

BLESSED POVERTY
(Matthew 5:3)

The Sermon on the Mount is not only one of Jesus' most famous teachings, but also His most definitive and authoritative teaching on what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, or in other words a Christian. All believers in Christ are not only citizens of their country of origin, but also the kingdom of heaven. As believers our first and foremost citizenship is to God's kingdom, therefore our highest loyalty and calling, as we will belong to it for eternity. Jesus opens this sermon on kingdom citizenship with eight character qualities that not only define a believer's life and make it blessed, but also provide a sequential process for becoming a kingdom citizen. These are commonly referred to as the Beatitudes (Mt.5:3-12). Having found the study of these Beatitudes to be a tremendous tool to gauge my own spiritual walk and growth, even my salvation, I'm excited to do a devotional on each so you also will have the opportunity to use them to examine your spiritual life as God calls us to do (I Cor.11:28).

The first Beatitude is being poor in spirit. In Mt.5:3 Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now we all know what it means to be poor in a financial, physical goods sense, but what does it mean to be poor in spirit? And if being a Christian means being spiritually alive and filled, then how can being poor spiritually be a blessing? When studying the Bible it is often necessary to go to the original language to find out what words means to help interpret a passage. The Greek word used for poor here is the strongest of Greek verbs for poverty. It means begging poor, totally destitute, utterly dependent on others to survive, *and* unable to ever change your circumstances. This is not a temporary situation. It is like those in Jesus' time who, for whatever reason, were unable to move and had to lay on pallets and beg for their daily sustenance. Now, let's apply this definition of poor to being poor in spirit. What Jesus is saying is that when it comes to spiritual things, to spiritual life we are begging poor, totally dependent, and absolutely unable to do anything to change it. Not only that, but Jesus says the realization of this fact makes us blessed! As fallen humans we have absolutely nothing spiritual in and of ourselves to enable us to have any kind of relationship with God, or anything good or righteous to merit entry into heaven, nor can we do anything to change that! We are all spiritual beggars and the sooner we recognize that truth, the sooner we will begin seeking that which we need to have spiritual life, to have a life-giving relationship with God here on earth and in heaven. So being poor in spirit is coming to the realization that there is *nothing* spiritual about you that will merit a relationship with God both now and in eternity. It means recognizing in and of yourself that you can *never* be good enough or righteous enough to be in God's holy presence. In Isaiah 64:6 God makes this perfectly clear when He likens all our righteous deeds to filthy rags. In the original Hebrew language filthy rags means menstrual rags. This word picture clearly illustrates the lifelessness of this blood as opposed to the life-giving blood of Jesus. God does not so much look at *what* we do as He looks at *why* we do it (I Sam. 16:7). Thus *all* our good deeds, *all* our righteous acts are spiritually lifeless because they are more often than not tainted in that they are motivated to some extent by the sins of pride, selfishness, and self-righteousness. This is a hard truth, a bitter pill for people to swallow. We all want to think that there is some good in us; perfection, no, but overall good, yes. Yet Scripture is quite clear that even though we can be trained to do good

according to the standards of God's Word, nonetheless all of us, as fallen, sinful beings, can *never* do enough good to get us out of spiritual poverty, of being spiritual beggars (Rom.3:23). Living eternally with a holy and righteous God demands perfection (Mt.5:48). That certainly begs the question, then who can be saved?! In Mt.18:26 Jesus answered this question when asked by His disciples. His answer was, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

So how does God make it possible for spiritually poverty stricken humans to be good enough to be in heaven with Him? If you recall the definition of poor used to describe our spiritual condition also contained the concept of total dependency on another and the inability in the natural realm to ever change that. Thus our only hope for attaining spiritual life is by daily depending on someone else. But who? Obviously it must be someone in the spiritual realm; someone who has spiritual life so as to be able to give it to us beggars. The only person who fits this criteria is the Lord Jesus Christ. The only way to receive the spiritual life He offers us is by believing in who He is and all that He accomplished for us on the cross of Calvary and His consequent resurrection. By having His Son take the penalty of all the sins of mankind, God made it possible for our spiritually dead, unrighteous nature to be exchanged for Christ's spiritually alive, righteous nature (Eph.4:22-24). Thus those who will humble themselves so as to see the dire reality of their spiritual condition, and put their faith in Christ, will receive not only spiritual life through His righteousness, but a wealth of spiritual blessings (Eph.1:3). He alone can give us the spiritual life and righteousness we need so as to have a relationship with God now and for eternity. Not our parents, not our mate, not our church membership, attendance, or ministries, not baptism, not our gifting, not a priest, pastor, or saint. Jesus alone is perfect in His goodness and righteousness as they are untainted by all that disqualifies our good deeds and acts of righteousness as His are motivated by nothing but pure and unselfish love.

