

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT**  
**MATTHEW 5:3**

**INTRO.:**

1. **ILLUST.:** I am sure that most all of you have heard the famous song from the musical “Oklahoma” which begins, “Oh what a beautiful morning, oh what a beautiful day; I’ve got a wonderful feeling, everything’s going my way.”
  - a. As the song expressed a lot people today tend to regard happiness in that light.
  - b. “When everything’s going my way, I will be happy. I will have that wonderful feeling.”
  - c. But what about when things are not going my way?
    - 1) What about when life becomes a treadmill?
    - 2) What if we never reach the point where everything’s going our way?
    - 3) We look around us and conclude.
    - 4) In fact, as we look around us we may even conclude that there is no possibility in this life of everything going our way.
  - d. In times like this can we ever find happiness?
2. But the fact is that you do not need to have everything going your way to be happy.
  - a. God’s way of making men happy is very much different from the sentiments expressed in this song.
  - b. We normally associate happiness with such things as comfort, peace, and security.
  - c. But God’s way of providing happiness is sometimes found in sacrifice, discipline, and humility.
  - d. God’s way to true happiness is found when we get out of self and turn our lives over to Him.
3. Some of you may have read the story of Robert Reed several years back.
  - a. Robert Reed said, “I have everything I need for joy!”
  - b. But if you looked at him you would see that his hands were twisted and his feet were useless.
    - 1) He could not bathe himself.
    - 2) He could not feed himself.
    - 3) He could not brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear.
    - 4) Strips of Velcro held his shirts together and his speech drug like a worn out audiocassette.
  - c. For you see Robert had cerebral palsy.
    - 1) The disease kept him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk.
    - 2) But it did not keep him from graduating from high school or attending Abilene Christian University, from which he graduated with a degree in Latin.
    - 3) Having cerebral palsy did not keep him from teaching at St. Louis junior college or from venturing overseas on five mission trips.
    - 4) And it did not prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal.
  - d. In 1972 he moved to Lisbon, Portugal, alone.
    - 1) There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese.
    - 2) He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language.
    - 3) Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ.
    - 4) Within six years he led seventy people to Christ, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.
  - e. One day when Robert was speaking after he had come back to the U.S. men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform.
    - 1) People watched them lay a Bible in his lap.
    - 2) They watched his stiff fingers force open the pages.
    - 3) And as they watched they wiped away tears of admiration from their faces.
  - f. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite.
    - 1) He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, “I have everything I need for joy.”
    - 2) His shirts were held together by Velcro, but his life is held together by joy.
  - g. Robert knew the secret that Jesus reveals to us in the Sermon on the Mount and especially in the beatitudes and the one that we will be studying this AM that is found in Matt. 5:3.

4. In Matt. 5:3 Jesus said, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”
  - a. At first glance we may say, “How preposterous!”
  - b. How can someone who is poor be rich?
  - c. It seems that Jesus is making a contradictory statement here.
  - d. In our society that equates happiness with possessions and unhappiness with poverty, we are left scratching our heads and wondering what Jesus was talking about.
  - e. But when we realize that Jesus was talking about a whole new approach to life, a radical change in our direction, we begin to see that what He is saying has a much deeper meaning than what we see on the surface.
5. This AM let us look at what Jesus was talking about as He began this great sermon. – Let us look at what type of poverty was He is calling for here.

### LESSON:

- I. 1<sup>st</sup>: What did Jesus mean when He used the term, “*poor in spirit?*”
  - A. The specific Greek word Jesus used here for “*poor*” was PTOCHES, and it describes the man who is in absolutely abject poverty.
    1. This is a person who is absolutely destitute.
    2. It refers to a person who is so poor and needy, that they have to beg in order to live.
      - a. It is the person who is truly homeless.
      - b. It is the person in Haiti one year ago who literally lost everything they had and were reduced to begging for even the basics of life.
    3. By using this word to refer to those who are “*poor in spirit*” Jesus was seeking to convey an important message.
  - B. The thought that genuine joy and satisfaction comes from being poor in anything is diametrically opposed to the conventional wisdom of today’s culture.
    1. In the minds of those who have bought into the world’s way of thinking, what Jesus said here ought to read “Blessed are the rich, the famous, the powerful, the movers and shakers, the important, the aggressive, the self-reliant, the self-confident, the glamorous, those who win American Idol, etc.”
    2. In today’s world, being “*poor in spirit*” is equated with being depressed, weak, timid, and passive.
      - a. Everyone knows that this is not the way to get ahead in our society.
      - b. Everyone knows that this is not the way to attain “happiness.”
    3. Today’s conventional wisdom teaches us to assert ourselves, to care for nothing but ourselves.
    4. We are taught that the only virtue is strength and the only vice is weakness.
    5. We are encouraged to be strong and we are told that “The world is ours if we will just reach out and grab it.”
  - C. Unfortunately, the conventional wisdom held by our society is often at odds with Biblical wisdom.
    1. God’s wisdom and ways are radically different from the current thinking of our secular society.
    2. As a matter of fact, Paul said that “*the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God*” (1 Cor. 3:19).
    3. Thus the question that we must ask ourselves is “Are we willing to accept the radical teachings of Jesus as truth?”
    4. And if so, “Are we willing to let them change our lives in the radical way Jesus intended?”
  - D. Notice that those who are “*poor in spirit*” are not:
    1. Those who are financially destitute and lack this world’s goods.
      - a. True happiness does not depend on what one had or does not have.
      - b. Rather, it depends upon who we are, or what is on the inside – our spirit.
    2. Those who go around with a “woe is me attitude.”
      - a. It does not describe one who is full of self-pity or lacks a backbone.
      - b. It is not one with a suppressed personality.
    3. Those who lack courage or vitality.
    4. Those who exhibit a false sense of humility in order to gain sympathy from others.

