

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

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Matthew 5:1-16
August 9, 2009
Live Upside Down

I came across the lyrics of a song written by a man named Mac Davis. The song is entitled "It's hard to be humble." I would like to read the lyrics of this song to you. So, sit back and listen to the heart-touching lyrics of this beautiful ballad:

Oh Lord it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror 'cause I get better lookin' each day. To know me is to love me, I must be a heck of a man. Oh Lord it's hard to be humble, but I'm doin' the best that I can. I used to have a girlfriend but I guess she just couldn't compete with all these love starved women who keep clamoring at my feet. Well I probably could find me another but I guess they're all in awe of me. Who cares I never get lonesome 'cause I treasure my own company. I guess you could say I am a loner, a cowboy all locked up and proud. Well I could have lots of friends if I wanted, but then I wouldn't stand out in a crowd. Some folks say that I'm egotistical - heck I don't even know what that means. I guess it has something to do with the way that I fill out my skin tight blue jeans.

Mohammed Ali, the famous boxer, once said:

When you're as great as I am, it's hard to be humble!

Ted Turner, the founder of CNN, once remarked:

If I only had a little humility, I would be perfect!

I believe that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of our culture is pride. It seems as if our world is fueled by pride. And this is so much the case that being prideful has become an art form. From the moment that we get up in the morning until we close our eyes to go to sleep, we are the center of the universe.

But the world that Jesus is ushering in, this kingdom of God, is radically different from the world that we have grown accustomed to. This kingdom of heaven has a radically different set of values and priorities. And in many ways, the laws of this kingdom are completely upside down from the laws of this world.

Tonight I want us to look at the Sermon on the Mount and see a description of this upside down world of Jesus. Borrowing from the text that we will be studying tonight, I've entitled my sermon, "Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit." Please bow your heads with me in prayer before we continue. Let's pray.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount has been called the greatest sermon ever preached. I don't think that it would be an exaggeration to say that there is no person alive today that has not been touched in some way by the teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount. Every sermon that has ever been preached since that great sermon, any where, at any time, even to this day, has been profoundly influenced by this sermon of sermons.

The Sermon on the Mount is found in chapters 5-7 in the Gospel of Matthew, but when it was originally preached, it was probably a lot longer than what we see in chapter 5-7. So what we have in the book of Matthew is some of the key points, the highlights, the essence of what Jesus preached.

I wish that we could spend a couple of hours digging into the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount tonight, but since we don't have that kind of time, what I am going to focus on is just one small section at the beginning of that Sermon called the Beatitudes. And out of all the Beatitudes, I am going to be spending a majority of the time on verse 3, which is the very first Beatitude. And the reason that I am going to focus on that first Beatitude is because there is a definite progression to the Sermon on the Mount. They are not just random list put together haphazardly. There is a definite order. Each Beatitude builds on the previous one, and as you go down the list, you will see that it gets harder and harder. But it all starts with the first Beatitude. Everything else that Jesus will teach on in his Sermon on the Mount, it all begins with this first Beatitude:

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

Everything starts here. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

And before we read the passage for tonight, let me share just two more important points:

First, the Sermon on the Mount is a description of what every Christian should look like. This is not some extreme list of things for super Christians or Christian leaders. This is a description of what *every single* Christian should look like. And we are to demonstrate not just one or a few of the Beatitudes, but every single one of them. The Beatitudes are not a prescription of how someone becomes a follower of Jesus, but rather, they are a description of what someone who is *already* following Jesus looks like.

And second, it is vital to understand that the traits described in the Sermon on the Mount are not natural characters that we are born with, but they are supernatural, meaning that it is something that God builds into us. So, in a very real sense, what we see as the description of what a Christian should look like, can, in fact, be only lived out by those who are truly Christians. Christian or not, many people may possess personalities and demeanors that may look similar to what is described in the Sermon on the Mount. Many of us here tonight, Christian or not, may naturally be meek, may show mercy at times, may pursue peace in their lives, but what Jesus is teaching here

is not a personality trait or a natural disposition. What Jesus is getting at here is a supernatural empowering of the follower of Jesus so that they may shine before all man that they may glorify God. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. So regardless of what your natural disposition may be, we all can, we all must, by the power of the Holy Spirit, live this out!

So with that in mind, let read the passage together.

Matthew 5:1-16

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them. He said: 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. 13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

As the scene opens, we see that it was a particularly busy day in the life of Jesus. People were coming from everywhere to see Jesus. For you see we are told in chapter 4 that news about this Jesus who was preaching the good news of the kingdom, who was healing diseases and casting out demons, news about this Jesus is spreading like wildfire. So huge crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, and Judea, were all coming to see Jesus. Can you just imagine, not merely the size of this crowd, but what kinds of people were gathered here? People who are sick, people who are fighting terrible diseases, people who are dying, people who are demon possessed, people in painful relationships, people struggling with all kinds of addictions and brokenness, people who have absolutely nowhere else to turn, people rejected by the world are flocking to Jesus by the thousands!

