

The Poor Who Are Rich

Matthew 5:3

Halifax: 12 October 2003

Introduction

“Blessed...”

- What a wonderful word to begin a sermon with!
 - This is how Jesus began the great sermon that we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Here is an example of the kind of preaching that King Jesus did as He went from city to city in Galilee.

- Jesus began with grace because He had come into the world to establish a kingdom of grace.
 - In this kingdom, He promised His people the richest of blessings:
 - The forgiveness of sin...
 - And new life by the regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

This world is not a place of blessedness because from the beginning the human race chose to go its own way.

- We brought cursing upon ourselves because we abandoned God’s way.
 - Last Sunday night, we looked at the nature of the first temptation in the Garden of Eden...
 - Satan persuaded Eve that God was keeping her from something good, some blessing, something that would make her happy.
- This thinking is all wrong!
 - God’s way is the way that leads us into something lovely and desirable!
 - It is the path of blessing and happiness!
 - To leave His way is always to take the path to destruction.
 - If you have any sense,
 - You will follow God’s way with the same attitude with which you would follow a guide if you were lost in the Catacombs!
 - You know what the Catacombs are like—
 - all sorts of winding pathways cut out in the rock, going all different directions.

- Suppose you were desperately lost in there and could not find your way out.
 - If you met someone who know the way,
 - would you look at following him as something oppressive and restrictive?
 - Would you say:
 - “Why do I have to turn left here—I want to go up these stairs instead...”
 - No! You would be glad that he was there to keep you from going in the wrong way.
 - How much more eagerly would you follow him if he was not only showing you the way out, but also taking you to a precious treasure!
 - Whenever God’s way seems restrictive rather than blessed...
 - when you are frustrated because you want to do something and His word won’t allow it...
 - You can be sure that you are not looking at things in the right way!
 - He came to in order that He might bless us!
 - “I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.”
 - This is why God sent Him!
 - Acts 3:26: God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.
- Be thankful for His way!
 - If you find yourself looking at God’s word and saying,
 - “Oh no, what is He going to ask of me now...”
 - It is clear that you are looking at His instruction the same way Adam and Eve did when they Fell—
 - “This is something restrictive and restraining...”
 - “This is not the path of blessing.”
- The beatitudes show us that those who have truly come to Christ and entered His kingdom follow Him with that kind of an attitude.
 - They follow Him without question because they distrust themselves and they fully trust Him...

- They even follow Him when His way leads them into persecution...
- And Jesus declares of such persons,
 - “Blessed are you!”
- King Jesus came to bring us blessing!
 - We ruined ourselves but departing from God...
 - But He comes to restore us again.
- Brothers and sisters,
 - Jesus has blessedness in Himself because He is the Son of God.
 - The multitude was right when they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:
 - “Hosanna! Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD! The King of Israel!” (John 12:13)
 - The Holy Spirit tells us in Timothy that He is
 - the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light...
 - God is altogether lovely, perfectly wise and holy, without spot or blemish...
 - There is absolutely nothing wrong with Him, and nothing that ever can be wrong with Him...
 - He is the eternally blessed One whose being is wholly saturated with blessedness!
- Jesus begins His sermon with a pronouncement of the blessings of His kingdom to all who follow Him because that is what He came to do.
 - He did not come with the message of condemnation,
 - but with the message of salvation.
- Now this word **blessed** with which Jesus begins His sermon is a word that means **happy**.
 - Some commentators quibble about translating it as happy because it seems too trivial to use such a common word here...
 - One of the reasons that some give is because the word happy suggests that you are glad because of happenstance—what has happened to you...
 - And these commentators point out that Jesus is very obviously talking about a kind of happiness that transcends circumstances when He says things like “Happy are they that mourn.”
 - But I cannot agree with these commentators about that.

