

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

INTRO – Have you ever heard the criticism that “Christianity is just a crutch”? Why is that considered a valid criticism? Is it because we do not like to think of ourselves as cripples? Blessed are the ‘ptochos’ – the beggars – those who crouch down low in total destitution, nothing to offer, hands outstretched. This sermon does not begin by ratcheting up the requirements of the law as a means to salvation, but by identifying salvation to those who are spiritually empty and impoverished. Destitution, not works, brings salvation. This beatitude is the antithesis of the world’s message of self-reliance, self-confidence, self-help, and self-expression. Our imaginary goodness is harder to conquer than our actual sin. A hand clutching pebbles cannot be filled with gold.

In Spirit – The sphere of poverty is not in our earthly property. Rich and poor alike can place their trust in wealth. Wealth can be a sign of blessing or a curse. Solomon, the richest man in the world, saw all he had ‘under the sun’ and realized that it was all vanity – empty. Poverty can be a blessing or a curse. “If only I had...” Phil 4:11-13. One who is poor in spirit is destitute of inward assurance and comfort.

Blessings and the Order of the Beatitudes

God does bless all men in one sense (Matt 5:45), but not all men in this sense. These ‘beatitudes’ are for His people particularly (Psalm 3:8, Psalm 144:15). But these blessings, and Christ’s teachings, almost seem upside-down. This is the paradox of the gospel – “If you want to be great...”, “If a man seeks to save his life...” Notice also the order of these blessings. Poverty of spirit must come first.

How Do I Know if I am Poor in Spirit?

You are not Haughty – There is no sense of demanding for there is nothing to leverage (Psalm 131:2). We take Christ on His own terms (Rom 9:18). There are no rights demanded for personal freedoms, or sins. We gladly sell all that we have, for we know that we have nothing (Mark 10:17-27).

Your Eyes Rest on Christ – Like serpent-bitten men, we dare not take our eyes off of the bronze serpent (John 3:14). This brokenness is characteristic of David, not only when He is in sin (Psalm 51:17), but also when he is obedient (1 Chron 29:14).

You Abhor Yourself – In an age consumed with cultivating a ‘good self-image’ you quote Job 42:6. There is a healthy, godly, ‘worm theology’ (Isaiah 41:14, 57:15). But there is a counterfeit spiritual poverty, a false humility. Abject self-pity in front of men is nothing less than inverted pride and asceticism is just another form of self-centeredness.

You Exalt Free Grace – The poor are very thankful (1 Tim 1:14-15, Heb 13:15).

The Kingdom of Heaven

Those who are impoverished in spirit inherit an eternal kingdom, one which we pray for and serve. So what does this poverty promise?

True Wealth – riches that will never rust or rot. A kingdom that will never end.

True Nobility – Christ esteems the humble (James 4:10, 1 Pet 5:5-7)

True Comfort – We do not have to trust in ourselves, but in One much higher (Psalm 61:1-2). Under these promises we may truly cast away all anxiety (Luke 12:32).

Theological Arrogance

As individuals grow in the faith, there can be a temptation to be proud of all you know, or all you have done. “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Prov 16:5, James 3:13-18). As a church, God has granted us the beginning of a reformation. We must remember it is all grace. Our boasting must be only in the cross of our Lord, or we risk becoming like the church of Laodicea (Rev 3:17).

*Just and holy is Thy Name
I am all unrighteousness
Vile and full of sin I am
Thou art full of truth and grace*