

Lesson 13: Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit **Matthew 5:1-3**

Memory verse: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9).

Text: “And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: ³ “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Monday

Today we want to start our study by looking at the first three verses and the very first phrase uttered by the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Verses one and two give us the setting for the sermon and verse three gives us the principle thought that guides everything else that follows. Let’s break the text down and look at some different lessons this week. The first one is this:

1. The Lord spoke this sermon to His disciples - publicly (v. 1).

He did it in the presence of “the multitudes.” The Lord was always concerned with the multitudes, whether the people were physically ill or healthy, emotionally stable or not, financially poor or rich, oppressed or powerful, religiously insignificant or influential, ignorant or educated. Jesus had concern for them all and He gave His messages openly and publicly.

But even though the Lord spoke this sermon in the presence of the multitudes, it should be immediately obvious that the audience of the sermon was “His disciples.” In other words, the multitudes were bystanders, onlookers looking in on a discussion that didn’t directly concern them. They were, however, welcome onlookers. The Lord loved them. He had compassion for them. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, living in a terrible spiritual need. So they were welcome; and, He spoke this sermon to inform them, should they come to the critical point of counting the cost and coming to Him as Lord and Savior.

His concern for His disciples was that they should know how to live as His disciples - how they were to follow after Him. The Sermon on the Mount, then, is first and foremost a message about discipleship, living the Christian life. And it is also a sermon spoken evangelistically, that is with the intention of driving people to a recognition of their sin and their need for a Savior. Until the multitudes believed in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, the demands of the sermon would only show them how terribly far they were from meeting God’s standards. The Lord Jesus in His compassion for the multitude was getting ready to confront them with their desperate sinful condition.

Now you need to understand something else about the setting, and it is simply that this sermon is also directed at you today by the Lord Himself. It is no accident that the Holy Spirit included this sermon in His word, and it is no accident that God has ordained for you to be where you are

reading this lesson or listening to it being taught. The Lord Almighty’s teaching is directed towards you too, in the exact same way it was directed toward His disciples at that time. Are you ready to hear His message?

What was the setting for this sermon? _____

Who is directly addressed in this sermon? In other words, who does the “them” refer back to in verse 2? _____

Are “the multitudes” welcome in your church? Do they feel compassion from the membership? Are the lessons and messages evangelistic, even when they aren’t directly aimed at them? Why is this important? _____

Tuesday

A second lesson from these first verses is this:

2. The Lord spoke this sermon as an intense cry of His own heart (v. 2).

Verse two says, “Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying...” This statement in the word of God is not simply something superfluous or obvious that God is using as filler. I hope that you know God doesn’t do that, but every word in the Bible has a purpose. And the phrase “and opening His mouth” (ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα) was a common saying of that day, a colloquialism that was used both to introduce a message that was especially solemn and important to the speaker and to indicate an intimate, heartfelt testimony. A modern equivalent in our language might be, “And Jesus opening His heart began to teach them,” or “And Jesus baring His soul, began to teach them.”

It is unfortunate that the English translations typically mask this idiom, because it costs us in terms of understanding. You see, if you left this lesson today you could potentially communicate two very different things about what happened here. You could simply say, “The pastor wrote a lesson,” or you could say, “The pastor opened his heart to me today, the pastor bared his soul, the pastor spoke transparently and intimately, or the pastor shared his passion with me today.” Do you understand the difference in meaning? “The pastor poured out his heart today.” That shows a much deeper and greater intimacy. When the Lord Jesus spoke this beautiful sermon, He was revealing something very intimate and precious to the heart of God. He was giving a message that is crucial to the heart of God. Jesus, the Almighty God, bared His soul when he gave this

message.

For that reason alone, we need to be very concerned about what is being said in this Sermon on the Mount. If you are reading this and you name Jesus Christ as your Lord, then you should be very intent and concerned when your Lord reveals to you things that are intimate and close to His heart. That is what the bible means when it says, “He opened His mouth and taught them.” This is not blase filler. This is the language of passion.

