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

The Only Way to Happiness: Be Poor in Spirit
Scripture: Matthew 5:3
Code: 90-189

I want you to open your Bible tonight to Matthew chapter 5, Matthew chapter 5. As I mentioned to you, I have recently been able to release a book called The Only Way to Happinessand it's a book basically on the Beatitudes. Jesus presents for us in Matthew chapter 5 the most profound and at the same time paradoxical teaching on true happiness. But it's not just a subject among many, it's foundational to all His teaching and it's foundational to entrance into His kingdom. God wants us happy. Psalm 144:15 says, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord." God wants our lives filled with joy. God wants to bless us. He wants us to experience bliss, a deep inner happiness, not produced and not affected by emotion or by changing circumstance, a kind of blessedness and a kind of joy, a kind of bliss, a kind of happiness that is not subject to outside forces but only inside ones produced by God in the heart.

And this should be the character of a believer...blessedness, happiness, joy. This is what His kingdom promises us and the Beatitude says it so magnificently and so pointedly. The Lord wants people in His kingdom to enjoy real happiness. And that's the subject of the Beatitudes and that's the subject of the Sermon on the Mount which the Beatitudes begin. Of course, the sermon runs all through chapter 7 to the very end. But Jesus starts with these Beatitudes, they're called. Each one begins with the word "blessed" which is just another word for happiness. Jesus was talking primarily to His disciples, you'll remember. His disciples came to Him it says in verse 1, but also beyond them, they were the inner circle, the multitude could hear what He was saying as well. Everybody needs to hear about happiness, not just those who already know the Lord but everyone. Everyone needs to hear that God wants to bring to us true happiness, true blessedness.

And the question is...how do you find that? And the Beatitudes indicate to us that it really is opposite what the world would assume. Blessed are the poor...the world would say blessed are the rich. Blessed are those who mourn...the world would say blessed are those who laugh. Blessed are the gentle, or the meek...the world would say blessed are the proud and the confident. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...the world would say blessed are those who don't hunger and don't thirst cause they have everything.

We get shaped by the world, even those of us who are in the kingdom. And our attitudes become shaped by the world. The world's media, newspapers, books, magazines, television, radio, music, movies, you name it, literally, relentlessly sells us the world's perspective and in the end corrupts our otherwise pure thinking. This is not just inimitable to our day. There were people in Israel, including the disciples, who sought to truly understand God and the kingdom. But their thinking was also

corrupted by the reigning philosophy of their day which was perpetrated by religious leaders, in those days Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus had to clear away all the lies and all the error and get right back to the core of true happiness.

True happiness is found, by the way, only by entrance into His kingdom. What does that mean? That simply means only by coming...becoming a subject of His, only by acknowledging Him as King coming into His sphere of life, coming under His rule, coming under His authority, coming under His blessing. That's the only place true happiness occurs. So any offering of happiness is at the same time a call to the kingdom. When Jesus said, "You'll be happy if you do this...You'll be happy if you do this," He was really saying, "This is how you enter the kingdom and there is where you find the happiness."

So, you have here not only teaching about how to be happy, but teaching about how to enter the kingdom because they're the same thing. Entering the kingdom is where happiness is found. And outside the kingdom there is no lasting happiness. The word "blessedness" has an opposite, the word "blessing" has an opposite...cursedness, cursing. In fact, in the Greek it's the word ouaiwhich is "woe" in English. And woe is not a wish regarding a coming condition. Woe is not a description of a present condition. Woe is a truth pronounced on people and it means they're cursed. And the word "blessedness" is the opposite. Blessing, makarios, blessedness is a word pronounced on people, pronounced on them as recipients of all the goodness of God which produces a condition of happiness.

The kingdom is a place for God to pour out blessing. Ephesians 1 verse 3, "We have been blessed with...what?...all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." When we came into the kingdom, we began to be blessed. In Ephesians chapter 2 it tells us that that blessing will go on forever because it says in the ages to come He will show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. He started blessing us the day we entered into the kingdom. He started providing all the things to make us truly happy and that will go on forever and ever in this life and the life to come. God offers us salvation, from our perspective, to bring to us true happiness, contentment, bliss, joy, gladness. That's what God offers. And the path, or the pattern to receive that blessing and to enter the kingdom is outlined for us in these incredible Beatitudes. It starts with being poor in spirit, mourning, and being meek and hungering and thirst...thirsting for righteousness. It manifests itself in an attitude of mercy, purity, and peacemaking and it causes the world to react to us with reviling and persecution and false accusation. But in the end, it transforms us in verse 13 into salt and verse 14 through 16 into light. This is the flow of the Beatitudes.

The first step in entering the kingdom, the first step to happiness is being poor in spirit, realizing your spiritual poverty. The second one is mourning over it. The third one is humbly falling down before the glory of God in your condition. The fourth one is then pleading for a righteousness which you don't have and hunger for. That begins then to manifest itself in an attitude of mercy toward others, a

pursuit of purity and peacemaking in your own life, and creates hostility in the world. That's the flow of the Beatitudes.

