

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Call to Worship: Psalm 145

1st Scripture: Luke 6:20-26

2nd Scripture: Matthew 5:1-3

Hymn #4- *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*

Hymn #127- *Let Us Love, and Sing, and Wonder*

Hymn Insert- *The Power of the Cross*

Introduction

Having set apart twelve of His disciples to be trained as His Apostolic representatives, we saw last time, that our Lord Jesus Christ then took them to a mountain, where He began to teach them about the nature of His Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the quality of citizenship that would make up this kingdom. And as He taught them to this end, great multitudes watched and listened along to this sermon, which, we have come to label, “The Sermon on the Mount.”

Keeping in mind then, once again, that our Lord will be describing the very nature of all who are truly part of His kingdom, this morning, we move into the first portion of the message, what we call, “the Beatitudes,” which contain the famous “Blessed” statements, which describe the blessings that belong to those who truly contain and exhibit the inner qualities that are described in this list. And again, while we will be seeking to work through one beatitude each week, it is important that we remember that these beatitudes are a unit, providing a general description of the heart that must and will govern the lives of all who are truly part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And as we have seen already, we ought to expect to find something radically different (here) than the outward, self-justifying, religious system that makes up the very essence of Pharisaical Judaism, which has sadly twisted and distorted the true design of God’s Kingdom and will. Indeed, in many ways, our Lord’s sermon will be organized as a direct contrast to the religion of the Pharisees. This will be most evident, even now, as we consider the very first of our Lord’s Beatitudes.

I. Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Now, before we consider the specific blessing here proclaimed (the second portion of the verse), let us spend some time examining the *object* of this blessing (the first portion of the verse). In doing so then, we ask the question, “Who is it that is described as *blessed* here?”

“Blessed are *the poor in spirit.*” Well, that settles that. Let’s move on to the next beatitude then, shall we? No. No. No. Of course, we need to unpack this statement, don’t we? What exactly does it mean to be “poor in spirit?” Well, when we think of the term “poor,” our minds tend to immediately run to matters related to finance and material wealth. We think of those who have very little in life, and in fact, are incapable of properly supporting themselves. Those who are poor, do not even have enough to obtain the basic necessities of life. They can’t make ends meet. They miss meals. They have torn and ruined clothing. They live in very uncomfortable and trying conditions. They depend upon the generosity and kindness of others, just to survive. All in all, they “lack.” Now, we will come back to this financial and material aspect of poverty, shortly, to consider if there is any material relevance to this first beatitude. But, for now, let’s carry the notions of, “lacking” and “dependent,” into the second portion of the phrase, so as to grasp what exactly our Lord is *primarily* addressing here.

What exactly does it mean to be poor *in spirit*? Well, perhaps, if we consider the term “spirit,” for a moment, and then merge this consideration into what we’ve just pondered about being “poor,” we will be better able to answer this question. The term “spirit” here, refers to the inner man. It is the invisible part of man; the very core of man’s being which directs all of his actions and the entire course of his life. It contains the heart (not the physical beating heart, but the core and seat of the will, the desires and the emotions; it includes the mind), and it is out of the spirit that we derive every inner motivation and drive for the things that we do. The spirit is what God sees (the inner man in each of us), and that which we cannot see in others. We cannot see the spirit, although patterns of outward fruit can help us discern the spirit in others. That said, even our observations can be imperfect and flawed, and we can be fooled when observing others, because again, we cannot see the inner man. And so, all in all, the spirit is the immaterial inner man, and that which most concerns God (as we will see throughout the course of this

sermon), because it is within the spirit that we find the very root of all the motives that drive what we do and how we live. Finally, physical death itself, involves the separating of the spirit from the body, leaving the body lifeless, while the spirit returns to stand before God who gave it. [Note: to worship God in “spirit,” is to worship God with all sincerity, in the inner man, as opposed to mere outward, mechanical worship]

