

January 30, 2011

Matthew 5:3

Alright good morning! Praise God – normally I tell you each week that I'm glad that you are here – today I think I'm more glad that I'm here! Yesterday Jason Ford and I competed in a 10 mile mud run called the Tough Mudder down by Austin and the fact that I am here today and can move at all is because of the grace of God and Tylenol. But if I have to run off the stage at some point today it is because part of that race involved wading and swimming through no less than 8 cow ponds in the middle of nowhere – the kind of muddy ponds you would see with your buddy and go “I'll give you a hundred bucks to jump in that” – and they'd go “no way – not for a thousand.” Well we did and there's no telling what microorganisms I've got inside now – so just beware. Sadly Jason didn't make it back – he didn't die – he just stayed in Austin to see some friends. So if I'm moving less today – it's not because I'm less passionate – it's because I'm in pain.

Alright – I don't know how we're going to get back into this, but here we go – get your Bibles and turn back to the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew chapter 5.

What we find and start today are the Beatitudes. Just to be frank this morning, these have been lost to Christianity. We know what they are – we probably can't list them – but we know them and yet we have basically ignored them. We treat them as if they are pious little platitudes that don't impact your life.

There are 1000s of verses in the Bible – all of them relevant to your life – but the Beatitudes, especially the 1st three...if these are not mastered, we will never ever reach our fullest fulfillment as a child of God.

In each of these there are three components. First is the statement we looked at last week a lot – blessed – that internal contentment, happiness that is untouched by externals, that characteristic of peace, the approval of God. But in each one, Jesus pronounces a blessing on a particular group. Secondly in each there is a description of a character quality of the blessed person. **These are not character qualities that are found in some Christians and not others; these are qualities that are found in all who are citizens of the kingdom.** Third there is a specific blessing that belongs to the one who has the particular character quality. Let's look at them together and then we'll focus on the first one today. **Matthew 5:1-12**

Prayer

Back to verse 3 – *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* This is how Jesus starts the unfolding of his teaching in the NT. First recorded sermon – first statement – *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Why start here? It must be significant. Why begin with this?

Because **it is the FUNDAMENTAL characteristic of the Christian – the fundamental characteristic of the kingdom of heaven. All the other characteristics flow from this one.** This is where everything starts – where blessedness, happiness, approval begins – where entrance into the kingdom begins. **Jesus begins here – really these first three – because they are the KEY to whether you will ever master and live the Sermon on the Mount or not.** These three are crucial.

Every word just about in the first one – in verse 3 – is important – divinely chosen by Jesus on purpose. And I've got to say first, he's not talking about material poverty. A lot of people try to make this into some kind of ethical standard and have it just be “blessed are the poor” and they put some virtue alongside poverty itself – that it is the absence of material possessions and money that is some kind of virtue in itself. That's not what Jesus is talking about. If it was, then it would be un-Christian to alleviate someone's burden – to give money to the poor. But the Bible over and over again says we ought to give money, food to the poor – to meet the needs of those who are without. If somehow poverty is a virtue, then in doing that we'd be taking them from virtue to vice. So it would be better to leave starving people starving, and distressed people in distress, and orphans as orphans, stop the mission efforts if blessedness is somehow related to material poverty. But it's not.

There is a word in Greek for poor that is not used here – it is used in 2 Corinthians 9:9 for poverty. The Greek makes these distinctions. The word there is a poverty that demands diligent labor to earn a living. Someone who doesn't have a surplus and big savings account – someone who has to work every day just to put food on the table. But they can – that's the point. However that's not the word here.

The word poor here is another word – comes from the verb ptosso. It **means to cower and cringe like a BEGGAR.** It has the idea of shrinking from someone – of begging out of shame – shame **because you**

have no other choice – crouching unwilling to lift your eyes, pleading for help – no wealth, no influence, no position, no honor, no respect, NOTHING to offer.

This poverty is further defined as being poor *in spirit* – again not money or material things – nothing **EXTERNAL – but with regard to what is internal - to any ability to produce anything of value SPIRITUALLY.** In other words – spiritual bankruptcy. Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt. That's what we see in **Psalm 51:17** for example that says: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*

So when he says “poor in spirit” he isn't talking about somebody who lacks enthusiasm or who is lazy or is quiet or indifferent or passive. He's talking about someone who understands their own spiritual bankruptcy. They can produce nothing of value spiritually – they have nothing to offer God.