And so we see at the outset that this sermon is a message born out of the intimacy of God’s heart. It is a message born out of His intense love for His disciples and His heart for the multitudes. It is a message provided by the Spirit in His word for you also, for the very same reason. Why? Because the Lord loves you and wants you to turn from sin, find salvation in Him and then discover the great satisfying joy of pursuing a godly life.

Have you ever longed to be able to “get inside” another person and been frustrated? Have you ever known the joy and value of having a very close friend? What’s the difference and how does it make you feel? _____

Understanding that God has opened Himself to us and shared with us intimately and personally those matters closest to His heart, how should this impact us personally? How should it change us? _____

How might you respond to a person that says, “God is unknowable,” or “God is distant and untouched by us,” or even “I wish I could draw near to God or know Him, but I can’t”? _____

Wednesday

The last two days we have seen that the Lord Jesus spoke this message primarily to His disciples, but He did so publicly and that in so doing, He opened His heart and passion to them. There is a third lesson we want to draw out today:

3. The Lord spoke this sermon to show the way of true joy (v. 3).

“Blessed....blessed....blessed....blessed....blessed....,” He says. Before we turn to the specifics of any of the beatitudes, it is necessary for us to discuss what is meant by this word “blessed,” which comes before them all. The word “blessed,”(μακάριος - makarios) means to be supremely blest and happy. It refers to one who has received that which is the “highest good” and is to be congratulated. When someone was blest in the sense of this term, it meant that person was “beautified” and pronounced fortunate, blessed, literally “made beautiful” by God.

Happiness, true happiness, deep and abiding joy, blessedness is the great question confronting mankind. The whole world is longing for this kind of happiness. Every person wants this kind of supreme joy. And people look for it in all kinds of ways: human relationships, money, careers and jobs, projects and hobbies, any number of kinds of entertainment and diversions, even in children and doing things they think are good. But it is tragic to see, because all of these things have the same end. None of them can produce true, lasting or ultimate happiness. None can place a person in a right relationship with God and none therefore, can satisfy the deepest needs and longings of the human heart.

Further, the vast majority of people are seeking happiness in ways that are bound to produce only greater misery. Lust and illicit sexual encounters, alcohol, drugs, materialism, vented anger and spitefulness, throwing themselves deeper into various sinful activities promise fulfillment, but don’t deliver. I tell you that anything which, by evading the difficulties of life, merely makes people happy for the time being, is ultimately just going to add to their misery and problems. That is where the utter deceitfulness of sin comes in. Sin is always offering happiness, and it is always leading to unhappiness, misery, wretchedness and finally destruction. It hasn’t changed one bit since the Garden of Eden. “Eat this fruit and you shall be like God.” And they thought, “Hey, you know that sounds pretty good.” So they ate and on the other side of their action was a curse, death, and broken fellowship with the one who truly loved them.

Understand then, that when the Lord Jesus says, “Blessed,” He is talking about the ultimate unending happiness that is only found in communion and fellowship with the Father. Psalm 68:35 says, “Blessed be God!” Psalm 72:18 says, “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders,” and of the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Tim. 6:15 says, “who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Blessedness is a characteristic of God. He is the One in the universe that is supremely, ultimately, gloriously happy. And if we want to ever have a share in that true and glorious happiness, then we must enter into unhindered fellowship with Him. As 2 Peter 1:4 says, we must “become partakers of the divine nature,” that is a koinonos, a sharer in the joy, a sharer in the blessedness of God.

There is no blessedness, Beloved, no perfect contentedness and ultimately no true joy for mankind outside of a personal relationship with God. Anything you pursue in life that is against God’s character and nature, His goodness and righteousness becomes a stumbling block to true happiness and joy. Sin is not a trade up; it is a trade down. On the other hand, self-denial for the

sinful man and woman, for us - even though it is counterintuitive to our sin-sickened and tainted minds - denying self to pursue God becomes the path to joy inexpressible and full of glory, to ultimate fulfillment.

