

# The Riches of Bankruptcy

*The Beatitudes*

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 5:3  
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Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5 as we renew our study on the Sermon on the Mount after being away last Tuesday. We come now to enter into the individual Beatitudes one by one. After having three weeks of introduction in broad and increasingly more narrow consideration of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, now we come to the individual Beatitudes which are going to be a great blessing to our hearts and I trust and pray that it will be a blessing to our church as well. This is not the first time that I've preached this passage of Scripture at Truth Community Church; we preached these Beatitudes several years ago, six, seven years ago, and what I'm hoping that the Lord will do is produce an even deeper and more profound response in the hearts of our church to what Christ our Lord has said as we come to grips with the fullness of what he taught us in this blessed Sermon on the Mount.

So we're just going to look at verse 3 here this evening. It may surprise you that there are full sermons that need to be preached on each particular verse, and tonight we start with the first Beatitude, which is the opening and the introduction to everything else in the Sermon on the Mount. Verse 3 we read, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The Beatitudes are the foundation of so much. They are the foundation to everything else that we see in the Sermon on the Mount and this particular Beatitude about being poor in spirit is the entranceway, is the door into the vestibule which leads into the blessedness of fellowship with a perfect God. You cannot have fellowship with God, you are not a Christian without something of poverty of spirit being in your heart, and so we're going to consider that here this evening.

We're going to expound the meaning that Jesus has through three questions that we'll ask and answer about this particular verse. The first question that I want to ask and answer is this: what does it mean to be blessed? What does it mean to be blessed? That seems like a pretty easy and fundamental question, doesn't it, but it's been distorted by modern takes on it as people have bumper stickers that say "Blessed" on their expensive vehicles or posts on social media, they're blessed as they're on a great vacation or something like that and it brings this materialistic, carnal, earthly emphasis to the question that is entirely contrary, directly contradictory to what Jesus says here in the Sermon on the Mount and particularly in verse 3. There is no blessing apart from what we see here in verse 3. That's how important it is and it is significant that "Blessed" is the opening word of this entire

sermon. It is the opening word of the entire sermon. Jesus, in other words, is opening the door to blessing by what he says in verse 3. These words open the door to well-being with God.

Now, what does it mean to be blessed? That's the question that we're asking and answering. Now, there are some people, very good Bible teachers, that say that, you know, that understand this word is simply meaning happy, you know, and that there's an inner feeling of satisfaction that Jesus is describing and inwardly people are happy who are like this. What do we think about that? Well, sometimes disciples do feel happy, don't they? But that superficial term, especially as we use it today, cannot possibly be the intent and the fullness of intent of what Jesus is saying. You know, you think about happy in the terms of happy birthday, and you've got a birthday cake and balloons and things like that, and there's this superficial sense of happiness, obviously, Jesus is speaking far beyond something like that because in what follows Jesus is talking about spiritual character. He is building toward a conclusion that warns about eternal judgment.

If you just look at chapter 7 for a moment, the sermon opens with these words in verse 3, and then it concludes at the end of chapter 7, beginning in verse 24, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." This opening of blessedness leads to a warning about judgment and a contrast between wisdom and foolishness. I think it's obvious that the word happy, at least as we use it in modern days, cannot possibly be stretched to cover such fundamental spiritual matters as what Jesus is talking about in this sermon. The overall context demands something more significant, and even in verse 6 of chapter 5, if you'll take your eyes and fingers back there, Matthew 5:6, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." There are these spiritual longings compared in the matters of the soul to the matters of the body of thirst needing water and hunger needing food for satisfaction. Jesus says the people who are blessed are those who desire the righteousness of God like that, who have an inner compulsion, an inner desire, a longing, an appetite for righteousness. And obviously, not everybody that wants to be happy actually wants to be righteous. That's a far more narrow subset of humanity, even within the church.