You can see the dichotomy in **Luke 18**, turn with me there – this is a passage you know but I'll read it to you.

Verse 9 says: *“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-- robbers, evildoers, adulterers-- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, (that's the attitude of a beggar – won't even lift his face – he cowers, cringes,) beats his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

(and then Jesus indicts the whole self-righteous culture by saying) *I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Jesus is saying blessed are those who before the high and holy God realize their state of SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY. That's what allows someone to come into the kingdom – when you aren't trying to convince yourself that you're really ok – when you aren't rebelling against the fact that you know you're not ok – but when you submit to your condition and cry out to God for mercy.

That kind of teaching isn't really popular in churches today. Instead you find way too much emphasis on celebrities and experts and rich and famous folks and a lot of talk about the prosperity gospel – just come to Jesus and get your best life now - when Jesus says the key to real blessedness is being poor in spirit.

And here's the deal – when we understand this today, then it ought to make sense because we have seen it all through the Word of God. This truth was true long before and after Jesus actually spoke it.

Remember **Isaiah** standing before God in **Isaiah chapter 6**. Absolutely shattered and broken. He says “woe is me” – I am undone – literally disintegrating – I look at me and I see nothing. That's how he assessed himself. And the chapter records God's words saying “Whom shall I send – who will go for us?” I need a preacher – who will go?

There's only one guy there folks – Isaiah knows he is supposed to answer the question. He says “here am I Lord – send me.” I've heard preachers embellish that into something like “HERE AM I LORD, SEND ME!” But I don't think so. Not in what is going on and just happened. I think Isaiah had his head down – eyes on the ground – held his hands over his head and said “Here am I, send me” probably expecting God to crush him. And God says – You're the man I want –get up and go. His usefulness was born of brokenness. We have to understand that – poverty of spirit.

Think about **Gideon in Judges 6** – used big time by God because he was aware of his inadequacy. In Judges 6:15 he says how am I going to save Israel? Are you kidding? My family is poor. I don't have anything. I'm the least in my father's house and my clan is the weakest in the tribe! I'm a nobody in a nothing family. But what did God say? This is great – “The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior!” Gideon's looking behind him to see if the angel is talking to someone else.

It is in the heart of **David** – the shepherd, the poet, the warrior, the king, the man after God's own heart - **in 1 Chronicles 17** – David who says “Lord who am I that you should come to me? You sure you have the right person?”

Peter – aggressive, arrogant, confident by nature but devastated in the presence of the Lord says in **Luke 5** “Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man.” Get out of my presence – it is too intimidating.

Paul – the greatest missionary ever – wrote most of the New Testament - knew this – in **1 Timothy 1**, he lays out that he is the worst of sinners – a blasphemer and persecutor. In **Philippians 3** remember he says all he had ever achieved was dung – manure – he counted it all loss because he had no confidence in the flesh, in himself. He was good for nothing.

See that’s where all this starts. And it doesn’t end after that – living in the kingdom requires constant admission that in yourself you are nothing. Not just what is bad about you – but even what is the very best about you – your best efforts are filthy rags.

And as that really sinks in, I want you to see it in a couple other places too – two ends of this spectrum. Remember the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking how can I get eternal life – how can I get in the kingdom? If not, the event is recorded in **Mark 10 beginning in verse 17**. But that is a good question – right question. And Jesus says let’s start with the law – keep the law – that’s one way to get in – nobody can do it, but it is one way hypothetically – just keep the law how about that?

And what does the guy say? Oh – I’ve kept all those since I was knee high to a grasshopper.

Guess what? – end of discussion. Right there – nothing more to say. Now Jesus does go on – he offers another standard as an invitation – sell all you have, give to the poor, come follow me. And the guy turned and left.

We almost always focus on the heart issue of material things here and that his mistake was not following and trusting Jesus – valuing the reward in heaven. And that’s true, but before it ever got that far, there is a problem. Did you see it?

