

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Matthew 5:1-3

The Beatitudes – Week 1

By Andy Manning

I. HAPPY EASTER

1. On Easter Christians around the world celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus died on Friday afternoon and then early Sunday morning He rose from the grave.
2. When His followers saw Him alive they were shocked, but they shouldn't have been because He predicted His resurrection multiple times.
3. Why is the resurrection important?
 - i. The resurrection means that Jesus is who He said He is – the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, God incarnate.
 - ii. The resurrection means that God accepted His sacrifice for our sins.
 - iii. The resurrection means that we can trust everything that Jesus said – there is a God who created us and loves us, there is life after death, there is forgiveness of sins, and there is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

II. EVERYONE IS SEARCHING FOR HAPPINESS

1. Everyone wants to be happy. Everyone wants to live a fulfilling, satisfying, joy-filled life. Everyone is on a happiness quest. We're all wandering around in the maze of life, trying to find our way to the destination of happiness.
2. The good news is that God wants you to be happy too, and He explains exactly what you need to do to find it.
3. The surprising thing about the Bible's answer to happiness is that it is completely different than the way most people search for happiness. Typically, people try to find happiness through the Ps – pleasure, possessions, position, power, prestige, and people-pleasing. But the Bible's secret to happiness doesn't have anything to do with those things. And that shouldn't surprise us because we all know those things don't bring lasting happiness. Some of the most miserable people on earth have all the Ps in the world. But the frustrating thing about human

nature is that even though we know that the Ps don't make you happy, we still run after those things. I guess we assume that while the Ps have never made anyone happy in the history of the world, we'll be different. We can't imagine being rich and famous and powerful, and at the same time unhappy.

4. I hope in this sermon series to convince you to stop trying to satisfy your soul with the things of this world, and to turn to the things that really satisfy.
5. Over the next eight weeks we are going to study what Jesus had to say about happiness in a famous portion of Scripture called the Beatitudes.
6. **Matthew 5:3-12**

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

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11 "You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. 12 Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

III. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

1. To give you some context, you need to know that the Beatitudes are the introduction to Jesus' greatest sermon, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.
2. The name "Sermon on the Mount" was coined by Saint Augustine, who lived in the fourth and fifth century. He obviously called it that because Mt 5:1 says that Jesus preached the sermon on a mountain.
3. The Sermon on the Mount is the best-known part of Jesus' teaching.

4. The Sermon on the Mount has been called the Compendium of Christ's Doctrine, the Magna Charta of the Kingdom, the Manifesto of the King. It is the essence of Jesus' teaching.ⁱ
5. The ESV Study Bible calls the Sermon on the Mount "the authoritative message of the Messiah."

IV. THE BEATITUDES

1. The introduction to the sermon on the mount is a passage of scripture called the Beatitudes. It's found in Matthew 5:3-12.
2. The beatitudes is one of the most famous passages in the Bible.
3. The beatitudes have been called the Manifesto of the Kingdom, and the Norms of the Kingdom.ⁱⁱ
4. Someone called the Beatitudes the "Beautiful Attitudes" of the kingdom, for they give us the character qualities of those who are true children of God.ⁱⁱⁱ
5. There are different ways to organize the beatitudes. The most popular is to divide it into two sections. The first four beatitudes focus on your relationship with God, and the second four on your relationship with other people. That's similar to the Ten Commandments; the first four commandments deal with your relationship with God, and the second six deal with your human relationships.
6. Why are they called the beatitudes? The word "beatitude" comes from the Latin word *beatus*, which means happy, or blessed.^{iv}
7. How important are the beatitudes? We can find out in the introduction.
8. **Matthew 5:1-2** When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to teach them, saying:
9. The introduction gives us **three clues about the importance of the beatitudes**^v:
 - i. "he sat down"
 1. Today when someone gives a speech, they typically stand up. But back then when a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially or formally, he would sit down. So, the fact that Jesus sat down tells us the Beatitudes are central, official, important.
 - ii. "Then he began"

1. Literally it says “he opened his mouth”.
2. In Greek this was a figure of speech that meant two things:
 - a. The speaker was saying something very important, very serious, very weighty.
 - b. The speaker was opening his heart and pouring out his mind without holding back. He was speaking His mind. This is what the speaker really thinks. He is being very frank, very blunt, very open, not worried about political correctness or being controversial.
- iii. “to teach them”
 1. The verb “teach” is in the imperfect tense, which indicates repeated, continuous, habitual action. It can literally be translated, “This is what he used to teach them.” In other words, this was not a one-time sermon. This is what Jesus was continuously teaching His followers throughout His ministry.

