

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### Happy Are the Humble

Scripture: Matthew 5:3

Code: 2198

Take your Bible if you will, and let's look at Matthew chapter 5 together, Matthew chapter 5. Sometimes I think the shorter the verse is the more I can think of to say. And usually that's because when you only deal with one verse, you deal with it as one verse because it is so full of meaning.

It is so pregnant with truth, and we're going to find as we go through the Beatitudes, and we'll go one Beatitude at a time, that even though they're one simple statement and only one verse, we have to take them one at a time because they're so loaded with tremendous truth.

And so tonight, we're going to be looking at verse 3, the beginning of the Beatitudes, the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. Verse 1 says, "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was seated, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, 'Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'"

As we studied in our last lesson, Jesus came to bring man happiness. Jesus came to bring man blessing. Jesus came to make life meaningful. And the key to the kind of happiness and the kind of blessedness that's talked about in these Beatitudes - the word "blessed" was our theme for part of our discussion last time - the key to that kind of blessedness is following a new standard for living, a new kind of life. And that is what Jesus sets forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew chapter 5 through 7, our Lord is establishing and counter standard of living, counter to everything the world knows and practices, a new approach to living that results in blessedness, *makarios*. And we saw that this *makarios* is deep inner happiness, a deep and genuine sense of blessedness, a bliss that the world cannot offer, not produced by the world, not produced by circumstances, and not subject to change by the world or circumstances. It is not produced externally. It cannot be touched externally.

The promise of Christ, then, in the Sermon on the Mount is at the very beginning. He is saying if you live by these standards you will know blessedness. And so in verse 3, it's blessed, in verse 4, it's blessed. In verse 5, blessed. Verse 6, verse 7, verse 8, verse 9, 10, 11, and finally, as a result of all this blessedness, verse 12, rejoice and be exceeding glad.

The whole Sermon on the Mount introduces itself with a promise of blessedness, happiness, deep, inner satisfaction. Now we said also last time that this blessedness, this well being, this bliss, this

happiness, in which believers live and which they enjoy, is really a gift of God. For *makarios* or blessedness is characteristic of God.

The greatest possible understanding of the term “blessed” comes when you understand that God is blessed. So happy is the people whose God is the Lord. Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord, for he, above all, is blessed. “Blessed be God,” says the Bible. “Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ.” And if they are blessed, if they have this deep inner bliss, this deep sense of contentment and blessedness because of the virtue of divine nature, then only those who partake in that divine nature can know that same blessedness.

Only as we partake of the very nature of God can we be blessed, can we know this happiness. It doesn't belong to anyone outside those who know God. So Jesus came offering a new standard for living. And his emphasis was not on externals, it was on internals. He was not telling them a new way to live every day. He was telling them a new way to think first that would result in a new way to live every day. He was not talking only about behavior, he was talking about attitude. He was saying that the inner part of a person's life is the real key to happiness. And last week, we talked about the fact that you can pile up all you want stuff on the outside and it never brings any happiness to the inside.

So that we see that Jesus is offering blessing and happiness based on a new standard of life, a new kind of living, a righteous standard, and if you will – and this will be a key word – a selfless standard. A selfless standard. This great sermon, the greatest sermon, no doubt, ever preached, focuses on this kind of happiness, this kind of blessedness. And the amazing thing about it is as we said last time, the only people who can know this blessedness are the people who know they can't live this way on their own and so they're totally dependent on Jesus Christ.

Now remember that I told you last time that the multitude was there and they were hearing and they were listening. But the message was really directed to the twelve. Because no one outside faith in Jesus Christ could ever know this blessedness. No one who didn't have the power of God operating in his life could ever function in this way. No one who had not come to this particular point of humility could ever know and experience any of these great blessings. Only the partakers of the nature of God can know this blessedness.

And I believe, beloved, that this message is for all of us. I know that historically some evangelicals have objected to the Sermon on the Mount and said it's too hard. Matthew 5:48, “Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.” That's too hard. That's not for us. If it's too tough, we just pass it off to the millennium. Must be the kingdom and a lot of people have said that the Sermon on the Mount is kingdom living. It is kingdom principles, but there are lots of problems with that. It's really impossible for many reasons.

First of all, the text does not say “this is for the millennium.” Secondly, Jesus preached it to people who weren’t living in the millennium. To me, that’s the greatest argument of all. Three, it becomes meaningless if you push it into the millennium, because it says, “Blessed are you when you’re persecuted for righteousness sake. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, say all manner of evil against you falsely.” Now in the kingdom, my friend, nobody’s going to get away with that stuff. Or the Lord will rule with a rod of iron.

Matthew 5:44, along with many other things, would become meaningless. “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you;” It’s the same idea. There’s not going to be any of that in the kingdom. And by the way, another reason I believe this is for all believers of all ages is because every principle found on the Sermon on the Mount is found somewhere else in the New Testament.