- E. Positively, then, what does it mean to be "*poor in spirit*?"
1. It means to humbly bow our hearts to God, acknowledging our total spiritual poverty before Him and our utter dependence upon Him.
    - a. It is to understand that apart from Christ we are spiritually destitute.
    - b. It is to personally acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy.
    - c. It is the conscious confession of our unworthiness before God.
    - d. It is the conscious recognition that I have absolutely no right to approach God or expect His blessings.
  2. To be "*poor in spirit*" is to say "I am nothing; I have nothing; I can do nothing; I stand in need of all things; and only God can fill that void."
  3. Being "*poor in spirit*" is the opposite of being haughty and self-sufficient.
    - a. It is the very reverse of that independent and defiant attitude which refuses to bow to God, or acknowledge our need for and total dependence upon God.
    - b. It is opposite the attitude of King Saul in 1 Samuel 15 when he refused to obey God because he was king and the king could do anything he wanted.
    - c. It is opposite the attitude of the church at Laodicea in Rev. 3:17-18 who said we are doing pretty well on their own and did not need God's help.
  4. Being "*poor in spirit*" could be summed up by the word "*humility*."
    - a. Humility is admitting that you do not have it all together.
    - b. Humility is admitting that you do not know it all.
    - c. Humility is realizing that the universe does not revolve around you.
    - d. Humility is admitting to God that not only do you need His help, but also that you cannot survive without His help.
    - e. Humility is coming before God as a destitute beggar.
- F. As we look in the Bible we find numerous examples of those who were "*poor in spirit*."
1. Gideon.
    - a. When God came to Gideon and told him that he was going to be used to "*save Israel from the hand of the Midianites*", Gideon's reply demonstrated the fact that he was "*poor in spirit*."
    - b. Gideon said in Judges 6:15-16: "*O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house.*" But the Lord said to him, "*Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.*"
  2. Moses
    - a. The fact that Moses was truly "*poor in spirit*" is seen in his feelings of unworthiness to perform the task that was laid upon him.
    - b. While he was making excuses, he was also consciousness of his own insufficiency and inadequacy (Exodus 4:1-12).
  3. Isaiah.
    - a. Having seen a vision of the Lord, Isaiah demonstrated that he was "*poor in spirit*."
    - b. His words were, "*Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips...*" (Isaiah 6:5).
  4. Peter.
    - a. Peter was naturally aggressive, self-assertive, and self-confident.
    - b. He was a rough and tough fisherman who knew how to catch fish.
    - c. But when He saw the feebleness of his own efforts and the greatness of the power of the Lord, his words were "*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*" (Luke 5:8).
  5. Paul.
    - a. Even though Paul's credentials were more than impressive (Phil. 3:5-6), he still realized how worthless it was.
    - b. He said, "*More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.*" (Phil. 3:8-10).
  6. Jesus - Perhaps no other place in the Bible describes the Lord's poverty of spirit than Phil. 2:6-8.

