

The Message of the King Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Text: Matthew 5:3 (NIV)

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

Introduction:

The story is told of a young American student who visited the Beethoven Museum in Bonn, Germany.

The student became fascinated by Beethoven's piano that was on display there.

It was a thrill to think that Beethoven had composed some of his greatest works on that piano!

The student asked the museum guard if she might play a few notes on it.

To help persuade the guard, she also slipped him a lavish tip.

The guard agreed and the girl went to the piano and played the opening of the Moonlight Sonata.

As she was leaving she said to the guard, "I suppose all the great pianists who come here want to play on that piano."

The guard shook his head and said, "Paderewski, the famous Polish pianist was here a few years ago, and he said he wasn't worthy to touch it."

Spiritual Application:

Poverty of the spirit is certainly not something that comes naturally to some people, and as a matter of fact, it's not something that is celebrated in our time and culture.

Our culture and our world emphasize and appreciate things like self-reliance, and self-confidence and they look down on someone who does not present this kind of characteristic in leadership.

The current thinking of our culture in which we live goes absolutely in the opposite direction of Biblical wisdom.

Biblical wisdom turns conventional wisdom on top of its head.

Our worldly wisdom says the way up is up.

Biblical wisdom says that the way up is down.

- Now to some people that might seem crazy.
- In fact, to some people it seems more crazy and seems absolutely ridiculous.
- The Bible often makes statements like the way to save your life is to lose it.
- Or if you lose your life you will find it

You see the problem with conventional wisdom is that it is not very wise.

Biblical wisdom is true wisdom.

It is not only wise, but it is true! It sounds too paradoxical.

However, Biblical wisdom is full of paradoxes like this.

The world's greatest teacher is going to teach us that very thing from these verses.

It will not only turn conventional wisdom on its head folks, but listen to me, IF YOU AND I REALLY HEAR THIS, IT WILL TURN US ON OUR HEADS AS WELL.

Jesus starts this Sermon of the Mount by saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”

- How radical this is! It flies in the face of everything we've been taught today.
- Conventional wisdom today teaches us that any kind of poverty is something to be avoided.
- But when we understand what Jesus is saying – we get it!
- What Jesus is saying is that poverty of the spirit is absolutely essential for us to be right with God and for us to be righteous in His eyes.

The J.B. Phillips' translation renders it, ***“How happy are the humble-minded, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs!”***

Jesus is teaching us that this characteristic of being “Poor in Spirit” is one that will make us happy.

But most people in our society today would argue the opposite.

Many in our society would argue that “Poverty of Spirit” leads to despair, not happiness.

They would say “Happy are the successful, the powerful, the rich, the famous, the aggressive, the self-reliant, the self-confident, the glamorous.”

So, to them, being “Poor in Spirit” is equated with being depressed, weak, timid, and passive.

It should not surprise us that this is the first of the Beatitudes, because it is definitely a key to all the ones that follow and a key to embracing the entire Sermon on the Mount that Jesus taught.

Certainly Jesus put the Beatitudes in a logical and definite sequence because He is the Son of God and understands the importance of this sequence.

By necessity this one must come first. No one can enter the kingdom of heaven without first being “Poor in spirit.” Listen, it has to begin here!

Poverty of spirit is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian, and all the other characteristics proceed from this one.

If you can’t be “Poor in spirit” you’ll not get the rest of these Beatitudes.

So what does it really mean to be “Poor in spirit?”

- Some people are shy by nature, but this is not the same as being “Poor in spirit.”
- God created every one of us with different temperaments and personalities.
- There are some people in this Dome who are extroverts.
- There are some people here who are introverts.

- **But the question is – is it possible to be an introvert and be proud and an extrovert and be humble?**
- Peter was probably an extrovert and Thomas was an introvert.
- Both these men were good men, disciples of Jesus, but because one was an extrovert and the other an introvert did not mean one was better than the other.

Let’s begin by trying to describe what being “Poor in Spirit is not.”

I. What Poverty of Spirit is NOT

A. First of all, being poor in spirit does not mean financial poverty.

1. Spiritual poverty is not a matter of money.
2. Certainly money can be a problem for us spiritually. Jesus had a lot to say about that during his ministry.
3. But how much money we have or don’t have is not the question here.
4. You and I could be flat broke, and yet we may not be poor in spirit.
5. **The real issue of being poor in spirit, as we will see, has to do with the heart.**

6. To be “Poor in Spirit” means knowing that in myself, I am spiritually bankrupt, but when I am in Christ, I am rich.

B. Second, being “Poor in spirit” does not mean being biblically illiterate.

1. Some might think that having biblical knowledge is the same thing as being spiritually mature, but that is not the case.

