

**Mt 5:3-12 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**4 Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.**

**5 Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.**

**6 Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.**

**7 Blessed *are* the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.**

**8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.**

**9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.**

**10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**11 “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds
of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad,
for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.**

I hope our introduction prepared us for this guide to happiness. In it we saw how this blessedness was really only for believers. It describes something quite unusual in the world of people.

Now we begin with verse 3. And it is actually quite startling. Imagine that you were in this Jewish crowd. Imagine that you were awaiting a Messiah. God had done amazing miracles to your ancestors in time past, but He had been silent for 400 years. Then you began hearing rumors of God being on the move again. And the name of this carpenter from Galilee keeps turning up. There is a lot of interest. So you go to a place where **He is** so you can hear him preach.

Your expectation is that this Messiah will primarily restore political supremacy. You expect that He is going to tell you what part **you must play** in bringing back an independent Israel. You figure that He will make great demands of you to do those things He needs you to do to accomplish these

goals. And you, being a good Jew, are willing to do it. You will do anything to free yourself of the **Roman tyranny** and to **worship in freedom** and self rule. Maybe repentance will be called for. But that repentance is only to restore everyone's loyalty to this mission of freedom.

OK Try to put yourself in a mindset similar to that. And Jesus opens His mouth, teaching to the crowd. Now, what He **starts out** with would be very very significant. It will set the tone for everything that is to come.

Keep in mind, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. And He did it all extremely intentionally. He was going to say the **most important thing** that could be said to start this teaching. The prophets were silent for 400 years and this is the first recorded thing God said through His servant to the general populace of His people.

Do you feel the drum roll drumming. Do you see the anticipation. In all of the events in human history, this has to be in the top 10. God is speaking again. And Jesus opens his mouth and this is what He said.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

What?

God breaks silence after 400 years and this is what He has to say?

This was not what they would have expected. In fact it is probably **nothing like** they expected, maybe **opposite** of what they expected.

Let's look at what they would have understood by what was said.

We already talked about the word Blessed. This is a word they would have understood in their culture as being a happiness of the gods. It was a state of happiness. It was a position of happiness. It was normally not used of humans. That is really how **good** it is. It is the happiness that comes due to God's approval.

So the first word Jesus utters after 400 years of God's silence to the populace is **happiness greater than most people could expect or imagine**. Clearly Christ has something wonderful to tell us.

We cannot hardly move on without taking a look at ourselves. Do you look to others who know you well as someone who has **something ultimate** to be **happy** about? Maybe a good exercise would be for us to ask the people who know us the best, **do you perceive me as being someone who is deeply happy?**

Do you see me as a person who gravitates to happiness based on a deep belief of well being?

OK. Now who are the **happy**?

The audience probably expects Jesus to say something like, “happy are those who the Lord will soon deliver to economic prosperity and political supremacy. Happy are those who have their own country and a prosperous living.

But that is **nothing** like what Jesus said.

Blessed are the **poor in spirit**.

The word for poor essentially means having so few resources that the person is completely at the mercy of others to provide resources for them. Blessed are those who are **spiritual beggars**.

Imagine that you just lost all your income. And imagine that every effort of yours struck out. Imagine that you were so bad off that you went down to Englanders downtown, and put out your cup and asked money from whoever passed by, because you knew that if they were **not generous**, you and your family would starve.

That is what this word is describing.

One thing is for sure. If you or I ever reached that state, we would brag of **nothing**. If everything we needed was provided to us only by the **mercy of another**, we would have nothing with which to elevate ourselves. We would not hold ourselves in great esteem for our accomplishments. No. We would be ashamed of our state. And we would be profoundly appreciative of anyone’s efforts to help us because we were completely dependent upon them for our survival.

Are we getting this?

All of our spiritual journeys are different. Some of us came to Christ because we were enthralled with His love for us. Some of us came to Christ to avoid His punishment of us. We all started at different places. And many times those places are only beginnings. Often we think to add Christ to our lives because He will bring **improvements** to something that we are already **pretty satisfied with**. We may have liked our lives our lives. But we felt we needed a few self help touches that Christ would help us with.