10. **William Barclay** “The Sermon on the Mount is greater even than we think. Matthew in his introduction wishes us to see that it is the official teaching of Jesus; that it is the opening of Jesus’ whole mind to his disciples; that it is the summary of the teaching which Jesus habitually gave to his inner circle. The Sermon on the Mount is nothing less than the concentrated memory of many hours of heart to heart communication between the disciples and their Master.”^{vi}

11. There are eight beatitudes, and each one follows the same pattern. There’s a promise, a condition, and an explanation. In other words, each Beatitude says (1) you will be blessed, (2) if you do this, (3) for this reason. For example, notice the second Beatitude in Matthew 5:4, which we will study next week.

12. **Matthew 5:4** Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

13. Notice the pattern:

- i. The promise: “Blessed are”
- ii. The condition: “Those who mourn”
- iii. The reason: “for they will be comforted.”

14. In other words, Jesus is saying, (1) you will be blessed, (2) if you mourn, (3) because you will be comforted.

15. Let's look more closely at the first beatitude.

16. **Matthew 5:3** Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

17. This morning we are going to study the pattern of the first beatitude, which has three parts.

V. THE POOR IN SPIRIT

1. The Promise: "Blessed are."

- i. **Matthew 5:3** Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- ii. The promise is blessedness. You can live a blessed life. God wants you to be a blessed. And you will be blessed if you follow Jesus' teaching.
- iii. What does the word "blessed" mean? Happy.
- iv. **John MacArthur** "It simply means happy in the genuine sense of internal joy."^{vii}
- v. But this is not normal human happiness which is dependent on the circumstances of life. Christian blessedness (*makarios*) is untouchable by your external circumstances.
- vi. **William Barclay** "The beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain, that joy which sorrow and loss, and pain and grief, are powerless to touch, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away... the world can win its joys, and the world can equally well lose its joys. A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition, even a change in the weather, can take away the fickle joy the world can give. But the Christian has the serene and untouchable joy which comes from walking forever in the company and in the presence of Jesus Christ."^{viii}
- vii. This blessedness is synonymous with the inner joy of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).
- viii. **James Montgomery Boice** "The happiness spoken of here does not depend upon circumstances and fills the soul with joy even in the midst of the most depressing events."^{ix}

- ix. In the beatitudes, Jesus is not just telling us where to find happiness. He is telling us where we won't find happiness. We won't find happiness outside of a relationship with Christ. And we won't find happiness in the things of this world.
- x. **John MacArthur** "Physical things do not touch the soul... You cannot fill a spiritual need with a physical substance."^x
- xi. There's a good example of this in the Bible. King Solomon, the third king of Israel, had it all. He was the most powerful man in the world – he had total military and political success. He was the wealthiest man in the world. He had the best foods, and the best chefs. He had plenty of pleasure – seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. He had fame – he was world famous. But after gaining the whole world he concluded, "Everything is futile" (Eccl 2:2). Meaningless. Pointless. Useless. The things of this world don't satisfy. They don't make you happy.
- xii. It reminds me of words of **Saint Augustine**. "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." Augustine described this as a "divine madness" or homesickness that keeps the soul in constant motion, like an arrow seeking its target. Our souls are forever discontent, no matter how much of the world we acquire, until we make God our target, our goal, our purpose.
- xiii. The things of this world can't make you happy. But Jesus is promising in the beatitudes that you can be happy, He wants you to be happy, and you will be happy if you stop chasing the things of this world and follow His teachings in the beatitudes.

2. The Condition: "The Poor in Spirit."

- i. **Matthew 5:3** Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- ii. The condition for happiness is poverty of spirit.
- iii. What does it mean to be poor in spirit?
- iv. In Greek there are two words for poor.^{xi}
 - 1. *Penes* describes the person who has to work for a living. This would actually describe most Americans today. We are poor in the sense that if we didn't go to work, we'd quickly

run out of money and starve. If we quit our jobs and just sat around the house, it wouldn't take long before the bank took the cars, and then the house, and we'd be on the street corner with a sign that reads, "Veteran. Anything will help."