2. Having biblical knowledge is helpful in our growth as a Christian, but it does not guarantee it.

3. Spiritual maturity involves being and living according to God’s Word.

4. It’s not how much you know, but how much you obey and apply.

5. A simple basic that we need to work at getting right is this verse from God’s Word about poverty of spirit.

C. Third, being “Poor in spirit” does not mean thinking poorly of yourself.

1. Some think that if they just put themselves down enough they will be poor in spirit.

2. God doesn’t want us to think poorly of ourselves, he wants us to think properly of ourselves.

3. The issue isn’t proper loathing of self, but proper leaning on God.

D. Fourth, being poor in spirit does not mean we are to be timid and weak.

1. But it does cut to the heart of those who would exalt themselves in the characteristics of pride, self-reliance, and self-confidence.

Illustration:

I read the story this week of a monk who wanted to show his humility to others who were watching and he ran to the altar crying, “I am a nobody, I am a nobody, I am a nobody.”

Another monk who was watching him also ran to the altar and cried so others could hear him, “I am a nobody, I am a nobody, I am a nobody.”

A custodian who was standing off saw what was happening and was so touched by this, that he sincerely moved by this scene, also ran to the altar and cried, “I am a nobody, I am a nobody.”

And the first monk looked at the other monk and said, “Look who’s a nobody!”

Okay, so if poverty of spirit isn’t being financially poor, biblically illiterate, or putting

oneself down, or being timid and weak, then what is it?

II. Here is What Poverty of Spirit IS

A. There are two words used in the NT for poverty.

1. The first is the Greek word, “*penes*” which speaks of the person for whom life is a struggle.

- a. It is the opposite of being affluent
- b. The person who is penes somehow manages to get by.
- c. They struggle daily to be used of God

2. The second Greek word is “*ptochos*” which speaks of absolute poverty, being destitute, bankrupt.

This is the word used here in this first Beatitude.

B. To be Poor in Spirit means knowing yourself, accepting yourself, and being yourself to the glory of God.

- It’s knowing your strengths and weaknesses, you hidden desires, you ambitions, your spiritual gifts and natural abilities – and being honest with yourself.

Illustration:

When I was in grade school, I wanted to be accepted.

Do you remember when we lined up and the teacher choose two people to be Captains and then the Captains would choose which ones they wanted on their side?

It really made me feel bad when I wasn’t chosen among some of the first ones.

And yet I felt badly for those who always were chosen last.

It was painful experience when you weren’t chosen among the first.

Sometimes getting to know your true self is a painful experience, but my friend, listen to me, it is a part of maturing.

C. To be poor in spirit really means to realize that we are spiritually bankrupt, that we cannot save ourselves.

It’s actually coming to the realization to say, “I recognize my spiritual bankrupt nature, and my dependency on God, and Oh, I’m so happy that I know God will meet my need.”

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In the Expositor's Bible Commentary, Carson explains,

“To be poor in Spirit is not to lack courage but to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It confesses one's unworthiness before God and utter dependence on Him.”

To be Poor in Spirit means that we see our total spiritual poverty before God and our utter dependence upon Him.

We can be well educated and be spiritually ignorant.

There are some people who get all hung up on the educational degrees and they make sure people know they have them.

We can be financially secure and be spiritually bankrupt.

We could be the president of some corporation, but without Jesus Christ that person is in the spiritual unemployment line.

One of the best biblical illustrations of poverty of spirit is the story that Jesus told about the Pharisee and the Publican from Luke 18:9-14.

1. Luke introduces the story with the words,

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“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.” (vs. 9)

Those who are confident of their own righteousness and who look down on everyone else are certainly not poor in spirit, right?

In the spiritual sense they have completely missed the boat!!

In this parable of Jesus, he tells about a certain Pharisee who went to the temple to pray.

a. Now this is commendable. People ought to pray, right?

b. But this man promoted himself in prayer, rather than humbled himself in prayer.

c. The Pharisee certainly had 'I' trouble, not “eye” trouble.

d. He prayed, ***“I thank God I am not like other men...I fast twice a week...I give tithes.”***

e. Note his arrogance and pride in all he has done or is doing.

f. The Pharisee was one of those “holier-than-thou” types. He thought that God really loved him because of how righteous and holy he was.

g. He was kind of like the guy who wrote the book, “Humility and How I Attained It.”

h. That, my brothers and sisters, is self-righteousness.

i. That is not being poor in spirit.