- Jesus is not talking about a happiness that transcends circumstances.
- He is talking about the happiness or blessedness that comes from the circumstance of being a member of His kingdom!
- It is a happiness that comes from a wonderful change in your circumstances!
 - From being in the kingdom of darkness to being in the kingdom of light!
 - From being guilty and condemned to being forgiven and favoured!
 - From being corrupt and vile to being righteous and holy!
 - It is a happiness that is absolutely based on what has happened to you that Jesus is talking about here!
- But having said all that, let me also say that there is nothing wrong with translating the word as blessed.
 - You will hear me translate it that way often as we study the beatitudes...
 - I just want you to understand that happy is just as good a translation,
 - And it helps to fill out the idea that Jesus is trying to get across.
- He is deliberately making statements here that sound contradictory—and that **are** contradictory to the way the man of the world sees things.
 - Deliberately so!
 - He wants you to know that His kingdom is not of this world...
 - He wants you to know that those who find blessing in His kingdom are those who can find no satisfaction from this fallen world anymore...
 - but who have come to despise their own rebellious ways and the ways of those around them...
 - He shows you what His true disciples are like as long as they remain in this world...
 - They are poor in spirit, they mourn, they are meek, they hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers,
 - and for all this, they are persecuted because they are no longer of this world, but of His kingdom.

TRANS> Today, I want to focus in on the first of the beatitudes:

- v. 3: Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

I. What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

A. Let me begin by asking simply:

- What does it mean to be poor?

1. The original word is $\rho\tau\omega\kappa\omicron\nu$

a. $\rho\tau\omega\kappa\omicron\nu$ means:

- to be without what is essential for life—
- to be destitute of the basic essentials.

b. $\rho\tau\omega\kappa\omicron\nu$ speaks of one who is not only poor,

- but who is also powerless to accomplish anything for himself...

1) There is another word in Greek that speaks of the working poor—

- one who is able to provide the basics for himself through daily labour...
- but $\rho\tau\omega\kappa\omicron\nu$ speaks of one who is reduced to dependency on others...
 - one who has no means to support himself.

2) Often, it is used in the sense of a beggar...

- In Luke 16 tells, $\rho\tau\omega\kappa\omicron\nu$ is translated that way...
 - Luke 16:20-21: But there was a certain **beggar** named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.

3) $\rho\tau\omega\kappa\omicron\nu$ is also used of those who are not necessary beggars, but who are dependent on the support of others...

- It is often used, for example, of a widow.
- She may have regular support if someone is taking care of her, but she has no means of providing for herself.

TRANS> So Jesus is saying here that those who cannot provide the basic necessities of life for themselves are blessed and happy in His kingdom!

- But there is more!

2. He adds to the word “poor” the words, “in spirit.”

- The blessed one is not just **poor**; but **poor in spirit**.

a. “In spirit” in this context seems to mean,

- “right down to the core, right to the heart.”

- 1) For example, when we are told that Jesus “sighed deeply **in His spirit...**”
 - What does this mean but that that the sigh went right down to the core of his being?
 - 2) When we are told that John the Baptist grew to be strong “in spirit,”
 - what does it mean but that he grew to be strong within?
 - He was a man of solid, unshakeable character and conviction.
- b. By adding these words “in spirit” Jesus speaks of a poverty that goes to the very depth of your being!
- 1) It is not a mere outward poverty that He is speaking of,
 - but a poverty of the very spirit of a person.
 - 2) The world might well understand how a poor person could be called blessed who had a rich spirit...
 - I’m sure you have met people like that...
 - A person who has very little outwardly,
 - but who is inwardly rich and full.
 - 3) But Jesus’ statement here is more shocking than that!
 - He is talking about people who are poor on the inside!
 - He is talking about an inner weakness...
 - A lack of character...
 - A lack of what we might call inner greatness!

B. Now I want you to know that this poverty of spirit is true of every one of you.

1. God made us that way.
 - a. He made us to be dependent on Him for our greatness...
 - He made us to derive richness of spirit from Him.
 - That is the very thing we don’t like!
 - We want to be great on our own, without Him!
 - b. He made us to walk in His counsel, and to be empowered by Him to live in His perfect blessedness.
 - As long as we continued in His way, we were truly happy and blessed!
 - We were reflectors of the very glory of God,
 - shining the way Jesus shined as the very image of God.

