

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Sermon on the Mount promises happiness. The word **blessed**, repeated so often, means something like, **O how happy and to be envied**. It means to be truly satisfied.

The pursuit of happiness is something many are engaged in. Sadly, the way most people go about it is bound to backfire and produce misery! The usual pursuit is of an easy, satisfy-me-now experience that avoids the discipline and difficulties of a satisfying journey.

These series of statements that begin with the word **blessed** are commonly called the beatitudes. These Beatitudes list seven characteristics that make up the Christian character. The eighth Beatitude deals with the reaction of the world to these traits.

They are the Lord's description of every single believer. This is what we are to be like.

In other words, this isn't a description of certain super-saints. It is the everyday expectation of the Christian.

All of us are to manifest all of these characteristics. They are not natural; traits of our personality. They are supernatural. They are produced in us by the indwelling Holy Spirit. They are the product of grace, not effort.

There may be people, even unbelievers, who seem to be poor in spirit; but that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about

deep changes in our very way of thinking and responding as we yield to the Holy Spirit.

The beatitudes begin and end with the phrase, **For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven**. In the New Testament the “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are used interchangeably. The “kingdom of God” refers to God’s sovereign rule over the whole universe, of which the “kingdom of heaven” is a part.

The first thing you must know is that you belong to a different kingdom than the citizens of this world.

It is a kingdom that is coming, for sure. It is coming when Jesus returns to establish it on the earth for one thousand years. It will continue after this creation is over, on into eternity.

But it also exists right now. It is the rule of Jesus in your heart, and it can produce these traits. You can be happy!

Happiness begins in an odd way, doesn’t it? Apart from the words of Jesus – would you ever have equated the starting point of happiness with being **poor in spirit**?

Many commentators have discovered a progression in the beatitudes. They build one upon the other. So then being **poor in spirit** is the bedrock, the foundation, upon which the rest depend.

Jesus was on this mount, giving this sermon. The mount itself was a subtle illustration. To a certain extent, His listeners had to climb the mount. The sermon, with its teaching, essentially presents the spiritual ‘mount’ you must climb. It reveals the dizzying heights you must ascend.

But, as it begins, you are told that you cannot do it at all! By yourself, you are utterly helpless to take even the first step to the summit.

The world values self-reliance; self-confidence; self-expression. Frank Sinatra summed it up best when he sang, *I Did it My Way*. That is the ‘spirit’ of the world.

Until you experience the poverty of your spirit, you cannot begin this ascent. You can never be truly happy or satisfied.

Poor, as opposed to rich. It is a realization and confession that you have no spiritual assets. It is the word for **poor** that describes extreme poverty – as if you were a beggar.

Poor in spirit does not mean you are by nature insignificant or without intrinsic value. It means your spirit has nothing by which you might commend yourself to God. You are a spiritual beggar, with no hope of Heaven – until you realize you are a spiritual beggar with no hope of Heaven and cry out to God to save you!

What is it, then, to be **poor in spirit** after you are saved? It seems to be, in Scripture, the proper assessment of ourselves with regard to the presence and the glory of God.

You see this all over the Old Testament:

1. Isaiah, though God's prophet, saw himself as poor in spirit. He saw God, then recognized he was a man of unclean lips. It was then that God anointed Him with the coal from the altar.
2. Gideon had a poverty of spirit when the angel commissioned him to deliver God's people. He realized he was the weakest person from the lowest tribe.
3. David was constantly astonished that God would call him, then make from him a household.

Looking closer to us, in the New Testament, we see Peter who once asked the Lord to depart from him because he realized his poverty of spirit.

The ultimate expression, though, of this and each of the beatitudes must be Jesus Himself. See the Lord, leaving Heaven for earth. On earth, in His human body, He lived as a man, though He was still God. And in His poverty of spirit He would declare, **I can do nothing of Myself**.

He said,

John 14:10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?
The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

You see the Lord – fully God yet fully man – praying, seeking His Father’s will and permission. He modeled for us total dependence upon God.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (whom I love on this passage!) offers this definition of **poor in spirit**:

It means a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and self-reliance. It means a consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God. It is nothing, then, that we can produce; it is nothing that we can do in ourselves. It is just this tremendous awareness of our utter nothingness as we come face-to-face with God.

Thus we do not ever rely on our natural temperament... our natural birth (as to status)... upon our position in life... upon wealth... upon education... upon any of the things that we really do put weight upon – even in the Church.

How should we approach becoming **poor in spirit**? You do not look to yourself, nor try to do anything yourself. Instead, you look at God. Read the Bible; see the standards of perfection; think about meeting Him one day soon... And in that poverty of spirit will be the soil from which His fruit will manifest itself in your life.