We want to start at the beginning because this is tremendously important information, tremendously important truth who are outside the kingdom as well as for those who are inside the kingdom. Let's take the first beatitude tonight in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Now we want to answer a few questions that will be posed and that will take us through the meaning of the beatitude. Question number one, why does Christ begin with this? I mean, this is the first recorded sermon of Jesus. This is how He inaugurates His unfolding teaching throughout the New Testament. It begins with these first things, and this first statement, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is the first real instruction Jesus gave in the New Testament, the first gospel, the gospel of Matthew, first recorded sermon of Jesus, first statement, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And it's fair to ask...why does He start here? It must be significant, it's the first thing said, first thing recorded in terms of actual preaching from Jesus. Why does He begin with this? Because it is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian. It is the fundamental characteristic of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven. All other characteristics flow from this one. This is where everything starts. This is where happiness begins. This is where entrance into the kingdom begins. Jesus begins by saying...There's a mountain you have to scale, there are heights you have to climb, but the first thing you must realize is that you are outside the kingdom of God and you can't get there on your own. The mountain is too high, the heights are too great, you can't do it. And you have to start with that realization. You cannot enter My kingdom, you cannot be happy until you realize your bankruptcy, your poverty.

This is very important stuff to the Jews who are very proud about their religious achievements, very proud about their ceremonial accomplishments, very proud about the sacrifices they had offered to God, very proud about their zeal for the law, very proud about their circumcision, very proud about their identification with the covenant people Israel, very proud about their self-righteousness. They were self-confident. They were self-important. And Jesus says if you're going to enter the kingdom and find true happiness, you've got to recognize that you have absolutely nothing, you are bankrupt. That's where it all begins. Poverty of spirit is the foundation of all other graces. Poverty of spirit is where everything starts. You may as well expect fruit to grow without a tree as the other graces to grow without this one. Nothing happens until this happens. As long as a person is not poor in spirit, that person is not capable of happiness in the sense that God offers it. That person is not capable of entering the kingdom. As long as I'm clutching my own self-importance and my own self-righteousness and my own accomplishments and my own religiosity and my own morality and as long as I'm holding on to this as if it somehow gained me access to God, as long as my hand is full of that dirt, it can never receive the gold of God's grace. Happiness is only for those who are unworthy.

Isaiah said it of Christ and Christ reiterated it. Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Jesus repeated it in Luke's gospel. "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted." Everything begins with brokenheartedness. Until someone is poor in spirit, Christ is never seen for what He really is. He's never precious. Before you can see how bankrupt you are, you can't understand how valuable Christ is. You can never see His matchless worth until you understand the full extent of your own worthlessness. He who sees himself clothed in filthy rags can appreciate the robe of righteousness that Christ breaks. Until you're poor, you can't be rich. Until you're a fool, you can't become wise. Until you lose your life, you can't save it. Jesus often said such paradoxical things.

And why is this first? Because inevitably what prevents people from entering into the kingdom is pride. And at the very start pride must be broken. Proverbs 16:5 says, "Cursed are the proud." These things God hates, a proud heart...at the top of the list.

Now pride doesn't necessarily mean that you parade your money. It doesn't necessarily mean you parade your goods and your possessions and etc. Pride means you put confidence in your personal achievement, personal morality, personal religion, personal goodness. You are unwilling to acknowledge the fact that the best that you can do is filthy rags. The only way then to come into God's kingdom, the only way to come to blessing, the only way to be genuinely happy, truly happy both in time and eternity is to confess your own unworthiness, your own utter inability to please God, your own incapacity to meet God's standard.

It was the apostle Paul who went through this. He said when I was a Jew and I was living out my Judaism and putting my trust in it, he said, as touching the law I was blameless. When it came to my external maintaining of God's law, I was blameless. Nobody could have identified any flaw in my ceremonial law keeping. But he also said, we have no confidence in the flesh, no confidence in the flesh. At...at the first glance of any Pharisaical-law-keeping Jew, Paul looked like a paragon of religious virtue. Paul says it was all manure, Philippians 3, it was all dung, he says, it was all waste, refuse. That's what Jesus is talking about. He's talking about looking at the best you are and understanding that it's waste, dung, manure.

The church at Laodicea was deceived. Revelation 3:17 they said, "I am rich and have need of nothing." That will keep you out of the kingdom for sure. How many such fools are there all the time throughout all history who don't see the reality at all? They're like the little maid Seneca wrote about who was born blind but wouldn't believe it. The world, she said, is dark but I am not blind. Many perish in such a foolish disdain for reality.

So, Jesus begins here because everything begins here. You will never enter the kingdom, you will never experience true happiness until there is a deep recognition of spiritual bankruptcy...not just in the worst things in your life, but in the best. That as Isaiah said it, "Your righteousness is like filthy

rags." "Your blamelessness as touching the law...Philippians 3...is manure." Your morality is worthless. It all begins there. And that's why He begins there. That is to say, the only people who enter the kingdom, the only people who experience God's blessing are people who come to a point of recognition of utter spiritual bankruptcy.

