“Are We to Be Poor in Spirit” 09/25/2016

Please open your Bible with me to the Book of Matthew chapter five.

There are a few passages in the Bible that are fairly well-known by both the Church *and* the world. Matthew five falls in that group. Like you, almost everyone knows something about the Beatitudes. And in the first eleven verses of Matthew five the LORD gives us eight very powerful eight statements on how to live well and to please Him. The Beatitudes, as you might know, are the beginning words, the introduction, to what we commonly call the “Sermon on the Mount.”

Now if the greatest Teacher Who ever lived introduces His sermon, His very first sermon with eight beatitudes, shouldn’t we invest the energies of our hearts and pay attention to them? And shouldn’t we imagine that these are eight things that Jesus would pray for? And aren’t they, then, eight things He would have you and I pray for as well?

The word “beatitude” isn’t found in your Bible. And it doesn’t mean “beautiful.” Instead it’s found in the Latin translation, the one called the Vulgate translation of the Bible. So, yes, it *is* in the Bible; but not the English Bible. The Latin Vulgate actually placed the word “beatitude” as a heading for this section of the Sermon on the Mount. In the Vulgate it’s “Be`at-itudo.” And a be`at-itudo is “an abundant happiness, something that indicates that you are very fortunate and that you are well-off spiritually. The simplest definition is this “spiritually prosperous.”

And “vulgate,” by the way means “common speech.” It does not mean “vulgar.”

So, what’s on my heart today is one of these eight beatitudes. I’ve titled today’s sermon “Are We to Be Poor in Spirit?” Shall we pray?

Let’s begin with the long view? Are you aware; are you really aware that the LORD is interested in your experiencing a blessed life? That’s it’s His will that you have a practical knowledge of blessedness?

There are a lot of people you and I know that are troubled and joyless; hurting and in a hurry; moving through life with the “same ‘ole; same ‘ole” philosophy and anything but blessed. Folks, do you really think that that’s God’s will?

As you are about to see, “blessed” is the norm, not the exception. When you consider the big picture from this sermon, you can say with huge confidence “the LORD does indeed want me to experience this blessedness.”

The modern term is “happy.” And it’s a theme that runs right through the Bible; but not a worldly kind of happiness. Rather, it’s a happiness that comes as a byproduct of living in a “right relationship with God” happiness; a happiness that is found in the Father/child relationship between God and man. Oh, how happy is the man or woman who finds his life and strength and peace and joy in the LORD!

The Beatitudes are amazing for a lot of reasons. But this must be the greatest reason. The LORD does want you to experience what He is like; blessed; happy. What the Beatitudes really are are characteristics of God and then, those same characteristics are found in people who are well connected to Him and His kingdom.

Blessed is the word that describes you who are citizens of a non-worldly kingdom; the kingdom of God; it describes qualities of people who walk with God in this world. These people usually aren’t the “high-rollers” of society. Nor are they the most well-known. And though they may not be the best known in the world, they influence you by the way they live and the way they die. They carry a heavenly light about them. We know that light as “blessedness.”

So, Matthew five is for you. It’s the word God uses to describe you. And have you ever noticed that the LORD divides this first part of His sermon into two sections? In verses three down to six He gives us four *inward* beatitudes. And in verses seven through eleven He gives to us four *outward* beatitudes.

And that, in itself is a blessing because God made you for happiness on the inside as well as happiness on the outside. And there one more thing to notice about each beatitude. Each one has two parts. There’s a condition for each one; and there’s an effect.

Let me show you what I mean. Take, for example, verse eight “Blessed are the pure in heart.” Purity of heart. That’s the condition. And the effect? “They [those who are pure in heart] shall see God.” So, as you read each beatitude, look for the condition and then look for the effect of that condition.

Folks, the condition of blessedness comes as you adopt these specific attitudes.

How many times have you chosen the exact opposite of what Jesus says? Here He’s speaking about happiness. And you don’t believe Him. You think there’s a better way.

