



Ministry of the Word

Wednesday 20th May 2020

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Scripture: Matthew 5:3

Subject: Part 15 – From Poverty to Paradise

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

The Beatitudes, as we see them laid out before us, are a blueprint and Constitution for life in the Kingdom, that is God’s Kingdom. They are very different to what the majority of religious leaders of Jesus’ day believed and taught about righteousness. They believed that true righteousness was obtained in the external observances of the Law. But Jesus is teaching us that the meaning of true righteousness is way beyond religion, never mind religious observances. Jesus' sermon in these chapters challenges us to really ask ourselves - firstly what do we believe about ourselves, and what do we believe about God? Jesus asks us, what do we believe about our sin and how do we relate to God? We see starting right from verse 3 that the Lord blesses those who realise they need help from God as well as His forgiveness.

So, why is this important? Jesus wants his followers to know the difference between true righteousness and false righteousness. *Why?* Because your eternity depends on it. Jesus here in the following verses, and even chapters describes the laws of His Kingdom and the spiritual principles that govern it. As we said last time in the introduction - The beatitudes, deals with attitudes - what we think in our hearts, our outlook on life, our attitude, our frame of mind, even our mental state. Jesus is concerned with our internal condition which affects our

behaviour, our bearing, our demeanour and ultimately our lives, and the lives we affect around us. As we go through this evening, there are certain questions that I would like you to examine yourself personally, don't be too soft, don't make excuses - *What is your attitude about yourself, in other words, how do you see yourself spiritually and what's your attitude to your sin?*

When you read these verses for yourself, don't underestimate how profound they are as well as challenging. If we would implement these into our attitudes daily, I believe our walk with God would not only be richer but it would be also deeper. This is why they have challenged fresh generations of believers down throughout history. The more we explore their implications the more it seems that there's more to discover. As FF Bruce said,

"We are near Heaven here".

Just before we get into the Beatitudes and what they teach, please note, that they are not for different disciples, for example, some who are "poor in spirit", some who are "sad" and some who are "meek". No! These are the qualities that ought to be found in each and every one of God's children! That means if you are a child of God, then this sermon is for you personally and not someone else. These are to be the characterises of all His followers just as the fruit of the Spirit ought to be as Paul listed in Galatians 5:22. These are exactly the same. They are unlike the gifts of the Spirit which are given to equip different ones in the body to do different things, but it is the same Spirit that seeks to work all these graces in each of God's children. What is more, there is no escape from our responsibility to **covet** these beatitudes and fruit of the Spirit. To covet them, to really really want them, we need to know and understand what in fact is being said. But let me highlight, underline, point out very clearly, head knowledge is not enough. If that's all we have, then we have not just missed the point completely, we have to ask ourselves - are we indeed a true follower of Christ?

With that said let's draw near to the word and explore verse 3 which says -

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

The first thing we need to do is to establish what is 'the poor in spirit' and why did Jesus say this first? You know some religions have interpreted 'poor in spirit' as physical poverty and preaching that by surrendering all your "worldly goods" you would be blessed! Monks and such like held to this for centuries. Strange as it may seem not many poor people were

accepted by these religious orders. If it was to be a material, physical poverty, then surely it would be unchristian to alleviate somebody's material burden, wouldn't it? It would be unchristian to give money to the poor.

Now, that's not to say that the Lord may call some to renounce their wealth in order to serve the Lord, in fact, one of my heroes in the faith, C.T. Stud, was one such man, among many. Poverty as well as wealth can be a hindrance to spirituality. There is a big difference between what the Lord requires and what men do. The Sermon has been used by leading psychologists to point out how to be happy! They have turned Christ teaching into a formula for mental health! They call it 'The Golden Rule'. There is without a doubt a connection between holiness and happiness. However happiness is what a person feels, Jesus is not speaking about that at all. Jesus is teaching about true righteousness which leads to happiness, *why?* because someone who is truly righteous is right before God. This is why they are "the blessed".

So what does 'the poor in spirit' mean?

The word for poor that is used here in this text is the Greek term *ptōchos* (*pto-khos*) which means to cower and cringe like a beggar, shrinking from something or someone. It is not someone trying to con someone out of money, but someone begging because they have no choice, they are ashamed. This describes someone with no position, no honour, no influence, no respect, possessing nothing but ragged clothes.

Penēs (*pen-ace*) is another word that is translated as poor which is used in 2 Corinthians 9 verse 9. It is a different kind of poverty in that it demands that you are so poor you have to work hard every day to sustain your life. They are two distinct types of poverty.