And so I've never been persuaded by those who say it simply means happy and interpret it along those lines. Is there a better way to look at it? I think so. A standard lexicon, a Greek dictionary, defines the term like this, the idea of blessedness and the one who is blessed, it says that to be blessed is to be "the privileged recipient of divine favor." The privileged recipient of divine favor. Notice that it's talking not about an emotion but a status, a state of condition, a state of blessing whereby the one who is in this state is on the receiving end of the goodness and the grace of God, someone who has received divine grace, divine favor. That is a far better way to consider this idea of blessedness and what it means to be blessed and, beloved, what you need to understand and need to grasp

as you enter into these Beatitudes, and the same word is used in all eight of the Beatitudes from verse 3 to verse 10, understand this, Jesus is not describing a subjective feeling here in terms of what someone feels and what their emotional state is inside of them. That's entirely too introspective, entirely too arbitrary to be what he's discussing here, especially in the light of judgment and wisdom and foolishness and all of these other things. Jesus is not describing a subjective feeling. He is describing an objective fact. He is describing a state and pronouncing that this state is a good place to be. People who are poor in spirit, whatever that means, people who are poor in spirit have received God's favor. No matter how they may feel at the moment, they are in a good position because God is favorably disposed toward them. God looks on them with favor. God has blessed them with a gift. God has done good to them. They are in a position to have, as Perkins referred to it, to enjoy fellowship with a perfect God. That's the sense in which we need to understand this state of blessedness. This is the only condition upon which a man or a woman can have fellowship with God, as if they are poor in spirit, no matter how they may feel at the moment.

And so it's a condition and a state of favor, not an inner feeling that we're talking about. So we need to set our feelings about things aside in order to look at the objective truth of what Jesus is saying to us here. To be blessed is to be the privileged recipient of divine favor. That's the key point, number one. Now, secondly, what does it mean to be poor in spirit? What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What do we need to understand about that? If God bestows favor on those who are poor in spirit, if a good and gracious God sends forth his blessing, his kindness upon those who are in this condition, then I don't know about you, but I want to know what that frame of mind is so that I can get in on that blessing for myself. If God blesses the poor in spirit, we must know what it means.

Now, beloved, as we enter into this consideration, I want you to understand that as we consider what it means to be poor in spirit, we are entering into a realm of exclusivity. These are the only people that God blesses and this state of mind, this settled attitude of self-perception is so contrary to the spirit of the world, so contrary even to the spirit of the church, that we really need to enter into and understand what it means. Nobody who is of a mind that they're a good person is blessed. If your fundamental self-assessment is, "I'm a pretty good person," you are not poor in spirit and you are not blessed, and as we'll see, you're not even in the kingdom. Think about it this way, beloved, in multiple places in Scripture, for example, in 1 Peter 5:5, we read this, "God opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble." God has a fundamental disposition of dealing with the human race, and those who are proud of spirit, he is opposed to. His favor, his kindness, his blessing is reserved for those who are humble in spirit, and we will see what that means as we go along here.

Now look there in verse 3 where we read, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Just to focus on the term "poor" for a matter of moments, the thought of poverty, and if you'll turn over to help us understand that term "poor," turn over to Luke 16 with me for just a moment. Luke 16. You will remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus and I want to just read a portion of it to set the context and help us enter into the terms and the meaning of the

terms that we're using here. In verse 19, Jesus says, "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day." And by contrast, verse 20, "And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried." Now, beloved, all we're looking at is getting a sense of the meaning of the term "poor" from the context in which it is used here. Notice how the poverty of Lazarus was contrasted with the well-being and the material prosperity of the rich man. Lazarus by contrast was poor. In other words, Lazarus had no resources of his own. He was dependent upon outside help for anything that he had. Let me say that again. Lazarus had no resources of his own. He was dependent upon outside help. Jesus uses that kind of word to describe the poverty of spirit upon which God bestows blessing and favor.

Now, as Jesus speaks here, we know that he is not pronouncing blessing on that kind of material poverty. He is not pronouncing blessing here in Matthew 5:3 on those who are materially bankrupt. We know that because he goes on to say he's referring to blessed are the poor in, in what? In spirit. Those who are poor in spirit. He's talking about an inner matter not an external one. He is talking about something that is inside a person's heart, not something that refers to their relative lack or abundance of material resources. Jesus is talking about a matter of the heart, something that is inside the way a person thinks and has his entire disposition of life.