And God is so gracious to us that He does not cast us out. But neither will He let us continue in that condition.

Think about your life history. Did He not do **to you** what He did **to Peter**? Peter thought what he brought to the table was impressive. He may have thought Jesus was lucky to have him with all his virtues and impressive

merits. Peter was glad to add Jesus to His life. And He was glad to play a part of Jesus's team. But what had to happen? Peter had to be shown his **utter spiritual poverty**. Peter had to be shown that he would go to the **heart of debauchery** if left to his own strength. Little could have been worse to Peter than denying the Christ that he had pledged with **all of his flesh** to **never dishonor**.

Are not all of our stories the same in that regard? Maybe we thought God was glad to have someone who would spread the word about Him. Maybe we thought he would be happy for us to carry part of the load of the Kingdom work for Him. Maybe we thought He would be glad to have someone so smart or so talented or so gifted or so determined or whatever. Maybe that is where it started. But that is not where it ended.

Did not God have to take us through the **Peter training course**? Did we not end up displaying what we were made of when temptations came, or when persecution came, or when we thought people might make fun of us, or whatever our particular weakness is? Did we not have to come to an **end of ourselves** before we began to be useful in the Kingdom? Did God not have to show us that we truly **are beggars**, just fortunate that He would show us any mercy at all?

Our histories are not all that mysterious. If we do not **begin** the Christian life understanding that we truly are spiritual beggars, we must **get there**. We are minimally useful until we reach that point. That point may not be the beginning of our **regeneration**, but it is the point of the beginning of our true **discipleship**.

And it is at that point that we begin to experience the true eternal **blessedness** of being a follower of Christ.

It is unfortunate that the gospel is so often presented by well meaning people in a way that would give a person the impression that Jesus is there offering Himself as **one of many options** to improve their lives. They say, look what Jesus will bring to your life. But they fail to mention our true spiritual condition. We are headed for hell in our natural condition. There is nothing that can be **added** to that condition that will **improve the direction**. We must **surrender it all**. We must see the truth of our condition. We must see our **lostness** and **utter spiritual poverty** before we can be truly saved.

The Gospel does not begin with with God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. It begins with the wages of sin is death. And all our

righteousness is like filthy rags. When we start there, we start with the **happy poverty** that Jesus described. It is only there that we begin to **beg God to save us**. It is there that we realize if **God does not show us mercy**, we cannot be saved. That is what it means to be **beggarly in spirit**.

This is why it is so important to tell the bad news before the good news, if a person is not already **gripped** with their **lostness**.

Now someone who is truly poor in spirit understands that their **work to obtain spiritual favor** will not obtain it. That is the thing about beggars. They know they have **nothing to offer**. So if a person thinks they can earn favor, they are not yet poor in Spirit. It might be coming. But they are not there yet.

Now the world is never going to be poor in spirit as this scripture describes. Look at the world's advice to human beings. The world worships self reliance, self confidence, and self expression. It tells us to believe in yourself. Follow your heart. Love yourself. You can do anything. Express yourself. It describes these things as **the answer** to our problem. It is blind to the fact that this is **our problem**. We **think** we are rich in spirit. We **think** we have treasures buried inside of us that we just need to uncover. Listen to the Disney songs and movies. They are full of that lesson. The world would never come up with the sermon on the mount, nor would the world be **for it** if it really **understood it**. The concept of "Poor in spirit" begins with condemnation before God.

So how does a person **become** poor in spirit? All that is required is that we **see God**. Naturally we cannot see the person of the Father. No one can. But we **see Christ** and we see the **word of God**. And when we face that mirror we don't see "pretty". We see all our flaws and shortcomings. We begin to feel like all of the people who experienced the presence of God and fell on their faces in utter shame. Immediately everything that was wrong with them become terribly evident. And they were crushed. Those biblical people were the poster children for the poor in Spirit.