This isn’t just for some super saints living in the kingdom. This is for us. It is the distinctive lifestyle of a believer of any age. It calls upon us to come to a new standard of living. It is Jesus saying to us, “Look, this is the way you must live if you are to know happiness, if you are to know blessedness.”

And isn’t it wonderful that God is offering us that, that God is not a cosmic killjoy? That God is not finding his greatest joy in raining on your parade? God wants you to be happy. God wants you to be blessed. And he gives us here the principles.

And, you know, another thing that we ought to say about this is that this is distinctive living. You live like this and I promise you you’ll be different. You really will. In many ways, I guess we’d have to say that Christians today have lost their distinctiveness. We were talking about that a little this morning, weren’t we? We have been shaped by the world. We have been molded into the world.

The world’s music and its sex morals, its marriages, its divorces, its morality, its liberation movements, its materialism, its approach to food, its approach to alcoholic drinks, its approach to dance, its approach to entertainment, its approach to sports, its approach to all kinds of things, and we get pushed into that, and it’s very easy for us to lose our distinctiveness.

And we’re seeing in our day something that the Lord has no doubt had his heart broken over for all the years since the church began, and that’s the corrupting of Christianity. And Jesus is really saying here, “God wants you to live different. God doesn’t want you to live the way everybody else lives. And if you’ll live this way you’ll be happy. If you live this way you’ll be blessed.”

And, you know, I’ve always believed that the manufacturer knows more about the product than anybody else. And if I have a car and I buy a car, the first thing I do is read that little book that tells me what to do. I know how to stick the key in and shift it, but there’s other stuff I need to know. Or if I get something that purchase an appliance, I read that stuff and I want to know what they say, how

that thing works.

And it's amazing to me that the manufacturer of everybody who lives in the world is God, and yet very few people want to turn to him and find out how they best can know happiness. How best can I know blessedness? How best can I know fulfillment? You made me. You tell me. And Jesus does right here.

I say again, he's dealing with the inside. Now let me add this. The idea that Jesus deals with the inside and with our attitudes and our feelings and our thinking does not mean that there's no commitment to the outside. Because when the inside is right, the outside is right. Faith without works is what? Dead. There's going to be an outside. You were created in Christ Jesus unto good works. But the true outside, the real outside can only be produced by the real outside.

I think Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives the best illustration of this I've ever read. This is what he says. "Take, for example, the realm of music. A man may play a piece of great music quite accurately. He may make no mistakes at all, and yet it may be true to say of him that he did not really play Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata.' He played the notes correctly, but it was not the sonata. What was he doing? He was mechanically striking the right notes, but missing the soul and the real interpretation. He wasn't doing what Beethoven intended and meant.

"That, I think, is the relationship between the whole and the parts. The artist, the true artist is always correct. Even the greatest artist cannot afford to neglect rules and regulations, but that is not what makes him the great artist. It is this something extra, the expression. It is the spirit. It is the life. It is the whole that he is able to convey."

There, it seems to me, is the relationship of the particular to the general in the Sermon on the Mount. You can't divorce, you can't separate them. The Christian, while he puts his emphasis on the spirit, is also concerned about the letter. But he is not concerned only about the letter. He must never consider the letter apart from the spirit.

On the one hand, to claim the spirit without living according to God's law is to be a liar. On the other hand, to try to live out the law without the spirit is to be a hypocrite. They both go together. The spirit is the right attitude and the letter is the obedience that comes as a result. True spirituality, then, starts on the inside and touches the outside.

Now as you look at the Beatitudes, you'll see that they're like sacred paradoxes. They're almost given in absolute contrast to everything the world knows. And let me just say a word that I want as a little footnote here. You see the word "blessing." The word "blessing" or "blessed" has an opposite word in the Bible. The opposite of *makarios* is *ouai* and we translate it "woe." The opposite of blessing is cursing. The opposite of blessed, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount "blessed" and he turned

around to the Pharisees later and said, “Woe unto you.” Those are opposites.

And let me hasten to say this. The word “blessed” and the word “woe,” neither one of them are really a wish. They are a judgmental pronouncement. Jesus is saying, “I” – he’s not saying, “I wish you blessedness.” He is saying, “Blessed is the man who goes this way, does this, thinks this way.” And other places, “Woe to the man who does this.” They are judicial pronouncements. They are not simply wishes.

Now as we look at these blessed, these judicial pronouncements of God. “Happy is the one who does this, who thinks this way.” We see a sequence. Look with me quickly at verse 3. First we see the poor in spirit. “Poor in spirit” is the right attitude towards sin, which leads to mourning, in verse 4, which leads after you’ve seen your sinfulness and you’ve mourned, to a meekness, a sense of humility, then to a seeking and hunger and thirst for righteousness. You can see the progression.

And that manifests itself in mercy – verse 7 – in purity of heart – verse 8 – in a peacemaking spirit – verse 9. The result of being merciful and pure in heart and peacemaking is that you are reviled and you are persecuted and you are falsely accused. Why? Because by the time you have been poor in spirit, mourned over it, become humble, sought righteousness, lived a merciful, pure, and peacemaking life, you have sufficiently irritated the world so they’re going to react.