2. *Ptochos* describes the person who beggarly poor. They are so poor they can't even work for a living; all they can do is beg. They are so poor that they don't have the health or the skills to work. All they can do is beg. They are completely dependent upon the goodwill of others. If they don't receive outside help, they will die. This is the word used in the second beatitude, "the poor in spirit."
- v. But Jesus isn't talking about financial or material poverty. He is talking about spiritual poverty. Notice that He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."
- vi. And that's obvious. If Jesus was saying "happy are the financially poor," then the worst thing you could do for someone is to give them money; to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and house the homeless. If Jesus was saying that the secret to happiness is financial poverty, then the Bible wouldn't command us to help the poor.
- vii. So what does it mean to be poor in spirit? **To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge your spiritual poverty. It is the recognition that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.**
- viii. **D.A. Carson** "Poverty of spirit is the personal acknowledgement of spiritual bankruptcy. It is the conscious confession of unworthiness before God."^{xii}
- ix. The poor in spirit believe four things (four beliefs):
 1. **I am a sinner.**
 - a. **Romans 3:10** There is no one righteous, not even one.
 - b. Some people don't mind admitting imperfection, but they don't want to call themselves a sinner. That's not poverty of spirit.
 2. **I don't deserve to go to heaven.**

- a. **1 Corinthians 6:9** Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom?
- b. Some people will admit that they are sinners, but they don't think they are bad enough to go to hell. Surely heaven is only for the really bad people like Hitler and Rosie and Osama bin Laden. That's not poverty of spirit.

3. I can't save myself.

- a. **Galatians 2:16** by the works of the law no human being will be justified.
- b. Some people will admit they are sinners and don't deserve to go to heaven, but they think they can earn it if they try really hard. That's not poverty of spirit.
- c. **John Stott** "To be poor in spirit is therefore to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, indeed our spiritual bankruptcy, before God. For we are sinners under the holy wrath of God, and deserving nothing but the judgment of God. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy the favor of heaven."^{xiii}
- d. To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge your spiritual helplessness. I can't do anything to contribute to my salvation, or to earn my way to heaven.

4. Jesus can and will save me.

- a. **John 3:16** For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.
- b. The poor in spirit don't just see their poor condition and drown in depression, they put their hope in Christ. In fact, they put all their hope in Christ and none in themselves.
- c. The old hymn, "Rock of Ages," expresses poverty of spirit well:

Nothing in my hand 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 Savior, or I
die.

- x. Jesus is saying, if you want to be happy, this is the place to start.
Poverty of spirit.

3. The Reason: The kingdom of heaven is theirs.

- i. Why are the poor in spirit happy?
- ii. **Matthew 5:3** Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- iii. What is the kingdom of heaven? Eternal life.
- iv. Matthew normally uses the term “kingdom of heaven” rather than “kingdom of God,” but the two terms are synonymous. Matthew was a typical Jew who didn’t like using the word “God” because it was too holy and sacred. So instead of saying, “God bless you,” they might say, “Heaven bless you.” But again, it means “kingdom of God.”
- v. But what is it? It’s best to think of the kingdom of heaven as both present and future; it is already and not yet. When Jesus came to earth, He inaugurated the kingdom of God. He said, “The kingdom of God has come near” (Mk 1:15), and “the kingdom of God has arrived” (Mt 12:28). At the same time, He spoke of the kingdom of heaven as something that we will inherit in the future, after the final judgment (Mt 25:34). So, the kingdom of God is both present and future; already and not yet. In its future and fullest sense, it refers to the final abode of the righteous, the new heavens and new earth. In its present sense, it refers to the salvation and eternal life that you receive the moment that you put your faith in Jesus and become a Christian. So, the kingdom of heaven is something you can begin to experience now, and it something that you will experience in its fulness when Jesus comes back. So essentially, the kingdom of heaven refers to eternal life; salvation.

- vi. Now you can see why the poor in spirit are happy. They have salvation today, and heaven to look forward to. They have eternal life.
- vii. This is the reason this beatitude is first. You have to have it to go to heaven. You have to have it to be saved. The poor in spirit is the only person that God accepts.
- viii. In fact, this is evident in the Greek. When Jesus said, “Blessed are poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs,” the word “theirs” is emphatic. That means Jesus was saying, “the kingdom of heaven is theirs and only theirs.”
- ix. You see this all over Scripture. You must be poor in spirit to be saved.
- x. **Isaiah 57:15 (NIV)** For this is what the high and exalted One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.
- xi. Being lowly of spirit is the same as poverty of spirit. And as we will see next week, being contrite is the same thing as mourning in the second beatitude.
- xii. **1 Peter 5:6** Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time.
- xiii. If you want God to exalt you, you must humble yourself by acknowledging your spiritual poverty.
- xiv. There’s a good illustration of poverty of spirit in the Old Testament (Isaiah 6). The prophet Isaiah has a vision. He sees the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; the hem of his robe filled the temple. The angels are singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies: his glory fills the whole heart.” The foundation of the doors shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. When Isaiah saw God in all his holiness, he saw himself in all his sinfulness. This is what he said:
- xv. **Isaiah 6:5** Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies.

