

Kingdom Attitudes

PART 1 • MATTHEW 5:1-3 • Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

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It is a great blessing to be together with God's people this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online, and we would also give the reminder that the elements for the Lord's Supper are available on the table in the entryway. We are happy to have Josh and Shelby back with us today! They have been traveling around the US over the past few months. They've just returned from the southwest and have come through Madison on their way to the northwest. I should also share a note from LaVerne Becker, who used to be a member here when she lived in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. She writes that she will be having her 90th birthday in a few weeks. If you would like to send her a card, I have put the envelope with the return address on the bulletin board.

Just a quick update on our recent visit with the church down in Key West, Florida. Last week, I mentioned that they have services in three languages – in English, in Creole, and in Spanish. While we were there, we noticed that their Spanish songbooks were primitive – no notes (just the words), and they were basically just copies of copies and in pretty tough shape. We haven't had a Spanish ministry here for a number of years, so we decided to send them our songbooks (which were in excellent shape). We gave those to UPS on Monday for \$145 (which was much cheaper than another trip to Key West), and those songbooks arrived down there on Thursday, and they are extremely thankful. We just wanted to pass along the good news that we have been able to be a tremendous blessing to a solid Spanish ministry this week.

As we get started today, as our tradition has been for more than two years now, we have moved the "invitation" to obey the gospel to the beginning of the lesson, to give everybody a bit more time to consider it. The gospel is the good news that Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and was raised up on the third day. We obey the gospel by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. And today, we have several very interesting examples, starting with three women from Ukraine who obeyed the gospel this week! This comes from Jeff Abrams (a fellow Freed-Hardeman graduate and gospel preacher serving in Lviv). He says, "Good news from Ukraine... Meet your new sisters in Christ... Lydia, Natalia, and Rita. These precious souls put on Christ in baptism for the remission of sins." Awesome news!

And I hesitate to make assumptions about people's ages, but the next three are pictures of those who have obeyed the gospel later in life. I think that is safe to say here! The first comes from Stan Crowley through the

Lord's church in Schertz, Texas. He says, "How grateful we are that Thomas Ross decided to be baptized today. Welcome, brother!" Great news!

This next one comes to us from Spencer Ross at the Northwest congregation in Fort Worth, Texas. He seems to be doing some preaching in Manchester, New Hampshire, and he posted this week week, not giving the woman's name, but he says, "It's never too late to obey the gospel even at 96 years old." Amen to that!

And then this next one comes from Johnnie LeMaster, gospel preacher and former major league baseball player. Johnnie spent most of his career with the San Francisco Giants and now lives in Paintsville, Kentucky, I believe. Johnnie posted several days ago and says, "This is Margy Hall she is 86 years old, [and she] was baptized in the hospital for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)." Again, awesome news, and we share this by way of encouragement: What these people have done (in Ukraine, in Kentucky, in New Hampshire, and in Texas) you can do also. If you would like to learn more, please pull me aside after worship today or get in touch with one of our elders, and we would be glad to open the word of God with you.

This morning, I would invite you to be turning with me to Matthew 5 as we return to what has become a rather sporadic disjointed series of lessons from what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount. We started a year or two ago when someone asked some good questions that we answered toward the end of Matthew 5, and we have been very sporadically working our way backwards from there. I have some regrets about this! At the time, I just dug into those verses at the end of this chapter, but there is so much in this sermon, so we are now back at the beginning of it. The picture on the wall up here, by the way, is of the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount. It is known as the "Mount of Beatitudes," and is located on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. Obviously, we don't really know whether this is the exact spot, but it would have been somewhere in this area.

If you are in Matthew 5 by now, as we put these words in context, I would invite you to turn (or scroll) back with me to the previous chapter, to Matthew 4. You'll notice that Jesus is tempted in the wilderness in the first part of Matthew 4, he begins his ministry (in verses 12-17), and in verse 17 Matthew says that from that time Jesus began to preach and say, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" Jesus, then, is preaching that the kingdom is near. He then calls his disciples (in verses 18-22), and we close Matthew 4 with Jesus traveling all throughout Galilee, "**...teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.**" He is healing all kinds of diseases, word gets around very quickly, and in verse 25 the text says that "**Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.**"

This brings us to Matthew 5, where Matthew says that "**When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them saying...**" I would note, first of all, that Jesus, when he sees the crowds, "**he went up on the mountain.**" Some have suggested some parallels between Jesus and Moses here. Just as Moses received God's Law on a mountain, so also Jesus preaches his New Law from a mountain. Both Moses and Jesus, of course, were threatened by evil rulers when they were born, both came up out of Egypt, both passed through the water, both were tested in the wilderness, and so on. But we do note that Jesus goes up on the mountain for this.