But when it’s all said and done, verse 12 says you can “Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven:” And when you live like that, poor in spirit, mourning, meek, seeking righteousness, and as a result of it becoming merciful and pure, and peacemaking, and having the world revile and persecute and say all these things against you, then you can be sure that verse 13 is true. You are the salt of the earth. That’s what it takes. You are the light of the world. You can’t be salt and light, beloved, you can’t start in verse 13 until you start in verse 3.

So let’s look at verse 3. “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is so basic, so necessary. And I’m going to ask you five questions tonight and I want you to just answer them with me as we look at this one statement. Why does Christ begin with this? Why does he start with being poor in spirit? When he’s talking about a new kind of living, a new standard, a new way to live, why does it begin here? Why is this the source of happiness?

Well, simply because it is the fundamental characteristic of a Christian. It is the very first thing that must happen in the life of anybody who ever enters God’s kingdom. Nobody yet ever entered God’s kingdom on the basis of pride. Poverty of spirit is the only way in. The door to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is very low and the only people who come in crawl.

Jesus begins by saying, “There’s a mountain you have to scale. There are heights you have to climb. There is a standard you must attain, but you are incapable of doing it, and the sooner you realize it

the sooner you'll be on your way to finding it." In other words, he's saying you can't be filled until you're empty. You can't be worthwhile until you're worthless.

You know, it amazes me that in modern Christianity today there is so little of the self emptying concept. I see a lot of books on how to be filled with joy and how to be filled and how to be filled with this and how to be filled with the spirit and so forth. There's lots of books on how to be filled, but I don't think I've ever seen a book on how to empty yourself of yourself. Can you imagine a book entitled "How to be Nothing"? It would really be a great seller in our day. "How to be a Nobody."

You know, in so much of our modern Christianity, Phariseeism feeds on pride. Poverty of spirit, on the other hand, is the foundation of all graces. You know, if you don't have poverty of spirit, beloved, you might as well expect fruit to grow without a tree as the graces of the Christian life to grow without humility. They can't. As long as we're not poor in spirit, we can't receive grace. Now even at the beginning, you can't even become a Christian unless you're poor in spirit.

And as you live your Christian life you'll never know the other graces of the Christian life as long as you violate poverty of spirit. And this is tough. Jesus is saying, "Start here. Happiness is for the humble." Happiness is for the humble. Until we are poor in spirit, Christ is never precious to us. Because we can't see him for the looking at ourselves. Before we see our own wants and our own needs and our own desperation, we never see the matchless worth of Christ. Until we know how really damned we are, we can't appreciate how really glorious he is. Until we comprehend how doomed we are, we can't understand how wondrous is his love to redeem us. Until we see our poverty, we cannot understand his riches.

And so out of the carcass comes the honey. It is in our deadness that we come alive. And no man ever comes to Jesus Christ, no man ever enters the kingdom who doesn't crawl with a terrible sense of sinfulness, repentance. Proverbs 16:5 says cursed are the proud. God gives grace to the humble. This has to be at the very beginning. That's why it's first. Listen, the only way to come to God's kingdom is to confess your own unrighteousness, confess your inability to meet God's standards, confess that you can't do it. You can't do it.

Paul experienced this. I think it's – we won't take the time to look at Philippians chapter 3, but men were singing it tonight so beautifully. And Paul, in that passage, says, "Touching the law, I was blameless." And he says, "However, I have no confidence in the flesh." No confidence in the flesh. And it all begins here, people. You enter God's kingdom with a sense of helplessness. You enter God's kingdom with a sense of desperation. And if you want to know happiness as you live in his kingdom, you keep that same sense of helplessness and desperation.

The church at Laodicea said, "I am rich and have need of nothing." In the words of Jesus to them were, "You don't know that you are poor and blind and naked. You think you are rich. You aren't."

How many fools there are in the world who never see the truth, like the little maid of Seneca who kept telling everybody because she was born blind she is not blind, she would say, "I am not blind. The world is dark"? Fool. There are people today saying, "I'm not blind. The world is dark. This is how it is in the world." Fools who do not see the reality. "I am rich and have need of nothing." And they're desperate.

Jesus begins here because this is where you got to begin and this is where you got to begin to get saved, and this is where you got to begin to live the Christian life in blessedness. There is no room for pride. And, as I said, Christianity today in our world is feeding on pride. It is just feeding on it, on the exaltation of the individual.

Second question. Why does it begin here? Because this is where it has to start. You cannot come to God unless you realize that you're spiritually bankrupt, and that's the way you got to live your Christian life. You have nothing in your flesh, nothing.

Second question. What does this term mean, "poor in spirit?" We now know why it's here because it's a start, but what does it specifically mean? What kind of poverty is he talking about? Now some people suggest that it's material poverty. They take Luke 6:20, which says, "Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the kingdom." And they say, "See, it's just plain poor." No.