Now let's go in to that and ask a second question. Specifically, what does Jesus mean "blessed are the poor in spirit"? What is He saying in specific? Or to put it another way, what kind of poverty is He talking about?

Well, let me say, first of all, that He's not talking about material poverty. And there are a lot of people who want to sort of make the Sermon on the Mount into a nice little warm and fuzzy ethical standard and they want to quote it, "Blessed are the poor." And they want to put some virtue alongside poverty. In fact, Luke 6:20 says, "Blessed are the poor." Here in Matthew, of course, we indicate what kind of poverty we're talking about. But there are plenty of people who think that poverty in itself, that is the absence of material possessions and absence of money, is somehow in itself a virtue. That's not what our Lord is talking about. If it was, then it would be unchristian to alleviate somebody's burden, wouldn't it? It would be unchristian to give money to the poor. And the Bible over and over and over again tells us to give money to the poor, give food to the poor, meet the needs of those who are without. If somehow poverty in itself was a virtue, we would be taking them from virtue to vice. So we would be better off to leave the starving people starving and let the war-ravaged refugees continue in their abject distress, leave the orphans alone, shut all the hospitals, end all the mission efforts if spiritual blessedness somehow was associated with material poverty...it is not.

Today the sort of new gospel is that spiritual blessing is associated with wealth. The wealthy you are today, the more evidence supposedly you give of having entered in to the prosperity of the gospel.

We're not talking about material things at all here. Being poor or being rich has nothing to do with it. There were many poor people and still are who come into the kingdom. And there are a few rich, not many but a few. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea were wealthy men, as apparently was Philemon. As I said, 1 Corinthians 1:26 says there are not many but there are some. David, you'll remember, in Psalm 37 testified that in all his years he had never seen the righteous forsaken, had never seen them begging for bread. In Paul's life there were times of hunger, there were times of thirst and there were times when he had enough. He knew how to be abased and how to abound, he told the Philippians. There was never any begging, neither was there with the Lord. Some people think Jesus was the poorest of the poor. He wasn't. Jesus grew up in a middle class home, maybe even better than a middle class home. His father had his own business. He was a carpenter or a builder, also could have been a mason building houses and all things like that. Jesus grew up learning a trade. The only reason that Jesus didn't earn a living was because He became an itinerant minister, an itinerant preacher and traveling around was supported by the donations of those who

believed in His ministry. But they had money. They had enough money to give away some. You remember Judas was holding the bag and it was kept not only for the needs of the disciples as they traveled but also a little extra to give to the poor as necessary. The Lord never begged, the Twelve never begged, Paul never begged.

And they were accused, the disciples were, of being unlearned. They were accused of being ignorant. They were accused of being mad. They were accused of turning the world upside down. But nobody ever accused them of begging. They were not somehow virtuous because they were living in a state of poverty.

So what is this poor in spirit? It is the Greek term ptochosand it comes from the verb ptosso. Ptochosmeans to cower and cringe like a beggar. It has the idea of shrinking from something or someone. It carries the classic idea of begging out of shame. Not talking about a con-man here, you're not talking about somebody who's figured out how to get wealthy by falsely being identified as a beggar. You're talking about a real cowering, cringing, shrinking person, shamed to have to beg but having no choice. Classic Greek describes this ptochosas one who is reduced to beggary, who crouches, unwilling to lift his eyes, pleading alms and moving about in wretched conditions, says one lexicon. It's a beggar, somebody with no wealth, no influence, no position, no honor, no respect, in some cases possessing nothing but the ragged clothes they wear, a real beggar here.

There's another word translated "poor" in the New Testament, penes. It's used in 2 Corinthians 9:9. That's a different kind of poverty. And the Greek makes these distinctions. That's poverty that demands diligent daily labor to earn a living. That's somebody who doesn't have a stockpile, doesn't have a savings account, has to work every day just to eat every day. Penesis being so poor you have to work hard every day to sustain your life. Ptochosis being so poor and so destitute and so unskilled, your poverty is so deep and you are so unable that all you can do is beg. You don't have the capability to work. You don't have the skill to work. So you're totally dependent on the gifts of others, everything comes to you from an outside source, that's ptochos. You have no resource, no talent, no skill, no craft, no trade, nothing. Typically in the ancient world it would so humiliate a man to be a beggar that he would crouch, cover his face with a garment, holding out his hand, ashamed to let even the giver know his identity. That's the word Jesus used.

You want to enter His kingdom? That's where you start. This is the true diagnosis of man. And it's only when you recognize it that you become a candidate for entrance into God's kingdom of happiness. When you see yourself as empty, poor, helpless, bankrupt, you can't contribute one single solitary thing to your salvation, you can't give God anything that in any way qualifies you for any blessing from Him, you are ptochos, not penes. You need mercy. You need grace from an outside source, from God Himself because you can bring nothing, you are destitute, beggarly, helplessly dependent.