Now what could that possibly be referring to? Well, let's read on. Verse 3, Matthew 5:3, if you go back there with me, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Beloved, look at it there, all of those verses and the ones that follow as well are referring to inner attitudes, heart dispositions, heart affections, self-assessments even, you might say. Poor in spirit. Mourning is a matter inside. Those who are meek or gentle. And especially, you see this clearly in verse 6, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Everything that Jesus is talking about here in this opening section known as the Beatitudes are referring to spiritual matters, as verse 6 shows, someone who hungers for a righteousness that he does not have.

Now, when you carefully put these things together, we are in a position to answer the question, what does it mean to be poor in spirit? This is a statement about someone who understands that he or she has no spiritual resources of their own. The person who is poor in spirit says, "I am not righteous. I do not have power to secure my own salvation. I am a sinner. I have rebelled against a holy God. I stand guilty before him. I am condemned. I deserve to go to hell." That's the kind of poverty of spirit that Jesus is describing. A modern word that we could use is bankruptcy. "I realize that I am spiritually bankrupt. I do not have," follow me here, "I do not have the resources needed to pay off my spiritual debts." Lazarus had no money to procure his own material benefits, so Jesus said he was a poor man. Beloved, Jesus is talking in vertical spiritual terms. We come before God, we stand in the presence of God and we realize that we have nothing to give to him, we have

nothing to commend ourselves to him. We bring only our sinfulness and our guilt and that's all that we can present to him.

Now beloved, that's an objective fact; whether you feel that way about yourself or not, that's the reality of matters. Look over, let me remind you in this context of Romans 3. Turn there with me to Romans 3 and in a mixed room like this, young and old, people I know well, people I don't know much at all, people new to Christianity and the Bible, those that have been there for many decades, we all need to evaluate ourselves in light of these things. Paul in Romans 1:18 through 3:20, is laying out the universal guilt of mankind and explaining thereby why the wrath of God is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men as he started in chapter 1, verse 18. As you come to the middle of chapter 3, he's approaching the end of his argument and having established that the Jews are guilty before God and the Gentiles are guilty before God, equally guilty, equally lost, with nothing to commend themselves to God. Now, Romans 3:9, "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written," verse 10, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Now, beloved, when Scripture talks about a poverty of spirit, being poor in spirit, being spiritually bankrupt, understand that it is speaking from that kind of context so that to be poor in spirit, you could say as we compare Scripture with Scripture, is to say from the bottom of your heart that what Paul convicts all of humanity in, in Romans 3, is true of you as well. You look at Romans 3:10 and it says, "None is righteous, no not one," your head nods in agreement and say, "That's true of me. No one understands, that was true of me before Christ. There was a veil over my eyes. I was spiritually blind. I was spiritually dead. No one seeks for God, that was me. I may have been religious, I may have made outward profession but from the bottom of my heart, earnestly desiring God and Christ and nothing else, that was not what I was like." Verse 12, "'All have turned aside, together they've become worthless; no one does good, not even one.' Yes, yes, yes, yes, that is describing me apart from Jesus Christ. No understanding, nothing good, not a lover of God, not seeking him, that's what I was like. That's what I am like apart from Christ."

There's a couple of different ways that you can think about this and understand that we're talking about the way that we perceive ourselves in the presence of God. There's a couple of ways that you can think about this. Think about who God is by very nature, who he is by essence. God is transcendent. God is uncreated. God existed before time began. God dwells beyond time. He is eternal. His life will never end. He is sovereign, majestic, holy, separate. He has a triune essence that is utterly unlike anything that I can conceive, and certainly is utterly different from anything that I am. God is like that, high, lofty. To see him is to melt, to cry out, "Woe is me, for I'm a sinful man and I live among a people of sinful lips!" He's too high. He's too lofty. He's invisible. He's immortal. He's God-only wise. "I," before we even get to a concept of sin in the picture here, beloved, you say and you recognize about yourself, "I can't possibly attain to him. He is in heaven. He is invisible. He is spirit. He is uncreated. I, as a creature of sinful flesh, bound to this earth, I

cannot attain to him. He is too high. He is too lofty. I can't get to him. He is too far above me for me to reach him." That's one aspect of poverty of spirit is you realize, "I'm nothing in his sight. I'm a grasshopper in the presence of Almighty God. God is transcendent and he has a superior essence to mine. We're not equals! I do not speak with God on equal terms because he's infinitely above me." Those are the beginning motions of poverty of spirit, rightly recognizing the transcendence of God and recognizing in utter humility, "I'm nothing before him. I have nothing in his presence."