- c. As a man, Jesus became poor in spirit, and his greatness as man was that He followed God...
 - As man, He was the exact image of God as we all ought to be!
 - 2. Do you remember what I said about widows before?
 - a. They are called poor not necessarily because they have nothing,
 - but because what they have, they obtain from others.
 - b. Jesus, by becoming man, became like a widow...
 - He continued in prayer and received strength from God.
 - He lacked nothing, but what He had, He had by depending on God.
 - That is the way we were made.
- C. The most foolish thing we ever did, or course, was to sever ourselves from God.
- 1. That is what impoverished our spirits!
 - Before the fall, our spirits were continually enriched by God...
 - But now, every member of the human race is by nature impoverished in spirit because we are cut off from God.
 - 2. But our poverty goes even deeper than that!
 - a. Not only did we impoverish ourselves,
 - We also went into tremendous debt!
 - It is one thing to be deprived of riches,
 - it is even worse to be debt.
 - b. We put ourselves in debt to the justice of God.
 - By our rebellion, we offended the holy justice of God.
 - Now we must pay the penalty...
 - and we have not resources to do so.
 - c. There is no greater poverty than this poverty!
 - You are absolutely dependent on God for mercy!
 - If He does not show mercy on you, He will bring the full weight of His holy wrath and justice upon you...
 - And there will be no escaping it for all eternity.
 - There is nothing you can do but beg!

TRANS> You see how poor we are!

- We were dependent to start with...
 - And then we rejected the One who alone is able to supply our living and brought His wrath upon us!
- Every member of the human race is, in the sense, poor in spirit—
 - You need God’s provision of a living...
 - And you need God to forgive your debt.

II. So what does Jesus mean when He pronounces a blessing on the poor in spirit in the first beatitude?

- Does He mean that everyone will be blessed?
- Since everyone shares in the poverty of spirit I have just described,
 - does this mean that everyone shares in the blessing?

A. No! Jesus does **not** mean that everyone will be blessed.

- He makes is very clear in His teaching that many will **not** be blessed.
1. Toward the end of this very sermon...
 - He says that **many** will enter the wide gate that leads to destruction...
 - And after that,
 - He speaks of how on the day of judgement, many will say, “Lord Lord”
 - and tell of all the things they have done for Him...
 - to which He will reply:
 - “Depart from me, you that work iniquity.”
 - And at that very end of this sermon,
 - He speaks of those who hear and do not believe as those who build a house on sand that falls.
 2. Throughout His entire ministry, Jesus emphasised that many will not be saved.
 - Most of His parables make a contrast between those who are saved and those who are lost—
 - the lost being cast into outer darkness or burned with unquenchable fire.
 - Upon the Jewish leaders, Jesus pronounces woes or curses...
 - He is the One who called Judas, “the son of perdition.”

- Surely, if anyone had an impoverished spirit, it was Judas...
- Yet, he is by no means a partaker of the blessing of Christ's kingdom!

B. So what does Jesus mean when He speaks of the poor in spirit and says they are blessed?

1. How does He make a distinction when **everyone** is impoverished in spirit?
 - a. I think it is obvious that Jesus is not speaking about what a person is,
 - He is talking about what a person sees himself to be!
 - b. To fill out His words,
 - He is saying,
 - "Blessed are you who **know** yourselves to be poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."
 - c. Jesus often speaks this way...
 - For example, in John 9:39, He says:
 - "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."
 - What He means is that those who *think* they see apart from Him must become blind—realise that they don't see.
 - In the same way that Jesus says, "that those who see may be made blind,"
 - we can say with reference to Matthew 5:3,
 - that those who are rich in spirit must become poor in spirit.
2. Jesus words to Church at Laodacea applies to all who do not know themselves to be impoverished by sin:
 - In Rev. 3:17, He says:
 - "You say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' —and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—
 - This church had nothing, but they thought they had everything!
 - They **were** poor in spirit in reality...
 - But they **were not** poor in spirit because they knew it not!

C. Let me assure each one of you!

1. There is no blessing for you from Jesus unless you are poor in spirit.

- there is no blessing for you in just being wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked before God if you don't know yourself to be so!
 - a. Some of you may carry about in yourselves the notion that God owes you something...
 - or that you have the power in yourself to make God a debtor to you in some way!
 - You may say,
 - “Oh, I have done this for God and I have done that for God, surely He will bless me...”
 - You are not poor in spirit—you are a stranger to the blessing of Jesus!
 - b. Some of you may be busy trying to save yourselves...
 - You think that you can do something for God that bring you into His favour...
 - Perhaps you say, “I do the best I can, I love my neighbour and I go to church and I read my Bible...”
 - I hope that God will accept me”
 - You are not poor in spirit either—
 - Do you not know that you are
 - wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked?
 - c. Some of you may be pretending that there will be no judgement...
 - or that things will somehow just work themselves out...
 - You are like the man in Deuteronomy who hears God's curse and blessed himself, saying:
 - “I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my own heart.”
 - You are not poor in spirit—
 - You could never think that way about God's judgement if you knew what you are before God!
 - You would be filled with terror and dismay about meeting Him.
2. But listen to me!
- You can all take encouragement from this!
 - It is wonderful news that the salvation that Jesus brings is a salvation that you cannot contribute anything to!