What is Jesus saying then? Happy are the destitute, happy are the beggarly, happy are the hopelessly dependent, happy are the people who have nothing and can earn nothing. Let me tell you, folks, that's shocking stuff because it just goes right against the grain of everything the world assumes to be true.

Now this poverty is further defined as poverty in spirit, it's not poverty with regard to money, material things. It's not poverty with regard to something external, it's poverty with regard to what is internal with reference to the spirit. In other words, they look inside and realize their state of spiritual bankruptcy. This is the first message Jesus wanted to give to sinners, recognize your condition of spiritual bankruptcy. And He gave it to people who thought they were spiritually rich. These Jews who thought they had attained salvation by their own self-righteousness.

Isaiah 66:2, Isaiah speaking for God says, "To this man will I look." What kind of man does God look to? "Even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembles at My Word." Somebody who recognizes his spiritual poverty and who shakes at the contemplation of the judgment of God and realizes his spiritual bankruptcy, realizes there's nothing to commend himself to God, realizes he's hopelessly under the wrath of God.

Psalm 34:18 puts it this way, "The Lord is near to those who are of a broken heart and saves such as be of a contrite spirit." Same thing. Who does He save? Those who know they're nothing. Those who are broken. Those who are devastated on the inside because they've come to grips with their condition in sin and depravity, their empty, poor, helpless, hopeless condition. Psalm 51:17 says it again, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Again it's that spiritual brokenness, that sense of spiritual bankruptcy and emptiness that draws the grace of God.

I love Isaiah 57:15, there are a number of places where this same emphasis is made, but maybe this is the most clear of all because the contrast is so great. Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the high and exalted One...God...the One who lives forever, whose name is holy, I dwell on a high and holy place." And here all of this language exalts God and elevates God and lifts God, He's called high and exalted and He dwells in a high and a holy place. Then he says this, "And I dwell with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." That means those who know they have no value, know they have nothing to commend themselves.

When He says "poor in spirit" He's not talking about poor spirited in the sense of somebody who lacks enthusiasm or somebody who is lazy or somebody who is quiet, or somebody who's indifferent, or somebody who's passive. He's talking about people who understand their spiritual bankruptcy, in contrast to the Pharisees who were so proud about what they supposed was their own righteousness. Paul in Romans 10 says, "They went about to establish their own righteousness." The poor in spirit is

the opposite. He's the one who has had all the sense of self-sufficiency removed, it's all gone. It's a heart of desperation, prides himself on his knees.

He's best described, I think, the illustration of Luke chapter 18, this one of the most poignant of all Jesus' stories. Luke 18 and verse 9 told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. See, that's just kind of how it was. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous. He said, "Two men went up to the temple to pray...verse 10...one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax gatherer." And, of course, tax collectors were the most despised, despicable and hated of all people in Israel because they bought their tax franchises from the oppressive invaders, the Romans, who were not only the enemy of Israel but were even more so distasteful because they were Gentiles. And in order to be a tax gatherer in Israel you had to buy a franchise from Rome, so you literally lined up with Rome to betray your own people and they became literally the hated. They became the most despised in that culture.

And so, into a temple came a Pharisee, into the temple came a Pharisee and a tax gatherer. "The Pharisee stood, was praying thus to himself, `God, I thank Thee that I'm not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week. I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax gatherer standing some distance away was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven," that's the attitude of a beggar, he wouldn't even lift his face, he wouldn't even lift his eyes, cowers, crouches, cringes, beats his chest. "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." And Jesus indicting the whole self-righteous culture said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

So, Jesus is saying, "Blessed are the beggars in spirit. Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt. Blessed are the spiritually destitute. Blessed are the spiritual paupers. Blessed are those who cringe and cower because they have nothing to offer. Blessed are those who before the high and exalted and holy God realize their state of bankruptcy."

And the poverty here is not one against which the will rebels. It's one under which the will bows. That's what causes someone to come into the kingdom. When you're not trying to convince yourself you're really okay, when you're not rebelling against the fact that you know you're not, but when you submit to your condition and cry out to God for mercy.

I'm afraid this kind of teaching is rather unpopular in the church today. We have a lot of emphasis on celebrities and experts and superstars and rich and famous folks, and a lot of the talk about the prosperity gospel. But the key to real happiness is sadness.

Jacob had to face his poverty of spirit before God could use him. You remember, according to Genesis 32, he fought God all night. He fought constant(?). Not a good choice of combatants, by the

way. He fought God all night until God had dislocated his hip, put him flat on his back. And when he couldn't fight anymore cause he had a dislocated hip, and he's lying flat on his back, in effect he says, "I give, I can't do it." In Genesis 32:29 the Bible says God said to him, "You're blessed." The text actually says, "And God blessed him there." Blessed in brokenness.