Here it says you need to be *ptōchos*, so poor, so destitute, so unskilled, your poverty is so deep, you are so unable that all you can do is beg. You don't have the capability nor the skill to work. You're totally dependent on the gifts of another. Everything and anything that comes to you, comes from an outside source, that's *ptōchos*. You have nothing. Typically, in the ancient world, it would so humiliate a man to be a beggar that he would crouch, cover his face with a garment, holding out his hand, ashamed to let even the giver know his identity. That's the word Jesus used here.

Jesus preached Repent, He preached the Kingdom is at hand and Now He preached, if you want to enter His Kingdom, this is where you must start. You must know the true diagnosis of your spiritual position. Then and only then you can become a candidate for entering into the Kingdom of everlasting happiness, God's Kingdom.

So what is that true diagnosis? - You are poor, helpless, bankrupt, empty. Nothing to give, nothing to contribute, absolutely nothing you can do, nor do you have any qualification to come to God, to aid your salvation on your own, you are *ptōchos*, not *penēs*. You are destitute spiritually and helplessly dependent on another, who is Jesus.

So what we read here is really Blessed are those who know they are spiritually bankrupt, spiritually paupers. Blessed are those who know they have nothing to offer or even have any self-qualification which would enable them to come before Holy God. Jesus is saying Blessed are those who realise that their state is of spiritual bankruptcy. And because of their poverty they cower, they bow before God. This is submitting before God, you know your condition and cry out to Him for mercy.

In the Old Testament, poverty came to have spiritual overtones and to be identified with humble dependence on God. For instance the Psalmist David, who was king at the time says this in Psalm 34:6.

“This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles.”

The “poor man” in the Old Testament spiritually speaking, is one who is afflicted (troubled, tormented) by guilt of sin and knows that he is unable to save himself, therefore, looks to God for salvation. Salvation is deliverance, rescue, recovery, escape. While recognising at the same time that he has no claim upon Him, he looks for God’s mercy and grace only and alone. We see this again in Isaiah 41 verses 17 and 18, where in this chapter God assures Israel His people of His help. The people described in verse 17 as “*poor in spirit*” are those with “*a contrite and humble spirit*”. It is these people, those who are poor in spirit, God Who is high and lofty, He who inhabits eternity, He Whose name is Holy, is pleased to dwell with them. Now, no wonder they are blessed as Jesus stated. (cross reference - Isaiah 57:15 and chapter 66:1-2) We see this time and again throughout the Old Testament. Take for example Moses in Exodus 4. Moses felt conscious of his inadequacy, so conscious of his insufficiency, he felt unworthy for the task of leading the people out of Egypt, he had a stutter, but God said to him ‘Who made your mouth’.

Gideon knew of his unworthiness, in Judges 6. When God told Gideon you are it! You are the person I'm going to use to be the great leader, Gideon said, 'but I'm nobody' but God was going to make him somebody and he said this 'The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour'.

Isaiah the prophet continually warned Israel in the first 5 chapters of his book.

"Woe unto you Israel, you have forsaken your, God, your religious rituals mean nothing to me." Wash your- selves, make yourself clean, put away the evil of your doings, from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:16-17).

For several chapters Isaiah lists the warnings; Then Isaiah, in chapter 6, after His vision of the Lord high and lifted up, in verse 5 he said -

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

In the Hebrew he said, "I'm disintegrating, I'm literally disassembling, I'm literally falling to pieces, I'm turning into nothing. I'm going back to dust. When you see the holy, righteous God in all His glory and majesty you get a real picture of how unholy and unrighteous you are. I look at myself and I see absolutely nothing. And I'm a man," he says, "with a dirty mouth." That's how he assessed himself. A vision of God will reveal the truth about ourselves. We see Jesus. And then we see ourselves. Honestly how do you assess yourself in the light of Jesus?

In the New Testament, Peter is a good example. He was aggressive, self-assertive, confident by nature, but devastated in the presence of the Lord in Luke 5 when after a night of fishing the caught nothing but on Jesus command they caught so much that their boats began to sink and verse 8 says:

"But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Even the apostle Paul knew His diagnosis - he called himself the chief of sinners. He had no confidence in the flesh.

Perhaps the best later example of the same truth is a letter that was sent to the nominal church of Laodicea in Revelation 3 and in verse 17 Jesus said to them:

'You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.'

What an indictment! This visible church, for all who profess to be Christian, was not truly Christian at all. Self-satisfied and superficial, it was composed (according to Jesus) of blind and naked beggars. And the tragedy was they would not admit it. They were rich, not poor, in spirit.

