

Understanding Poverty Of Spirit

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[0 : 00] Now may the words of my mouth and meditations of all our hearts be found acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. Amen. I want you to turn in your few Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, verse 3.

And I want to begin this morning to look again at the Sermon on the Mount, simply because I feel something of the fundamental importance of it for us as a congregation.

And this sermon, which goes from chapter 5, verse 3, to the chapter 7, verse 29, something that you could read over from time to time if you would like to sort of think ahead and to get the overall picture of what's involved in this sermon.

And it begins really with the verse, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And by that verse creates its own audience, because if you want to go on any further, the essential and primary condition which you must meet is that you may be poor in spirit in order that God might bless you and give to you the kingdom of heaven.

So that's the required condition. Now, most people would automatically assume that our generation and our world has decided on other forms of blessing.

[2 : 10] And therefore, they are people who have achieved something, and there is no other sort of balance. All these Beatitudes have a balance.

Your condition, God's provision. So you're meant to go down, check off what your condition is, and then see the provision that God has made.

Now, because in our modern and sophisticated world, people are not sure whether there is any provision, they tend to take such things as the Beatitudes and make them simply a description of what we are in ourselves.

So that blessed are the people who have made it in this dog-eat-dog world. That becomes obvious to people. And blessed are those who can so handle their liquor and take their drugs that they're comforted against the worst injuries which our society can do to them.

And blessed are those who have learned the advantages of aggression because they get ahead in the world. And you can go through the whole of them and, in a sense, look at them, meditate on them, study them, and see whether, in fact, this is the world you live in or how you would adapt these to describe the world that you live in.

[3 : 52] Blessed are the poor in spirit is considered to be the Beatitude of which all the others are only taking the white light of that one Beatitude and breaking it down into its many different colors.

Poverty in spirit means mourning. It means meekness. It means hungering and thirsting. It means being merciful. It means being pure in heart. It means being a peacemaker.

And so you have that breakdown. But how do you identify in your own life whether or not this condition of poverty obtained?

Now, somebody has said recently, and this has helped me, that while Christian faith is available to everybody, not everybody wants it.

And that really is what the New Testament is full of. It doesn't expect that everybody will want it. It doesn't expect that everybody will buy into it.

[5 : 05] It doesn't expect that everybody will believe. So when you read this, you may categorically reject the whole thing and say, I'm sorry, I don't want it.

That's not part of my life. You may consider it to be so hopelessly impractical and idealistic that it won't affect you and therefore doesn't provide anything for you.

But there's a stronger possibility, and that is that you may discover that in the Beatitudes you have a reality spoken of, which you don't need, which isn't part of you.

And it's sort of like if you're in the sort of minor hockey league and play hockey fairly well, you look around you and see that in my league, I'm a star.

But then you come up against the big leagues and you find that you don't even qualify to get on the team. And I want to tell you that spiritually, these Beatitudes refer to the big leagues.

[6 : 32] You can live in a world of spiritual dwarfs if you want to, and among them you may be a fairly significant person, more honest, more upright, more devoted, more committed than the other person, and you can draw that satisfaction.

But once you move into the big leagues spiritually and discover what a small person you are, then by the grace of God, there might break in on your heart and mind the awareness that there is missing from your life that poverty of spirit that makes you very small indeed.

And that's why these Beatitudes are terribly important. They're important because if you're prepared to take life seriously at all, if you're prepared to find what God means your life to be, then you've got to know how much room there is for you to improve, how much room there is for God to do big things in your life.

You see, that's why we surround ourselves with friends who, in a sense, reinforce what we are.

They accept what we are. They go along with what we are, and we do the same for them, and so we tend to live in little puddles where we're doing as well or better than most people.

[8 : 08] And nobody wants to move into this awareness of the dire poverty spiritually in which they live because, well, they're more comfortable where they are.

One of the illustrations which fits this is if I was to come and tell you, my friend, as a member of this congregation, I want you to know that the things that you were supposed to do this week you haven't done, and the things that you've done five nights out of seven in this week you shouldn't have done, and that in terms of the contribution that you've made to this parish, it could be considered nil.

Well, I hope you'd be insulted. In spite of the fact that you just said that about yourself and the general consent. But there's a big difference, isn't there, between getting down on your knees and saying, I haven't done what I ought to have done, and I have done what I ought not to have done, and there is no help in me, and God, you know that, and you've forgiven me, so we'll carry on.

But we don't really come to terms with the reality that that, in fact, is true, and that we haven't done what we ought to have done, and we have done what we ought not to have done, and there is no help in us.

That's poverty of spirit. That's something that can put you in the place where God can work in your life and accomplish what he purposes to accomplish in your life.

[9 : 54] I sometimes feel, there's a lovely thing you sometimes get from traveling in powdered water, and I don't know how you do it, but it's called a blowfish, and it's apparently a little fish all covered with spines, and then it blows itself up, and it's prickly in every direction.

Have you ever seen one of those? I'm sure you have. Well, that helps me to understand myself.

That's what I am, full of hot air and prickly as anything. And that's just a good picture, and I tell you that because it makes me look humble.

But don't you dare tell me that. Because that would be hard, wouldn't it? Hard to take. Hard to accept from other people.

And yet, you and I are drawn into this fellowship in Christ, where in order to be honest and in order to be loving, in order to meet the primary conditions of life in the Christian church, we should be able to do that to one another.

to be able to go up and say to one another, look, this is where you're missing altogether what belongs to you. And not to meet with, I am like you, I'm as good as you, and anybody you can bring up against me, which is the natural reaction of our hearts and minds to say that.