This guy was not only not willing to follow Jesus, he was unwilling to acknowledge his spiritual bankruptcy and that he had systematically and continuously – unendingly – violated the law of God. He thought he was good to go – was perfect since he was a boy. But the truth was he had nothing to offer – no good to brag of. He was outside the kingdom and he couldn’t get in because he would not become poor in spirit. And so he went away as lost as when he showed up. That’s one end of the spectrum

On the other side of the spectrum in getting this principle, maybe the best place that we see what Jesus is talking about here – is in one of the more difficult and most misunderstood events in the life of Jesus. It’s here in Matthew – you can turn there if you want or just listen – it is in **Matthew 15 beginning in verse 21**.

Here we find the story of this Canaanite woman and as shocking as this dialogue is, this encounter was providential so that God could reveal the work he had done in her heart and the posture of faith every believer ought to have. Don’t misunderstand what Jesus is doing – he is not being abusive to this woman in what he says. He is setting up a scenario in which he can show the grace in her heart and call his disciple to emulate the same. Look at it.

In verse 22 she comes to Jesus and says, Lord I know you’ve been healing people, please – my daughter is demon possessed – please heal my daughter.

And Jesus responds by saying in verse 24 – I’ve been sent to the lost children of Israel – not to some Canaanite like you.

Seems harsh at first, right? A woman with a broken heart comes to the one whom she knows can save her daughter and says “Lord heal her” and he says I wasn’t sent to you but to the Jews.

She persists in verse 25 – kneeling before him – Please help me, Lord.

And Jesus responds with a derogatory phrase from his day in 26: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

“Dogs” was something the Jews called the Gentiles in that day. And this woman doesn’t flinch. In her Christ-wrought humility she says, Yes – you’re right Lord – I deserve nothing from you – but “even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Wow! She says I have no claim on you – I deserve hell – but I ask you anyway, save my daughter. And he did – Jesus turns and says something about that woman that he never said of his disciples – he says this woman has great faith! She had learned poverty of spirit – she went to Jesus in all her humility and the minute this woman says I have no claim on your kingdom – Jesus says the kingdom is yours. The minute we admit that in yourself you cannot please God - you can’t do it – that we have no right to the blessings of God – **the minute we acknowledge that we do not DESERVE the kingdom, we are told the kingdom belongs to you.** Poverty of spirit – and that leads to what in Matthew 5:3? For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Theirs” is in the Greek in the sense that it is theirs ALONE and no one else’s – only those with a beggar’s heart.

“Theirs is” – not WILL BE – but theirs is. Whatever follows is present tense – here and now – not some future reality – not limited to the new heaven and new earth – **theirs is the kingdom of heaven now.**

And remember – we talked about this – how kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God – same thing in Matthew. **In Matthew, “Heaven” is really the same as “God” – another way of referring to God – the rule of God mediated through the LORDSHIP of Christ, the King of the kingdom.** And Jesus says we have the kingdom now. What does that mean? John MacArthur puts it well when he writes:

“We have kingdom grace, we have kingdom mercy, we have kingdom peace, we have kingdom joy, we have kingdom wisdom because we are subjects of the King. We have kingdom sovereignty – that is the sovereign King takes care of his subjects. We have kingdom comfort for the times of sorrow. We have kingdom wisdom dispensed to us through the kingdom manual which is the living Word of God. All spiritual blessings are ours – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness.... All of the fruit of the Spirit constitute the blessings of the kingdom, the promise of glorification, the promise of sanctification...the promise that everything is going to work together for good because we’re subjects of the King.”

Everything that is ours in Christ constitutes kingdom BLESSING and it is ours now. If we are poor in spirit. Everything that Christ died to give us is the blessing of the kingdom of heaven – and it is ours now – if we are poor in spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Inevitably what prevents people from entering into the kingdom is PRIDE. Pride doesn’t mean you parade your money or possessions and stuff around. Pride means you put confidence in your personal achievement, personal morality, personal religion, personal goodness. You are **unwilling to acknowledge the fact that the best you can do is filthy rags.** **The only way into God’s kingdom – the only way to come to blessing is to CONFESS your unworthiness, your utter inability to please God – to become poor in spirit.**

Well let me pose a question as we start wrapping up. How do you become poor in spirit? How do you get to that place? I think if you’ll think back to the examples we looked at it, it becomes clear. It happens when we see God and we see what he asks – what he requires.

So what does that mean? I think first of all – and this is the best place to start: Stop comparing yourself to other people. Look at the standard – perfection – holiness. Start looking at God – compare yourself to what you find – do you stack up at all?

