

The Sermon On The Mount

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“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.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

June 2nd, 2024

Matthew 5:1-3

Scott Hogeveen

Good morning, Redeemer! It is good to be with you all this morning! If you have a Bible with you, would you please open it now to Matthew 5:1. This morning we are beginning a new series through the sermon on the mount. After a long journey through the book of Acts, after spending significant time following the growth and progression of the gospel from Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection to the explosion of church planting and gospel witness all over the known world and being invited to participate in this work that God is doing in the world, I figured that spending some time here in the sermon on the mount would be incredibly helpful.

As we seek to live out the great commission, as we seek to share the gospel with those around us we need to remember what our primary evangelistic strategy is. Martin Llyod-Jones says this exact thing in his studies on the sermon on the mount.

“The world today is looking for, and desperately needs, true Christians. I am never tired of saying that what the Church needs to do is not to organize evangelistic campaigns to attract outside people, but to begin herself to live the Christian life. If she did that, men and women would be crowding into our buildings. They would say, ‘What is the secret of this.’”¹

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Second edition. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 22.

If Christians truly live a Christian life, people will notice. They will stop and stare and wonder at why we live the way we do. And the primary purpose of the sermon on the mount is to tell saved people how to live in a way that resembles Christ.

I want to make sure you heard that properly. The sermon on the mount is not telling people how to get saved.

It is telling saved people how to live.

That is an important distinction, and we will come back to it multiple times throughout this series so that we don't forget. Once again, Llyod-Jones is helpful here as he says:

“He came, I say, and lived and died and rose again and sent the Holy Spirit in order that you and I might live the Sermon on the Mount.”²

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, his ascension into Heaven, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost all happened in order to enable us to live in a way that glorifies God; so that we can reflect Christ to the world around us. The sermon on the mount spells out what this Christian life looks like. And we need this reminder. We need to remember that there is an inherent connection between FAITH and ACTION.

As the book of James reminds us that faith without deeds is dead. So too Jesus says in John 14:15:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15 ESV)

A true salvation experience, truly seeing Jesus, turning from your sin, and putting your faith in him ALWAYS results in a transformed life. So, we need the sermon on the mount. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the gospel of Matthew are FOUNDATIONAL and FUNDAMENTAL to the Christian life. The sermon on the mount serves as a guide to how we should live, and it serves as a lens through which we can test ourselves. I love the way Leon Morris says this:

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Second edition. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 23.

“The teaching in this sermon certainly sets a high standard. If we take it seriously, we realize that we cannot attain it and therefore cannot merit salvation. It is the end of the way of law and drives us to seek salvation in Christ. But when we have received this salvation as God’s free gift, the sermon shows us how we should live in the service of our gracious God. It shows us what life is like in the kingdom of God.”³

The sermon on the mount reveals our desperate need for Christ, and it shows us what life is like in the kingdom of God.

Naturally, then, it begins with the beatitudes. A series of statements of blessing that reveal the character of one who is in Christ. The fact that the sermon on the mount begins with these beatitudes is no coincidence or happenstance. It is significant. There is a logical progression from character to conduct, naturally the sermon on the mount shows the same pattern and emphasis.

Christian conduct flows naturally out of Christian character.

And Christian character flows out of saving faith in Jesus; out of the regeneration of our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit and the washing away of our sins by faith through grace. Therefore, even with the beatitudes themselves there is a logical progression. The beatitudes begin with the most foundational and essential aspect of Christian character, which is where we are going to spend our time this morning. Hopefully you have your Bibles open to Matthew 5:1.

Hear now the Word of the Lord.

“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:1-3
ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 91–92.

As I mentioned, the beatitudes are a series of statements of blessings. They lay out aspects of Christian character and behaviour that are FITTING for the Christian and that RESULT IN blessing and happiness. Now, we often think of the word blessed to mean fortunate or privileged. We hear it all the time in awards speeches. Someone wins an Oscar and talks about how they feel so blessed and fortunate. That is not exactly what the Bible means when it talks about being blessed. As D. A. Carson helpfully points out.

“To be “blessed” means, fundamentally, to be approved, to find approval.”⁴

Let me repeat that.

“To be “blessed” means, fundamentally, to be approved, to find approval.”

Essentially, what we are seeing here in this first beatitude is that being poor in spirit LEADS TO God’s approval which in turn leads to happiness, satisfaction, and joy, and that progression is incredibly significant.