- That's not something that brings you into bondage!
- That's something that frees you up to come to Him!
 - He does not minimise your condition and pretend that it is not that bad!
 - He knows that you are too ruined to save yourself...
 - That is why He came—to save those who are desperately lost!
 - The only thing that disqualifies you from His salvation is that you keep on pretending that you can contribute to it in some way!
 - Why is it so hard for you to come with nothing?
 - Why is it so hard for sinners to be poor in spirit?

III. If you are poor in spirit, Jesus says that you are truly blessed!

- He tells you that you are blessed because the kingdom of Heaven belongs to you!
- A. What does this mean to possess the kingdom of heaven?
1. It means that you belong to the kingdom that Jesus came to establish on earth.
 - a. It is called the “kingdom of heaven” because it originates from God, who dwells in heaven.
 - The other gospels usually call it the kingdom of God,
 - but Matthew, writing to the Jews, refers to it in the Jewish manner as the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - b. Belonging to a kingdom means, of course, that you are under a king.
 - And in this case, that king is none other than King Jesus Himself.
 - The scriptures tell us that He will reign until He has brought all His enemies under His feet.
 - His goal is perfect submission to God everywhere.
 - His kingdom will thus be characterised by perfect holiness and righteousness—
 - It will be a world of perfect love,
 - In time, there will be no enemies to molest His subjects.
 - Jesus establishes this righteous kingdom in this sinful world.
 2. Belonging to this kingdom means that you have the blessings that King Jesus brings to His people.
 - a. The first and greatest of these is the forgiveness of sins.

- By His death on the cross, He secured this blessing for all His subjects.
 - He took the place of them all when He went to the cross.
 - All of God's wrath against their sin was poured out upon Him.
 - He paid the full penalty.
 - Now there is no more condemnation...
 - Jesus has taken it all and His people are free!
 - His kingdom is a kingdom of forgiven people,
 - of people who are reconciled to God,
 - of people whose debt is paid in full.
- b. The second blessing is the blessing of sanctification.
- 1) Sanctification also begins as soon as you enter this glorious kingdom.
 - The Lord Jesus gives you the Holy Spirit who opens your eyes to the truth so that you receive it as the very word of God...
 - You believe His promises, tremble at his curses, and follow His instructions.
 - The Spirit gives you a heart that desires to please God.
 - 2) The beginning of this work is so radical that it is called a new birth!
 - From there the work continues as you grown in grace,
 - You become more and more full of the blessing of God.
 - You die unto sin and live unto righteousness.
 - You become more and more beautiful—like Jesus.
 - And the promise of Jesus to all His subjects is that He will complete this work that He has begun at the last day.
 - When our enemies are destroyed on that day, it will not only be the enemies that are outside of us (Satan, the world)
 - But it will be the enemy of sin and death within.
 - King Jesus is perfect in the beauty of holiness, and He will make us perfect also!

TRANS> Now you can see why Jesus says that those who possess this kingdom are blessed!

B. And I want you to notice that this kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit **now!**

- All but the first and last of the beatitudes speak of future blessings, but this one says that the kingdom is something that the poor in spirit already possess!
 1. The call of Jesus, wherever He went, was to repent and enter His kingdom.
 - It is not something you have wait for, it is something you can do now!
 - Sure, there are many blessings of the kingdom that you must wait for because they are yet future—
 - Full comfort will not come until the last day,
 - and it is not until then that you will be filled with righteousness.
 - But Jesus calls you to enter His kingdom **now** by turning against what you are now and turning to Him as He is offered in the gospel.
 2. But what if you are not contrary to what you are now?
 - a. What if you are generally satisfied with yourself?
 - What interest would you have in a kingdom whose sole purpose is to deliver you from sin?
 - b. I think it should be perfectly obvious that anyone who is not poor in spirit has no use for this kingdom.
 - If you think that you are fine the way you are—
 - or that by sweat and hard work you can become all that you need to be...
 - what use would you have for a kingdom that was established solely for the purpose of bringing salvation to the needy?
- C. But what is it that can make a person to be poor in spirit?
1. It is to meet the King of this kingdom, Jesus Christ!
 - Every one of you who is truly a part of His kingdom has met the king,
 - and it was meeting the king that caused you to become poor in spirit!
 - a. Until you saw the glory of the only begotten Son of God,
 - you may have thought you needed some changes in your life,
 - but you had no real sense of your poverty—
 - you did not see yourself as completely without resources before God...
 - you did not see yourself as contemptible in God's sight—
 - you did not see yourself as worthy of eternal wrath and judgement.