- II. Seeing what Jesus meant by being “*poor in spirit*” now let us now notice why this quality is so important in our life if we are going to be His disciple.
- A. 1<sup>st</sup>: Being “*poor in spirit*” is fundamental to our salvation.
1. Without being “*poor in spirit*” a person cannot even come to Christ.
  2. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican shows that to be justified one must be “*poor in spirit*,” that is, we must admit the fact that we cannot be righteous by our own efforts no matter how hard we try (Luke 18:9-14).
  3. When we are willing to acknowledge that God must fill us or we will forever remain on empty, then we are in a place where God can save us.
  4. The fact is that God has never saved someone who came to Him with a proud arrogant attitude.
  5. Only those who have made the painful discovery that all their righteousness is but filthy rags and that even in their best state, they are “*altogether vanity*” are saved (Psalms 39:5).
- B. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Being “*poor in spirit*” is the very foundation upon which spiritual maturity is built.
1. As one writer put it, “Jesus puts this beatitude first because humility is the foundation of all other graces, a basic element in becoming a Christian. Pride has no part in Christ’s kingdom, and until a person surrenders pride he cannot enter the kingdom. The door into His kingdom is low, and no one who stands tall will ever go through it. We cannot be filled until we are empty, we cannot be made worthy until we recognize our unworthiness; we cannot live until we admit we are dead. We might as well expect fruit to grow without a tree as to expect the other graces of the Christian life to grow without humility. We cannot begin the Christian life without humility and we cannot live the Christian life with pride.”
  2. The same humility that it takes to bring us to the point of salvation is the same humility that it takes to accept the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and start living the radically different life Jesus calls for.
    - a. In fact we will see that many of the obstacles that keep us from maturing in the Lord are dealt with honestly and openly in the Sermon on the Mount.
    - b. But it will take a great deal of spiritual poverty to admit our sin and to submit to the Christ’s leading.
  3. James tells us that with “*meekness*” or humility we are to receive the Word of God (James 1:21).
    - a. It is those who are “*poor in spirit*” who are teachable.
    - b. The meek will be taught the ways of God according to David’s words in Psalms 25:9, “*The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*”
- III. Seeing how essential being “*poor in spirit*” is if I want to be a follower of Christ, the final question is, “How do I become poor in spirit?”
- To answer this question I would like to use what David said in Psalms 37:3-9.
- A. 1<sup>st</sup>: “*Trust in the Lord*” - vs. 3: (Read).
1. Instead of placing too much confidence in oneself, those who are “*poor in spirit*” have their confidence in God alone.
  2. It means that we will adopt His ways in everything that we do.
    - a. We believe in the honesty, integrity, and justice of God.
    - b. Therefore we will do what is right before Him.
  3. People who place too much confidence in themselves do not regularly follow what is right and moral.
  4. Since they trust in themselves, they think that their ways will always work.
  5. But for us who “*are poor in the spirit*,” we believe that God’s ways always are the best.
- B. 2<sup>nd</sup>: “*Delight yourself in the Lord*” – vs. 4: (Read).
1. The self-confident person delights himself in his accomplishments.
    - a. He praises his abilities and accomplishments.
    - b. He boasts of himself and expects to be given special attention and priority.
    - c. And if he does not receive it, he is unhappy and you are in trouble.

2. But the “*poor in spirit*” delights in the Lord.
  - a. To delight in the Lord means to be highly pleased or to have great joy or pleasure in the Lord.
  - b. The point is that men tend to give more importance to anything that gives them pleasure or anyone who gives them joy.
  - c. When we delight in the Lord, it means that we give Him importance and priority in everything that we do.
    - 1) Instead of thinking, what will please me, we think of what will please our God.
    - 2) Instead of saying, “I want, I feel, I think...” we say, “What does God want? What can I do to please Him?”

C. 3<sup>rd</sup>: “*Commit your ways to the Lord*” – vs. 5-6: (Read).

1. Committing one’s way to the Lord means letting God be officially in charge of our lives.
  - a. We give Him the authority to use us according to His purpose and plan.
  - b. We surrender our abilities, strengths, and resources unto God’s authority.
  - c. We are willing to be His instruments.
2. Anyone who possessed too much self-confidence that they will not allow God to interfere in their plans is not “*poor in spirit*.”
3. Anyone who feels God has no right to determine the direction of their life, or what He wants them to pursue in life, will not be “*poor in spirit*.”
4. Anyone with the attitude of, “God it is my way or the highway,” will not become “*poor in spirit*.”

D. 4<sup>th</sup>: “*Be still before the Lord and wait*” – vs. 7-9: (Read).

1. The “*poor in the spirit*” knows that there is wisdom in waiting at times for God to work.
  - a. They believe that everything has its perfect time and they must wait.
  - b. They believe that God is always at work for His people and in His world.
2. Conversely, those who assert too much self-confidence are always anxious about their status.
  - a. They do not want anyone to get ahead of them.
  - b. So they are always aggressive and if anyone went ahead of them, they are envious, angry, and irritated.
3. But those who are “*poor in spirit*” are patient and wait for their opportunity.

IV. In concluding this beatitude, Christ gave us a promise, “*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

A. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit because:

1. They are the only ones who have truly sought it.
2. They are the only ones who have a constant urge to keep seeking after God.
3. And they are the only ones who are totally willing to conform their lives to the conditions of entrance into and membership in the Kingdom of God.

B. NOTICE: Christ was actually saying that everything God has in His kingdom belongs to those who are “*poor in spirit*.”

1. All the power in God’s kingdom.
2. All the joy in God’s kingdom – It is ironic that the happiest people in the world are those who are poor in spirit and realize their need for God’s help in their lives.
3. All the freedom in God’s kingdom – Free to be real with people and not have to put on a face, or cover-up.
4. All this can be yours if you are willing to admit to God that you are totally lost without Him.
5. When we do this, God has promised: Ja. 4:10: “*Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*”

CONC.:

1. This first beatitude could be called the “Base Beatitude.”
  - a. This beatitude states not only the most difficult attitude to attain; but also the most vital.
  - b. And this beatitude is the starting point for all of the other attitudes upon which God’s kingdom is established and regulated.
  
2. QUESTIONS:
  - a. Have you come to realize your deep spiritual need for God’s help in your life?
  - b. Have you tried to deal with the problem of sin in your life on your own and failed?
  - c. Is there any area of your life you are trying to get control of and it just is not working?
  - d. Are you willing to come to God now as a spiritual beggar, and ask for Him to help you?
  
3. It is when we humble ourselves before God and admit our weaknesses and that we cannot do it on our own that He will be able us help us, and work within us.