Think about your own life. Now, think about your life in relation to this one beatitude; verse three; would you *choose* to be poor in spirit?

Just what did Jesus mean when He spoke these words? Imagine this. Here is the LORD’s first public sermon. And He’s speaking to you and me; *ordinary* people. He’s not at the synagogue delivering a sermon to the Scribes and Pharisees. He’s not even seated inside the Temple. He’s outdoors. He’s with a group of people atop a hillside in Israel. Folks, the Beatitudes aren’t words for theologians.

At the same time, these are some of the richest lines ever spoken by anyone. And my hope this morning is to encourage you to apply what Jesus says. Why? Because it’s not enough, as you know, to just see the value of these conditions. It’s a call to make them yours. Adopt these attitudes because that’s what the beatitudes are; attitudes that make life work; attitudes that belong to those who belong to Him. And when you choose to adopt these attitudes, you can be sure you are seeking to please the LORD.

So, today I’d like to present to you the first beatitude and to offer you just a few ideas that might help you see just what “poor in spirit” means.

Matthew 5:3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Just what does the LORD mean when He commend being “poor in spirit”? Here are you choices. Is it:

1. Having no enthusiasm
2. Being downcast
3. Being miserable
4. Being poor
5. None of the above

The correct answer is “e)” None of the above. Although there are some who do believe that’s what the LORD is saying here. Here’s what it is though.

1. To be poor in spirit means you are lacking in

something. Lacking in what? Poor in what? The answer might be quite simple. When you are poor in spirit, among other things, you are lacking in something major. What would the LORD most want you to have lack of? Can you guess what it might be?

Someone who is poor in spirit is someone who lacks spiritual pride. Do you recall the story of the Pharisee who bragged about his *great* religious life and his *great* spiritual abilities and his *great* acts of religiosity while nearby knelt a humble tax collector who wouldn’t so much as lift up his eyes? The religious man was pompous; meaning proud.

Both of these men have a story to tell. Look with me at Luke chapter eighteen. Here’s the story.

Luke 18:9 *“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: (10) Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. (11) The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

*(12) I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. (13) And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. (14) I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

Your best description of what it means to be “poor in spirit” is not found in this Pharisee. It what you see in the heart and the words of the publican. By the way, the NT makes many references to publicans A publican is a Jew who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman government. And when he collected the taxes, he had the right to keep a significant portion of those taxes for himself before he passed some of it on to his supervisor in Rome.

And although it is likely that this tax collector was quite wealthy because a tax collector was typically a cheater, he’s seen by Jesus as “poor in spirit;” at least at this stage in his life.

You can see this in his attitude. Notice verse thirteen. Luke 18:13 *“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”*

It was his attitude that pleased the LORD. His attitude indicated how he saw himself. His attitude was that he was anything but proud of his accomplishments. And how does a man who is poor in spirit see himself? He sees himself as a sinner; an undeserving sinner; someone who doesn’t even have the right to be near the LORD; someone who doesn’t have a right to in the LORD’s temple house of worship.

Now, we all know how important it is to have a good attitude. But even a good attitude can be displeasing to the LORD, if you value your good attitude as an expression of self-exaltation.

To be fair, I’m going to conclude from the words of this Pharisee that he might very well have *had* a good attitude. But it’s obvious that the LORD did not send this man away justified. The Pharisee’s attitude was “look at me.” “Look at what I’ve done.” “Look at what I do.” “And, notice, LORD, I’m not at all like this publican. I’m no extortioner. I’m not unjust. I’m no adulterer.” “I fast; sometimes I fast twice a week.” “I give tithes of every single thing that I own.” “Look at me.”

Folks, the attitude by which you see yourself before God tells on you. The attitude described by Jesus as “poor in spirit” is one that “admits to God that your soul is *hurting* and condemned for your sins. It’s an attitude in which you know you are in great spiritual need apart for Him. [Found on [www.antipas.net](http://www.antipas.net)].