Now you go further, and you think about the moral perfections of God, his utter holiness, that he is a God too pure to even look upon evil. Habakkuk 1.13, "Your eyes are too pure to see evil." Christ was sinless and you realize, "I'm not like that either. God is transcendent above me not only in the nature of his essence, but in his moral perfection. He set forth the perfection of his moral law, and either by action, motive, thought, or word, I've broken every one of them. I'm guilty before a wholly transcendent God," you say to yourself. Now we're starting to enter into the nature of what it means to be poor in spirit. You start to realize, you start to embrace, you start to openly confess, "I have nothing before this God," and you say, "The truth of the matter is, this God has no reason to notice a sinful soul like mine. I'm below him in essence. I'm separated from him by my sinfulness. My best righteousness, as Paul says, is like dung. What can I say to him? What can I do?"

Notice the contrast that we see in Luke 18 that contrasts the proud spirit of the religious man with the humble sinner who is poor in spirit; this is a great illustration of the difference of which we are speaking. In Luke 18:9, Jesus "told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee,' who was viewed as the religious leaders of the time, who outwardly were the most moral men in Jerusalem, outwardly being the operative word there, look at how the Pharisee prays and look at his self-assessment. 'The Pharisee,' verse 11, "standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'" He was not poor in spirit. He was not in the kingdom, even though he was a religious leader of the day. You can see his spiritual pride in the fact that he compares himself man to man and places him ahead of himself among others. He stands before God and he compliments his own supposed virtues in prayer before God, thinly veiled thanksgiving, masquerading for the horrible pride in his heart. He pointed to his religious activities, "I fast twice a week." He pointed to his own conduct in generosity, "I give tithes of all that I get." This guy thought he was something special, better than the man next to him, full of pride over his good deeds and his religious activity, and what's the contrast? Here in verse 13, we see what poverty of spirit looks like, being poor in spirit. "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" This tax collector is an illustration of what it means to be poor in spirit. He's not appealing to anything about himself in the presence of God. The Pharisee, yes, he appealed to all kinds of stuff about himself in the presence of God. The tax collector, nothing of the sort. The tax collector says in effect, "God, I appeal only to mercy and free grace, nothing of myself, not of my own merit.

You must be merciful to me. I ask you for mercy that I do not deserve in your presence!" One boasting in who he was, the other denying himself and asking God to give him grace and mercy that he does not deserve.

Now beloved, with that exposition, let me ask you a question: how do you see yourself in the presence of God? Who is God and who are you in his presence? These are the most fundamental questions that we could ask. Who is God? In uncreated essence, God is actually separate and superior to you. Do you freely acknowledge that before him? Or do you come with him with a sense of expectation, with a sense, better stated, a sense of entitlement? "God, you owe me for my religious stuff. God, you owe me for the religious activity. You owe me." God doesn't owe us anything. He's separate, superior. In moral perfection, he's separate and superior to you. The question is, and that only you can answer in the depth of your heart, is how do you honestly assess yourself in his presence? Is it a matter of small consequence to sin against him? Is it a matter of small consequence to be lukewarm to him? Are you the Pharisee in the temple or are you the tax collector who says, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner"? Answer the question well, beloved.

Let's think about it from another perspective here, just in terms of rightly assessing ourselves in the presence of God. There is God, lofty and exalted, the train of his robe filling the temple. God rules over the universe in unchallenged supremacy. God, by the might of his word, spoke everything into existence. God, by the might of his power, sustains the universe and directs all of its infinite details to accomplish his purposes. That's who God is. Who are you and I? Scripture says that you and I, we are flowering grass that passes away; we flourish in the morning and we're gone by evening. You see, beloved, we're dwelling on this for good reason. It is contrary to the nature of the human heart to acknowledge, admit, and embrace these things because we're so impressed with ourselves, we so love our mirror, we so think well of ourselves, and Scripture says we have to deny and repudiate all of that if we are to enter into this state of blessedness.