When you have two records in the Bible in the Gospels, you compare them. "Blessed are the poor." What poor? There are all kinds of poverty, right? You could be poor in terms of money. You could be poor in terms of your education. You could be poor in terms of friends. You could be poor in terms of a lot of things. So when you read Luke say, "Blessed are the poor," and you find Matthew, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," you make the conclusion simply that Matthew tells us what kind of poverty Luke was referring to. That's all. It's no big problem. We just put the two together, comparing scripture with scripture.

What kind of poverty? Well, poor, without money, and there are a lot of people who have written on this thought that God just blesses and gives his kingdom to poor people. Now let me tell you something, folks. If he just means the people without money, then the worst possible thing we as Christians can ever do is give somebody money. I mean, alleviating the poor is terrible.

You know, feeding the hungry is ridiculous. We must stop immediately any aid to anyone who is poor. In fact, what we really ought to do is just get all the money out of everybody we possibly can so they'll all be poor. We'd all be sort of con men. See, we just need to get it all. Only thing is, in so doing, we who get it lose. That's stupid.

We can't go around the world abolishing that kind of stuff. We'd have to close every orphanage, every hospital and all the missions and everything that reaches out to needy people. And if spiritual

blessedness came from material poverty – no. On the other hand, riches can really mess up people. I think poor people have a running start on the right attitude toward life, believe it or not, because in their desperation they seek a source beyond themselves.

The self sufficiency of the rich causes them to be hard-pressed to know God, and that's why the Bible says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom, because he trusts in his riches. A poor man has none to trust in. But there have been a few righteous people who were rich. [Laughter] Not many. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, oh, some wonderful ones in the Old Testament. Philemon was no doubt wealthy. But, you know, God isn't talking here about material poverty. In fact, do you realize that David said in all his years, he never saw the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread.

In Paul's life, he had times of hunger and he had times of thirst, but he never was a cringing beggar. And the Lord Jesus never went around with his twelve begging for food. They were accused of being mad – the disciples and the Lord, – they were accused of being ignorant. They were accused of turning the world upside down. And believe me, if they would have been beggars, they would have been accused of that, too. But no such accusation was ever leveled at them.

Well, you say, "What kind of poverty is it?" Well, he tells you. Poor in spirit. Poor in spirit. Now let's take that term. The word "poor," *ptchos*, interesting word. From a verb – now watch this one – the verb in the Greek means "a shrinking from something or someone to cower and cringe like a beggar." That's what it means. Like you just kind of cringe and cower like a beggar does.

Classical Greek uses this word to refer to one who is reduced to beggary, who crouches in a corner of the dark wall to beg for alms. And the reason he crouches and cowers is because he doesn't want to be seen. He is so desperately ashamed to even allow his identity to be known. Beggars have all that stuff piled on, all those things pulled over their face, and they reach like this, lest they should be known.

By the way, the word "poor" here, the very word, is the word used in Luke 16 when it says, "Lazarus the beggar." That is what the word means. It is not just poor, it is begging poor. And by the way, there is another word in the Bible for normal poverty, *pens*. *Pens* means you're - generally and sometimes there's an overlap – but generally *pens* means you're so poor you have to work just to maintain your living.

*Ptchos* means you're so poor you have to beg. You're reduced to a cringing, cowering beggar. *Pens* you can earn your own living. You can earn your own sustenance. *Ptchos*, you are totally dependent on the gift of somebody else. All you've got going for you, no skill, no nothing. In many cases, you're crippled, you're blind. You're deaf. You're dumb. You can't function in society and you sit in the corner with your shamed arm in the air, pleading for grace and mercy from somebody else. You have no



resource in yourself to even live. Total dependence on somebody else.

Not just poor, begging poor. “Now that,” says Jesus. Just get it. “Is a happy man.” You say, “You got to be kidding.” Well, he’s not talking about physical begging, physical poverty, but he’s talking about poverty of spirit. Listen. This is the best diagnosis of man you could ever find. Man is empty, poor, helpless. Can he work to own his own salvation? Is he *pens* poor so that he can do just a few things and if he cranks out hard enough and works hard enough he may get in by the hair of his chinny chin chin? You think he can cut that? No. He’s not *pens* he’s *ptchos*. He is absolutely incapable of anything and totally dependent on grace from somebody else.

So, he says, “Happy are the destitute, cowering, cringing, beggars.” Boy, what news, folks. The world says, “Happy are the rich and the famous and the self sufficient and the proud.” Well, what does it mean in spirit? Let me talk about that for a minute. It means with reference to the spirit, which is the inner part of man, not the body, which is the outer part. That’s all. He’s begging on the inside, not necessarily on the outside.

Isaiah put it this way. Isaiah 66:2. “But to this man will I look.” Here’s God talking. Now listen. “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word.” It’s the man who shakes on the inside because of his destitution. Psalm 34:18 put it this way. “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Psalm 51:17. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, Oh God, thou wilt not despise.”

