let us pray oh God our father help us to remember the words of our

[47 : 37] Lord Jesus Christ and we pray that you would write them upon our hearts may we learn these words of the first beatitude and never forget them because they are so important we thank you that he has shown us the way to everlasting bliss and happiness he has shown us how the kingdom of heaven becomes ours oh that we might kneel and bow before you as those who know our own true poverty of spirit and say with the hymn writer thou must save and thou alone and may we receive from your hand all of the blessing that you have promised to those who are poor in spirit we ask these things for Christ's sake amen thank you