Here is an Old Testament verse that supports what Christ said:

Isa 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

I believe it is impossible to overemphasize our need to see ourselves from God's perspective. Why do you think God allows us to continue **in our own way** until we really get the idea of its **hideousness**? Do you not think He would have protected us from it, if it was not necessary for our spiritual walk. We, like Peter, must see **what we are made of** before we will **depend upon Christ like we must**. Who would have thought that path could possibly lead to blessedness? But if it shows us ourselves **with clarity**, if it shows us our **beggarhood in things spiritual**, it's effect is wonderful.

Brother Jones has this to say:

That, then, is what is meant by being 'poor in spirit'. It means a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and of 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. That is to be 'poor in spirit'. Let me put it as strongly as I can, and I do so on the basis of the teaching of the Bible. It means this, that if we are truly Christian we shall not rely upon our natural birth. We shall not rely upon the fact that we belong to certain families; we shall not boast that we belong to certain nations or nationalities. We shall not build upon our natural temperament. We shall not believe in and rely upon our natural position in life, or any powers that may have been given to us. We shall not rely upon money or any wealth we may have. The thing about which we shall boast will not be the education we have received, or the particular school or college to which we may have been. No, all that is what Paul came to regard as 'dung', and a hindrance to this greater thing because it tended to master and control him. We shall not rely upon any gifts like that of natural 'personality', or intelligence or general or special ability. We shall not rely upon our own morality and conduct and good behaviour. We shall not bank to the slightest extent on the life we have lived or are trying to live. No; we shall regard all that as Paul regarded it. That is 'poverty of spirit'. There must be a complete deliverance from and absence of all that. I say again, it is to feel that we are nothing, and that we have nothing, and that we look to God in utter submission to Him and in utter dependence upon Him and His grace and mercy. It is, I say, to experience to some extent what Isaiah experienced when, having seen

the vision, he said, 'Woe is me!... I am a man of unclean lips'—that is 'poverty of spirit'. As we find ourselves in competition with other men in this world we say, 'I am a match for them'. Well, that is all right in that realm, if you like. But when a man has some conception of God, he of necessity feels 'as one dead', as did the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, and we must feel like that in the presence of God. Any natural spirit that is in us goes out, because it is not only exposed in its smallness and weakness, but its sinfulness and foulness become apparent at the same time.¹

Now, how do we know if we are poor in spirit? Well poor in spirit means that we view ourselves as having no innate resources that will provide a good spiritual outcome.

If that is the case let's try a test.

How poor in spirit are we?

Let's apply the "**I would never**" test.

Have you ever said "I would never **do** this wrong thing" or I would never **have done** this wrong thing?" Do you ever think it? Do you think a thing is so bad that I would never do it?

Think about that for a bit.

What is that based upon? Where does that come from?

Does it not come from a trust in our own moral goodness? Does it not come from the belief that I am too good of a person to commit that particular sin? I might commit other more trivial sins, but I would never commit that one that is so abhorrent.

Now some sins **don't appeal to us** and we cannot imagine that they ever will. I can safely say that I would never steal your bowl of split pea soup because I don't like split pea soup. I am not talking about the kind of sin that does not have any attraction to us.

What I am talking about is a sin that could be particularly attractive to us in the proper setting, but we cannot imagine ourselves ever committing that sin because, well, we would just never be quite that bad.

Do you see what I am saying?

¹ Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1976). [*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*](#) (Second edition, pp. 54–55). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

When we are talking about sins like that, when we say, “I would never” we show that **we do not really get the heart of absolute spiritual bankruptcy**. We are not yet **THAT** poor in spirit.

It seems to me that Peter’s denial of Christ is the perfect example. Peter believed that **he would never** deny Christ. He was completely confident of that particular **moral goodness** that he possessed. He may **not have said** he would never **bash someone’s head in**. He knew that might be his **weakness**. But he thought that he would never be disloyal to a friend. He regarded that as one of his **strengths**. It was something he, in his natural state, had to offer to Christ. But Peter had to go to “**poor in spirit**” school. He had to come face to face with just how inept **the flesh is** at doing God’s will. He had to see that all of his righteousness really was like rags that are too gross to touch.