So Jesus comes to us in the Sermon on the Mount, pours out His heart and says with the very passion of God, “There is a true path to happiness.” If you want to be supremely blest, if you want to receive that which is the highest good, to be truly fortunate, truly filled with joy, if you want to escape from misery and destruction, to put aside the false and phony junk offered by this world and have the deepest needs of your heart satisfied forever, if you want to be right with God and share in His blessedness, here is the way. If you want to have all of these things in fellowship and communion with the living God, here is the way: you must be “poor in spirit.” Why? Because the poor in spirit, “theirs is the kingdom of God.”

Philosophers, since the dawn of time, have said that the most basic motive behind all human conduct, even suicide, is a desire to be personally happy? God, in no way condemns this motivation in Scripture. Rather, He condemns looking for happiness in the wrong places. He condemns the futile effort to find blessing in wrong places. **Jeremiah 2:13** “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, *And* hewn themselves cisterns -- broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Where do you personally see people around you searching for happiness? _____

Where does Jesus say happiness can be found? _____

Be honest, is that what you want for your life: true joy, true happiness, true blessedness, to be beautified by God Himself? How will you get there? _____

Thursday

Yesterday we saw the depth of the word “Blessed” that the Lord Jesus uses nine times in the next few verses. Let’s begin to look at the way to this blessedness, then. How do we get there? This takes us to the fourth lesson:

4. The Lord Jesus spoke this sermon to exalt brokenness (v. 3).

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” It would certainly not be an overstatement to say that this is the most critical statement in the entire Sermon on the Mount. In fact everything else depends upon it as you will begin to see in the weeks ahead. It would even be accurate to say that there is no more perfect statement in Scripture of the doctrine of justification by faith alone than these few words spoken by Jesus. And they must have hit His Jewish audience like a thunderbolt, shattering their religious illusions and shaking their hearts to the very core.

You see, beloved, there was a great history here. What was the cultural context of this statement? Who were the people it was spoken to? The people that Jesus was addressing, throughout their whole lives, had been taught a system of works-righteousness. The religious leaders, rulers, Pharisees and scribes had erected an entire system of theological error, teaching that a man or woman becomes right with God by following the law, doing works of righteousness and good deeds.

Their leaders were hyperlegalists, who constantly externalized religion. They were the very epitome of all who pursue a form of godliness with no reality, no heart. Although they were fanatically religious, they were no nearer the kingdom of God than a prostitute or a drug dealer. Their credo included adherence to more than six hundred laws, many of which were simply their own inventions, additions if you will to the revelation of God. They believed, for instance, that it was alright to swallow vinegar on the Sabbath, but not to gargle it, since gargling constituted labor. One Pharisaical teaching held that it was permissible to eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath only if the chicken was killed the next day for having violated the Sabbath. These people were so enamored with their legalism that they simply couldn't stand it when Christ confronted them with the utter futility of their religious works and rituals and made it plain to them that reliance upon these things separated them from God and consigned them forever to the depths of hell.

They taught the people that the way of salvation was by adherence to their law. If you are overall good and follow some necessary rituals, then your sins will be forgiven and you will see God. Sounds familiar doesn't it. That's because that is the typical view of salvation in our nation today, except without the law - people just adhere to their own made up standard instead. Once I was witnessing to a man and asked why God should let him into heaven. He answered, “I deserve it.” And that's the way people think of it. “I haven't been that bad. I don't deserve hell. I deserve heaven.” So they're not really concerned about their eternal state.

Now here were the people, the multitudes, raised in this system of belief. They thought they were spiritually rich, prosperous, self-sufficient. They were rich in the things of the Spirit. They had completely missed the **central theme** of the Pentateuch and the Old Testament, which is redemption by grace through faith. In their rigid emphasis on religious works, they de-emphasized the blackness of sin and the need for God's grace and forgiveness, which is evident throughout all of Scripture. They were so busy trying to earn righteousness that they neglected, for example, the marvelous truth of Habakkuk 2:4, “The just will live by his faith,” and the clear

statement of Is. 64:6, “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

So Jesus, the promised Messiah, comes and says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...” Boom, there it is. Who will have fellowship with the Father for eternity in heaven? The poor in Spirit. Who will have ultimate happiness? The poor in Spirit. Most of the people in this multitude would have known immediately what He was talking about, and it must have shaken them badly.