I should also note that Jesus sits down to teach. I know I've mentioned this a few times through the years, but it's a part of our congregation now. In years past, our adult Bible class teacher would sit in a chair to teach, and one day we had a visitor who actually stood up in class and started yelling at the teacher that he was disrespecting the word of God by sitting down to teach. He actually got physically aggressive. Right at that

moment, we had a member at the time who was a bouncer at a Milwaukee bar in a previous life, and he stood up between the aggressive visitor and our teacher and created a physical barrier. Before we had elders, it fell on me to take the guy into the back room to try to calm him down a bit. We noted that the most famous sermon ever preached was preached by Jesus while sitting down! Long story short, I got in touch with the police department up in Michigan where this guy came from, and the secretary said, "You found him! Please hold for detective so-and-so." The guy was actually wanted on charges of child abuse, and they eventually took him into custody in the parking lot of a local Wal-mart. Anyway, I always think of this when we note that Jesus preaches this sermon while seated – almost like a judge speaking from the bench or like a king speaking from his throne.

I should also note that Jesus is speaking to his *"disciples."* A disciple is a student, a learner. This sermon, then, is aimed at Jesus' followers, but it was also heard by the crowds. He was speaking to his disciples, but others were listening – those who were curious, the skeptical, the searchers. And, in fact, when we get to the end of this sermon (in Matthew 7:28-29), Matthew says that ***"When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."*** We might compare it to what we're doing here this morning. I am preaching to those who are students of Jesus, but others are certainly welcome to listen in – both here in this room as well as online and on the phone.

Nevertheless, as we are about to discover, Jesus starts this sermon with a series of blessings, known to us today as the Beatitudes, ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the gentle,"*** and so on. And right away, we have a challenge, and that is: We don't always go around using the word ***"blessed"*** do we? These days, ***"blessed"*** is almost exclusively a "church word." When I'm driving, I have never said, "Blessed are you when you cut in front of me on the beltline." We just don't talk that way today. Literally, the word Jesus uses here could simply be translated as ***"happy."*** "Happy are those who this or that." And that may be the way some translations handle this, but the word is a bit deeper than just being happy. When I think of being happy, I think of lighthearted laughter. And the word "happy" is quite literally tied to our circumstances: This thing happened that made me feel good. It's a word that shares a background with "happenstance" or "happening." Happiness is a good feeling tied to a circumstance. The beatitudes are a bit more than that. Our blessedness in the kingdom is a bit more than feeling good because something happened to us. It's hard to put into words, but I would describe what the Lord speaks of here as being favored by God, blessed, happiness and inner peace that goes beyond mere external circumstances. It's the inner peace that comes from being right with God. If your mentor in life pulls you aside and says that you're doing a good job, that's the idea of these statements.

So, we have eight of these statements, and they come across almost as proverbs. They are short statements, a little bit mysterious, and they are paradoxical, we might say – on the surface, they seem to be contradictory, until we understand what Jesus was really saying. We will pay more attention to this over the coming weeks.

As we begin, I should give the reminder that Matthew is not necessarily written in chronological order (as Luke seems to be), but instead, Matthew seems to arrange Jesus' teaching into a series of several sermons. As we have studied the gospel accounts previously, we've learned that Matthew's gospel account was first written for a Jewish audience and was perhaps something of a textbook for the church in Jerusalem. And as a textbook it was perhaps intended to be memorized. The Beatitudes are just begging to be memorized! So, I would invite you to memorize these over the next several weeks, and to help with this, I've put a handout on the table right inside the front door (take this with you, take a picture of it, or maybe use it as a bookmark). But Jesus starts, then, with something that almost comes across as a list of bullet points, "Listen up! This will be on the test!" And then he gives this list short and very memorable statements, full of meaning, easy to remember.

I would describe these as “Kingdom Attitudes.” We’ve just noted (twice in Chapter 4) that Jesus is introducing the kingdom as being *“near.”* The Beatitudes, then, are a description of life in his kingdom. These are kingdom qualities or “Kingdom Attitudes.” And they come in the form of “blessings.”