Jesus is the only cure for our diagnosis of being poor in Spirit. Christ reiterated Isaiah's word in Luke 4v18 when he read out Isaiah 61 verse 1 -

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

Everything begins with broken-heartedness, this poverty of spirit. It's not until you realise your spiritual poverty, Christ can never be truly seen for who He really is and what He has done for us. He's never precious. You can't even really begin to understand how valuable Christ is. How can you see His matchless worth until you understand the full extent of your own worthlessness? When you see yourself clothed in filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) you can then completely appreciate the robe of righteousness that Christ offers. The bible is clear over and over again, until you're poor, you can't be rich; until you're a fool, you can't become wise; until you lose your life, you can't save it.

And why is this first? Because ultimately, pride prevents people from entering into the kingdom so from the get go, pride must be broken. Proverbs 16:5 says, "Cursed are the proud." God hates a proud heart. Pride doesn't have to mean that you parade your money, your possessions, your position in life et cetera. Pride means that you put confidence in your personal achievement, personal morality, personal religion, personal goodness. Just think about what happened to poor Nebuchazar when he did that! If you have pride then you are unwilling to acknowledge the fact that all you have are filthy rags.

Poverty of spirit, humility, precedes all the other characteristics and attitudes. John Chrysostom said, ***"Humility is the mother, root, nurse, foundation, and center of all other virtues."***

It is the foundation of all other graces. Poverty of spirit is where everything starts. Nothing happens until this happens. As long as a person is not poor in spirit, that person is not capable of happiness in the sense or in the way that God offers it. As long as we clutch our own self-importance, self-righteousness and our own accomplishments and our religiosity and our own morality, and as long as we hold onto this as if it somehow gained us access to God, as long as our hands are full of that dirt, it can never receive the gold of God's grace. Happiness is only for those who are unworthy. So the first step into God's kingdom is to confess your unworthiness and inability to please God and meet His standards.

When do you begin to feel spiritually bankrupt and feel humility?

When you are convicted by the Holy Spirit and you begin to see God and then see yourself. Start comparing yourself to God, stop comparing yourself to other people. Are you as holy as God? If you're not, you're wretched. 1 Peter 1:16 says "Be ye holy as I am holy." Are you as holy as God? Well Matthew 5:48, tells us "Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." Are you perfect? If you don't know the answer to that, then start reading about God. Read the Word of God. Face His person on its pages.

When you do this, you will see yourself as spiritually destitute and dependent on God. You can only then realise that you have nothing that can save yourself; pride is gone, self-assurance is gone, and you stand with nothing to offer God except an empty hand and an empty heart. It is the exact opposite of positive self-regard or positive self esteem. The world wants you to praise yourself, to assert yourself. *So you mean there is no place for self esteem?* If esteem means 'correct assessment of self' yes there is a place for that. But if esteem means unconditional commitment to the self, then no! there is absolutely no place for self-esteem. Humility is not false humility. The Bible does not say or teach that human beings have no value. God made us. We are created in His image, we are the crown of His creation. But God hates pride and arrogance. Isaiah wrote (66:2) ***"to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word."***

This brothers and sisters, is the language of the poor in spirit. Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican which we read about in Luke 18:9-14. The Publican had down cast eyes, cried out, ***"God be merciful to me a sinner"*** To such and only to such, is the kingdom of

God given. For God's rule which brings salvation is a gift that is absolutely free and it is absolutely undeserved. It has to be received with the dependant humility of a little child.

Right at the very outset Jesus made it very clear that all the expectations of human judgment all the ideals held by the nationalistic expectations of the kingdom of God are false. We place the religious with the political aspirations, as we find in Scripture, the one that is still held onto with "vigour" today by many. In our Lord's day, it was not the Pharisees who entered the kingdom of God. Many, if not most, of them thought they were rich in merit and they even thanked God for their attainments. They were far, far, away indeed, they became enemies of Jesus and rejected His Word. They were traditionalist builders not truth seekers. It was the publicans, the prostitutes, the rejects of human society, the everyday persons, those who looked for truth, who in fact knew that they were poor in spirit, they knew that they could offer nothing and achieve nothing. All they could do was to cry to God for mercy; and He heard their cry.