One of the things that I worry about as a pastor, is there are certain segments in the Christian church that are content to not be like the rest of society, you know, and they'll be swift to condemn abortion, homosexuality, corruption in political leadership, swift to condemn those things and that's okay, I'm against those things too. But beloved, understand something really, really critical that draws a sharp line between that kind of proud political pseudo-Christianity with what Jesus is talking about here when we speak about spiritual bankruptcy. When God gives a command to repent, Acts 17:30 to 31, God is commanding all men everywhere to repent, understand, beloved, that God is not calling you to repent of the sins that society commits. That's not the call to repentance at all. The gospel comes to you, declares the death and resurrection of Christ as the payment that is sufficient to reconcile a sinner to God, but it calls you to repent of your sins, of the sins that you have committed, your sins of lust, your sins of godlessness, your sins of prayerlessness, your sins of anger, your sins of selfishness, and on and on it goes. If society was suddenly changed immediately and all of these societal sins, which are so obvious, were immediately taken away, and there was nothing left for spiritually conservative people to criticize outwardly, beloved, you and I would still be left with all of the inner corruption of our own that we need to confess and repent of. It does you no

good to be politically conservative in the presence of God if you are not repentant of your own sins. God doesn't call you to repent of the abortions and homosexuality of other people, he calls you to repent of your own personal sins against him and the question is, do you acknowledge that?

It does grieve me, and I'm remembering specific conversations in what I'm about to say. People, you know, find out you're a pastor and people come with all kinds of things and when somebody immediately starts talking about abortion, immediately starts talking about politics, I shiver for their spiritual condition. When they self-righteously condemn those things without any kind of expression of personal repentance, personal poverty of spirit, personal appreciation for grace, it's all too superior, it's all too much like the Pharisee, "I thank God that I'm not like them." Beloved, that's not poverty of spirit and those that are awash in Christian nationalism and speak so freely in such a condemning spirit toward the sins of society, look at one level, I'm sympathetic with that but if that's not marked with an even greater concern for personal holiness, of personal repentance, it's empty and means nothing in the presence of God if it's done from a spirit of spiritual self-satisfaction. "I'm better. That's bad. I'm glad I'm not like that." Welcome to the Pharisee of Luke 18 and look at what the judgment is that Jesus pronounces in verse 14, if you're still in Luke 18, Luke 18:14. Jesus, speaking about the tax collector, said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Beloved, I can only encourage you, plead with you, to consider these things well and to consider them seriously and to examine yourself. Scripture says that, "The boastful shall not stand before your eyes, O God, you hate all who do iniquity," Psalm 5:5. Psalm 51:17, listen carefully. Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." There's the boastful and there's the broken. Where are you on that side of the chasm, beloved? Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this about being poor in spirit, he says, "It means a complete absence of pride, self-assurance, and self-reliance. It means a consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God. We are nothing and we have nothing. We look to God in utter submission and in utter dependence upon his grace and mercy." Beloved, I just ask you in light of these things, when you look at yourself, consider yourself, what do you say about yourself? Not what you say to others, not what mask you might put on. What do you truly think and say about yourself? If there's any sense of self-distinction vis-a-vis other men, you're not poor in spirit. If there's any sense that, "I'm a little bit better," if there's any sense of, "God had favor on me because I'm a little bit better than the other person," you're completely contradicting this poverty of spirit. It's a bankruptcy. "I have nothing to offer."

Now, go back to Matthew 5 with me, and we'll consider our third and final question for today. These things are all very searching and, you know, in one sense, if you're trying to give people what they wanted to hear, this isn't what you'd tell them, is it? People like to be told how good they are and to be congratulated and stroked. We're all like that to one degree or another. We all like to be stroked. Jesus is not stroking us in the Sermon on the Mount. He's saying this is what's necessary to enter in to the condition of blessedness in the kingdom of heaven. and without this, you are not blessed. You are outside the



kingdom. Now, why would, here's our third point, why are these people, the poor in spirit, blessed? Why are they blessed? That's our third question, third and final question for this evening. Why are they blessed?