- b. It was not until you saw His perfection that you were enabled to see the depth of your imperfection.
- If your only standard is your neighbour, who is nearly as corrupt as you are...
 - You will not seem very corrupt...
 - But the day you encounter the glory of King Jesus, you loathe yourself.
 - Now you have seen what true glory and true blessedness look like,
 - now you know that you are far from it.
- c. There are a lot of examples about those who saw the glory of Christ and how they responded...
- 1) they always become poor in spirit.
 - a) Isaiah saw the glory of Christ in the temple, and his response was:
 - "Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."
 - b) Peter saw Jesus' glory when Jesus filled his nets with fish...
 - When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"
 - 2) But I think the clearest example of all is that of the apostle Paul.
 - a) All his life, Paul had worked hard to make himself righteous.
 - And if you were to compare Paul to other men, he was more righteous than them all!
 - In Philippians 3, he seems to say, "If you want to compare me to other men, I have them all beat..."
 - Phil 3:4-6: "If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (in other words, he kept all the ordinances about washing and sacrifices and food restrictions).
 - b) But what does Paul say about all his righteousness after meeting Christ?
 - Phil 3:7-10: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found

in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

- c) After meeting Christ, Paul thinks his righteousness is rubbish!
- Compared to other men, he could be proud—
 - He could strut about proudly, showing off his righteousness.
 - But when he brought that fleshy righteousness before the true and living God, it was loathsome and despicable!
 - Like Job, he had to repent in dust and ashes!
 - He had to rely on the righteousness of Christ.
 - His own righteousness would only get in the way and corrupt everything!
 - Paul became poor in spirit because he met Christ.

2. But how does it come about that you see the glory of Jesus?

a. Well, first of all, you see Him as He lived in the world.

- His life is recorded for us by His Spirit in the Bible.
- It is the kind of life that God requires of every human being, and that is described in God's law.
 - It is that obedience that makes God's will the very centre of your life.
 - If pleasing the Father means going to the cross, then to the cross you will go.
- It means no more feeling sorry for yourself, no more excuse making, no more blame shifting, no more hesitation to do God's will.
 - When you see how Jesus lived, you see that you come up short in the way that you live.
 - You begin to see your poverty of spirit, that you are undone before God.

TRANS> But this is only the beginning...

- this is to see that you lack,
 - but full poverty of spirit comes when you begin to see **how much** you lack...

b. And that comes when you see Jesus crucified for your sins.

- 1) If King Jesus only came as a guide to show you how to live,

- then you could proudly come and start out on a new course!
 - “Now I have the instruction I need—
 - soon I will be all that I need to be!”
- 2) But when you grasp what Jesus had to do in order that the subjects of His kingdom might be pardoned....
- that is when you really begin to become poor in spirit!
 - If it were possible for Him to guide you into behaviour that would make you acceptable to God, He would never have gone to the cross!
 - But your sins were such that an atonement had to be made if there was to be any forgiveness of those sins!
 - What desperate poverty that the price of the blood of the Son of God was required!
 - How loathsome you in the sight of God!
- 3) All who belong to Jesus’ Kingdom know what He had to do to save them....
- You cannot be in this kingdom unless you know that!
 - And you can’t know that and remain proud!
 - You are poor in spirit because you have come to the king and become a part of His kingdom by faith...
 - You have looked to Him to save you because you realise that you can’t possibly save yourself.

Conclusion:

What a great blessing it is to be poor in spirit!

- It means that you possess the kingdom of Heaven.
 - It means that you have seen the King of glory...
 - It means that you have received from Him the forgiveness of sin and the promise of the Spirit!
 - It means that you have a sure hope for all eternity to share forever in His happiness.
- How thankful you should be that you were not left to carry on in your blind pride!
 - Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.