This is such a foreign concept to the world. In fact, it is the COMPLETE OPPOSITE of what the world teaches. Depending on who you listen to and what circles you travel in, the world will tell you that your own approval of yourself matters the most; that happiness is found in wealth, success, financial freedom, fame, and achievement. They will tell you that when you achieve these your goals and dreams then you will find peace. Others might tell you that if you want true happiness than you need to be happy with who you are and what you have. They will say true happiness is inner peace; it is accepting and loving ourselves for who we are; it is trusting in ourselves and our own sense of direction.

Whatever it is that the world is saying is the source of happiness. I can GUARANTEE that they are not telling you that happiness is poverty of spirit. They aren’t telling you that joy is founding in mourning, or purity, or in being persecuted.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 16.

The beatitudes are as COUNTER CULTURAL as it gets.

They don't describe people of the world. They describe people who belong to the kingdom of Christ. This is why the first and last beatitudes end with "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is describing here what people who belong to God, whose ultimate citizenship, allegiance, loyalty, and love belong to Jesus look like. These beatitudes describe kingdom people. They are not a checklist of things to make us feel good about ourselves. They aren't a target that if somehow achieve we will earn salvation. The beatitudes tell us what people who have turned from their sin and put their faith in Jesus look like.

Naturally then, the beatitudes begin in the most logical place, with blessed are the poor in spirit. This is where we are going to spend our time this morning, unpacking what it means to be poor in spirit and then we are going to look at four ways that being poor in spirit changes how we live.

So, the first question we want to answer this morning is:

What Does It Mean To Be Poor In Spirit?

First and foremost, it means to have a humble and contrite heart. We see this all throughout the Bible. Isaiah 66:2 says for example:

"But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

Being poor in spirit means being humble, recognizing our failures and shortcomings. It means recognizing our sin and our utter dependence on God. There are two primary ingredients that are necessary in order for us to develop this proper attitude.

The first is knowledge of God. You see, when we understand who God is, when our eyes are opened to understand his perfect righteousness, his immense holiness, his overflowing grace and mercy, his unfailing love, when we TRULY see who God is, we are humbled before him.

Consider the way Isaiah responds to seeing the throne of God in a vision in Isaiah chapter 6.
There we read:

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train^[a] of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”^[b]

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:1-9 ESV)

And I said “Woe is me! I am Lost! I am UNDONE!”

Left to our own devices, we cannot hope to stand before the throne of God and say anything other than those words. “Woe is me. I am Lost. I am undone in the presence of God almighty.” When we truly see God, we know that we have ABSOLUTELY NO BUSINESS standing in his presence. We don’t deserve to be there. When we see his holiness, perfection, and goodness, we are made plainly aware of how far short we fall of his perfect standard.

Knowing who God is teaches us that WE ARE NOT HIM. And that’s significant. That has been our problem from the beginning. Remember in the garden the serpent tempted Adam and Eve with the fruit saying that if they ate it, they would become like God. Ever since the fall, we have been consistently setting ourselves up as the Gods of our lives. That’s the constant refrain in the book of Judges. “In those days there was no king in the land and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”

We are constantly trying to be the kings and gods of our own lives. This beatitude speaks directly against that. This is why it is the first one. If we do not get this right nothing else will fall into place. If we want to be blessed, if we want to be approved, if we want to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven than we must submit to the king. We must realize that we are not God. We

must bow down before and worship the king of kings. Being poor in spirit means knowing who God is.

And it means knowing who we are. That is the second ingredient in creating a humble and contrite heart.

It means knowing that we are sinners, we are fallen, we are unable to live up to God's standard on our own. We are in desperate need of help. Even our best and most righteous deeds are tainted by our sinful, prideful hearts.

The story of the rich young ruler is a wonderful example of this. We find this in Mark 10:

“And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’”²⁰ And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” (Mark 10:17-22 ESV)

This man thought that he had a fantastic resume. He comes to Jesus and says “look Jesus I have obeyed all the laws since my youth, I have done all these wonderful things what else must I do? So, Jesus cuts right to the heart. He sees this rich young man's pride; Jesus sees his self-sufficiency and he reveals it to him.

There is a reason Jesus follows up this interaction by proclaiming that it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to get into heaven. The point Jesus is making is that if we think we sufficient in and of ourselves we are sorely lost.

If we think we are sufficient in and of ourselves, we are sorely lost.

This is why we need to start with knowing who God is. It absolutely obliterates any thought in us that we could possibly live up to his good and perfect standard. When we understand who God is. We understand our lack. We understand our spiritual poverty. When we understand who God is and who we are in light of that we become like the tax collector in Jesus parable.