And in the midst of this crowd, I imagine that his disciples are absolutely fired up. This ragtag bunch of misfits who signed up to change the world with Jesus, they are full of anticipation and excitement, thrilled to be a part of this great movement of God in this world. And Jesus takes these disciples, and it is to *them*, not the crowd, that Jesus begins to preach the Sermon on the Mount.

He takes his disciples up on a mountainside, and he sits down taking the teaching posture of a rabbi, and he begins his message.

Well, let's pause for a moment here. What kind of message do you think his disciples are expecting to hear right now? Think about it! Here they are, up on this mountainside, with Jesus, and as they look down from the mountain they can see thousands of people. There is great sense of excitement in the air and they are probably expecting to hear something along the lines of, "The revolution is here! And this is how we are going to change the world. We're gonna get radical. We're gonna get crazy. We are going to raise an army of powerful soldiers like you've never seen before. We're going to march across this land. We're going to destroy our enemies. And the world will know that we are here!"

But that is not at all what Jesus says. He says:

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

What? Jesus, are you sure you know what you're talking about?

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Jesus, do you know how popular we are? Do you know how famous you are?

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Jesus, do you not see how powerful we can become? Do you not see that we can start a revolution here?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Really, is there *anything* on that list that sounds revolutionary to you? Poor in spirit? Those who mourn? The meek? Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness? The pure in heart? The peacemakers? Those who are persecuted because of their righteousness? Seriously, can this list possibly be any more lame? And yet, is there anything more counter-cultural?

I imagine that as Jesus was speaking these words, for many of those who were gathered there, that their hearts just dropped. Many of them were probably confused, maybe even a little sad or angry. I bet there were some there who were desperately looking for a way out saying, "This is not what I signed up for!" *But* there are others in this group who are listening to these words of Jesus and their eyes are getting bigger,

and their heart is beating faster, and they are dreaming with their eyes wide open, saying “Can this really be true? Is this really how the revolution is lived out?”

And I imagine that many of us here tonight have a mixture of emotions on hearing these words of Jesus. I know that many of you are absolutely fired up after the awesome experience you had at Breathe. Mike and Jay shared some amazing teachings. There is a new passion burning in your hearts right now, maybe like you’ve never ever felt before. And I think that is awesome! I say, “More, Lord! Lord, set us on fire for you! Use us to change the world! We want to be a part of that!” And I want to say to you tonight, as Jesus spoke to a group of people 2000 years ago, a group not all that different from us:

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

This is where it all begins. This is where it starts. This is how the revolution of Jesus is ushered in. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is the mantra of the revolutionaries of Jesus. This is the mission statement of revolutionaries of Jesus. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is where it all starts because the kingdom of heaven is only expanded by kingdom people with kingdom values. If we want in on this revolution of Jesus, we must first become the kind of people for whom the values of the kingdom defines the core of who we are. And that begins here: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

BLESSED

As we read in the passage, each Beatitude begins with the word, “blessed.” So what does “blessed” actually mean?

There are some versions of the Bible that translate the word “blessed” as “happy.” And I think that is very unfortunate because while “blessed” does indeed speak of happiness, to be blessed cannot be simply reduced to being happy. Happy is a feeling. Happy is subjective. Happy is good. But it does not fully encompass all that it means to be blessed.

Also, to be blessed is not talking about the person who is driving that Mercedes with a bumper sticker that says, “Too Blessed to be Stressed.”

So what does it mean to be blessed? To be blessed means to be approved by God! To be blessed means to be approved by God. God smiles upon the person who is blessed. The blessed person is one who receives the “applause of heaven.” He is approved by *God*. And there is no other approval that is more significant than this approval which comes from God, the creator of the Universe, he who made us, he who knows us intimately, he who has no beginning and no end, he who holds all things in his hands. To be approved by God, he is indeed a blessed person!

POOR IN SPIRIT

Jesus says that those who are blessed, those who are approved by God, are the poor in spirit. The poor in spirit! What does it actually mean to be poor in spirit? Well, let me start off by explaining what it does not mean.

To be poor in spirit does not mean weakness, or shyness, or gutless. To be poor in spirit does not mean that the person thinks that he or she has no self-worth. To be poor in spirit does not mean to be some loser, or some sort of a spiritual Napoleon Dynamite.