3. The other man that Jesus told about in the parable was quite different.

a. He stood back in humility...he would not look up toward heaven...he beat his breast as an expression of deep sorrow over his sinfulness.

b. His prayer was not elegant, nor long, all that he could say to God was, ***“Have mercy on me, a sinner.”***

4. Jesus said, ***“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”***

5. The publican went home justified, not because he had done more right things, but because he had the right heart – he was poor in spirit.

III. How Can I Know If I am Poor in Spirit?

A. First, The poor in spirit have a broken and contrite heart.

1. The person of spiritual poverty knows that they are a sinner who is spiritually bankrupt.

2. They know that they are not righteous and cannot be righteous without God’s grace and power.

3. They know that they are saved not by works, but by God’s grace.

4. Knowing their failure to live up to God’s standards brings them great remorse as they look to God for mercy.

B. Second, The poor in spirit are humble.

1. To be poor in spirit means to have an absence of spiritual pride.

2. Pride says look at me and how good I am.

3. Humility says that any goodness in me comes from God.

4. Pride causes us to compare ourselves with others, and says look at how much better I am than you are.

5. Humility causes us to compare ourselves with God and recognizes how far short we fall.

6. And if we are in any way more righteous than others, it is because of God’s grace and help.

7. A man named Powell once observed: “Pride is so subtle that if we aren’t careful we’ll be proud of our humility.

When this happens our goodness becomes badness.

Our virtues become vices.

We can easily become like the Sunday School teacher who, having told the story of the Pharisee and the publican, said, ‘Children, let’s bow our heads and thank God we are not like the Pharisee!’”

C. Third, The poor in spirit are dependent on God.

1. In The Message, by Peterson, he translates the Beatitude we are working on today, “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.”

2. One of the most important lessons for us to learn is to stop relying on ourselves, and to depend more on God.

3. A good illustration of daily dependence on God comes out of the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness.

a. When they left Egypt, they took with them the riches that God allowed them to take as plunder.

b. Yet with all those things of monetary worth, they had no ability to feed or water themselves in the wilderness.

c. No amount of money can help someone who has no food or water.

d. If they were going to live more than a few days, then they would have to depend on God to provide for them.

e. As you know, God proceeded to provide them daily manna and quail and water.

4. Like the Israelites, we Christians need to learn to look to God for our daily spiritual needs.

5. We can’t fill up on what is needed just once a week, or once a quarter.

6. We need what God offers every day, and for that matter, every moment of the day.

7. The poor in spirit learn to walk with God expressing continual dependence.

8. The poor in spirit don’t trust in themselves, they recognize their ongoing need for God.

IV. How Can I Become Poor in Spirit?

A. The answer is not to look at yourself or try to do it yourself.

1. The way to become poor in spirit is to behold and draw near to God.

2. Read the Bible as it talks about Him. Watch what God does. Look at God’s Son.

3. If anyone feels anything in the presence of God except utter poverty of spirit, then it means they haven't really faced Him.

4. You cannot truly look at God without feeling your absolute poverty, emptiness and unworthiness.

5. Think of Isaiah who when encountered by the Lord cried out, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." (Isaiah 6:5)

6. Think of Peter – after the miraculous catch of fish, Peter bowed down and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Lk. 5:8)

7. I can't even begin to count the number of people who came to Jesus and threw themselves at his feet.

B. Poverty of spirit has to do with humbling ourselves before God and expressing a broken and contrite heart.

1. Poverty of spirit has to do with emptying ourselves of all spiritual pride, and expressing our dependence on God for salvation and for transformation.

2. The promise of this first Beatitude is "blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

3. Poverty of spirit leads us toward the salvation by grace through faith that God offers, and poverty of spirit becomes the foundation for all the other beatitudes that lead to maturation.

4. We cannot be filled until we are empty God cannot fill what is already full.

5. And we cannot be filled and helped by God until we recognize our need for God's help.

C. God loves us and accepts us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way.

1. God wants us to have real righteousness and be just like Jesus.

2. The Beatitudes are a composite of the character that will make us be like Jesus.

3. The first is "the poor in spirit" and requires that we die to self through brokenness, humility and dependence upon God.

4. This is only the beginning, but it is the right place to start.

5. And it is the right place to keep on starting.