How then can we bring all that we’ve considered, together, so that, we can rightly understand what our Lord means by “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” here? How is it that our Lord expects His true people to be those who “lack” (and are “dependent”) in spirit, in some sense? Well, simply put, our Lord is stating that those who are blessed, are those who (again, contrary to the Pharisees and the religious leaders) sincerely and genuinely recognize their own utter weakness and frailty, leading them to depend completely on God for all things. Those who are poor in spirit *truly* lack (in other words, although imperfect, it does not ultimately have to be forced) every bit of confidence in themselves, in every respect. They have come to see and understand their own true and desperate dependence upon God for all things. The blinders which once covered their eyes, leading them to think that they were anything, or could do or achieve anything that mattered, have now been removed. God has graciously brought them to the place where they could actually see, to some significant extent, that apart from Him, they are doomed in every respect. They have become so sensitive to this reality, that the very air that they breathe, which they once took for granted, is now recognized and understood as that which God provides to sustain them, at every moment. Indeed, every sustaining blessing that they have ever had, from a physical or spiritual standpoint, they now recognize, to have come from God, and not themselves. And had God, at any moment, withdrew His care, they would have hopelessly collapsed on the spot. And so, to be “poor in spirit,” is to be brought to that place, by divine grace and providence, where man comes to understand, who his Creator is, and who he himself is, driving him to give continual thanks, while now living with the type of conscious dependence upon God, that is befitting a creature, who was created by and for God.

Now, let me just add one more factor to this, before we move on to solidify what has been stated, with a few specific biblical examples (in fact, this will actually lead into our consideration of biblical examples). It is important for us to realize that being “poor in spirit,” is not something

that God requires of man, simply because of the fall of mankind. Now, don't get me wrong, our fallen, sin nature, should provide us with a very significant additional motivation for recognizing that we are poor in spirit, however, being "poor in spirit" (being utterly dependent upon God), is something that belongs to us, naturally, as finite creatures, who were created by and for our infinite Creator. We ought to be poor in spirit, by virtue of creation, and not simply because of the fall. In fact, we can say that the fall is further evidence of the fact that man ought to be poor in spirit, because the fall is ultimately a consequence of Adam and Eve, failing to trust and depend upon God, in all respects. Their lack of faith in God, is what led to their downfall.

Now, I say this because we get the greatest picture and example of what it means to be "poor in spirit," by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who upon becoming a man, although without sin at anytime, exemplified this reality perfectly for us. Consider our Lord's words from John 5:19 & 14:10 for a moment. "So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise" (5:19). And again, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does His works" (14:10).

Now, while there is certainly a very unique connection between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Father, which is rooted in their divine relationship, what we find in our Lord here, is a willful submission to the Father, which He took upon Himself at His incarnation, such that, everything He did, He only did, in and by the Father, and in accordance with the Father's will. In other words, Jesus, as a Man, wholly subjected Himself to the Father, in every respect, even depending upon Him for all things. When our Lord became man (sinless man), He took on the fullest expression of dependence upon God, at all times. And if you still question this reality, go back and listen to the sermons that I preached, where we considered the prayer life of our Lord Jesus Christ. He took absolutely nothing for granted, and continually prayed to the Father, which was perhaps the greatest expression of His "poverty of spirit," and ultimate dependence upon God. Indeed, He prayed through an entire night, just to ensure that the Father would direct the course of His selecting twelve of His disciples to become His holy Apostles!

Contrary to our Lord's example, consider the Apostle Peter, just before he had denied the Lord three times, following our Lord's arrest. When our Lord had informed His disciples that every one of them would be made to stumble because of Him; that they would flee and leave Him, as He faced His most fierce and bitter trial (ultimately leading to His death), what were Peter's (well meant and sincere) words? "Lord, even if everyone else forsakes you, I will not. I will stay with you, no matter what!" Had Peter been "poor in spirit," at that very moment, he would have dropped to His knees in prayer, pleading with the Father to provide him with the strength that He does not naturally have in himself. But Peter still had a high degree of confidence in himself, which was poisonous to his ministry, and which God would strip from him, by humbling him through his later denials. Peter would be further broken, by grace, so that, he would find his confidence in God and not man, which would make him a most effective leader, following the resurrection of Christ.