Can you see how this tremendous condition is one that Jesus could describe as “blessed”?

You see, the poor in spirit lack something. That something is pride. Pride always goes before a fall and pride always goes before destruction.

So, to begin with, how would you go about adopting this characteristic? Here’s how. Choose to see yourself as having been born without spiritual life and now, seeing yourself as without spiritual life, you choose, like the tax collector to empty yourself of all pride and all self-exaltation. And then, you humbly ask God for what? To “be merciful to you, a sinner.”

In a word, you could say that this first beatitude is the first acknowledgement of your soul that you are in great spiritual need; the first ray of spiritual light that enters into the heart of a sinner; the awareness that he or she is spiritually bankrupt and the knowledge in your heart that there is a spiritual void within you. It’s the attitude of the tax collector who sees himself in desperate need of God; in desperate need of a personal Savior; in dire need of Someone to forgive him.

So, when someone asks you this week “How’s your day going?” Think about yourself in relation to your LORD. Do you need Him? Or, are you able to get along with His word or His presence or His hand upon you?

The Bible Commentator Matthew Henry says it like this. “This poverty of spirit is a gracious disposition of soul, by which we are emptied of self, in order to our being filled with Jesus Christ.”

The first attitude that must be adopted in the heart and life of the blessed on is the attitude of “spiritual poverty;” that you are truly lacking in something; and that you need the LORD constantly and for everything. But there’s another aspect of this blessedness that can also be seen here in Jesus’ words.

1. To be “poor in spirit” means you’ve chosen to

conduct and control your life by true humility. And what is true humility? The LORD describes it in the *simplest* way possible so that anyone anywhere can understand it.

Would you turn with me to Jesus’ words in Matthew 18? Matthew 18:1 *“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (2) And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*

*(3) And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (4) Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

And Mark 10:15 *“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”*

Think about your own relationship to God today. Is there any sense of this attitude having been adopted into your soul? Without it, do you have any chance whatsoever of entering into God’s kingdom? In fact, it’s so powerful that if you choose to act like an *adult* before you act like a *child* before the LORD, you can be sure that you won’t enter *His* kingdom.

All who enter the kingdom of God come as little ones.

Being poor in spirit, folks, it, above everything else, taking the role of a teachable, gentle child. You’ve got to imagine Jesus in action here. The adults, the disciples, they came asking the LORD the question. “Who’s the *greatest* in the kingdom?” Please don’t forget the LORD’s actions here. He calls a little child to Him and sets him in the middle of the entire group. And He says *“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

Folks, your spiritual pride will always keep you from the enjoyment of life both here and in the hereafter. But the moment you step down off your self-ladder and come before God as a little child, you are given something phenomenal. You are given His spiritual life. You actually become a subject in a kingdom that is not of this world. You become a son or a daughter of Go.

You see, it’s how you see yourself that sets your success before God. It determines your spiritual character. It decides your spiritual destiny. It enables you to experience what Jesus calls “blessedness;” the condition of all spiritual souls.

What a way to find “spiritual poverty”! It’s by coming to God as though you were a little child.

Folks, God’s ways are not man’s ways. Man’s way is “put all the effort forth possible to make sure you are well-known.” “Be sure to brag on yourself because nobody else will.” “Be great because you are great.” God’s way is “except ye be” converted and become as a little child; gentle and teachable; you will not enter the kingdom.

The way of a child is the way of simple faith. The little child believes. He or she trusts. He accepts what you say as true. The little one just looks to you and lets you have your way with him or her.

And what is the way of a little child?

First, the way of a child is simple faith; confidence in God.

Second, the way of a child is the way of humility. It’s the exact opposite of pride. Here’s how C. S. Lewis puts it. *“Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness and all that are mere fleabites by comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”* [Found on [www.pbcc.org](http://www.pbcc.org)].

Third, the way of a child is to have no more confidence in yourself.