The standard of God, Beloved, has always been clear. “Without holiness no one will see the Lord.” And Jesus states the standard again in the Sermon on the Mount. In verse 20, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” He then gives six examples of true heart righteousness, which “exceeds” that of the scribes and Pharisees and says in 5:48, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” In other words, “People, if you are going to earn your way into the kingdom of heaven by living a good life, if you are planning on earning your way into the presence of the almighty Holy God by following your own efforts, you must live a perfectly holy life, a life without a single sin. That is the standard.” Wow and ouch!!

So at once in the Sermon, the Lord comes to us and says in effect, “There is a mountain you have to scale, the heights you have to climb in order to reach heaven; and the first thing you must realize, as you look at the mountain which you must climb, is that you cannot do it; you are totally incapable of it, in and of yourself, and any attempt by you to climb this mountain on your own is simply proof positive that you have not understood it, and that you have never faced God or come to know Him.”

The law of God is both the standard by which you must abide, if you are to ever see God, and it is also a teacher, designed to show you that you can never ever meet the standard. It is designed by God to bring you to your knees, so that you will cry out to Him, “mercy Lord, please have mercy!”

With that background, we come then to the critical question. If we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven through our own efforts, if the only true entrance, in fact, is brokenness, becoming poor in spirit, what does it mean, then, to be truly poor in spirit. This is a critically important question, because there is no entry into God’s kingdom without becoming poor in spirit. It is the fundamental, most basic characteristic of a true Christian, a true child of God. We’ll look at it together tomorrow.

Friday

We asked the question yesterday, “What does it mean to be poor in spirit?” Let’s answer it. Simply put, to be poor in spirit means to have a right view of yourself and a right understanding of who you are when compared to and confronted with the holiness of God. In other words, a right view of yourself in the face of God.

It means that you recognize your spiritual poverty, that you see yourself as you really are apart from God: lost, hopeless, helpless, incapable of righteousness. It means that you see yourself as spiritually destitute. No matter what your education, wealth, social status, accomplishments, religious knowledge, or human goodness as men measure it, you see in truth that you are totally **spiritually bankrupt and shameful** when measured against the standard of God's holiness.

The Greek word for poor, ptochos, comes from a verb meaning "to shrink, to cower or cringe as a beggar." Of the many words in the Greek language for "poor" it is the most severe. It refers to a person reduced to total destitution, who would crouch in a corner begging. And as the beggar held out one hand for alms, he would hide his face with the other hand because he was ashamed of being recognized. That is the meaning of this word: **cowering, cringing, begging shame**. It was the word used by God for Lazarus in Luke 16:20, a beggar, who was full of sores and laid at a gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, he was so destitute that the dogs came and licked his sores. Beloved, this is not even poor as the widow, who came to the temple and put in two small copper coins into the treasury, all that she had to live on. She is called poor, "penichros," but not poor, "ptochos." Why? Because even she had some meager resources, two small copper coins. This kind of poor, that Jesus is referring to, is begging poor with absolutely zero resources spiritually, completely and utterly destitute.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." Blessed are those who knowing their spiritual shame cower and shrink back before the Almighty God! Blessed are those who know their spiritual nakedness and cover their faces in shame! Blessed are the beggars before God, full of the open wretched sores of sin, that reach out longing to be fed on the crumbs of mercy falling from His table! Blessed are those who recognize they have absolutely no resources spiritually whatsoever! Those are the ones that will be ultimately happy. Those are the ones that will be beautified by God.

How else does the Scripture say it? To be poor in spirit is what Isaiah said in 57:15, "For thus says the High and Lofty One, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

It is the spirit of a man like Gideon, who when the Lord sent an angel to him to tell him the great things he was to do, said, "No, no this is impossible; I belong to the lowest tribe and to the lowest family in the tribe." You see it in David when he says, "Lord, who am I that you should come to me?" It is the spirit of Peter, when he truly understood who the Lord was standing before him cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" It is the spirit of Isaiah, who when he saw God in his glory cried out with a curse on himself, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" It is the spirit of Paul who said, "I am the chief of sinners," and "O wretched man that I am, who will save me from this body of death!"