Isaiah 57:15 adds this. “For thus saith the high and the lofty one who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, ‘I dwell in the high and holy place with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and revive the heart of the contrite ones.’ ” Listen, people. God identifies with people who beg on the inside, not people who are self sufficient, not people who can work out their own salvation, not people who believe in their own resources, but those who are destitute and beggarly.

It doesn’t mean poor spirited, in the sense of lacking enthusiasm. It doesn’t mean lazy or quiet or indifferent or passive. It doesn’t mean that at all. A poor in spirit individual is one with no sense of self sufficiency. He is bankrupt.

Let me give you an illustration. Look with me a Luke 18. In Luke 18:9 we read a story. “And he spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:” There’s the opposite. Here are the opposite of the poor in spirit. Here are the proud in spirit. “ - who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:” We’ll do it on our own. We’ve got all the resources, et cetera.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and even as this rotten tax collector over here. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, - ” ooh, he’s like a beggar. He’s cringing. He won’t look up. He won’t even look at God.

And he cringes “ - and he beats his breast and he says, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’ ” Want to hear the diagnosis Jesus gave? “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.”

Listen. That’s as clear as you’ll ever hear it. It’s the broken and the contrite. “Blessed are the beggars,” says Jesus. Blessed are those whose spirit is destitute. Blessed are the spiritual paupers, the spiritually empty, the spiritually bankrupt who cringe in a corner and cry out to God for mercy. They are the happy ones. Why? Because they’re the only ones who tapped the real resource for happiness. They’re the only ones who ever know God. They’re the only ones who ever know God’s blessedness. And theirs is the kingdom.

James put it this way. It’s not just the Sermon on the Mount, James said it. He said in James 4:10, “Humble yourselves in the sight of God and he will - ” what? “ - lift you up.” The poverty here is not a poverty against which the will rebels, but it’s a poverty under which the will bows in deep dependence and submission. I’m afraid this is a rather unpopular doctrine in the church today. We emphasize celebrities and experts and superstars and rich, famous Christians. But happiness is for the humble.

Can I illustrate it to you? Just listen. Jacob, Jacob had to face the poverty of spirit before God could use him. He fought God all night in Genesis 32, and finally God dislocated Jacob’s hip. Remember that? He dislocated his hip. He put him flat on his back, and he said, “I give. I can’t do it alone.” And the Bible says in Genesis 32:29 - I love it - “And God blessed him there.” God made him happy.

Oh, I think of Isaiah, used wonderfully by God, but he couldn’t be used at all before he was poor in spirit. His great lamentation over the death of King Uzziah, King Uzziah died and he was so upset and he was thinking only of his loss and only of what it was like not to have King Uzziah around, and God graciously invaded his life and God showed him who really mattered, and it wasn’t Uzziah. He showed him himself high and lifted up in a vision. And the result was that Isaiah said in Isaiah 6, “Woe is me for I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the king.” And at that point, God blessed him.

And Gideon. Gideon, Judges 6:15, became aware of his inadequacy, and he said, “Oh, Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh and I am the least in my father’s

house. You must have the wrong address.” And the Lord said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.” You know who the mightiest man of valor is? The man who knows that in himself he is impotent. That was the spirit of Moses. God said, “Moses, I want you to lead my people.” And he was so desperately unworthy of the task. He was so horribly, fearfully, conscious of his inadequacy and his insufficiency that God used him.

It was the heart of David when he said, “Lord, who am I that thou shouldst come to me?” We see it with Peter, aggressive, self assertive, confident by nature, and he says, “Depart from me, oh, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” The beginning of the beginning for Peter. The apostle Paul recognized in his flesh is no good thing. He was the chief of sinners, a blasphemer, a persecutor, everything he had was dung, refuse, all things he counted lost, no confidence in the flesh. He was sufficient for nothing. His strength was made perfect then in his weakness.

Listen. When you admit your weakness, when you admit your nothingness, that’s not the end. That’s the beginning. But that – watch it – is the hardest thing you will ever do. It’s the hardest thing you will ever do. Jesus is saying the first thing you got to say is, “I can’t. I can’t do it. I can’t.” That’s poverty of spirit.

I think about the parable of the unjust servant in Matthew 18. Beautiful truth. The unjust servant owed a fortune that he could never pay back, never. I mean, it was an astronomical amount of money. Verse 26. “He fell down, and worshipped his master, and he said, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.’ ” He was saying, “Boy, you just hang in there and I’ve got the resources to do it all.” Fool. No way could that debt be repaid. And Jesus was saying in that parable, “What a fool to say to the Lord, ‘Just be patient. I’ll do it all.’ ”

Poor in spirit, the absence of pride, the absence of self assurance, the absence of self reliance. There must be an emptying before there can be a filling. There’s got to be. And this is the way to live, people, not just to get saved, but this is the way to live. You know, time after time after time when I face the task of coming to the pulpit to preach to you, it goes in my mind and through my mind, “Lord, you got to do it. You got to do it. I know the mechanics, Lord, but that’s just what I don’t want, the mechanics. You’ve got to do it. You’ve got to do it.”