Here’s how one lawyer describes his entering into the condition of being one who is poor in spirit. *“Before the Lord Jesus comes to dwell in a human heart, he strips it bare of all the things that have piled up in there and now lines the walls. He does not seek to make us better, to*[*upgrade*](http://www.cslewis.org/blog/a-word-of-grace-april-12-2010/)*our virtues and capacities. He seeks to make us over and if we allow him to get a hand on us, he won’t stop until he has his way with us.*

*I tell you from intimate experience that this happens. There is nothing as terrifying or thrilling as Christ’s relentless transformation of the human soul. Things that I once accepted with trained thought and good conscience to be the best part of me, he has insisted on throwing out with the rubbish*

*of my worst sins and traits. The peeling away of cherished understandings and proud convictions can be painful. I’ve begged him to stop at times. “Lord, what is wrong with this. You gave me this ability, didn’t You? This belief was learned from Your people. Everyone thinks this is OK. Can’t You just leave me alone and*[*work*](http://www.cslewis.org/blog/a-word-of-grace-april-12-2010/)*with what You have? ”*

*His answer to that prayer is ever and always, “No, your claim to strength is a denial of My grace and an exaltation of imperfection. I am not interested in historic preservation of your quaint and quirky soul. I, your Creator, am no caretaker. My power is at its maximum efficiency when you are weakest (II Cor. 12:8-10).*

Your salvation, folks, means God starting over from scratch with you and making a completely new creation (II Cor. 5:17). [Found on [www.cslewis.org](http://www.cslewis.org)] by Kent Hansen, Attorney at law].

The new creation that God makes is the new heart and the heart of a little child. Mark 10:15 “*Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”*

First, the poor in spirit are lacking in something. They lack spiritual pride.

Second, the poor in spirit are those who have humbled themselves before Him.

And third, the poor in spirit are those who own a new piece of property; they own the kingdom of heaven. Look again at Matthew five and verse three. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.”*

The kingdom belongs to you and you belong to the kingdom. The kingdom is experienced and enjoyed by those who are poor in spirit; those who are blessed, as per Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of heaven in all its glory belongs to people who think they don’t ever deserve it. It’s yours; not because you are so capable, so strong, so good, or so efficient. It’s yours because He gives it to you as an effect of choosing something and Someone outside the box of this world. It’s not earned or deserved. It’s the free gift bestowed upon those who come with humble, needy heart.

It’s like He gives a million times more than we could ever pay for when we choose to receive it in a spirit of humility.

God’s work is always that way. He’s the Giver and you are the receiver. And if you ever do give anything to God, it’s because He’s already given it to you.

Now, for today, will you choose the blessedness Jesus offers over the “happy hours” of this world? If not, why not? What would hold you back from entering into a state of divine blessedness, a spiritual happiness that only God can give?

Folks, the LORD has shown us His way. It’s yours to apply what He says.

Now you may be here today and know that you are not among the blessed as the Bible describes blessed. As far as worldly things are concerned, you’ve likely experienced happiness; temporary fleeting happiness. But, up to this point in your life, this condition of blessedness that Jesus describes here has eluded you. And why? Because you have insisted on your sins and your ways for your entire life. You’ve never seen yourself as God sees you, a sinner who is destined for the judgment to come. And so, you’ve rejected Christ time and again.

Well, today is the day of salvation. Why would you not stand before Christ and repent and receive Him today as your Savior and LORD. *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Folks, there is a day of salvation. Today is that day. Your sins became His. He took all your sins onto His body and He paid the penalty for those sins on the tree we know as the Cross of Calvary. Why? Because love is what draws each heart and moves us into the condition of blessedness with God.

So, what will you do about your sins today?

•         “I Repent” = I change my mind about God, Christ, my sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.

•         “I Believe” = I simply trust the Lord Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for my sins. And in believing, I make Him Lord over my entire life.

Today, will you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your LORD and Savior? Shall we pray?

Please turn with me in your Hymnal to # \_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”