

## **The Beatitudes- Matthew 5:1-12**

A study

Rev. Charles R. Biggs

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### **Introduction to the Beatitudes**

In our last study we learned the meaning of 'Beatitude' as well as what Jesus was communicating when he was preaching these "blessings". We learned that the 'Beatitudes' are ultimately a picture of Christ's character, and yet as we learn from Christ by His Spirit, these are the characteristics of Christians as well as we reflect his grace and goodness to us. The 'Beatitudes' show the kind of Christians God will produce through grace and faith in Jesus as we grow and mature!

### **"Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"**

Today, we begin with the first and most foundational 'beatitude': "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." What exactly does Jesus mean about "being poor in spirit"? Simply put, the poor in spirit are those who are absolutely dependent upon God for their spiritual and physical needs. They are those who are not self-reliant and proud, but humble in heart.

It is interesting that Jesus starts with the characteristic of being poor in spirit as the foundation for all the others 'Beatitudes'. The reason is that you cannot know or grow in the Lord Jesus Christ without first understanding your poor condition before the Living God. We must first know of our sinful condition and great spiritual need for a Savior, before we even begin to see or enter the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. John 3:1-18).

### **The Poor**

In the Old Testament, the poor were often equated with those who were pious. The reason being was that they were without in this world, and totally dependent upon the Living God for help both physically and spiritually. This did not mean that the poor were automatically God's people, but they served as real and living examples in this world of those totally destitute and in need of God's help. These were oftentimes contrasted with the rich who were proud, boastful and powerful (Psalm 9:18; 12:5; 34:6; 51; Prov. 29:23; Isaiah 25:1-5; Luke 1:46-48; James 4:3ff). For an example of "the poor" in the Old Testament, carefully read a portion of Psalm 72:

**Psalm 72:1-14: OF SOLOMON. Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! <sup>2</sup> May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice! <sup>3</sup> Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! <sup>4</sup> May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the**

needy, and crush the oppressor! <sup>5</sup> May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations! <sup>6</sup> May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth! <sup>7</sup> In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more! <sup>8</sup> May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! <sup>9</sup> May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust! <sup>10</sup> May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! <sup>11</sup> May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him! <sup>12</sup> For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. <sup>13</sup> He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. <sup>14</sup> From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.

God's concern for the poor helps us to remember of his great mercy for his own! The "poor" in the Old Testament illustrated the importance of what it meant to be "poor in spirit". We need the LORD for all things. We are utterly dependent upon his goodness for the sun and the rain, as well as for all material blessings (Matthew 6:24-33). In fact, Jesus will later teach in the Sermon on the Mount that God knows of our great needs, and will meet them and so there is absolutely nothing to fear or worry about!

Sometimes our fear drives us, and we refuse to believe that God will provide for us! We are oftentimes proud of who we are and what we do as our positions in the world, but if the truth be known, we are all utterly need and dependent upon the Living God for all things we receive in this world. Most of the time, it is easier to see this utter reliance and dependence upon God in "the poor" than it is in "the rich" (James 5:1ff).

### **"Nothing in My Hands I Bring..."**

Jesus uses the idea of "the poor", but he specifically speaks of the "poor *in spirit*" as being "blessed". Who exactly are the "poor *in spirit*"? Those who are poor in spirit are those who know that "nothing in their hands they bring" to be saved, but "simply to Christ's cross do they cling" as Augustus Toplady's hymn teaches us! Ephesians 2:1-8 sums this up well:

**Ephesians 2:1-8: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ**

**Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...**

The Apostle Paul tells us of the grace of God in Christ Jesus in this passage. He tells us that we were truly "dead in the trespasses and sins" when God found us. We were "sons of disobedience" and "by nature children of wrath". Then I love the next two words in verse 4: "But God." Those are two of the greatest words ever written: "But God!" But God intervened, God saved, God intruded by His Spirit in His great mercy and love and he saved us!! This should cause all to be constantly "poor in spirit".

### **"...Simply to Thy Cross I Cling!"**

We have nothing to offer to God. We must continually repent of even our best deeds and works (Isaiah 64:6)! Yet God loved us not because of something we did for him- - we were busy being children of disobedience when he saved us! As Ephesians 2:8 teaches us: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God..." This is our great hope as those who are poor in spirit!

Yet some Christians truly believe that they are saved based on something they do. They believe that they are saved based on a decision or choice for the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than being saved and then deciding and choosing. The point that must be remembered by the poor in spirit is that there is absolutely nothing we can do to be saved, because we are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-4), until we are born again. Jesus taught Nicodemus that one must be born again before he sees or enters the Kingdom of Heaven (John 3). It is all because of God's mercy that he saves us, then we believe and decide for Jesus because we are now able to humble ourselves, "poor in spirit", so that we might be saved. This is important for us all to remember. Salvation is all of grace!