Isaiah was used wonderfully by God but never until his spirit was broken. It wasn't until he had the vision in the temple in Isaiah 6, this is incredible. He went into the temple because King Uzziah had died and King Uzziah had been king for 52 years and King Uzziah represented the success of the nation, the success of the theocracy of Israel and they had been at peace with all their neighbors. There was a strong position in the cold war, the military strength of Israel was formidable and their enemies left them alone. There was flourishing economy in Israel. The crops were doing well. They were doing fine on the world economic stage. And all was well and there was a facade of religion and they all meandered down to the temple at the appropriate time and paid their external homage to God and went through the motions. But there were terrible seeds of destruction in the nation and God through the prophet in Isaiah chapter 5 pronounced death sentence on Israel...death sentence came. And the prophet Isaiah was stunned by this death sentence that comes in a series of six woes in chapter 5, and so he went to the temple to check in with God and say, "What's going on? You're supposed to be the God of this people, You're supposed to protect this people not judge and punish this people. Why don't You...why don't You restore them? Why don't You bring revival? Why don't You do a positive work? What's going on?" He didn't understand and he went to have a vision of God.

And you remember in the vision of God, he was broken, he was absolutely shattered. And he says in chapter 6, "Woe is me," and he repeats the word "woe" which was used six times in chapter 5 to pronounce curses on Israel and he literally took the same word and cursed himself. He says I'm disintegrating, woe is me, I am undone. In the Hebrew, I'm disintegrating, I'm literally disassembling, I'm literally falling to pieces, I'm turning into nothing. I'm going back to dust. I look at myself and I see absolutely nothing. And I'm a man, he says, with a dirty mouth.

And that's how he assessed himself. And then the Lord said, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" I need a preacher. I need a preacher to go to this people that are under judgment. I need a preacher to go call them to repentance. Who will go? And there's only one guy there, folks. And Isaiah knows he's supposed to answer the question. He says, "Here am I, Lord...what?...send me." I've heard preachers, you know, embellish that, "Here I am, send me!" I don't think so. I think Isaiah had his head down, probably toward the ground, he wouldn't even lift his eyes and he held both hands over his head and said, "Here am I, send me," expecting God to crush him. And God said, "You're the man I want, get up and go." And again, it was usefulness out of brokenness.

Gideon...Gideon, that mighty man of God was used mightily by God because he was so aware of his inadequacy. In Judges 6:15, "Lord...he says...how am I going to save Israel? Are You kidding? How

am I going to save Israel? How am I going to be the great leader? My family is poor in Manasseh, I don't have any resources in my family, and I am the least in my father's house. I'm a nobody in a nothing family." And the Lord said, I love this, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor." Gideon was probably thinking He was talking to somebody behind him.

You see, the key to blessing and the key to happiness is always unworthiness. Think about Moses who felt deeply unworthy for the task, you remember, God told him to lead the people and he said, "I can't lead the people, I have a spe..spe...spe, I can't da..da..da, I stutter." God says to him, "Who made your mouth?" He was so conscious of his inadequacy, so conscious of his insufficiency.

It was the heart of David also when he said, "Lord, who am I that You should send...whom am I that You should come to me? Who...who...do You understand who you have here? You sure You have the right person to do what You're asking?"

In the New Testament we see it in Peter, aggressive, self-assertive, confident by nature, but devastated in the presence of the Lord and saying to Him, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." Get out of my presence, it's too intimidating.

The apostle Paul knew in his flesh was no good thing. He was the chief of sinners, he says. He was a blasphemer. He was a persecutor. Everything he ever was and everything he'd ever achieved was dung, manure. He counted it all loss, he had no confidence in the flesh. He was not sufficient for anything. His strength was only found in his weakness.

You see, that's where it all begins. That's where entrance into the kingdom begins. That's where it all starts. By the way, it doesn't end after that. Living in the kingdom requires a constant and continual admission that in yourself you're nothing and your only strength comes in the midst of your own admission of weakness.

Now listen, this is the hardest thing for the hardened sinner to do because if he doesn't worship the true God, he worships the god that he himself has invented which in many cases is synonymous with himself. He's been bowing to the shrine that he himself has erected. And he is the god who occupies the primary place in that shrine. The hardest thing the hardened sinner has to do is admit his utter bankruptcy and unworthiness.

You Jews, Jesus is saying, you think you're in God's kingdom, you think you found the way to get in? I want you to know something, you're not in and you can't get in on your terms. John 7:34 He says to the Jewish leaders, "You will seek Me and you will not find Me and where I go you will never come." You're not in My kingdom.

So, that's where salvation begins. Blessing begins, happiness begins with this admission...the absence of all pride, the absence of all self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-assurance, self-reliance, the knowledge that we're nothing before God in ourselves at all. There must be this emptying before there can ever be a filling.

It was St. Augustine before his conversion, he was so proud of his intellect. He was a great mind, so proud of his knowledge. But he himself confesses that it was only after he emptied himself of pride that he found God's true wisdom. Martin Luther entered a monastery in his youth and the reason he entered the monastery was in order to earn salvation. His objective was to go to the monastery and earn his salvation through piety and good works. They...there are many people who have believed that through the years, those monastics. You go in there and somehow by your deprivation and contemplation you earn salvation. But Martin Luther had an acute sense of failure when he was in the monastery. He was hammered by guilt. He began to recognize his own inability to please God, began to empty himself of all efforts to earn his salvation and only then did God save him by grace through faith.