For time’s sake, we won’t read all of these at once this morning, but I would like for us to start with the first one, and then we will move through these over the next several weeks. I should emphasize that although we are studying one at a time, we do not get to pick and choose! I like the one about being merciful, but I think I’ll skip the one about being persecuted. That’s not the way this works! No, this is a bit like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 – all of these are important! And these are also not qualities that we just have to have between us as a group – you take mercy, I’ll work on being pure in heart, now we need somebody to sign up for peacemaking. Again, that is not the way this works.

With all of this as background, let’s look at the first of these eight statements. It comes in Matthew 5:3, as Jesus says, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Can we memorize that one this week? *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* With each of these lessons, I’d like to break each statement down into two parts: 1.) The blessing, and 2.) The reward.

I. First, then, let’s focus in on the BLESSING itself, “BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT.”

The New Testament has two words that are sometimes translated into English as *“poor.”* The first refers to those who are basically living paycheck-to-paycheck. They don’t have much, they barely have enough, but they have just enough to live; financially, they struggle. Secondly, though, we also have a word referring to those who are so poor that they actually beg. This is the word Jesus uses here. It’s the idea of crouching, shrinking back, or cowering, and the word refers to those who may beg for scraps of food out on the street. They aren’t just poor, but they are completely impoverished, even to the point of nearly starving, crouching in the corner while begging for food. This is the word Jesus uses here.

So do we see the problem? *“Blessed are those who are poor?”* We don’t think about poverty as being a blessing. And we need to realize that Jesus isn’t really talking about physical poverty here. In the Bible, we have righteous people who are poor (Lazarus at the rich man’s gate, for example), and we have rich people who are righteous (Job and Abraham in the Old Testament, for example, men with many flocks, and servants, and land). So we need to note that Jesus is not referring to physical poverty, but he’s referring to being *“poor in spirit.”* The reference, then, is to those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty before God, humbly bowing down before the Lord, not making demands, not sending God our resumé with a list of reasons why we are deserving of salvation, but recognizing that we have nothing to trade. Spiritually speaking, we are beggars, calling out to God to save us.

We might think of being *“poor in spirit”* as having spiritual humility. It’s the opposite of spiritual arrogance. We might think of Isaiah’s response when he was called by God to be a prophet. He didn’t say, “Dear God, what took you so long? It’s about time you recognized by superior talent and ability!” No, Isaiah responds in Isaiah 6:5, *“Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”* Isaiah saw himself as spiritually bankrupt before the Lord. Or, we might think of Peter’s response to Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:8, *“Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”* Peter saw himself as being completely unworthy before the Lord.

We see a contrast, then, between God’s kingdom and the kingdom of this world. The world says, *“This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.”*

And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' This world wants to build back better. But the Lord says, ***"You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*** The world says, ***"I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing."*** But God says, ***"...you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."*** It's best, then, to start out acknowledging that we are indeed, ***"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"*** before the Lord. We might think of the words of David in Psalm 34:18 where he said that ***"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*** According to Psalm 51:17, ***"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart."*** God runs to meet those who approach him with the attitude, ***"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men"*** (Luke 15:18-19).

In fact, Jesus tells another parable to illustrate this. In Luke 18, he tells of ***"...two men who went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*** On the outside, most people in the world would have seen the Pharisee as appearing to be more righteous than the other man. But God looks at the heart. And that's what Jesus is teaching in the first beatitude: Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty before the Lord.

And I love that this is Beatitude #1. In a sense, this is where it starts. This is the first step, the first rung on the ladder. We might even compare it to the first step in most 12-step programs, "We admit that we were powerless over whatever, that our lives had become unmanageable." In a sense, this is one of the first steps in approaching God, "Dear God, I am completely unworthy. I am a beggar before you. God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

Later in today's service, Josh will be leading us in *Rock of Ages*, written by Augustus Toplady. I thought I had an interesting name! His father was an officer in the British army, and Augustus Toplady published a hymnal in 1776. He was on the other side, but that's an easy date for most of us to remember here in the United States. Back in 1776, one of the songs he published was *Rock of Ages*,

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

Or, as Jesus says, ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit."*** So, this is the blessing.

II. **Let's continue by looking at the REWARD, ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN."*****

To those who are beggars, God gives not food, not a scrap, not a few coins, but a KINGDOM, the ***"kingdom of heaven."*** He gives this kingdom, not to those who think they deserve it, not to those who wheel and deal, not

necessarily to those who pray the longest or most elegant prayers, not to the scribes and Pharisees who think they are righteous, but God gives his kingdom to those who are ***“poor in spirit”*** – the tax collectors, the prostitutes, those who are broken down in sin and know it. And this is the paradox. This is what seems to be a contradiction. The poor in spirit are blessed, because they have been given a kingdom.

