

Beatitudes-Spiritual Beggars—Matthew 5:3
College Baptist Church
June 6, 2021

Last week we began a new summer sermon series on the Beatitudes. You can find the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. So, I invite you to turn there with me. If you didn't bring a Bible, there are Bibles in the pew racks. You will find Matthew 5 on p. 809. The sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes.

As you turn there, I wanted to remind you of my summary definition of the Beatitudes, which I shared last week. The Beatitudes are kingdom blessings, pronounced by King Jesus, upon citizens of his kingdom, which is already but not yet. Let me say that again. The Beatitudes are kingdom blessings, pronounced by King Jesus, upon citizens of his kingdom, which is already but not yet. So, these are pronouncements of divine favor and approval from Jesus on his people that have consequences in the present *and* future.

We also looked at the structure of the Beatitudes last week; and I noted there are eight Beatitudes. So, my plan is to cover one Beatitude per sermon through the summer months. And though we will only cover one Beatitude each Sunday, we will read ALL of the Beatitudes each and every Sunday—as a way of remembering the context and everything we have learned. I would also encourage you to read them prayerfully every day at home—soaking in God's blessing all summer long.

I'd like to add one more note about the structure of the Beatitudes before we come to the text this morning. Each Beatitude consists of a pronouncement and a promise. For instance, the first Beatitude is "*blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The first half is the pronouncement: "*blessed are the poor in spirit.*" The second half is the promise: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The pronouncements are quite shocking in and of themselves. Blessed are...

- The poor in spirit
- Those who mourn
- The meek
- Etc.... These don't sound like "blessed" states, do they?

And that is why the promise that follows each pronouncement is so important. Each promise starts with the word "for," which grounds the pronouncement. The promise explains the pronouncement. The promise answers the question "why" or "how" this shocking pronouncement is actually a blessing, even though it doesn't sound like one. And so, we want to make sure that we hear the whole beatitude—both pronouncement and promise as we study each one.

With all of that as background, let's listen again to Matthew 5:1-12; before focusing on the first Beatitude, which is found in verse 3.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Pronouncement: Blessed are the poor in spirit

Look with me again at verse 3. The pronouncement of Jesus in the first beatitude is “*blessed are the poor in spirit.*” But what exactly does it mean to be “*poor in spirit?*” I thought we might begin to answer that question by stating what is *NOT* meant by the phrase “*poor in spirit.*” By ruling out a few things that we might accidentally think is meant by the phrase “*poor in spirit,*” I hope we will then be able to better understand what is meant by being “*poor in spirit.*”

First, “*poor in spirit*” is NOT emotional poverty. In other words, being “*poor in spirit*” does not mean you are “down in the dumps.” It doesn’t mean you are having a bad day or feeling a little bluesy. Now, I can understand why you might think that, because we often ask someone going through a tough time, “how are your spirits?” And so, we might think that someone who is feeling poorly is “*poor in spirit.*” So, good guess, but that kind of emotional poverty is not what Jesus is talking about here.

Second, “*poor in spirit*” is NOT enthusiastic poverty. I don’t know if they still do this cheer at athletic contests—but they did when I was in high school and college. You know the one where one student section yells to the other, “We’ve got spirit, yes we do, we’ve got spirit, how ‘bout you?” And then the other replies with the same response—only louder, “We’ve got spirit, yes we do, we’ve got spirit, how ‘bout you?” And then it goes back and forth a few times before each student section, starts yelling, “We’ve got more! We’ve got more! We’ve got more!” Now, I have to imagine that Jesus is all about enthusiastic school spirit. So, being “*poor in spirit*” is not about lacking that sort of enthusiastic spirit. That sort of spirit of enthusiasm and courage is actually a good thing to possess—not just on the playing field, but in all of life.

Third, “*poor in spirit*” is NOT material poverty. This is actually the trickiest to explain, because in the Gospel of Luke there is also a list of Beatitudes in what is known the “Sermon on the Plain.” So, Matthew records Jesus preaching a “Sermon on the Mount;” and Luke records Jesus preaching a “Sermon on the Plain.” And there is a lot of overlap in the content of those sermons—including some of the Beatitudes.

Now this should not surprise us, because Jesus was travelling all over Galilee—preaching in synagogues and in the countryside. And he would have been reiterating a lot of the same points in different places. After all, he couldn't say, check out last week's sermon on YouTube if you missed what I said on the mountain or two weeks ago on the plain.

But if you listen to Jesus' sermon on the plain in Luke 6:20, you would hear Jesus say, "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*" So, Luke records Jesus as saying "*blessed are you who are poor,*" NOT "*poor in spirit,*" like Matthew.

Now, some have suggested that Matthew may have added "*in spirit*" to spiritualize Jesus teaching. But this seems an unnecessary hypothesis. There is no reason to think that both Gospel writers aren't correct. On some occasions, Jesus said, "*blessed are you who are poor*" and on other occasions Jesus said, "*blessed are the poor in spirit.*" But what are we to make of the difference?