- xvi. He said, “I’m so sinful that I am doomed. God is going to strike me down and send me straight to hell.” That’s poverty of spirit. But as soon as he said those words, an angel took a hot coal and touched Isaiah’s lips, and said, essentially, “Your sin is forgiven.”
- xvii. Poverty of spirit is the key to forgiveness and salvation.
- xviii. The best illustration of poverty of spirit in the Bible is found in one of Jesus’ parables. It’s often called the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector.
- xix. Luke 18:9-14**

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else:
10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth, of everything I get.’
13 “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, have mercy on me,, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
- xx. Two men go into a temple. First, a Pharisee, a highly religious man. He thinks he is good, righteous, and deserving of heaven. He thinks he is better than other people, especially the tax collector who was standing far off. He is impressed with himself. Second, there is the tax collector. The difference is not that he is a sinner and the Pharisee is not, but that the tax collector acknowledges his sin.
- xxi. **Jerry Bridges** describes the attitude of the tax collector. “Everything about the man displays his poverty of spirit. He stands far off – we might say today that he takes the very last seat in the church. He does not lift his eyes; he is ashamed of his sin. He beats his breast; he is in agony about his sinful condition.

But it is his prayer that really captures his poverty of spirit: ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’^{xiv}

- xxii. Jesus ended the parable by saying that the tax collector is the one who was justified, which is another word for saved.

VI. TAKE IT HOME

1. So how do we apply this to our lives. Let me leave you with two applications.
2. **First, poverty of spirit is essential for Christians.** It’s not just for unbelievers who want to be saved. It’s for believers who want to be healthy and continue to grow. Why?
 - i. Poverty of spirit changes your attitude toward God.
 1. It leads to gratitude. The poor in spirit are the best worshipers, because they appreciate how much Christ has done for them.
 2. **John MacArthur** “Until we are humble, Christ is never precious to us... Until we know how damned we are, we cannot appreciate how glorious He is. Until we see our poverty, we cannot understand His riches.”^{xv}
 3. It also leads to dependence. The poor in spirit are the ones who pray the most, go to church the most often, read their Bibles the most, because they feel a deep sense of weakness and need and dependence. They see how much they need to grow, and how much help they need. They believe the words of Jesus in John 15:5, “Abide in me; for apart from me you can do nothing.”
 - ii. Poverty of spirit changes your attitude toward others.
 1. It leads to humility and compassion toward others. The poor in spirit don’t see themselves as better than everyone else; in fact, they see themselves as worse. They are like the apostle Paul. Even though he was an apostle, a missionary, a preacher, one of the authors of scripture, a miracle worker, he called himself the worst of sinners (1 Tim 1:15) and the least of the apostles (1 Cor 15:9). And because the poor in spirit don’t see themselves as better than others, they are compassionate and merciful when

others sin. They know, “If not for Christ, that would be me,” or “Before Christ, that was me.”

3. **Second, poverty of spirit is essential for salvation.** If you don’t see your need for a Savior, then Jesus can’t help you. Jesus can only help the poor in spirit. If you want to be saved you must believe four things:

- i. I am a sinner.
- ii. I don’t deserve heaven.
- iii. I can’t save myself.
- iv. Jesus can and will.

ⁱ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, Revised Edition, The Daily Bible Study Series.*

ⁱⁱ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:3, Logos.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv} Charles Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount, 42.*

^v William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, Revised Edition, The Daily Bible Study Series.*

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} John MacArthur, *The Only Way to Happiness, 33.*

^{viii} William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, Revised Edition, The Daily Bible Study Series.*

^{ix} James Montgomery Boice, *Sermon on the Mount, 13.*

^x John MacArthur, *The Only Way to Happiness, 40.*

^{xi} William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, Revised Edition, The Daily Bible Study Series.*

^{xii} D.A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, 21.*

^{xiii} John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount, 23.*

^{xiv} Jerry Bridges, *The Blessing of Humility, 10.*

^{xv} John MacArthur, *The Only Way to Happiness, 58.*