Saint Augustine, before his conversion was proud of his intellect. He was proud of his knowledge. And he says it held him back from believing. Only after he emptied himself of his pride did he ever know God. Luther, the great Martin Luther, when he was just a young man entered a monastery. And he entered a monastery to earn his salvation through piety. But he had a tough time doing it. And he woke up one day in his priesthood life and realized he had an acute sense of failure. All those years and he wasn’t yet there. He recognized his own inability to please God. He emptied himself of himself. He based everything on the salvation provided by God through faith, and that was the beginning of the reformation.

Someone has beautifully written, "But though I cannot sing or tell or know the fullness of thy love while here below, my empty vessel I may freely bring, oh, thou who art of love, the living spring, my vessel fill. I am an empty vessel. Not one thought or look of love I ever to thee brought. Yet, I may come and come again to thee with this, the empty sinner's only plea, thou lovest me."

The sum of the great truth is simply stated. The first principle of the Sermon on the Mount is that you can't do it by yourself. There's a new lifestyle to live and that new lifestyle promises eternal happiness for you, but you can't do it by yourself, so that the only standard for living is for those who know they can't do it.

This concept is seen, I think, in the first giving of the law of Sinai. When God gave his law – now think with me – God gave his law on Mount Sinai, there were no – there would be no idols, no adultery, no stealing, no murder, you know, and so forth, bearing false witness. But even while God was giving it, the people were down below breaking it, right? God was giving it to Moses and Aaron was leading them in an orgy. So right at the start you have the fact that God's standards are not within the realm of man's possibility.

Some of the people of Israel recognized that. They recognized they weren't keeping God's standard. So they gave sacrifices and they confessed, and they came humbly, and God in his sweet grace forgave them. But there were other ones who thought they could do it, so they boasted in their self righteousness and they began to try to keep the law. Well, they couldn't do it, either. So they whittled the law down, and that's why the rabbi started adding traditions. They piled traditions up because the traditions were easier to keep than the law of God.

Listen. The law that has grown up around the Torah, the Talmudic law, the Jewish law that has grown up around the Torah, the true law of God, is nothing more than a whittled down standard so that men could at least have some sense of satisfaction. Now the rabbis said they were trying to protect the law of God, but the fact was they were lowering the requirement so that when Jesus arrived on the scene, they were doing great with the peripheral stuff and they were living in daily violation of the true law of God.

You see, there were some people who thought they could do it. But they couldn't, and the ones who knew God were the ones who said, "We can't, God." And humbly and penitently, they offered sacrifices of confession and God forgave them. It's the same with the Sermon on the Mount. This is the law. This is the way to live, but you can't do it, and you got to recognize it. By the power of the Holy Spirit and dependence on Jesus Christ, you've got to desire it. And then you got to deal with your failures in humble contrition and confession.

Jesus put the standard up there when he said, "Be ye perfect as my Father in heaven is perfect." He said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that peripheral whittled down righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you're not going to be in my kingdom. You substituted –" Matthew 15:9 says "– the traditions of men for the commandments of God." That's not going to make it.

The whole purpose of law – see, watch it – the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is the same as the purpose of Sinai. It's to show you you can't make it. The Sermon on the Mount was to show them they couldn't make it and they had to come to poverty of spirit and total dependence on God. You can't just present these standards to an unregenerate man and expect him to live them. You know what that would be like? You think, I think James Boyce gives this illustration. In the kingdom, the lion will lie down with the lamb, right? The lion will lie down with the lamb. Isn't that wonderful?

If you want to try something, go to the zoo and get to the lion's cage and teach that lion millennial truth. You teach that lion that he is going to lie down with a lamb and you get it clear in his mind. Then you take him over and put him in with the lamb. You know what will happen? No lamb. You know why? That lion will not cooperate on the basis of the sermon. The lion's got to have a new nature. You see? You can't preach the Sermon on the Mount to an unregenerate person and expect them to live it. He's got to have a new nature. That all begins with poverty of spirit.

So we ask two questions. Why does Christ begin with this? Because it's the beginning. What does it mean? It means humility. Poverty of spirit. What is the result? And these are shorter questions, so you can relax. What is the result? Well, look and see. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Pronunciation is fantastic. "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is an announcement, folks, not a wish. This is it. Theirs – and by the way, theirs alone – is the thrust. Just theirs.

Who does the kingdom of heaven belong to? Just the poor in spirit. Theirs is mine. I'm in that theirs. I came to Christ, bankrupt in my own life, and I asked God time and again to help me live every day of my life in that same sense of humility and dependence. I hope I'm there every day. I know I came that way and my salvation is forever. I'm in on that. So you know what it says to me? Blessed are the poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Mine. Just me. I'm in on it. That's exciting.