A person who is poor in spirit is someone who humbly acknowledges his unworthiness before God. A person who is poor in spirit is someone who realizes that they have absolutely nothing within themselves to commend them to God. So, to be poor in spirit is to know that we are spiritually bankrupt.

The poor in spirit is a person who knows beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he is justified before God by faith alone, and that by grace. So, in a very real sense, we find in this short little phrase "blessed are the poor in spirit" the entirety of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The person who is poor in spirit understands in his heart of hearts that God is God and that he is not. And it is this person who is blessed, who is approved by God.

The chief ambition of his life is to be make Jesus famous. He is profoundly humble, but absolutely confident because he knows God intimately. He does not strive for praise or honor. Fame and fortunes do not concern him in the least because he knows that his real treasure is found in God alone. He will not be shaken when the storms and the waves come because he knows that God holds all things together in his hands. He is able to worship in the midst of pain and suffering because he knows that God is a God of justice, and he will one day, make right all that is wrong, and reward all that is right. He kneels before God in humble adoration because he knows that that is the most fundamental posture of the Christian. He knows that it all starts there. He knows that being on his knees before God is the entryway to everything that follows in the kingdom of God. This is the man of God, the woman of God who is poor in spirit, and he is truly blessed.

POOR IN SPIRIT IN THE BIBLE

The distinguishing mark of some of the greatest people in the Bible is that they were poor in spirit.

David, the greatest king of Israel was poor in spirit. And when the prophet Nathan reveals the great promises of God to David, this is David's response in 2 Samuel 7:18:

2 Samuel 7:18

Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?

"Who am I, Lord?" This is what poor in spirit sounds like!

And of course, our Lord Jesus, was the greatest example of what it means to be poor in spirit. From his birth in a manger to his death on a despicable cross, his life exemplified what it means to be poor in spirit. So, Paul writes to the saints in Philippi these words:

Philippians 2:5-8

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

THE BEATITUDES OF THIS WORLD

And all this talk of being poor in spirit, this is not a very popular message in the world today, is it? If you brought together some of the greatest minds in the world today and asked them to put together a list of traits of people who are truly blessed, I don't imagine that "poor in spirit" would make the top 100 on that list. I would imagine that their list would look more like this:

Blessed are the strong
Blessed are the smart
Blessed are the rich and famous
Blessed are the beautiful and handsome
Blessed are the aggressive
Blessed are the assertive
Blessed are the proud
Blessed are the self-confident
Blessed are those who know how to get ahead in life
Blessed are those who know how to manipulate people

And I say that this is a list that the world would write up, but don't you think that most of us in this room would normally tend to agree with that? Maybe we won't word it in exactly those words, but we would probably use words like these:

Blessed are the leaders
Blessed are those who have lots of friends
Blessed are those who are married
Blessed are those who really know the Bible
Blessed are those who are gifted in evangelism
Blessed are those who know how to pray for healing

And to that Jesus says, "No, no! You are getting it all wrong! Blessed are the poor in spirit." In the economy of God, what matters to him, what truly touches the heart of God is not the same things that impress us, the things that make us go, "Wow!" What truly touches the heart of God is when we humbly kneel before God declaring humbly that

we have nothing to offer God for his extravagant love and mercy. The Christian on his knees before God. On our knees before God! It all starts here! It all begins here!

When God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, and before they entered the Promised Land, God spoke these words to his people:

Leviticus 18:3-5

You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for whoever obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

God is reminding his people that they are a holy people, set apart for him, and they are to be distinct, different from any other people in the world. More than anything else, the Beatitudes are what distinguishes us from the rest of the world. And more than anything else, the Beatitudes are what will attract the world to Christ!

What if the revolution that Jesus is ushering in is not so much about *what* we do but rather *who* we are becoming? What if what you and I can accomplish for God begins not from our hands, but rather, our heart? What if?

For those of us who are Christians, we have been redeemed from the Egypt of our lives. And as we embark on this faith journey to the Promised Land, Jesus is speaking to us today saying, "You must not do as they do in the world, where you used to live. I am the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Blessed are you who are poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.'"

So let me ask you tonight: Are you poor in spirit? As you look at yourself in the mirror, as you examine your life, can you say about yourself that you are poor in spirit, that you humbly acknowledge that you have nothing in yourself to commend you to God? Can someone distinguish you from a non-Christian?

BECOMING POOR IN SPIRIT

So how does one actually become poor in spirit? First thing's first: You cannot do this on your own. Here is how Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was the great preacher at Westminster Chapel, explains this:

The Sermon on the Mount... comes to us and says, "There is the mountain that you have to scale, the heights you have to climb; and the first thing you must realize, as you look at that mountain which you are told you must ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof positive that you have not understood it."

