

“Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit”

Introduction. It might seem as though Jesus placed these beatitudes in a very accidental or haphazard order. But I think we will see that this phrase is first in order because it is the key to all that follows. It demonstrates that it is not what a man does, but what he is in the sight of God.

Humility is the fundamental characteristic of a Christian and all other characteristics are the result of this one. We cannot be filled until we are empty. In order for a tree to grow upwards, it must first strike its roots downward. In order for man to be exalted, he must first have his mind deeply rooted in humility. Being humble is one of the hardest tasks for self-centered human beings to do. Self-sacrifice is not one of the words that come naturally in our vocabulary.

Pride is the basic ingredient in the fall of man (Proverbs 29:23; Isaiah 57:15). It is basic because it is the beginning of all sin, it resists spiritual growth, and is the complete opposite of a godly mind. Other sins flee from God, but pride alone opposes itself to God. Joseph Alleine said, “Pride is such a choking weed that nothing will prosper near it.”

I. “Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit”

- A. There are two words which describe poverty. One defines a person who lacked wealth, who was struggling for existence. The word used in the beatitude runs deeper and means “abject poverty,” one who is virtually destitute, or in imminent danger of real starvation. The word is used a number of times in the New Testament.
 1. The widow whose total possessions consisted of two mites (Mark 12:42-44).
 2. Lazarus who begged daily (Luke 16:20-21).
 3. Vagrants brought in as guests at the king’s banquet (Luke 14:21).
 4. The Lord’s earthly state in contrast to His heavenly state (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- B. Luke’s account seems to indicate that Jesus was speaking of money (6:20).
 1. Wealth is not within itself evil, nor poverty virtuous. A man is not worse for having more, nor is he better for having less.
 2. Money has no character of its own. It assumes the character of the one who possesses it. If it is possessed by the wicked, it becomes an instrument of evil. If it is possessed by the good, it becomes an instrument of righteousness. No man ever possessed the kingdom of heaven solely as the result of his poverty, nor lost it solely because of his wealth.
 - a) Abraham was “the friend of God” and very rich.

- b) David was "a man after God's own heart" and possessed unlimited wealth.
 - c) Judas Iscariot was a poor man -- poor enough to be tempted to betray his Lord and sell his own soul for a paltry sum, yet he was evil.
- 3. For these reasons, Matthew's record of the first beatitude correctly represents the Lord's meaning.
- C. The poor in spirit man stands before his Maker conscious that he is without merit, a condemned sinner, deserving of nothing but eternal woe, a beggar whose only hope is the mercy, love, and grace of God.
 - 1. Those who are poor in this world's goods are more likely to be seekers of true happiness that comes from God and not depend on material possessions (1 Timothy 6:9). Only in this sense is poverty more blessed than prosperity. It is not the poverty that is commended, but the attitude that causes that person to seek God (Psalm 40:17; Isaiah 41:17; James 1:9-11; 2:1-6).
 - 2. In Luke 16, Lazarus did not go into Abraham's bosom because he was poor, but because he depended on God. The rich man did not go into torment because he was rich, but because he depended on his riches rather than God (cf. Luke 18:18-25).
 - 3. Being poor in spirit does not mean that we glory in our poverty or are weak, nervous, non-courageous, or moral cowards. Nor does it mean that we suffer deprivation from persecution, sacrifice, etc. It does mean that we look at ourselves as unworthy before God (Galatians 6:3; Philippians 3:4-11; 1 Timothy 1:15), that we bow to God (Jeremiah 10:23), and that in affliction we bless God (2 Samuel 12:22-23).
- D. The Bible gives us many examples of people who have humbled themselves.
 - 1. Jacob (Genesis 32:10).
 - 2. David (2 Samuel 7:18).
 - 3. Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5).
 - 4. John the Baptist (John 3:30).
 - 5. The centurion (Matthew 8:8).
 - 6. The Syrophenician woman (Matthew 15:27).
 - 7. Paul (1 Timothy 1:15).
 - 8. Of course, Jesus Christ is the perfect example (Zechariah 9:9). Christ was free from what makes us proud or inhibits our pursuit of humility.
 - a) He was free from pride of appearance (Isaiah 53:2).
 - b) He was free from pride of worldly success (Isaiah 53:3).
 - c) He was free from pride of reputation (Matthew 2:23).
 - d) He was free from pride of riches (Matthew 8:20).

- e) He was free from pride of rank (Matthew 13:55).
- f) He was free from pride of kingship (John 13:5).
- E. How do we cultivate humility?
 1. We must recognize God's greatness and goodness (Isaiah 6:1-5).
 2. We must recognize our need for spiritual growth (2 Peter 1:5-12).
 3. We must put everything in its proper perspective (i.e., this world in contrast to eternity and the material in contrast to the spiritual).

II. ***"For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven"***

- A. This means that they are under the kingly rule of God and are citizens of a spiritual kingdom. The poor in spirit joyfully accept God's rule and participate in the life a Christian must live.
 1. Today this involves being in the church which is the present manifestation of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:18-19; Hebrews 12:28).
 2. It will involve the new heavens and the new earth in the kingdom's future and eternal manifestation (Matthew 13:42-43; 1 Corinthians 15:24).
- B. The first and last beatitudes both include this expression which implies that the intervening beatitudes include the blessings of the kingdom also.
- C. Jesus spoke this beatitude to arrogant, materialistic Jews who looked for an earthly reign of the Messiah and personal wealth, power, and glory.
 1. He was showing them that citizenship in the kingdom and the possession of its eternal blessings would not come as a result of a fleshly connection with Abraham, but rather would only come to those who in recognition of their own spiritual destitution humbly submitted to God's will.
 2. The gospel plan of salvation with the crucified Christ as its center through which citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is attained demands a self denial. Those who are poor in spirit will attain to citizenship. Those who are not poor in spirit will eternally fail. They are not disciple material. No man can be truly converted until he becomes poor in spirit.

Conclusion. Ultimately, being poor in spirit is the way a man looks at himself (Romans 12:3; Colossians 3:12). This is what matters, not being wealthy or poor. Humility is not admired by the world; it is despised by it. Our world wants us to believe in ourselves, realize our innate powers, and let the whole world see and know them. Being poor in spirit means a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance. It means a

consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God (Psalm 84:10). These are the people Jesus said are to be congratulated.

Winston Churchill was once asked, "Doesn't it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed to overflowing?" "It's quite flattering," replied Sir Winston. "But whenever I feel that way, I always remember that if instead of making a political speech, I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big."

In the final analysis, humility must come from a willing, penitent heart. Jesus came and lived the perfect humble life for us to have as a perfect standard. You cannot truly look upon Him without feeling your absolute poverty and emptiness. To be poor in spirit is to realize that I have nothing, am nothing, and can do nothing. I have need of everything. It issues from the painful discovery that my righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). This points to the need for you to obey the gospel today.