And by the way, that's a present tense verb. Theirs, mine, ours is the kingdom. We're not just talking about the millennium. Someday it's going to be - it's yours now. There is a future millennium in which the kingdom promises become full blown, fully realized. But the kingdom is now. The reign of Christ is now. Happiness is now. Blessedness is now. The kingdom of heaven is the rule of Christ. It has a future Messianic aspect. It has a right now aspect. We are now a kingdom of priests. We are now subjects of Jesus Christ. We are now overcomers.

We have already, it says in Ephesians 2, been seated together in heavenly places, the recipient of all of his grace and kindness from now throughout forever. We have the grace now. Watch it. We have

the grace now, the grace of the kingdom. We have the glory later. The kingdom as I see it is grace and glory. Grace now, glory later. What a tremendous thing. Do you know what it is, people to possess the kingdom? That's what the word means, to possess. You possess the kingdom. It is yours. The rule of Christ, the reign of Christ, you know what that means? You're his subject, he takes care of you. He gives you what you need, he fulfills every need your heart.

Someone has written, "He keeps us abundantly full, full of grace, mercy, and strength. Whatever is ahead in the kingdom, he now in the present provides for us a vast abundance of riches. He is ever faithful to us and makes us unutterably glad that we are his. In spirit, we are rich. We have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ. It's here and now, and someday even more."

Well, two more questions face us. If – this is basic and so important - and if it means humility and spiritual bankruptcy, sense of total inability – and I might add there is nothing, there is nothing as sickening. There is nothing as nauseating to the heart of God as spiritual pride. It violates this whole thing. It is the worst when you think you have arrived at spirituality based on your own function in anything.

Two final questions. How do we become poor in spirit? Say, "John, I see the message here. Be poor in spirit. How do I become poor in spirit?" Well, don't begin by trying to do it by yourself. That was the folly of monasticism. They all thought they could be poor in spirit by going somewhere, selling all their possessions, putting on a crummy old robe and sitting in a monastery somewhere and owning nothing. No. That was the folly of asceticism, monasticism, self-denial, mutilation. Some of them cut off some of their organs. They thought they could deny themselves in that way and attain this.

And by the way, you can't do it by looking at yourself. Also, you can't do it by looking at other people. Don't try to find somebody else who will set the standard for you. There's only one place to look if you want to become poor in spirit, that's to concentrate on God. That's the first thing. Look at God. Read his Word. Face his person in its pages. Look at Christ. Look at Christ constantly. As you gaze at Jesus Christ, you lose yourself. You lose yourself.

Secondly, not only look at God. I'll give you three little principles. If you're going to know what it is to be poor in spirit, look at God, not at you, not at anybody else. Look at God. Two, starve the flesh. Starve the flesh. You know, even the ministries, even the ministries of this generation feed on pride in so many cases. We have to seek the things that strip the flesh naked.

You know, I went through some things in my own life less than a year ago where I think I came to grips with something of the meaning of this. It's a fight for me to know this kind of spirit, but I think I came to grips with it to the point where I really sought, I really sought the things that stripped my flesh. You see, because it's easy for me to accept the accolades.

It's easy for me to hear the voices saying, "Thank you, John. Your message blessed me." Or, "I was saved when you preached." Or, "It's so wonderful at your church." Or, "What a wonderful message you gave." And it's easy for me to take that. It comes real easy to accept compliments. I don't have to struggle for that.

But for awhile, I began to have a hunger in my heart to seek, and it was, you know, it can get into a pitiful, poor me kind of thing real easy, but I had this hunger in my heart to seek the thing that stripped my flesh bare. I almost found myself wanting to face a folly because it drove me into the presence of God and in the presence of God, I was destitute.

Not long ago, I was confronted with some things that upset some people deeply. And it, my first reaction was that it hurt me very bad, because if I was in error, I didn't mean to be in error. And then all of a sudden God began to speak to my heart about the fact that more than anything this is what I needed. I needed to be confronted with the fact that I was nothing and that in one short breath everything that I ever dreamed or desired to do for God, which, by the way, he doesn't need me to do.

He can do it for himself through me – everything could be taken away that fast. And in a sense in my destitution and in my loss and in my failure and in my sense of folly and in the thing that I did that was wrong, I gained a greater measure of comfort than ever I would gain in that for which I was praised.

That helps you to starve the flesh. I'd say a third thing. These are the things I see in my own life. I've got to look at God all the time. Secondly, I got to starve my flesh. I don't want to run to the thing that compliments. But there's a third thing and I think it's simple. Ask. You want to be poor in spirit? Ask. There's one thing about a beggar. He's always what? Asking. You ever notice that. Always. Ask. "Lord," said the sinner, "be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said, "That man went home justified." Happy is the beggar in his spirit. He's the one who possesses the kingdom. Why did Jesus begin with this? Because it's the bottom line.