“He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed^[a] thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ 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!’ ¹⁴ 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.” (Luke 9:10-14 ESV)

When we know who we are, we stop comparing ourselves to other people and we start comparing ourselves to God. We don’t look down our noses at everyone else. Rather, we look down at the ground because we know we have nothing to offer God.

Listen friends, it doesn’t matter how impressive your resume is. It doesn’t matter how much money you have made, or how much you have given to charity. It doesn’t matter that you tried to be a good person. It doesn't matter how much good you accomplished in your life. It doesn't matter if you cured cancer or solved world hunger. NOTHING THAT WE DO IN OUR OWN STRENGTH AND ABILITY MATTERS.

The Bible tells us that our best deeds, our most righteous deeds are as filthy rags. THEY ARE NOT EVEN WORTH COMPARING TO WHO GOD IS.

What is giving millions of dollars to charity in light of the one who put every atom in the entire universe in place. How can we be proud of our generosity in light of one who gave us EVERYTHING IN THE FIRST PLACE. I am a created being, apart from my creator I HAVE NOTHING. I AM NOTHING.

How dare I stand before him and brag of all that I have done.

Being poor in spirit means recognizing this, recognizing that I have nothing to bring to the table, it means recognizing that ALL I HAVE IS CHRIST.

That's it. He's all I've Got

Ephesians 2 makes that abundantly clear.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)

Being poor in spirit means recognizing that we have been saved by grace and grace alone; it is not our own doing. We do not deserve the gift of salvation that God has given us in Jesus. We need to be like the tax collector crying out “God have mercy on me a sinner!” This is where knowing God and knowing ourselves leads us, to a place of repentance and dependence upon God's grace and mercy alone.

Being poor in spirit means having a humble and contrite heart before God and that comes from knowing who God is and knowing who we are. And this leads us to the next important question:

How Does Being Poor In Spirit Change How We Live?

There are a number of ways that adopting this heart posture changes the way we live. As we have seen this morning, there is an inherent connection between what we believe to be true and how we act. Therefore, if we truly believe that we are not God, if we truly believe that we are sinners deserving of punishment and death, if we truly believe that we are saved by grace alone, then that should result in some changes in the way we live.

Naturally being poor in spirit means being humble. But I think we actually need some help understanding what humility really looks like in action, how being poor in spirit changes the way we live.

Firstly, being poor makes us people who:

1. Listen

I grew up in a Dutch household and as the old saying goes “wooden shoes, wooden head, wouldn’t listen.” My family is quite an opinionated bunch, and we are quite open about sharing our opinions with others. We come by this honestly but this is an area where I have had to grow in and where am I still trying to grow. The Bible calls us to be slow to speak and quick to listen. Not because what we have to say is worthless. We are not slow to speak because we’re useless. We are called to be slow to speak because we are to consider others more significant than ourselves.

Listen, so often we are bad listeners, so often we interrupt one another, so often we dismiss what other people have to say because the whole time they are talking, we are thinking about what we are going to say.

We are not taking the time to truly consider what they are saying and that says a lot about how we consider them as a person. Having a humble heart means recognizing that we are not better than anyone, and it means considering others more significant than ourselves.

This looks like listening before we speak, it looks like being willing to be wrong, to be corrected and admonished. We all know someone who is incapable of being wrong. Anytime they are challenged they will either bulldoze past any critique or criticism, they will deflect, or they will simply change the subject. We all know people like that. Some of us are people like that. I know I feel those tendencies in my own heart. And this leads to the second change that being poor in spirit has in our lives, it makes us people who:

2. Repent

Being poor in spirit means being humble AND CONTRITE. We are being called here in this passage to humbly acknowledge our faults, to recognize that we are not perfect, to take feedback and criticism and REPENT.

A heart that is humble and contrite is a heart that REPENTS.

It is a heart that repents first. It doesn't justify. It doesn't deflect the blame onto someone else. A heart that is poor in spirit accepts that it makes mistakes, and it confesses those mistakes. Our sinful, prideful hearts want to defend ourselves. We hear criticisms and corrections and we say to ourselves "That's not true. I'm not really like that. This person doesn't have the whole picture. I am way better than this person or that person." We are constantly saying things like this in our own heart.

Listen, when pride rules in my heart then my highest goal is to look good in my own eyes. I will do whatever I have to and say whatever I have to, to others and to myself, in order to look good. But if my highest goal is to become like Christ, I not only receive correction and rebuke, I WELCOME IT. When I am well aware of my shortcomings and failures I long for others to speak truth into my life. This is one of the primary benefits of community, and marriage for that matter. Ainsley is able to help me see some of my blind spots; she is often reminding me when I fall back into old habits and speak harshly to my family.