[11 : 34] But if you've discovered, if you've discovered the reality of your own poverty of spirit and the meekness that goes with it, you'll be able to say, yeah, that's right.

Can you help me? And once you've done that, then you're in the position where you can be helped, where somebody can begin to bring into your life as the agent of God's mercy, the reality of the kingdom of God.

Now, I think that's a basic kind of human reality. I think that's what Alcoholics Anonymous have discovered.

And you can't join that organization until in relation to alcohol, you say, I am helpless and cannot overcome this problem by myself.

Well, you know, the enormous barriers of God that would have to be overcome before a person could say that. They'd rather die than admit that.

[12:54] So it's not an easy barrier. But it's exactly the same kind of barrier where you can recognize your own poverty of spirit and allow other people to recognize it too and to acknowledge it so that you can come as beggar with beggar to whatever help there might be.

you can begin to see the possibility of help when you recognize the extent of your own needs. And there simply is no purpose in telling anybody about the wealth and the riches and the fulfillment that belongs to the kingdom of God unless they have recognized the poverty of spirit in their own heart.

Because it's like going to somebody with their hands full. And you say, do you want some more? No, I got all I can handle. Because they don't recognize the emptiness of their own heart.

And once they recognize the emptiness of their own heart, then God can do what he promises to do. And the promises are very real.

[14:21] Isolate them and catalog them if you will. The kingdom of heaven belongs. Comfort and strengthening, inheriting the earth. Satisfaction at the deepest level, obtaining mercy, seeing God, being called the sons of God.

Those are the things that can happen. But who does it happen to? It happens to those who have acknowledged their poverty and fear.

Who have been brought in among the giants. Who have come face to face with the person of Jesus Christ.

And then you recognize how poor you are. And recognizing it is perhaps not good enough because you must acknowledge it. You must acknowledge it to one another.

I'm here because I need to be here. I'm here because I need the reality of love and the reality of forgiveness and the reality of fellowship and the reality of belonging.

[15:30] I'm here because I haven't got all the answers. I'm here because my life situation is one that I can't handle by myself.

That's poverty of truth. and suddenly when that's revealed by you or me or anybody else here then you create an opportunity for someone else to move in beside you and minister to you.

they can encourage you. They can strengthen you. They can help bring to you the reality of the kingdom. And that's how the congregation works.

Let me tell you about revolutions because I think that the Sermon on the Mount is talking about a very basic revolution. you know that there was the French Revolution in which the cry was liberty, equality, and fraternity.

And there was an American Revolution which went after life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. There was the Russian Revolution which was to overcome capitalism by the rise of the working man.

[17:06] and set the working man free. It was back in English history the glorious revolution as it's called in which the whole pattern of parliamentary government was established.

And all these are tremendously important revolutions. They're milestones in the history of the Western world. that they all sought a goal which they have never achieved.

They all went after something which they've never been able to take hold of. There could be no more eloquent expression of the failure of revolution.

It's and Poland is together. It's just there and you can't help but see that another more basic revolution has to take place among men.

and that all you're doing with political and economic revolutions is changing the power structure and you keep changing it and the people who come to the top start then to go down to the bottom.

[18:25] But there is one primary revolution and that is the revolution which Jesus Christ has initiated by preaching the Sermon on the Mount.

and the revolutionaries are those who are poor in spirit because they're going to be called the sons of God that change the world and they're going to become the pure in heart that see God and they're going to inherit the kingdom of heaven and they're going to inherit the earth that's going to belong to them.

Why is it? Because Jesus recognized that the primary revolution that is required is a revolution that begins in the heart of every man and woman and that these other revolutions cannot help but fail unless this primary revolution is producing wise and good men who have seen God who in their meekness have inherited the earth who by their poverty of spirit have recognized the reality of the kingdom that's what this is about it's so radically revolutionary you feel that something has got to happen in terms of the world in which we live and that's true but this primary and basic revolution starts with you and with me and with us in our relationship to one another and unless that revolution takes place all human revolutions will face that's the revolution that Jesus

Christ has initiated and that's the revolution which this church is basically committed to promoting in people's lives young people and students and business people and retired people and old people and infants some are harder than others but nevertheless the revolution has to happen and it has to be part of your life the revolution begins with having confronted the person of Jesus Christ in the fullness of his stature as Lord as Christ as the son of God you suddenly recognize the terrible poverty of spirit which belongs to you and it only can be met with him just pray for a moment or God give us the grace to recognize the terrible poverty of our own hearts and it's not poverty compared to other people it's only poverty in comparison to the abundance that you want to pour into our hearts by the Holy Spirit it's only poverty in comparison to your purpose of love towards us we are endowed in so many ways with so many things that it's hard to recognize the poverty of our hearts unless we draw close to one another unless we recognize your presence among us unless we know that we haven't done what we ought to have done and we have done what we ought not to have done and that there is no health in us unless we really come to terms with that and that we are helpless to help ourselves the only thing we can bring to you is the acknowledgement of our needs and the only thing you require of us is that acknowledgement we have grace to show and counter the reality of this revolution in our personal lives you may see all the blessings that you have pronounced in our lives in our lives and in the lives of those with whom we work as worships in Christ's name, Amen and amen thanks to Jesus give me some love

I know I know I will just transfer to this one I am going to come your love and ask for a perfect time