What does it mean? It means to be spiritually bankrupt and know it. What is the result? You become a possessor of the kingdom here and now and forever. How do you become poor in spirit? Look at God. Starve your flesh. And ask, beg. He doesn't mind a bit.

Final question. How will I know if I am? How do you know if you're poor in spirit? And you know, you need to take inventory. How do you really know? I'm going to give you seven principles. They're coming quick. How do I know if I'm poor in spirit? Number one. You will be weaned from yourself. You will be weaned from yourself. Psalm 131:2 puts it this way. "My soul *is* even as a weaned child." Oh, what a great thought.

One who is poor in spirit loses a sense of self. Self is gone. It's gone. All you think about is God and his glory and others and their needs. Self is gone. You're weaned from self. Number two. You will be lost in the wonder of Christ. You will be lost in the wonder of Christ. You will be in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "gazing at his glory." You will be saying, "Show me the Lord," and it sufficeth. You will be saying, "I will be satisfied when I awake and thy likeness lost in the wonder of Christ."

Third. If you are poor in spirit, you will never complain about your situation. Never. You know why? You don't deserve anything, anyway. Right? What have you got to offer. In fact, the deeper you go, the sweeter the grace. The more you need, the more abundantly he provides. When you lack everything, you're in a position to receive all grace. There are no distractions, you see. You will suffer without murmur because you deserve nothing. And yet at the same time you will seek his grace.

How do you know if you're poor in spirit? You'll be weaned from yourself, lost in the wonder of Christ, and you'll never complain about your situation because the deeper you get the sweeter the grace.

Fourth. You will see only the excellencies of others and only your own weakness. You will see only the excellencies of others and only your own weakness. Poor in spirit, the truly humble, is the only one who has to look up to everybody else.

Fifth. You will spend much time in prayer. Why? Because a beggar is always begging. He knocks very often at heaven's gate and he doesn't let go until he's blessed. You want to know if you're poor in spirit? Are you weaned from yourself? Are you lost in the wonder of Christ? Are you never complaining no matter what the situation? Do you see only the excellencies of others and only your own weakness? Do you spend much time begging for grace?

Six. If you're poor in spirit, you'll take Christ on his terms, not yours. You will take Christ on his terms, not yours. The proud sinner will have Christ at his pleasure, Christ and his covetousness, Christ and his immorality. The poor in spirit is so desperate he will give up anything just to get Christ, see.

Thomas Watson says, "A castle that has long been beseiged and is ready to be taken will deliver up on any terms to save its life." He whose heart has been a garrison for the devil and has held out long in opposition against Christ when once God has brought him to poverty of spirit and he sees himself damned without Christ, let God prosper. Let God offer. And he will simply say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He's right. Someone who is poor in spirit takes Christ on Christ's terms.

Finally, when you're poor in spirit, you will praise and thank God for his grace. If ever there is a characteristic of someone poor in spirit, it is an overwhelming gratitude to God. Why? Because every single thing you have is a gift from him. And so in 1 Timothy 1:14 says the beloved apostle Paul, "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant to us." Those who are poor in spirit are filled with thanks.



Well, how do you measure up? Why do the Beatitudes begin with this one? Because it's the foundation. What does it mean? Oh, a deep sense of spiritual helplessness. What is its result? The present possession of the kingdom of heaven. How do I become like this? Look to God, starve the flesh, pray. How will I know if I'm there? We just shared it with you. You'll be weaned from yourself, lost in the wonder of Christ, never complaining of your situation, seeing only the excellency of others and your own weakness. You will spend much time in prayer. You will take Christ on his terms. And you will thank God for everything.

The hymn writer sums it up for us. "Nothing in my hand I bring." What's the rest? "Simply to thy cross I cling." Let's pray.

Oh, Father, we pray that there would be no artificiality to our lives, that we would not seek some self induced poverty, but that we would know real poverty of spirit. Lord, help us to know that as Paul said, "Whatever we are, we are by your grace, and nothing more." We were blasphemers. We were godless. We were undeserving and still are. And oh, God, help us to know only by your grace do we exist in your kingdom.

If there are some with us tonight who has not entered your kingdom because they have not been willing to do the hardest thing they'll ever do, say, "I can't. I can't please God. I can't keep his rules. I can't keep his laws. I can't live his way." May this be the time they say that. And in the admission that they can't, may they know that you can. By your power that you can empower them through Christ to do what they could never do.

Father, we thank you that some of us have been to that place at the foot of the cross where we crawled into your kingdom in humility and a sense of useless worthlessness. And Lord, after we've gotten in and we've seen what you've done through us, it's so easy to be proud and boastful and we forget, Lord, that we sustained that blessedness. We sustained that happiness by sustaining that poverty of spirit.

Wean us from ourselves. Lose us in the wonder of Christ that we may be truly poor in spirit, possessors of your kingdom and of the bliss, the blessedness, the happiness that belongs to such. May we be so different from the world that it's obvious we belong to you. In Christ's name. Amen.

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