The eight Beatitudes that Jesus used to open this sermon on kingdom citizenship are in a very precise order. Poor in spirit is listed first because it is the first step in becoming a kingdom citizen; to salvation through Christ. Why? Because the first law of life is receptivity. If the soil does not receive the seed then the seed cannot bear life. All its potential for life is lost. The same is true for man and animals. Unless the seed is received by the womb there is no life. This holds true for spiritual life as well. There can be no spiritual life unless the seed of God's Word is received in our hearts. What makes a heart receptive to God and His Word? Only hearts that have become humbled by their spiritual poverty and have come to recognize their dire need of God will readily and willingly open to receive God through Christ (James 1:21). Therefore the first step of your spiritual life begins with becoming humble enough to see that you are poor in spirit. That's why Jesus proclaimed the poor in spirit to be blessed but also recipients of the kingdom of heaven.

Another reason we are blessed by being poor in spirit is because it sets us free. Only by letting God humble you will you see who you really are, thus enabling you to give up the pretense of being someone you're not, so as to finally become free to be the person God created you to be. Having the right perspective of yourself also enables you to see God as He really is, freeing you from misconceptions about Him that may be keeping you from truly knowing Him. The greatest obstacle to becoming poor in spirit and enjoying this blessing of freedom, is pride. It is pride that keeps us from being humbled, from

being willing to come to terms with how utterly small (but not insignificant!) we really are in the great scheme of things thus constantly causing us to try and make ourselves bigger; trying to be somebody so to speak. It is pride that causes us to continually compare ourselves to others so as to prove we are somebody. How accurate of a measure can this be of who we are when we decide the standard? It is pride that keeps us depending on ourselves and our perceived merit and abilities rather than God for the help we need. If you want to see the *real* you, the you God sees, then you need to stop seeking your identity from the carnival mirrors offered by this world that distort who you are and thus keep you from God. Instead you need to find your identity in Christ; you need to gaze at Him and make Him the only standard by which you measure yourself, your life. Now that's a reality check! Though painful and humbling, especially at first, it will lead to immeasurable blessing as it invites God to come and address your spiritual poverty. *Blessed* are you when you recognize that you are totally destitute spiritually thereby causing you to continually depend on God for your daily spiritual sustenance and life. Your reward is the kingdom of heaven, the greatest blessing of all!

Prayer:

Father God there is much within me that resists being humbled. I confess that I desperately need Your help in getting to the place where I can see myself as I really am. Please do whatever it takes to weed out the root of pride that entangles my heart, that keeps me from fully embracing, trusting, and depending on You. Lord God forgive me for defining myself by comparing myself to others rather than Your Son. I also seek Your forgiveness for not fully recognizing the depth of my spiritual poverty and the foolishness of thinking I can in anyway merit or earn my salvation. I ask that You would give me the strength and perseverance to stand in the light of Your truth so as to see myself as You do. Lord save me from the mindset of having to be somebody according to the world's mold so I can be free to become the person You created me to be. Lord God show me the good works You have prepared for me and help me to do them solely for Your glory and not mine. Amen

Follow Up:

Read the Parable of the Soils that Jesus taught in Mark 4:3-20. The point that He is using this story to illustrate is that the condition of our hearts (like the soil) determines what we do with the seed of God's Word. As shown in the parable only one of the soils fulfilled the Law of receptivity by receiving the seed and bringing it to fruition. The conclusion is that many hearts may initially be receptive to the gospel of Jesus, but it eventually dies as it finds a heart so full of self and the things of this world that there is no room, no nurture to allow the seed of God's truth to grow and come to fruition. So which of these four soils represents a heart that is poor in spirit? Which one represents your heart?

Challenge:

With the exception of being inspired by someone towards God, comparing yourself to another is a sin. Most of us have such a habit of comparing ourselves to others we are rarely conscious of doing it. If this is something you struggle with, then you need to consciously make an effort to put a stop to it because it is simply not right to put someone down so as to make yourself look better. Remember how it feels having it done to you. The best way to do this is to look at people like Jesus does. Jesus looks at us non-judgmentally because He sees us with the eyes of His heart, through eyes of love and compassion (Eph.1:18). Begin to make it your practice to compare yourself to Jesus alone, and see others with the eyes of your heart, rather than the critical eyes of your self-righteousness or insecurities.

For Further Study:

Psalm 34:18; 62:5-8; 103:14; Proverbs 16:18; Isaiah 57:14-15; 66:2; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 18:4; Romans 7:18-25; 12:3, 16; Galatians 6:3; Philippians 2:3-13; I Peter 5:5-7

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