

April 19, 2020
The Sermon on the Mount (2)
The Poverty of Self-Sufficiency
Matthew 5:1-12
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This morning we begin our study with verse 3. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!”* I want to begin with the meaning of “poor in spirit?” Poor in spirit does not mean low self-esteem or feeling poorly about yourself. It does not refer to mock humility which pretends to put ourselves down. Poor in spirit is not saying, “I look so fat in this dress don't I?” or “I really messed up that solo!” And poor in spirit doesn't mean material poverty or being poor in possessions or finances. Jesus wasn't talking about financial bankruptcy. It is about our absolute spiritual bankruptcy before God. John Stott says, “To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, indeed our spiritual bankruptcy, before God. For we are sinners, under the holy wrath of God, and deserving nothing but the judgment of God. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy the favor of heaven.” As I paraphrase today's text in verse 3, Jesus is saying, “Blessed are the spiritually empty, the spiritually bankrupt who know they are sinners and cry out to God for mercy. They are happy. They are ‘*makarios*’ because they are the only ones who ever know God.”

We can't pay for our own sin. We are fallen beings. Our actions, and inactions, and even our thoughts and desires condemn us. Paul says the purpose of God's law is to help us to see this fact. The law was given to show us that we are on the unmerited grace of God and we are guilty before God. In Romans 3:19-20 Paul says, *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law: rather through the law we become conscious of sin.”* The purpose of the law is not to save us. It is to condemn us and its function is to show us how desperate we are. Therefore, each of us needs Jesus. Jesus said, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (Mark 2:17) The only people who will ever come to get what Jesus has to give are people who know that they are sick people who realize they are spiritually and morally crippled.

Being poor in spirit is a sense of powerlessness. It's a sense of spiritual bankruptcy and helplessness before God. It's a sense of moral uncleanness before our Holy God. It's a sense of personal unworthiness before God. Everyone, whether they sense it or not, is powerless, bankrupt, helpless, unclean, and unworthy before God. The first step toward “*makarios*,” is a plea for help. They are aware of their spiritual crisis.

John McArthur says “Being poor in spirit means being without resources, without pride, without self-assurance, without self-reliance. There must be an emptying before there can be a filling. This is the way to live; not just to get saved, but to live.” The poor in spirit are those that realize they are a sinner under the wrath of God and deserve nothing but the judgment of God.

It is this realization that draws one to Jesus Christ, as it is understood that Jesus took God's wrath and judgment upon Himself providing one eternal life as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. The poor in spirit are not like the religionist. Instead, they are like the tax collector who realized his spiritual poverty and humbled himself before God. The poor in spirit practice humility. The poor in spirit know that without Jesus, they are nothing. The poor in spirit know that Jesus must increase and they must decrease. The poor in spirit humbly deny self, take up their cross and follow Jesus.

You can't even become a Christian unless you're poor in spirit. It is the very first thing that must happen in the life of anybody who wants to enter God's kingdom. The doorway to the Kingdom of God is very low and only people who see their sin and in humility bow low can come in. To begin the Christ life, to enter God's kingdom, we must bow low. We must in fact get on our knees before God confessing our helpless sinful state. We must begin with humility. So, this is why Jesus began his message on the attitudes of a disciple with this particular beatitude.

How do we embrace this attitude? How do we become poor in spirit? First, we need to ask regularly, daily, for God to help us see our sin as sin. We gradually tend to justify our sin. We become proud and begin to think like our world thinks. So to remain poor in spirit we must regularly, daily, ask God to show us our sin. To keep this attitude, to remain poor in spirit, to see our sin as sin, we need God's expertise. We need God to put a chalk mark on our sin. We need to pray as David did and say, *"Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me."* (Psalm 90:12)

Second, we must stop comparing ourselves to others. It is never possible to create a true poverty of spirit by looking within or by looking around at other people. The human heart is corrupt. And because of it, we will always latch onto someone who is worse in some respect than we are. We will find someone who is prouder than we are. Although we may still be quite proud, we will congratulate ourselves on being humble. We will find someone who has strong fits of temper. Although we have a temper, we'll congratulate ourselves on being more moderate than they are. It will go like this in all of our shortcomings. In the presence of one who is perfect, how can we boast about how good we are? So don't look around, look up. Don't compare yourself to others. Constantly compare yourself to God. To be poor in spirit, ask for God's help.

And finally, discipline yourself to depend on God for everything every day. In John 15:5 Jesus said, *"Without Me you can do nothing."* We may pray something like this: "God, I can't be a father without Your help. I can't be a husband or wife without Your guidance. I can't do this job without You. I can't do my part in the work of this church without Your strength. So help me, help me, help me." We need to prostrate ourselves before God daily and say this. Let us confess our sin to God and ask Jesus to forgive our sin. Let us have a moment to confess our need for God's help in life. If we give Him our life, then the kingdom of Heaven will be ours! *"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"*

The blessing that the poor in spirit receive is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is given to the spiritually poverty stricken. What is the Kingdom of Heaven? The phrase "kingdom of heaven" appears 32 times in Matthew and means the same thing as the "kingdom of God." It is

God's realm where He is enthroned and reigns in the hearts and minds of His followers today. So God's reign can be experienced here on earth as we yield to him. The poor in spirit let Jesus reign in them.

The kingdom of heaven also has a future element as the ultimate coming of the King who comes to bring victory and judgment. The followers of Jesus will then experience their reward and will enter the kingdom of heaven. So there is a present and future element to the Kingdom of Heaven. We have the promise of heaven, but we can experience blessedness and contentment even right now. But the requirement is to be poor in spirit.

We need to be spiritually poor and admit our spiritual poverty. We cannot earn our citizenship in the Kingdom of God by ourselves. We just humbly come to Jesus and acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy, emptying ourselves of our self-righteousness. That is what it means to be poor in spirit and that is the spirit that gains entrance into the kingdom of God.