So, the sum of this great truth is simply stated. The first principle of entrance into the kingdom is to recognize that you can't enter, you're not capable...you're not capable. That's where you have to start.

In yourself you can't please God. You can't do it. Even if you can keep some of the laws, you can't keep all of them. And if you break any of them, you have violated the whole law of God. Jesus put it this way in this...later on in this same chapter, Matthew 5 verse 20, He said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you're not going to enter the kingdom of heaven." Whatever kind of righteousness they got isn't going to get them there. Whatever kind of righteousness they possess is not sufficient, it's not appropriate, it's not adequate. It's going to have to be more than that.

How righteous does it have to be? Verse 48 of Matthew 5, "Therefore you're to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." You know anybody that qualifies? That's the point. Your righteousness has to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees how far? It has to be as perfect as God is perfect. You have to be as perfectly righteous as God, as perfectly holy as God before on your own you can enter the kingdom. Nobody qualifies.

So right at the very beginning of the Beatitudes, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, at the beginning of the New Testament, the beginning of Jesus' teaching the fact is established that God's standards can't be achieved, that entrance into the kingdom is not the result of any kind of human effort. And there were some people in Israel who got the message. We saw one in the tax gatherer of Luke 18, there were more who realized their sinful condition, realized their inability to please God, recognized their condition, came humbly confessing their helplessness, their sin, crying out to God for

mercy. There were others who rejected this message and eventually executed Jesus because it was such an offensive message. But the pattern is no different then than it is now. There are people today who want to bank their eternity on their own achievements, who want to hold to their own accomplishments, religiously and morally. And there are those, on the other hand, fewer obviously, who recognize their condition of utter spiritual bankruptcy. That's always the issue...that's always the issue.

And I would suggest to you that you need to know this in your own heart and for your own spiritual condition and you need to know this so that you can effectively communicate it to other people. Sometimes when we go to someone who doesn't know the Lord and we find out they don't know Christ, we'll say to them, "Well, you know, you just need to ask Jesus to become your Savior and all your problems are solved."

You need to back up from there a little bit and talk about depravity and what it means. Depravity doesn't mean everybody is as bad as they could be. Depravity doesn't mean that everybody is as wicked a sinner as any sinner could be. That's not the case. There are degrees of wickedness. What depravity means is everyone is unable to attain salvation, that's what depravity means. It means by the deeds of the law, the works of the flesh, nobody is going to be justified before God, Romans 3:19 and 20. That's what He means when He says poor in spirit, crying out out of poverty and one's realization that there is nothing of value in one's life that could cause God to grant salvation.

The third question that comes up in understanding this wonderful beatitude is what is the result of this attitude? He says it in verse 3. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What a great theme this is...what a great subject. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Theirs" is in the Greek in the sense of theirs alone, nobody else's, barring all others who approach God, except those with a beggar's heart. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, theirs IS, not will be, theirs IS. So whatever it is it's present, here and now. This is not a future millennial reality, there is a future millennial kingdom, this is not limited to heaven, the eternal new heaven and new earth. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven now. Heaven is really the same as God. You have interchangeably the phrase "the kingdom of heaven," "the kingdom of God" used in the New Testament. The kingdom of heaven is just another way of referring to God. And also, to refer to the rule of Christ. Christ is the King over God's kingdom.

What does it mean then? Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, it means you come into the kingdom and you inherit all its...you inherit all its blessings as you come on to the rule of God mediated through the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, it has an earthly millennial aspect and you'll be there in the glorious thousand-year millennial kingdom that Revelation 20 talks about, and, of course, it has an eternal aspect in the new heavens and the new earth laid out for us so magnificently in Revelation 21 and 22. But it also has a present aspect...a present aspect. You entered into the kingdom. It's yours now and we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus now. Revelation 1 tells

us, Revelation 5 repeats it, we have now become a kingdom, priests to God. We are the overcomers by whose faith we overcome. And Revelation 3:21 says we are seated with Him on His throne.

We have kingdom blessing now. What does that mean? We have kingdom grace, we have kingdom mercy, we have kingdom peace, we have kingdom joy, we have kingdom wisdom because we're subjects of the King. We have kingdom sovereignty, that is the sovereign King takes care of His subjects. We have kingdom comfort for the times of sorrow. We have kingdom wisdom dispensed through us..to us through the manual of the kingdom which is the Word of the living God. All spiritual blessings are ours...love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. All the fruit of the Spirit constitute blessings of the kingdom, the promise of glorification, the promise of sanctification until we reach glorification, the promise that everything is going to work together for good because we're subjects of the King. Everything that is ours in Christ constitutes kingdom blessing.

