

Sola 5 Sermon of the Week No 23-2008

(Distributed to subscribers on 26 July 2008)

Scripture reading: Matthew 5:3

Title: The Beatitudes: The Poor in Spirit are Blessed

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [Mat 5:3 ESV]

Introduction

Having seen the context of the Sermon on the Mount in the whole of Matthew's gospel and the context of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, we now move on to consider individual beatitudes. We have already stated that the beatitudes describe the nature of true righteousness. Now we get started with beatitude number one: *The poor in spirit are blessed.*

What does "poor in spirit" Mean?

In its wider compass it describes your attitude towards yourself including estimation of your own worth. But what does poor in spirit specifically mean here? We begin by defining the word **poor**. It is quite obvious that the usage of this word here does not refer to material poverty but poverty in the spiritual sense. The definition of poor can be drawn from the following contexts:

- Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; Christ was anointed to bring good news (or gospel) to the poor. In Romans 1:16, the apostle Paul tells us that this gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. So anyone needing to believe is poor. Here we see that the gospel is for healing spiritual condition not physical.
- In Matthew 11:25 the Lord says that the gospel was revealed to the simple in understanding not to the learned wise.

From the picture language above, we get some idea of what the Bible means when it uses the word poor:

1. It was used of *slaves and/or captives* who were without freedom and property because they themselves were part of the property of their masters. They could be bought and sold like furniture or cattle.
2. It was used of the *physically handicapped such as the blind* whose physical disability rendered them incapable of working for themselves but depend on others (like Lazarus and the rich man).
3. It was used of *those who were oppressed by others* e.g. debtors under creditors who had left them practically destitute (e.g. in the parable of the persistent widow and parable of the wicked servant in Matthew 18).

To be poor in spirit therefore, is when a person declares himself or herself spiritually handicapped, and under slavery to sin. It is to see oneself wretched due to sin to realise that without Christ, you are what the Lord describes the Laodecean Church in Revelation 3:17 and to seek to be dealt with in a manner stated in verse 18.

The Example of Christ

Christ not only preached against a sense of self worth and setting the heart on earthly riches but on the heavenly (Rev 3:17, Mat 6:19, 20, 25-34; 16:26), but Christ came into this world in a most humble way and lived a humble life and died a humble death. He showed us that setting one's mind on earthly riches corrupts the

soul and consequently damns it. By living the way He did, He clearly demonstrated that you can live a perfectly contented and most productive life on earth and later enjoy an eternally blessed condition in heaven. Blessedness is in godlikeness. Adam was happier before the fall than he was after and Christ, the man of sorrows, was happier than rich King Solomon. So Christ makes the invitation in Mat 11:28-30.

How the Poor in Spirit Live their Lives

- a) The poor in spirit have a modest sense of self worth. It is those who have no true value who push themselves up to be seen. Some birds and animals make their feathers or fur stick out to make themselves look bigger than they are. A balloon full of gas lifts itself up looking big and floats in air whereas a grain of sand sinks down. Empty vessels make the most noise. So it is with those who parade themselves when they are nothing.
- b) The poor in spirit always despise self-righteousness. A person who is poor in spirit knows he or she has nothing to offer to God or to show to men by way of righteous deeds any more than Lazarus would have had anything to give to Dives at whose gates he lay. He could be approached by no man but the unclean animals the dogs. The poor in heart mourn like Job "... therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes..." (Job 42:6) or like Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Both these cries are prayers seeking to be lifted up from the pit of shame.
- c) The poor in spirit do not allow the riches of the world separate them from Christ. They view the world as an oppressive taskmaster, they fear its spirit-incapacitating tendencies, that cause their souls to become callous and their consciences seared. It puts into bondage so that you become a slave of Satan and the flesh.

Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

The phrase *theirs is the kingdom of heaven* could mean any or all of the following:

- a) That they are God's children and that it is the evidence here on earth that they belong to heaven, that is to say this quality is a property of the children of heaven. The subjects of hell cannot have it. It is a distinguishing trait of those who belong to God.
- b) That they have passed the test and now have a place in heaven (in the same way you say that Zambia has a place at the African Cup of Nations). This condition qualifies them to enter of heaven and enjoy its pleasures. It is like a ticket or passport to heaven. Those who have it have heaven as well.
- c) That this is the path that leads to heaven and compel all who are going there to be like that. It is like a small child who asks his mother or father why the men in uniform are not walking like everybody else and the parent answers: "because they are on parade and we are not."

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