### **Humility before the Living God**

Being poor in spirit could be called a kind of humility of which we are aware. Oftentimes I have been told that if you are humble you will never know it. However, the Bible seems to indicate that some humility we are aware of. In fact in the Book of James and Peter, there are two commands to actually be humble. That would indicate to me that there is an awareness of what is humble and what is not. It would indicate to me that some do know when they are humble, or poor in spirit, and when they are not. Notice the following commands from James and Peter, who sat under their Lord's teaching on being "poor in spirit", both of whom were there for the entire Sermon on the Mount.

**James 4:6-10: But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your**

laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

**1 Peter 5:5a-8: Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you. <sup>8</sup> Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour...**

In both of these passages we have commands to be humble, or poor in spirit, or utterly dependent upon God for grace. We should remember as Christians that we begin the Christian life as those "poor in spirit" and by God's grace and the working of His Spirit, continue to learn just how "poor in spirit" or utterly dependent upon God we should be!

### **Saved and SELF-Righteous?**

Yet how easy it is for us to forget from what wretched condition we were saved! After a few days, a few months, a few years of being Christians, we so easily begin to be "rich in spirit" or proud and look down our noses at "poor sinners". Rather than looking at poor sinners with the eyes of Christ's compassion, we think we are so much better than they are because we are saved! How low can you go? This is a really bad place to be in, spiritually speaking. It means that when we are judging others for being sinners in this way, we are forgetting how sinful and dead we were when the mercy of God appeared to us! We are forgetting the two important words: "But God!"

The next time you find it so easy to judge another for their sins, and you pat yourself on the back for your great righteousness, or ability to "see through other's real motivations", remind yourself that you are not being "poor in spirit", utterly and totally dependent upon God at the moment, but you are being quite proud of yourself! Repent and remind yourself of the story Jesus tells about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector which is a great Biblical illustration of what it means to be "poor in spirit".

### **A Tale of Two Spirits**

**Luke 18:9-17: He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles**

**himself will be exalted." <sup>15</sup> Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>17</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."**

Notice something important from this "Tale of Two Spirits", it was the one "poor in spirit" who knew of their right standing as a sinner before God who was considered "righteous" and went down to his house "justified". Notice the comparison Jesus makes between the self-righteous, proud, "rich in spirit" person and the one who knows his poor condition before God and requests God's mercy because he knows as one poor in spirit that God is indeed "rich in mercy"(cf. Eph. 2:4-6).

Notice also from the story Jesus tells that in summarizing the story, Jesus says: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." This is another example of how true humility can be known in a person by the way they respond to the Living God. True humility is displayed throughout a Christian's life as an ongoing dependence and resting in the Lord Jesus Christ and His grace!

Finally, from the Luke 18 story, the way Luke places the other incident of infants being brought to Jesus right after Jesus tells his disciples this story. He tells them that they should "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." The point in arranging the stories this way is to illustrate true humility, or being poor in spirit. Being "poor in spirit", being utterly dependent upon the Living God is illustrated by an infant totally dependent and in need of their mother. I do not think it was by accident that this incident of the infants followed the story of the self-righteous Pharisee and the "poor in spirit" Tax Collector.

How do you view yourself? Is it with one eye toward heaven and one toward yourself? Is it a "balanced" and Biblical view? What I mean is, do you see yourself as both a sinner and as one saved by grace? If you do, then this is good. We never want to underestimate the work God has done in us and is continuing to do in us, yet we never want to forget that we are "works in progress", "under construction" by his grace! Therefore, because we utterly depend upon Jesus alone for salvation, we must utterly depend upon Jesus and His Spirit to continue to work in us by faith. We must continue as Christians to be "poor in spirit" by continuing to trust the Living God, knowing that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10).

Do you believe that it is truly "all of grace"? Is your life, your salvation in Christ all of grace, because of the two words given in Ephesians 2: "But God"? We

must repent of our self-righteousness, and by His grace continue to be "poor in spirit". We are assured that those who are utterly dependent upon God will be part of the Kingdom of Heaven now, but to be fully entered in when Jesus returns for those who are utterly dependent and patiently awaiting his return, which is also all of grace!

### **Rock of Ages**

I shall conclude with the words to Augustus Toplady's Hymn 'Rock of Ages'. You have probably sung this hymn many times, but truly focus on the words to this great hymn! Do you believe it? Are you poor in spirit? The reason why this hymn is such a great illustration of being "poor in spirit" is that it not only speaks of being humbled by salvation, but humbled by death and knowing that our only hope in death is Jesus' help! "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven!"

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
let me hide myself in thee;  
let the water and the blood,  
from thy wounded side which flowed,  
be of sin the double cure;  
save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labors of my hands  
can fulfill thy law's commands;  
could my zeal no respite know,  
could my tears forever flow,  
all for sin could not atone;  
thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
simply to the 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.

While I draw this fleeting breath,  
when mine eyes shall close in death,  
when I soar to worlds unknown,  
see thee on thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
let me hide myself in thee.