And such is the case for all of God's true children. And while it may be a life long process, it is a process nonetheless, which every true child of God enters at conversion, leading us, through trials, to be stripped of ourselves (to become poor in spirit) so that we might recognize and act in accordance with our true dependence (utter and complete dependence) upon God. We must be made human again; we must be removed from the throne of our own hearts, so that God can take His rightful seat there, if we are going to effectively serve God in His kingdom. [Note: Paul's thorn in the flesh, a messenger from satan, used by God, to buffet Paul, so that, his Apostolic status and experiences would not go to his head. God kept Paul "poor in spirit" by these means, and because of this, in Paul's weakness, God's power would remain strong upon him]

Now, before we consider the specific blessing here proclaimed, let us now consider if there is any "financial/material" connection with this "poverty of spirit" that our Lord addresses here. Is there any connection to material wealth, whatsoever, which is implied by this beatitude, or are we to completely limit this to the realm of the spirit? I want to suggest to you that there is a connection between the two here, but on the whole, in the whole of the matter, it comes back to the heart. Let me explain why I say this. [Read Luke 6:20-26, and show the direct contrast

given between verses 20-23 and 24-26. Clearly, the negative helps explain the positive. Then, note vs. 24, as the negative contrast to verse 20]

Here, we clearly see that there is a material connection, which is attached to verse 20. Well, what then is the implication here? Is our Lord saying that if you happen to be successful and earn a high wage, which is beyond what is necessary to meet your basic needs, then you cannot be among the blessed, as here described? Is there no such thing as a wealthy Christian? I don't believe that that is the point here, brethren. I do believe, that which is consistent with the rest of the Scriptures, that this addresses how we relate to material wealth; our general attitude toward our finances and to material things. If you love money; if your heart is given over to, and absorbed in material things; if you depend upon material wealth, then that is the issue that our Lord has in mind here. Now, why do I say this? Let me leave you with several reasons:

1) The Pharisees, whom our Lord is contrasting throughout the course of this entire sermon, were lovers of money. [Read Luke 16:14, and note the following context of verses 19ff]

2) 1 Timothy 6:6-10 & 17-19. James 2:1-9.

And so, what then is the connection to being "poor in spirit" and being poor in material wealth? Those who hoard riches and put their trust in them, exhibit the fact that they are not ultimately dependent upon God, in the inner man. In other words, you cannot possibly be poor in spirit, while loving and depending upon wealth, because you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and wealth. And, if we are utterly dependent upon God then, we will have an attitude toward riches and wealth, which is much more willing to part with it, and certainly unwilling to cling to it. This is why our Lord, speaking about "materially rich people," in general, states, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to be saved." Because it is very difficult for a rich man to exercise consistent dependence upon God, while bearing the burden of wealth, which constantly tempts the heart to idolize and trust in that wealth. And so, while being wealthy does not mean a person cannot be a Christian (indeed, many Christians throughout history have been well off, and have generously funded the spreading of the Gospel to the ends of the earth), it does take a significant, constant, inflow of sustaining grace from God, to keep such individuals "poor in spirit." In our culture, brethren,

where most of us really are well off, in this sense, this should all the more compel us to be a people of constant prayer. [Note: The bane of American Christianity]

All of that said, to simply state that there is a material connection to “poverty of spirit,” that we don’t want to ignore, which our Lord is addressing here. Having considered then the objects of blessing, given in the first portion of this beatitude, let us then move on to consider the specific blessing itself, given in the second portion of the verse.

II. For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, *For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Why are those who are poor in spirit, blessed? Because, our Lord tells us, that those described as such, are the ones to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs. That is to say, that that eternal Kingdom of God, over which, the Messiah would reign, which has been spoken about and anticipated throughout the Old Testament; that specific eternal Kingdom of peace and rest, where all opposition and contention cease to exist, belongs to those who are “poor in spirit.”

Now brethren, the startling and profound, seemingly radical nature of this statement from our Lord, would have bowled His Jewish audience over. Why do I say this? Because, their natural understanding of the kingdom of heaven, in keeping with their misunderstanding about the Messianic king who would reign over this kingdom, was that the eternal kingdom of God would belong to Israel, in the ethnic and physical sense, where the Messiah would reign, in the physical sense. But here, our Lord makes the claim that “Jewishness” or sharing the same physical ethnicity of Abraham, has absolutely nothing to do with inheriting the Kingdom of heaven. Indeed, when you read through the whole of this sermon, as a Jew, you are naturally stunned to find that none of what is described here, has anything to do with being a Jew, outwardly. You see, but that’s the whole point of the sermon, isn’t it? And that is why Matthew’s Gospel, written to a Jewish audience, was thoroughly eye-opening, from beginning to end. For, in it, he exposes that ethnic “Jewishness” means absolutely nothing to the kingdom of God, other than having the benefit of hearing about it first, and containing the oracles which proclaim it, from of old.