Look at verse 3 with me again. He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now, as we pointed out a couple of weeks ago, and this is so very, very critical to understanding the Sermon on the Mount and feeling the full impact of what Jesus is saying. Jesus, without question, is making an exclusive statement here in verse 3 and throughout all of the Beatitudes. When he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," theirs in the original language, it's an intensive pronoun, meaning it's like it's in super-bright italics, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It's also in an emphatic placement in the structure of the sentence. It's an intensive pronoun showing emphasis, the position in the sentence is emphatic, so that Jesus is saying, "They and they alone are the ones who are blessed. Anyone who is not like this is not blessed. Anyone who is not like this is not in the kingdom."

I see a lot of pens moving taking notes, so I'm just giving people time to write this down because it's important. Beloved, only people who are poor in spirit belong to the kingdom of God. No one else. The proud, the boastful shall not stand in the presence of God. Beloved, you and I need to take this deeply to heart. God does not receive people who think they are good. He doesn't. Remember what we read at the start, God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Beloved, God receives people who know that they do not deserve his blessing. We don't approach a holy God as sinful people with our hand out saying, "Give me what's mine. You owe me. The good outweighs the bad in my life. You owe me, God. I'm not Hitler. I'm not Stalin. I'm not a liberal Democrat," as some in conservative circles would say, as marking their point of spiritual distinction as if a comparison to man is what commends us to God. No, those are not the terms of the kingdom at all. As we saw in Luke 18, God receives people who know they do not deserve his blessing. Jesus said, "Come to me, you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." It's people who are conscious that they deserve judgment that he receives.

Look over at Luke 5 where Jesus makes this exact same point in a different way. The underlying principle is exactly identical. Luke 5:31, "Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'" Jesus says, "If you think you're righteous, I have nothing to say to you. You are excluded from my call." It's not that people are actually righteous, but that they regard themselves as righteous and Jesus says, "If you regard yourself as righteousness, you have no need for me because I came to seek and to save the lost. I came to call sinners to repentance, those who know that they are broken, those who know they are guilty and condemned before God. I come on a mission of mercy to call them to repent and to come to me because I will bless them and I will keep them. I will forgive them and cleanse them and give them eternal life." People who think they're righteous in themselves Jesus says, "Go on your own way." How foolish it would be for you to go to a doctor and say, "Doctor, I'm perfectly healthy." Doctor says, "Why are you wasting my time? Why are you even here?" Jesus says, "You think you're righteous? I

have nothing to say to you. Go on your own way but realize the disaster that awaits you at the end of that road."

No, no, it's those who come as the tax collector, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner," and if you're here tonight and you feel the weight of sin, the weight of guilt, your mind is clouded by fears of judgment, understand that Christ comes to you and extends his open hand and says, "Come to me. I will give you blessing. I will forgive you. I will secure your soul. I will make all things well with you." And that is the good news of the gospel, that those who know that they are condemned can come to Christ and find a sympathetic Savior who will give them the kingdom. It's really almost incomprehensible apart from the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit to contemplate this. Look at Matthew 5:3 with me again. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are broken before God and cry out to Christ like this.

Now there are many ways that we could speak about the kingdom of heaven. Let's just keep it simple for this evening. The kingdom of heaven is the realm where God reigns as King over those who have repented and believed. It's the realm where Christ reigns as King over those who have repented and believed. That's how we're using it for tonight. There's a future kingdom when Christ will reign on earth, that's not what we're talking about here tonight. Colossians 1:13 and 14, it speaks about how Christ delivered us from the realm of Satan and delivered us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. We're now in the kingdom in that sense. The poor in spirit, beloved, are blessed. They are the privileged recipient of divine favor because they are positioned to receive the benevolent reign of Christ over their lives. You can come to Christ in that broken, sinful, mournful condition and say, "Save me. Lord Jesus, come into my life and deliver me. Have mercy on me. I truly want to receive you as my Lord and Savior from this position of brokenness." And you can know for certain that Christ will do just that and receive you but the approach is premised on asking God for a goodness and a grace that you do not deserve rather than approaching him with a sense of entitlement that says, "You owe me. I'm good enough. I'm better than the next guy."