That's why when I originally wrote the book on the Beatitudes I titled it Kingdom Blessing Here and Now. A lot of people who study the Beatitudes have come to the conclusion, really I think it's a terrible mistake to make, but they've come to the conclusion that this is...this is such hard stuff, this is such strong language that it's got to refer to some...some future. And they...many people would put it in the millennial kingdom, that's where people have to have poverty of spirit and mourning and all of that kind of thing, that here in the age of grace we don't need to do that, all you need to do is believe in Jesus and everything's fine, you don't need to get too overwrought with your own spiritual condition, and all of this. This is really too much to ask. This is sort of contrary to simple faith and grace. And they want to push this off into the millennial kingdom and make it irrelevant for today.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Certainly we came into the kingdom today and we've been blessed with all spiritual blessings and the kingdom of God, Jesus said, is within you, it's right here, it's right now because you're the recipients of all kingdom blessings in Christ. That's why you're happy. That's why He can say happy are the poor in spirit. Why? Because they just got into the kingdom and they just inherited everything.

I'll promise you this, you may tamper with my superficial happiness but you can't touch my deep-down contentment because everything that matters eternally is settled, isn't it? I'm in the kingdom. I have kingdom peace. I have kingdom grace. I have kingdom mercy. I have kingdom power. I have kingdom truth. I have kingdom wis... I mean, I have it all. Everything that really matters is unassailable, untouchable because I'm in the kingdom and the King takes care of me. I'm not just the subject of the King, I'm...I'm the King's child, son of the King. And out of the vast treasure of the King's resources, He takes care of me and He takes care of you because we're in His kingdom, but nobody came in until they recognized their spiritual bankruptcy.

You remember the rich young ruler came to Jesus, he says, "What do I do to get eternal life?" That's a good question, that's a right question. And he was a pretty important guy, according to Matthew 19, he was a ruler which probably meant in Israel there weren't a lot of different options for what a ruler could rule. He was probably the ruler of a synagogue which meant that he had been the elected leader of his synagogue which meant that he was basically apprised as the most religious man in the place. He was young, which is even more remarkable that he would have attained to that kind of respect spiritually to be chosen as the leader of the synagogue. But he was honest enough to say, "I know I'm a leader in the synagogue, and I'm very involved in religious activities, but I don't...I don't have the confidence that I have eternal life, I'm worried about my future. I don't know what's going to happen after I die. I'm not sure I'm really connected to God. I'm not sure I'm really a subject of the King. I'm not sure in the kingdom. What do I need to do to get in?"

Nothing wrong with the question. And Jesus said, "Well, let's start here. Keep the law, that's one way to get in. Nobody can do it but it is one way, hypothetically. Just keep the law. How about...how about," and He gives him six illustrations of the ten commandments.

"Oh," he says, "I've kept all those, I've kept all those."

Guess what? End of discussion...end of discussion, nothing more to say. Jesus does say to him, "Well, look, there's another...there's another...there's another standard that I'd like you to comply with, sell everything you have, take all the money and give to the poor." The guy turned around and split and he went away lost and condemned.

Why? Not because he didn't ask the right question. But there were two things he would not do. One was acknowledge his spiritual bankruptcy and that he had systematically and continuously and unendingly violated the law of God. And the other was, he was not willing to follow Christ. Christ gave him a simple command, he said no way would I do that...which indicated there was no sense of allegiance and submission to Jesus as Lord, nor was there any recognition of sin. He's outside the kingdom and he can't get in because he won't become poor in spirit. And he went away as lost as when he showed up.

I suppose somebody might say, "Well, you know, Jesus really should have never lost that guy, all He had to say to him was pray a prayer, raise your hand, walk an aisle, whatever." But not Jesus. Jesus wanted to get to the real issue, you don't get into My kingdom without realizing your sinful, helpless, hopeless condition. And when he wouldn't admit it, there was nothing more to say.

Maybe I can just pose a last question. How does one become poor in spirit? How do you get to that place? I would say, first of all, and this is the best place to start, compare yourself to God, stop comparing yourself to other people. Are you as holy as God? If you're not, you're wretched. First Peter 1:16, "Be ye holy as I am holy." Are you as holy as God? Matthew 5:48, "Be ye perfect even

as your heavenly Father is perfect." Are you perfect? If you don't know the answer to that then start reading about God. Read the Word of God. Face His person on its pages. Look at God. And if you want to really see God clearly, look at God incarnate, look at Jesus Christ. The more you see God, the more you know the character of God, the more you know the attributes of God, the more you know the perfect holiness of God, the more you see it visibly in Jesus Christ the more you will recognize your true condition by contrast. Look at God. Don't look at other people. Compare yourself to Him. And when you conclude that you're not as holy as God, you will have concluded the most necessary thing, you fall short and you can't make up the gap.

Secondly, pray. Hey, beggars have to ask, right? When you've recognized your beggarly condition, it's time to ask. And what should you ask for? How about this, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." That's how people were saved throughout the whole Old Testament. Probably the most graphic illustration of an Old Testament conversion is the Luke 18 passage I read, Christ hadn't yet died, of course, when He told that parable and He hadn't yet risen, so the New Covenant hadn't yet officially been inaugurated and people were still being saved in the same way they had always been saved in God's wonderful redemptive plan, and that is they had come to a sense of spiritual bankruptcy, they had come to a brokenness and a contrite heart, they had come to the end of themselves, they knew that their righteousness could achieve nothing and that it was nothing but filthy rags and they fell on their face, beat on their breasts, and cried out, "O God, I've offended you, I've violated your law, I'm under judgment, all I can plead for is mercy, I have nothing to offer."