Those who are poor in spirit; those who share the utterly dependent faith of Abraham, in God and His promises, and not merely the physical descendants of Abraham, are those who inherit the kingdom. And to this end, any nation of people are welcomed in, if they are brought into conformity with these beatitudes, by the grace of God, in, by and through Jesus Christ alone. Our Lord's kingdom, is a kingdom of the heart; a kingdom, where every single citizen lives out of a heart that has been renewed and changed by God, through faith in Jesus Christ. And this heart no longer values or depends upon the riches of this world. This heart has been reborn unto new ideals and aspirations, which desire first and foremost to serve and glorify the King, to whom it belongs. Blessed are the poor in spirit. For to them, belongs the kingdom of heaven.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) If being "poor in spirit" is descriptive of the true children of God, then we ought not to be surprised to find the world, teaching, commending and portraying the very opposite as virtuous. And brethren, is that not exactly what we find portrayed in virtually every form of media that is used to inform our minds? What is the general, often repeated theme of all media? "You just have to look real deep within yourself, and find the good in you, and the power in you, and you can do anything your heart desires. Just be you. Just reach into the inner you, and you can do anything." You see, the message of the world is always, "You have natural, innate, power in yourself to do all things." It is the very opposite of what our Lord speaks of here, which tells us to look outside of ourselves, and to the Creator, who has designed us to be dependent upon Him. It is the very antithesis of our Lord's words to His disciples, which states, "Without Me, you can do nothing." And so, recognize the message of the world, and the natural inclination of your own fallen heart, to rely upon the arm of the flesh. And let that all the more drive you to the Word of God, and to God Himself, seeing that we are utterly dependent upon Him for all things!

2) A good gauge for us, brethren, to help us measure the sense of our lack of dependence upon ourselves and our utter dependence upon God, is our prayer lives. If we are not praying; if we are not daily conversing with God, that is a sure sign of the fact that we have become self-dependent and rich in spirit. No matter what we feel, on any given day, let us commit to enhancing our prayer lives, continually calling upon the One, who alone, is able to keep us from

stumbling and to present us faultless before His throne with exceeding joy. Like our Lord, those who are poor in spirit, will have a consistent prayer life. Prayer is definitely a critical means of saying to your Lord, “Lord, without You, I can do absolutely nothing.”

3) Brethren, as we consider this first beatitude, and as we continue to consider the remaining beatitudes, let us also remember that, while all of these virtues ought to be present within us (in truth), we are a work in progress. And so, while we must have every single one of these virtues, none of us has perfected them. We are within this realm; we are in this kingdom, but we are continually growing in these ways, and we will continue doing so, until we are with the Lord in glory. Even the best of Christians, falls short, and sometimes, pretty significantly, but again, this ought to be the general pattern which represents our overall disposition. We should look like this, but we are still growing.

4) Finally, let me ask you this morning, might it be the case that some of you, here, have no true experiential understanding of what our Lord means by being “poor in spirit?” Do you find yourself hardly descriptive of a person who recognizes your own utter frailty and absolute, desperate dependence upon God for all things? Do you find yourself clinging to, and relying upon, yourself, others and/or the things of this world, with hardly a sincere recognition of your dependence upon God? Do you look at this first beatitude and see it as completely foreign to your inward disposition and experience? Do you have a tight grip on this world and the things in it?

If such describes you, then understand that you are presently on dangerous ground. You are standing on a foundation that is cursed, broken and ultimately sinking into eternal judgment. And there is only one way to pull out of your present state, and to see yourself fixed in the eternal kingdom of God. And it is not by trying to force yourself to meet the standard of this beatitude (or any of the beatitudes listed here, for that matter). You must begin, in fact, by recognizing that *you* can't fix your present situation, because you need a heart change, and only God can bring about the change that you need. And the reason you have this need, is because, you are presently alienated/separated from your God, because of your sin. And until you are reconciled to God, you cannot even begin to take a step in the right direction. But, the good

news is that God has provided a way of reconciliation; indeed, the only way of reconciliation, through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel!!!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25