How are they blessed? How are the poor in spirit blessed? Jesus describes these blessings in everything that follows in the Sermon on the Mount. We can summarize it this way and don't let the simplicity of what I'm about to say cause you to take superficially the fullness of the blessing of God it describes. What are these blessings that come to the poor in spirit? Well, in the language of William Perkins, you have fellowship with a perfect, holy God. That's the supreme one for now. As you enjoy this fellowship with a perfect God, that same God, that good God, provides your needs on earth. He leads you like a shepherd. He provides for you. He protects you from your enemies. He prepares a table before them in his presence. Your cup overflows, surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. And then, and then you'll dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He'll give you eternal rewards in heaven. He blesses you now with his presence, he fills your life with good things, he comforts you in your illness, he comforts you in your sorrows, he forgives and cleanses you from sin, and then after he's blessed you like that, he receives you into the grand and glorious halls of his eternal kingdom. Is

that not a place of privilege? To be in that state, is that not to be the privileged recipient of divine favor? Spiritually speaking, you have nothing of your own and yet in this condition as Christ saves you, when Christ saves you, you have everything because you belong to the Christ who reigns over all.

It's remarkable. It's really, really remarkable. It puts all of the stuff of earth into a completely different perspective. We suffer in this life, you know what? Okay, I belong to the kingdom of heaven. That dwarfs everything by comparison. We have opposition in this life, so what? Christ is my shepherd and he'll never leave me, never forsake me. It changes everything. One writer said this, "The supreme lesson of Matthew 5:3 is that without poverty of spirit, no one enters the kingdom of heaven. Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with this statement to declare for all time that no one is saved who believes that there is something with him that will make God prefer or accept him."

So beloved, I ask you one last time: what do you say about yourself? On what basis do you believe that God should be good to you? Is it because you are good or because he is good? Answer that question well, beloved, because the kingdom of heaven is at stake.

Let's pray together.

*Gracious Father, it is remarkable and it is exclusively to your glory that you offer the kingdom to unworthy sinners like us. I pray that there would be a convicting move of your Spirit in our midst that would convince us of sin, judgment, and righteousness. that humbles us before you, that causes us to freely and freshly acknowledge our poverty in spirit, and that as your Spirit does that, that he would continue on and bring Christ to us in clarity and in conviction, Father, that we would turn to Christ for every spiritual need that we have, and that those who have been outside the kingdom, Father, would call on Christ and that Christ himself would usher them safely into the kingdom of heaven. Father, rid us of our pride, rid us of everything that we would otherwise trust in. Convince us through your word, convince us in our hearts by your Holy Spirit that these things are true and teach us then to rely exclusively and entirely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ as that which would satisfy your demands to welcome us into heaven. Nothing of ourselves, everything of Christ. Lead us, teach us, and help us to that great end, Father, we pray. And Father, I just ask you, Father, you know that as we went through this the first time, the apparent fruit of that was not at all what it seemed as though it should have been, just a sense of self-sufficiency, of pride. Father, it couldn't possibly have been the fullness of what you intended for us to have when we first went through this Sermon on the Mount so many years ago and so I just ask you, Father, for the sake of your name, for the sake of Christ, that you would work with power in the hearts of each one to whom you bring this message, clear from our minds all of the earthly distractions, protect us from everything that would detract from the purity of the teaching of your word and what your word says and means by what it says, and let it have a revolutionary impact on us, one by one and corporately, Father, so that the fullness of this blessing would belong to everyone under the sound of our voice, and that there would be a great love for Christ that draws up out of this consideration of the Sermon on the Mount that leads us to forsake the world, to forsake self, and to embrace*

*Christ as our all in all. Father, I ask for nothing less than that kind of sweeping spirit of revival in our midst as we consider these most fundamental truths to what it means to be in the kingdom of heaven. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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