We need other people. We need correction.

Someone that is poor in spirit see this and receives correction with confession of sin and repentance. They don't simply ask for forgiveness, THEY CHANGE. They receive correction and LEARN FROM IT.

And thirdly, being poor in Spirit makes us:

3. Depend

Ultimately, what being poor in spirit means is that we are needy. Simply put, we can't do it on our own. This is true of every human being who ever lived apart from Jesus Christ. Whether you acknowledge it or not, the truth is that you are not and cannot do enough on your own. You need help.

Those who are poor in spirit acknowledge that.

They know they need help. So, they ask for it. We depend on God through a number of ways and one of the most significant is prayer. Sometimes I think we take prayer for granted. In our natural pride and sin, we think that prayer is something that we have a right to. We think “of course I can pray to God. Of course, I can have direct contact with the creator of the universe. Of course he would want to draw near to me.”

I am not sure that we always realize how truly AMAZING the gift of prayer really is. If we did, I don't know if we would do anything else. If we truly understood what a miraculous gift prayer is than there is NOT A CHANCE that we would let a day go by without talking to our Father in heaven.

Being poor in spirit means realizing that we don't deserve to be in God's presence, it means realizing that we don't deserve to even talk to God. It means realizing that we are completely and utterly dependant on him. And it also means realizing that he has given us the means to depend on him. He has given us his word, and he has given us prayer.

Hebrews 4 ends with this exhortation:

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16 ESV)

We can receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. When we are poor in spirit we realize our need, and we can approach the throne of grace in our need. The most amazing thing about this verse is that we can approach the throne of grace with confidence.

Somehow, we can go from cowering before the throne of God in shame and sin to drawing near with confidence.

Because of Jesus.

That's the key.

Jesus lived the life we never could. He achieved God's perfect holy standard, and he trades places with us. He makes a way for us to receive the FREE gift of eternal life with God. Through faith in him. Being poor in spirit looks like depending on Jesus BECAUSE IT IS ALL BECAUSE OF JESUS.

ALL I HAVE IS CHRIST.

Knowing this, understanding this, makes all the difference in the world. And it means that We must depend on God for everything. We, who began this walk because of Christ, can't possibly try to finish it on our own. We must draw near to the Lord and depend on him daily, in prayer and in his word.

Fourthly and finally, being poor in spirit makes us people who:

4. Boast

Now, before we get confused. I 100 percent do not mean boasting in the traditional sense. I am not talking about boasting in ourselves and our abilities. I am talking about boasting in the Lord as the apostle Paul does in 2 Corinthians. He writes:

“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” (2 Corinthians 10:17-18 ESV)

The person who is poor in spirit knows that they have nothing to boast about in and of themselves. But, in Christ, they have EVERYTHING to boast about. Those who have tasted and seen the goodness of God, who have received the free gift of salvation by grace alone have everything in the world to boast about.

So we sing! We Rejoice! We give thanks! We Shout for joy! We tell others!

You've probably heard the famous quote. “Evangelism is just one beggar telling another where to find bread.”⁵ That is what we are talking about. Except on a much bigger scale. We are beggars telling others where there is the bread OF LIFE, and the WATER OF LIFE. We ought to be shouting from the rooftops “HERE OVER HERE, COME , COME, ALL WHO ARE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY THERE IS MORE THAN YOU COULD EVER WANT!”

When we are poor in spirit, when we realize our need, when we realize the depth of what we have received in Christ, how on earth could we do anything but boast in that?

Listen friends, Listen to the ending of the beatitude again:

⁵ Hard to say where this originated. Some say D.T. Niles, some say Luther.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Because of Jesus Christ, because of his life, his death on the cross in our place, and his resurrection from the dead, we have a place in heaven with God for eternity.

We bring nothing to the table. WE are dead in our sins. We are morally and spiritually BROKE.

BUT GOD.

That's the point of this passage. BUT GOD. We didn't do it. We do not bring ourselves into the kingdom of God. We receive salvation as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ. We DO NOT and CAN NOT ever deserve it.

This truth is of ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE. If you try to go it on your own. If you continue to rely on your own righteous, on your good deeds, or your wealth, or success, or anything else, it will only result in shame and suffering.

Recognizing our need, our lowliness, recognizing our poverty of spirit is how we enter the kingdom of God. It is how we receive the gift of grace. And it is the defining feature of our lives as citizens of heaven. It shapes and influences all that we do.

Oh God, help! Let's pray together.