Still today the indispensable condition of receiving the kingdom of God is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty. God still sends the rich away empty as Luke 1:53 says:

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

As C. H. Spurgeon expressed it, '*The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves.*'

He was referring to Psalm 21. I trust that is clear in our understanding, *but is it a characteristic in our lives?* Surprisingly it is easy to forget, that we are debtors to God for His mercy and grace. We must guard our hearts against self-righteousness and the attitude of thinking we have arrived on account of our profession of faith. The spirit of the Pharisee is very much alive and we need to be aware of this.

Becoming Poor of spirit begins our journey into the Kingdom. But we must not stop being poor of spirit. The Kingdom of God requires a constant and continual admission that in yourself, you're nothing, and your only strength comes in the midst of your own admission of weakness. Often we find ourselves not taking sin seriously enough for many reasons such as complacency, even self justification. If this is something you find yourself in, then brother, then sister, it's time for you to truly repent. Don't just say sorry, you need to be aware of who

God is and what your sin is like before Him. You need to remember the price that had to be paid on your behalf. A flippant sorry just doesn't cut it, like Isaiah, we need to be devastated by our sins, our sins should trouble us greatly, they should bring us to our knees.

That's where salvation begins, and that's where blessing begins, happiness begins, with this admission. The absence of all pride, the absence of all self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-assurance, self-reliance, the knowledge that we're nothing before God in ourselves at all. There must be this emptying before there can ever be a filling.

But thankful, Jesus just didn't say blessed are the poor in spirit, He gave those who are, a wonderful promise of amazing hope! He said 'theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'

What is this Kingdom? The expression "Kingdom of Heaven" appears only in Matthew's Gospel and it's generated lots of debate. *How is the kingdom of heaven different from the kingdom of God?* Some have explained that Matthew's Gospel is presented to the Jewish people, who out of respect, are reluctant to name or pronounce the name of God or use the expression God.

In ancient times, people had more of an understanding of kings and kingdoms than we do today. The king or sovereign held absolute power over the subjects in that kingdom and had responsibilities towards their subjects. The King was expected to provide;

- Protection From Enemies In the Territories controlled by the King.
- Provide for Subjects.
- Secure Order—in the sense of peace—the peaceful or lawful resolution of conflict.
- Represented the deity (in the Old Testament the King stood for God representing God's authority to the people).
- The King held life and death in his hand as he had absolute power in his kingdom.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the place where God rules. There is a mystery associated with this Kingdom with many scriptures describing it such as 1 Corinthians 2:9 which says -

"But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

The Kingdom is in at least one sense a present experience (Luke 11:20; and 17:21); when Jesus spoke or taught or performed miracles the Kingdom was present. But the New Testament writers also tell us that the Kingdom is in the future. The fullness of the Kingdom awaits the return of our Saviour as the rightful king. There is a sense in which the kingdom of heaven and the promises of that kingdom are already a part of the church and the believer's experience. But there is also a sense in which that power and that influence remains to be experienced. The fullness of the Kingdom will be realised when Jesus comes again.

For the Christian; the way up—is the way down. In Matthew 23 verse 12 Jesus said; ***“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”***

The poor in spirit are humbled before God, see their need for God and trust only God. There are many who are trying to gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven on their own, they are full of pride. But if pride turned angels into demons then humility no doubt can turn demons into angels. No wonder Jonathan Edwards said, ***“Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil's reach as humility”***.

William Barclay summed it up this way; ***“Christian humility is based on the sight of self, the vision of Christ, and the realization of God.”***

Those who know God must embrace humility—they cannot be proud.

Samuel Rutherford wrote; ***“Humility is a strange flower; it grows best in winter weather, and under storms of affliction.”*** He also said, ***“Our pride must have winter weather to rot it.”***

A Preacher once said that ***‘Humility is a strange thing. The minute you think you've got it, you've lost it.’***

It reminds me of a story I heard of a man who famously introduced J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission. The introduction was filled with so much flattery. When Taylor came to the pulpit he quietly said, ***“Dear friends, I am a little servant of an illustrious Master.”*** I wonder how many of us here would say that!

The late A.W. Tower was once presented to a congregation in a similar manner, and his response was, *“All I can say is, dear God, forgive him for what he said—and forgive me for enjoying it so much.”*

As Christian, we need to be poor in spirit, acknowledge our need for God, who is most Holy and our desire for Him. We should not be complacent about our sin, nor should we justify it. Remember the believers bar of soap as Chuck Missler use to call 1 John 1:9 -

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Let me just end with a stanza in the hymn “Rock of Ages” which was before me as I prepared this study -

“Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to Thy Cross I cling, Naked come to Thee for dress, Helpless look to Thee for grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly: Wash me Saviour or I die.”

Amen.