I remember praying with a guy who was dying of AIDS down here at the Riverside Hospital one night. And he was...he had come out of the homosexual world in which he had been involved for over twenty years. He was raised in a Christian home. He had Christian parents who had prayed for him the whole time he was lost in that deadly world. And he had been taken into the hospital because his AIDS was rapidly bringing him to the end and he told somebody in the hospital, "I want John MacArthur to come and see me." I had never met him and he had never been here. But he said he wanted to see me.

So, I went to the hospital to see him. And he told me that he was afraid to die and he told me that he was afraid of the judgment of God and he told me that he had lived a wretched, wicked, sinful life. And he knew it was wicked and he knew it was sinful and he knew it was worthy of the judgment of God. And he said, "I don't deserve to go to heaven. I don't want to go to hell. I don't want to die lost. I don't want to die in my sin." And he went on to talk about the...the terrible life...well...that he had lived.

In the room there was, I guess, some of his friends and lovers, there was an AIDS worker who was sent there who is another homosexual. There was a homosexual male nurse who was in there and then there were his friends. And as this confession started to come out of his heart, these guys started exiting rather rapidly out of the room. And finally it was just the two of us. And after he had

unloaded this, I said, "Do you understand the gospel, David?"

He said, "Yes, I understand the gospel."

I said, "Do you understand that Jesus Christ died on the cross in the place of sinners? That Jesus Christ actually bore the punishment of God in His own body for all that filth that you just spilled out on me in which you've been living for twenty years?" And I said, "If...if God is gracious enough to do that, I think you ought to...you ought to reach out in faith."

He said, "What do I do?"

I said, "I only know to tell you one thing, you're a beggar and you just need to ask God to be merciful. I can't tell you that there's something you can say or something you can pray that will make it happen. All I can say is God saves whom He saves when they cry out to Him." So I said, "Why don't you just do that?"

So he grabbed my hand and he was squeezing my hand the whole time, prayed a long time, about ten minutes. "Please, God, please be merciful, I only want mercy, be gracious, please forgive me." And when he was done then he wanted me to pray and so I prayed and I prayed and I just asked God to be merciful to him. And then we stopped praying and a long time had gone by and when he opened his eyes they were tear filled because he had been very passionate even in his weakness. And he looked at the clock and the calendar, there was a calendar on the wall, and he kept looking at it. I said, "What are you looking at, David?"

He said this one sentence to me, he said, "I just...I want to remember the time and the day of my new life." And a smile came across his face and he lived for five days and for those five days he had me giving him...he was trying to make up for a whole life...books and tapes. I said, "You know you're going to go to heaven and this is all going to be old stuff when you arrive, you know, you don't need to work too hard on this deal. In a few days you'll understand more than me."

You know, I mean, what else can I say? You just need to start by comparing yourself to God. And you can throw in there comparing yourself to the law of God which is merely an expression of His nature, isn't it? The perfections of His law are merely expressions of who He is. Compare yourself to God and Christ, recognize in that how far short you fall and then just cry, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." And then you will find another attitude that is manifest in your heart, it's the second beatitude, "Blessed are those who...what?...mourn." Well, we'll talk about that next time.

How do you know if you've really come to a poverty of spirit? How do you know that? Can I ask you this final question quickly? You know it when your pride is gone, your self-righteousness is gone. When as Psalm 131 says, "Your soul is like a weaned child," you've been weaned off yourself and

you begin to look at Jesus Christ with love and wonder. And all of a sudden you will have a hunger for the truth and a hunger for Scripture and you'll take it at face value and you'll believe it. See, I don't think the coming to believe the Bible is an intellectual exercise, I think it's a result of a spiritual transformation, that you find yourself longing to talk with the Lord and longing to read His Word and you'll take His Word at exactly what it says on His terms, not yours. And you won't try to twist it around and make it fit your life style. And you'll stop complaining about your situation and you'll begin to see the excellencies of others and only your own weaknesses. And you'll start to praise God incessantly for grace and mercy. Those are the evidences that your cry has been heard.

Well, we need to start here. As the hymn writer said, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

Father, we thank You for this clear truth, this powerful truth. And, O God, how we pray that anyone here in this place tonight who has not yet come to this place will come because out of this sense of unworthiness, out of this crushing, out of this brokenness comes true lasting happiness because this is the way into the kingdom and in the kingdom are all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. Everything is ours. The world is ours. And Christ is ours. And heaven is ours. And even the best of earth is ours when we become part of Your kingdom. To that end we pray for every man and woman. You desire our happiness, but this is the path. Take sinners down that path that they might enter in to the joy of the Lord in that lasting happiness which comes to those in the Kingdom. We'll thank You in Christ's name. And everyone said....Amen...Amen.

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