And while we are on this, we should also note that theirs ***“IS”*** the kingdom of heaven, not ***“will be,”*** but ***“is.”*** Now, in Beatitudes 2-7, Jesus does refer to blessings that seem to be promised in the future, but in Beatitudes 1 and 8, the blessing is something we may enjoy right now, ***“theirs IS the kingdom of heaven.”*** So, we know that there is some sense in which the kingdom of heaven is still out there on the horizon, but there is at least some sense in which we are in the kingdom of heaven right now. This is a blessing, but we might also say that this is a kingdom requirement. It is impossible to be in the kingdom while being RICH in spirit. We cannot enjoy the kingdom if we come to God arrogantly demanding that he let us in. Truly, the way up is down. I think back to visiting the Sears Tower down in Chicago through the years. I haven’t been there for a while, but as I remember it, to get up to the 110th floor, you actually have to go down. From street level, you have to go downstairs to get on one of the world’s fastest elevators to get to the top of one of the world’s tallest buildings. So also in God’s kingdom, the way up starts at the very bottom, as we acknowledge our complete and absolute spiritual poverty before God.

Conclusion:

As we apply these words to our lives today, I’d like to make two applications: 1.) To us as disciples, and 2.) An invitation those who may be thinking about following the Lord. Remember: We have both of these groups in the original audience: The disciples themselves as well as the observers.

But first of all, what does this mean for those of us who are already disciples? I would suggest that it takes an ongoing conscious effort to stay ***“poor in spirit.”*** And even this assumes that we were ever ***“poor in spirit”*** in the first place. But if we are, I would suggest that it is an ongoing challenge to stay that way. It’s very easy to forget that we really do need God – all the time and in every way. We are beggars – always have been, always will – the key is that we realize this. And so, as disciples, I would remind all of us that instead comparing ourselves to others, we really need to be comparing ourselves to God. As Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:14-16, ***“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.’”*** This struggle for holiness is ongoing, and we hopefully make progress over time, but God is God, and we are not. We need to always remember that we are beggars. We can never allow ourselves to get to the point where we start thinking that God sure is blessed to have us as his disciples. That is not the way this blessing goes! One reason we come together every Lord’s Day is to remind each other of this. We sing and pray, we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we give, and we study the Word as a reminder that we need to keep on working at it. Even as Christians, especially as Christians, we need what he has to offer, and the only way to approach God is with a broken spirit, a humble and contrite heart, ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”*** Every time we arrogantly try to hide our sin (from God and from each other), we are (in a sense) saying that we can do this on our own, and we cannot. So, first of all, this applies to us as disciples, ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”*** We need to stay that way.

Secondly, though, this also applies to those of you here today who may be on the outside, and I say this, because what Jesus says in this verse is an implied invitation. What Jesus promises here is attractive. I want to share in God’s kingdom, I want his kingdom to be a part of my life, I want Jesus to be my king. To have this in my life, if I am not ***“poor in spirit,”*** I need to get that way. I need to humble myself before the Lord. I need to take steps to

demonstrate that I am seriously torn up over sin in my life – not arrogantly justifying it, but turning away from it. I want to be the kind of person who is given this kingdom.

As an example, think of Saul (in the New Testament) – at one point, he must have been so proud of his Jewish heritage, and genealogy, and education, his zeal for God’s law (he describes this in Philippians 3). But once he meets the Lord on the road to Damascus (in Acts 9), Saul has a change of heart; he starts to see his true position before the Lord, and after praying fervently and not eating for three days, he does not hesitate to obey when Ananias says, **“Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”** Saul has had a change of heart and started viewing himself as a complete and total beggar before the Lord. As he would go on to write later in Philippians 3,

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What amazing humility! Saul was finally able to see himself as he truly was before the Lord, which then allowed him to obey the gospel. And that is the invitation we would give to you. If we can encourage your obedience to the gospel, if we can study together, please get in touch. Before we continue with the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven, You are the great and awesome God, creator of heaven and earth. We realize that we in no way deserve what you are offering to us, but we come to you this morning recognizing our own sin and asking for your forgiveness. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for making us a part of your kingdom on this earth. You are truly our savior and king, and we come to you today only with the permission of your son. In him we pray. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com