Understand me, Beloved, we are **not** talking about physical wealth or poverty. We are talking about an attitude, a position of the heart, the view of oneself in the spirit of a person. You can be in rags, living with the rats and still not be poor in this way; or, you could be a millionaire and be

utterly spiritually broken and destitute. We are also **not** talking about something that occurs with a person's natural personality. We are **not** talking about someone's natural tendency to be humanly self-effacing. Men like David, Isaiah and Peter could hardly be accused of this personality trait. And we are **not** talking about something you can manufacture in yourself like someone who is very anxious that everyone he meets should know what a humble man he is. Such anxiety is really a manifestation of spiritual pride, self-exaltation, and is at heart an attempt at self-righteousness. (You will see, Beloved, that none of these beatitudes have anything to do with natural personality traits). What we are talking about, then, **is the crushing spiritual realization of who you are in the face of God**, a realization that if you are one day going to stand in His presence and survive the power of His holiness, it won't be because of anything that you have in and of yourself. It won't be because you are worthy to be there. It will only be by His grace.

That then is the meaning of being poor in spirit. It means an absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and self-reliance. It means a consciousness that you are nothing in the presence of God. It is nothing then that we can do in ourselves. It is simply this awareness of our utter shame and helplessness as we come face to face-with-God.

Let me put it as strongly as I can. If you are truly a Christian, if Jesus is truly your Lord, you will not rely on any merit, which you think you have because of what you've done or who you are. You will not rely on your church membership or religious works such as baptism; you will not rely on your acts of charity; you will not rely on the fact that you belong to a certain family; you will not rely on your natural temperament; you will not rely on your position in life, your natural abilities, your money, your education, nothing. You will not rely on anything about you, nothing in the life you have lived or are trying to live. You will rely on none of these things to put you in right standing with God. You will simply sink to your knees like a child in utter dependence on God and cry out "Lord, Lord have mercy on me a sinner." You will be like the tax collector on the steps of the temple, who in shame couldn't even lift His face toward God in his prayer.

The grace and mercy of God in providing forgiveness of sins through His appointed sacrifice, Jesus Christ, will be your only hope.

Let me ask you something, are you like that? Have you come to recognize and know the depths of your personal shame before God? Are you a true believer? How do you really feel about yourself as you picture yourself standing in the presence of God? What a pitiful thing it will be for those who hope to boast in filthy rags and petty actions that will count as nothing but open and filthy sores at the great day when we stand in judgment in the presence of God. God describes the self-righteous impenitent in Isaiah, "From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness...but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores...." Oh that God would open our eyes to the truth of who we apart from Him, that we might be poor in spirit. Oh that we might see the truth that if there is any good at all in our lives, it is good that He has done in His grace. Let us learn to rely on Jesus alone, and knowing our own shame reach out to Him in faith and fear.

The verse ends with the phrase that is both a promise and a warning, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” Why? “For theirs, is the kingdom of heaven.” It is a promise because it tells us that the key to ultimate blessedness and happiness is in being poor in spirit, in becoming one who relies on nothing in himself, but turns to the Lord crying out for mercy. Such people will receive mercy and have fellowship with God in the kingdom of heaven. This is not cheap grace. It is a fundamental, traumatic change of heart that necessarily affects everything else in your life. So it is a promise of heaven to the poor in spirit.

It is also a warning because it tells us, “There is no entrance into the kingdom of heaven apart from being poor in Spirit.” The original language is written in the emphatic “**For theirs...theirs** is the kingdom of heaven.” They alone, only the poor in spirit, will have access to the kingdom of heaven. Those who see themselves in any other way will be cast off and shut out.

Are you poor in spirit today? If not cry out to God, cry out to Jesus, confess your sinful self-reliance, beg Him to convict you and show you the truth of your sin. Cry out to Him and He will save you. Depend on Him alone before the face of God. What about others you know who aren't? Will you pray for them to be broken?

Read Luke 2:34. How does this prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus given to Mary by Simeon relate to the Lord's teaching in Matthew 5:3? _____