In Luke, Jesus pronounced blessing on the materially impoverished, not as an endorsement of financial poverty per se, but as a reminder to poor Christians on this earth that they would ultimately receive the riches of the eternal kingdom of God in the new heavens and earth. Not only that, Luke's beatitudes are followed by "woes" or curses. And in contrast to the poor, Jesus says in Luke 6:24, "*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*" In other words, if you are rich because money is your god, then this is as good as it gets—and eternity will look pretty grim. So, it seems that Jesus *did* have materially poverty and riches in view in the "Sermon on the Plain" in Luke. He warned about the love of money, which is the root of all kinds of evil; and he pronounced a blessed reminder to poor Christians that eternal riches are yet to come.

But in Matthew, Jesus does not focus on material poverty. He says plainly, "*blessed are the poor in spirit.*" He is talking about *spiritual* poverty. So, what does spiritual poverty look like? Well, we know what material poverty looks like, right? What comes to mind, when you think of material poverty?

Maybe you think of someone going bankrupt. I recently read a news story that stated, "*Elizabeth Holmes was once a Silicon Valley star on the rise with a net worth of \$5 billion. Her blood-testing company, Theranos, was valued at \$9 billion. It would soon come out, however, that Theranos' blood tests were highly inaccurate. Holmes was charged with wire fraud in June 2018 and has a current net worth of \$0.*"ⁱ

Or maybe you think about the shocking reality of global poverty. According to one reputable source, "*over 1 billion people live on \$2.50 per day or less, including 280 million people in extreme poverty who live on less than \$1.25 per day.*"ⁱⁱ That's humbling.

Or maybe you think of a pan-handler—someone begging for money on the streets. That's a pretty powerful picture of poverty. In fact, the word translated "*poor*" in our text today was actually used in the New Testament world to refer to a beggar. Can you

picture a beggar on the street—maybe hunched over or crouched down, with an empty hand extended? That’s material poverty—a bankrupt, humble, empty-handed beggar. So, if that is a picture of material poverty, then spiritual poverty must look a lot like that—but in the spiritual realm. Trusted Bible scholar, D. A. Carson writes, “*To be poor in spirit is...to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It confesses one’s unworthiness before God and utter dependence on him.*” Jesus says, “blessed are the spiritually bankrupt; blessed are the humble of heart; blessed are the empty-handed spiritual beggars.”

Is that a description of you? Or are your hands full of your own self-made achievements and your own self-confidence and your own self-esteem and your own self-righteousness. Jesus does not commend full hands. Jesus pronounces blessing on spiritually bankrupt, humble hearted, empty-handed spiritual beggars. Why?

The Promise: For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Because the kingdom of heaven belongs to spiritual beggars. Into the empty hands of spiritual beggars Jesus promises kingdom citizenship now! Into the empty hands of repentant sinners, Jesus grants eternal life in God’s heavenly kingdom. Into the empty hands of humble believers, King Jesus pours out his kingdom blessings.

Jesus is calling us to be spiritual beggars this summer and always. He is inviting us to live empty-handed lives—recognizing that we come to him with nothing but the empty hand of faith. Remember what we sang earlier today, “*All [We] Have is Christ?*” We must come as spiritually-impooverished, empty-handed beggars if we hope to receive, NOT achieve, the kingdom of heaven. If you have never trusted Jesus, will you empty your hands and receive the blessing of his heavenly kingdom today?

And for the already-Christian, a key way to live empty-handed lives is to be a spiritual beggar in prayer—to come to the Lord daily in your spiritually impoverished state and beg him to fill your empty hands. In Christ, we are kingdom citizens, who are encouraged to approach God’s throne of grace boldly—petitioning God with our needs, begging him to do something miraculous. And I’d like to invite you to join me in two empty-handed, beggarly prayer this month.

First, let’s beg God to do a miraculous work in Vacation Bible School this year. Let’s beg God to solidify the faith of children in our church, to reach unchurched families, to link us together as Gospel partners, to save souls of children, and to bring more visitors than this historic building can accommodate.

Second, let’s beg God for a building addition. Let’s beg God to grant us wisdom and courage and faith and generosity as we consider what it will take to make the 4:12 Center a reality. Let’s beg God to either provide more space for us to minister to our congregation or community OR grant us the ingenuity to think creatively about how to do ministry in the space that he has already provided.

And however the Lord chooses to answer these prayers, may we continue to be “poor in spirit”—spiritual beggars in God’s kingdom seeking our blessing from King Jesus alone.

Benediction—Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ *The Lord bless you and keep you;*

²⁵ *the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

²⁶ *the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

ⁱ <https://www.businessinsider.com/rich-billionaires-who-declared-bankruptcy-2019-7>

ⁱⁱ https://finca.org/campaign/world-poverty/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwweyFBhDvARIsAA67M71vBWGygtGey29j-XaHA6z4xKteDmNYm_lQn4nFIQ2fifG1J-g0oOQaAm5CEALw_wcB