To become poor in spirit, you must begin by understanding this simple and profound truth: You cannot do it on your own! It's the same thing as saying, "I will work my butt off to become the humblest of all human being!" Well, right there you revealed that you so radically and completely missed the point altogether!

To become poor in spirit, you must often find yourself on your knees before God, the most fundamental posture of the Christian. To become poor in spirit, you must often find yourself crying tears of repentance. To become poor in spirit, you must often find yourself in exuberant joy at the greatness of the salvation that God has given us. And I think one of the greatest indicators of whether or not someone is truly poor in spirit is reflected in their prayer life because prayer is one of the most crucial ways that we demonstrate our desperate need for God, that to pray is to acknowledge that you can not do life alone. And also the content of your prayer reveals much about your spirit. Is most of your prayer focused on telling God what you want him to give you and what you want him to do for you? Or does your prayer often echo the humble words uttered by the tax collector who prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner"?

FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Jesus says, "Blessed is the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The great reward that is reserved for those who are poor in spirit is the kingdom of heaven. And it is theirs and theirs alone!

Well, what is the kingdom of heaven? First off, it is the same thing as the kingdom of God. Matthew, like many other Jewish writers of his time, felt that to speak of God was too holy and too lofty, so they would find different words to speak of God, which in Matthew's case was "heaven." So what exactly is the kingdom of heaven, this kingdom of God?

The kingdom of heaven is the sovereign rule and reign of God. The kingdom of heaven is not bound by space or time. The kingdom of heaven is not merely what awaits the saints of God in the glorious future, but the kingdom of heaven is the in-breaking into today, a taste of all that glory and wonder that is to come. We can experience the kingdom right here and right now! Absolutely, positively we can experience the kingdom right here and right now! The kingdom is here. The rule and reign of God is upon us!

Again and again, Jesus preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!" Jesus is able to say this because in the act of God putting on flesh and entering into our space and time, the kingdom of God has indeed broken in to our universe. The kingdom of heaven is here! And the means by which we can now taste of that future glory which is yet to come is to be poor in spirit.

HOW TO START A REVIVAL

The end of this section of the Sermon on the Mount concludes with these words:

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

I get thrilled whenever we talk about revival. This is my prayer. This is my heart's cry: Lord, let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven! Do a new thing in our midst! But it seems to me that most of our responses to talking about revival, or even evangelism for that matter, usually end up with some sort of a fancier, cooler, church program or outreach event. And while I am all for those things, when I read the Sermon on the Mount, I am absolutely convinced that what the world needs more than anything is a church full of people who are simply and radically living out the Sermon on the Mount. The world is not looking for powerful Christians. The world is not looking for Christians who are oozing with charisma. The world is not looking for slick programs. What the world is looking for are people who are simply committed to living out the radical words of Jesus. And I believe the world will forgive us if we fail at times. The world will even forgive us if we fall flat on our faces at times. But what the world will *not* forgive is when the church stops doing the very thing for which she was created, and that is to be a city on a hill, a lighthouse on the harbor, a beacon of hope in a dark world, shining brightly declaring, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

So this is how to start a revival: Let your light shine before others!

Christian, you are salt of the earth! You are the light of the world! How are you living as salt in your workplace? How are you being the light of the world in your classroom? And if you are not living as salt and light, then you are confronted with a simple question: Is your light really a light? Is your faith really a faith? Are you a Christian without Christ? Are you just a "formal" Christian? Lloyd-Jones writes:

There is nothing in God's universe that is so utterly useless as a merely formal Christian.

And who is the formal Christian? Well, the formal Christian is that person who knows just enough about Christianity to ruin the world for him, but not enough to fully embrace all of its beauty and power. The formal Christian is that person who understands just enough about Christianity to be aware of his own sinfulness, but not enough to understand that there is supernatural life bursting out of him.

The true Christian cannot help but shine. A chair was made to sit on. A plane was made to fly. A Christian was created to shine! He simply can not escape notice. So Joshua House, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds

and glorify your Father in heaven. Live in such a way that when people see you, they declare, "There must be a God!" So, let your light shine.

History teaches us that it is always when men and women take seriously the words of the Sermon on the Mount that true revival springs up. When we pray, "Let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," the answer to that prayer begins here: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Let's pray.

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

Insoo Kim
Matthew 5:1-16
August 9, 2009
Live Upside Down

Blessed (Matthew 5:3)

To be blessed means to be approved by God

Are the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3)

To be poor in spirit is to know that we are spiritually bankrupt

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)

The kingdom of heaven is the sovereign rule and reign of God

How to start a revival (Matthew 5:13-16)

Let your light shine before others