What could be **tempting** to you, but you state emphatically and confidently that you “**would never do it**”? You do not yet know yourself as well as you should. All you really have lacked up to this point, by the grace of God, were the **perfect circumstances** that would have caused you to do the thing that you think you are too good to do. It was not your **moral goodness** that gets the credit for you **not doing that thing**. It is **God’s grace** that He protected you from the devil’s will for your life.

The person who is deeply poor in spirit is not shocked to discover the wickedness they are capable of. It may cause him **deep sorrow**, but **little shock**. A person who is poor in spirit understands the capacity of their own flesh and will not trust in it.

Frankly it scares me when someone says they would never do something. Because the devil’s cronies are always listening. They have got to see such statements as opportunities to destroy a person. That was how Peter was sifted.

We are spiritually bankrupt apart from the grace of God. That is exactly what this means. It goes that deep. It is that clear.

What is it that you have said you would never do? What is it that you have said you would have never done? It is time to rethink that. The poor in spirit cannot make that claim.

What is the opposite of poor in Spirit?

Pride.

Have you ever given thought to just how dramatic the statements in the Bible are about Pride?

2 Samuel 22:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ You will save the humble people; But Your eyes *are* on the haughty, *that* You may bring *them* down.

Proverbs 18:12 (NKJV)

¹² Before destruction, the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor *is* humility.

Psalms 101:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure.

Proverbs 16:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Everyone proud in heart *is* an abomination to the LORD; *Though they join* forces, none will go unpunished.

James 4:6 (NKJV)

⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*"

In **Proverbs 6:17** The proud look is the first thing that God hates.

Have you ever considered the difference between a proud man and a humble man? Are not they the same in the most basic of ways? Are they not fallen human beings with a sin nature that has nothing good in it?

So then what is **the difference** between the proud and the humble?

Ultimately the **humble man** sees and believes the truth about himself and the **proud man lives in denial of that truth.**

The **humble man**, the poor in spirit man calls out desperately and passionately to obtain that which he needs most, a living breathing relationship with God and forgiveness of sins.

The **proud man** is not aware of needing anything that he cannot get for himself using his own devices, his own potential, his own resources, his own skills. The difference is not in what they **innately are** as humans. The difference is **what they believe**. In one sense every person is **poor in Spirit**. But only the humble **live** as if such a thing **is true**. That is the state Jesus is talking about.

Now if you are poor in spirit, if you see that you are completely dependent upon God for any goodness in your life, if you see that it is only as you **abide in Christ** that you can do **anything** of any spiritual value, then what is true? **For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

The people in the audience were looking for a kingdom. They wanted it on earth. They wanted the prosperity and protection so they could carry out their fleshly plans. But look what Jesus said. **These blessed people** who **see themselves** as **absolutely morally bankrupt** will inherit a kingdom. But it is **in** or **of** heaven. It is an **eternal kingdom**. They will enter it here. But they will only partially experience it here.

This spiritual kingdom is far better than a here and now kingdom. But it requires a **deep trust** to believe such a thing.

If we are in Christ, we must be poor in Spirit. Christ put this first because it is where **true discipleship** in Christ starts. And if we are **poor in spirit**, if we know that our salvation is **all** about what **Christ** did, and **nothing** about what **we** did, then we have entered the kingdom of God now, We have entered that Kingdom in a world that is **resistant to God** and we will live in the kingdom of heaven **eventually** where God reigns with **no resistance**. We will **possess** that which we **long for** now. Our poverty will lead to the abundant riches of an eternity with Christ.

We will close with a quote from Jones.

**But above all, look again at Christ, and then you will have nothing to do to yourself. It will be done. You cannot truly look at Him without feeling your absolute poverty, and emptiness. Then you say to Him,
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Empty, hopeless, naked, vile. But *He* is the all-sufficient One—
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come.²**

² Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1976). [*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*](#) (Second edition, p. 56). England: Inter-Varsity Press.