In case you don’t know the answer to that, start reading about God. Read the Word. And if you want to see God clearly – look at Jesus. **The more you see GOD – the more you know the character of God – the more you know the attributes and perfect holiness of God – the more you see all that in Jesus Christ – then the more you see your TRUE condition by contrast.**

In fact you can throw in comparing yourself to the law of God – which is just an expression of his nature right? **COMPARE yourself to God and to what God requires – compare yourself to Jesus – that’s the first step to real poverty of spirit.**

Then what? **PRAY.** Beggars have to ask right? **When you’ve recognized your condition, it’s time to speak – to ask.** What for? How’s this – **“Lord be merciful to me, a sinner!”** I have nothing to offer – I can’t produce anything of value – have mercy on me!

And as you do that, you’ll find another attitude showing up in your heart – and it’s the second beatitude. Blessed are those who what? Who mourn.

But as long as I’m clutching my own self importance and my own self righteousness and my own accomplishments and my own religiosity and my own morality and as long as I’m holding on to all this as if it somehow gains me access or anything to God – as long as my hand is full of that dirt, it can never receive the gold of God’s grace. **Blessedness is only for those who know they are UNWORTHY of it.**

Church – look at me – please hear the heart of Jesus today. It does not matter what anybody else thinks of us. So I’ve got to ask you today for a few moments right now in the privacy of your own heart and mind ask yourself “does this poverty of spirit reside with me?” It doesn’t matter what you are in the presence of other

people – even your own family – **it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks of us. What we are in the presence of GOD, that is what we are. No more. No less.**

Do you know this poverty of spirit? Or do you find yourself angry with God because of the circumstances he has brought to your life? Do you find yourself resenting him and feeling like, God, I deserve better – I don't deserve any of this. Or do you find yourself like that Canaanite woman – Lord you are right – I have no claim on you – and that's why I beg you anyway.

You know how you can tell – at least one of the ways? When your pride is gone and your self-righteousness is gone and you find yourself with a hunger and a thirst for Scripture and you take it at face value and believe it. You find yourself longing to talk with the Lord and taking his Word at exactly what it says on his terms, not yours. And you won't try and twist it around and make it fit your life style. You'll stop complaining about your situation. And – listen to this – you begin to see the best – the good – in others and the weaknesses in you. So you start to constantly praise God for grace and mercy. That's evidence that your cry for mercy has been heard – that Jesus has miraculously created in you this sense of poverty of spirit.

I say this sense of poverty of spirit – this sense of spiritual bankruptcy – sense of complete unworthiness – because objectively speaking everybody is poor in spirit. Every single person whether they sense it or not IS poor in spirit – IS powerless and beggarly and worthless and bankrupt and helpless and unclean before God. But not everybody is blessed.

Blessed are the poor in spirit – those who know it – who believe it – who EMBRACE it – and turn to Jesus as the only source of hope. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs and ONLY theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Until you and I get this, nothing else in the next 3 chapters matters – this is not only the entrance point to the kingdom – this is the key to life in the Kingdom.

I'm going to ask all of you right now to close your eyes and bow your heads. Just right now isolate yourself. This morning if you believe you are a Christian then it has to be because at some point in your past you got this. You saw that you were spiritually bankrupt and asked Jesus to save you anyway. But I wonder this morning if you have outgrown that? If somehow you have lost that sense of your poverty in spirit and now you think you have something to offer God? If that is you I invite you to use the words of the next song to remind yourself of the glory of your God and to look at your life – look at your perspective and ask God to renew your poverty of spirit before him so you don't miss out on what Jesus died for you to have.

But if you are here today and this is the first time you've got this. Maybe you've been counting on any number of other things to get you into heaven – to make you right with God – and now you see that you've got nothing to offer and the only way to God is to admit that and put all your faith and hope in the fact that Jesus Christ died for your sin then I invite you to simply admit that to God. Right where you are at – there are no magic words – simply tell God that you know you are a sinner and have nothing to offer him but you want all that He is. Ask Jesus to save you – to give you life – to bring you into the kingdom of heaven.

If that is you today, we are going to sing one verse and one chorus. And I would ask you to come tell me today what just happened in you. I'll be down front – one verse one chorus – either you get it or you don't, we're not playing games.

While all of us worship the King – all of us humbling ourselves to exalt the Majesty of Heaven. You deal. You come.