

How to Inherit God's Kingdom

Matthew 5:3

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula
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We call ourselves “Christians” and our assembly of believers, “the Church of Christ.” This implies that we are followers or disciples of Jesus Christ. If so, we want to know everything about Jesus: who he is, why he came, what he did, how he saves us, and what he taught. The teachings of Jesus are found throughout the NT. In the four gospels we have the life, ministry and teachings of Jesus. In the book of Acts we have the instructions that Jesus gave the apostles obeyed in their carrying the gospel to the world. In the 21 letters of apostolic men that follow we have the teachings of Jesus applied to life in Rome, Galatia, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Colossae, Corinth and other places where the church of Christ existed. The letters are the teachings of Jesus applied to life situations in these various cities and provinces. Almost everything the apostles taught can be traced back to the teachings of Jesus in the gospels. For examples, the short letter of James has over forty similarities to the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus Wants Us to Obey His Teachings

The teachings of Jesus are found throughout the four gospels. Jesus was an itinerant preacher who taught as he ministered and walked among the people. There are some concentrated, collected teachings of Jesus such as the Sermon on the Mount in the first gospel, Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7. Anyone who knows anything about Jesus knows about the Sermon on the Mount.

At the conclusion of this sermon Jesus told the story of the house built on the sand and the house built on the rock. The storms of wind and water beat against both houses. The house on the sand collapsed; the house on the rock stood firm. Jesus explained that those who hear his word but do not obey it are the house on the sand but those who hear his word and obey it are

the house on the rock. Jesus wants us to obey his words. After all, he is Jesus, our Lord and Savior. In this first gospel the story is told of the time that Jesus' mother and brothers wanted to see him while he was teaching a houseful of guests. He replied, "Who is my mother? And who are my brothers? Those who do the will of God are my mother and my brothers." We have kinship with Jesus as we obey his words. At the conclusion of the gospel in the last paragraph, Jesus instructs the apostles to "go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey all things that I have taught you." The all things that the apostles were to teach the newly baptized converts are the teachings of Jesus, the teachings such as those found in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount Is For Disciples on How to Live to Please God

The Sermon on the Mount is instruction for disciples of Christ on how to live for God by following Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is not the gospel. The gospel, literally, "the good news," is how God puts us right with himself by forgiving our sins through the sacrificial offering of Jesus for our sins and the resurrection of Jesus that followed three days later. The gospel is what makes it possible for God to forgive us and save us. The apostle Paul said it is "God's power for salvation to everyone that believes." The Sermon on the Mount is how disciples are to live once they have obeyed the gospel. According to Acts 2:38, obeying the gospel means believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior, repenting of your sins and being baptized in Christ's name. After that the disciples, now born again of water and the Spirit, and now members of God's kingdom, are to "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42) which are the things that Jesus told them to teach disciples to obey.

So in this Sermon on the Mount Jesus is not telling sinners how to be saved, or how to be forgiven. He is not addressing alien sinners, i.e., those who have never become disciples of Christ. He is addressing his disciples on how they are to live as Christ followers.

The Sermon on the Mount then is not for the world, the unsaved, or the nations of the world. The Sermon on the Mount cannot be practiced by those who do not have salvation and the help of the Holy Spirit in living for and like Christ. It is impossible for an unsaved person to live the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount describes the character and the

conduct of Jesus Christ. He is the perfect embodiment of this sermon. When we obey this sermon, we become more and more like Jesus. To the extent we obey this sermon, we are like Jesus; to the extent we do not obey this sermon, we are unlike Jesus.

The Beatitudes

The Sermon on the Mount begins with what we called the Beatitudes. This word is from the Latin word, *beatus*, which means “blessed.” These eight teachings of Jesus are indeed “beautiful attitudes,” or “beautifultudes,” as someone called them.

These eight beatitudes describe the character of the person who is in God’s kingdom and obeys God. These eight qualities are all found in one person: the disciple of Jesus Christ. It is not that one person is poor in spirit, another person is pure in heart, still another may be a peacemaker, and still another persecuted. These are eight qualities of a person who follows Jesus. This person is meek and merciful, poor in spirit and pure in heart, mourning and hungry, a peacemaker and persecuted.

After describing the character of the godly person, Jesus then teaches about the conduct of the godly person. The first part of the sermon then is about being; the rest of the sermon is about doing. We must first be something for God before we can do something for God. These beatitudes describe the inner spirit, the heart, the internal attitudes and dispositions of the person who follows Jesus. In v. 20 Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was primarily external, ceremonial, law keeping on the outside in good works and deeds. Jesus certainly teaches that we must obey God, that we cannot forsake the teachings of the Lord. Jesus is not against obedience, or doing what God says. Notices vs. 17-19: [read them]. But Jesus goes much deeper. He goes to the inside of a person. He internalizes righteousness. He examines our spirit, motives, motivations, attitudes and dispositions. Our righteousness must come from the inside and go out, and not merely be from the outside only.

Let’s now see what Jesus said he wants from us, his disciples. These teachings are for us now. This sermon is filled with present tense verbs of action, words that indicate that Jesus wants these characteristics and this conduct in our lives now. Those who love Jesus will do what Jesus says. These teachings are primary, fundamental, and essential, directly from the

lips of Jesus himself. To forget or neglect these sayings of Jesus is to forget or neglect Jesus himself.

“Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit”

Let’s examine now the first thing that Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The Meaning of “Blessed”

The word “blessed” is the Greek word, “*makarios*.” The word is used of God, as in “blessed be the name of the Lord,” or “blessed be God.” The word is used of God blessing us and of us blessing God. We acknowledge God and God acknowledges us. We get the idea of saying “the blessing” before we eat from this background. The root word, *makar*, means “to give approval to.” What this verse is saying is “Oh the approval of God (the bliss, joy, delight, spiritual happiness of God) rests on the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Some translations render this word “blessed” as, “How happy are those who are poor in spirit.” This may be a good translation if one has a correct understanding of happiness, but most of the time we do not. Happiness is from “hap,” which refers to chance, a happening, a happenstance. Happiness usually is thought of as coming from things, possessions, attainments, achievements, earthly delights, and feelings in the soul. When people are asked, “What is your main ambition in life?” most respond with, “To be happy.” Then the next question is, “What would it take to make you happy?” Most respond with something like, “Enough money to buy...and then they name a new car, paying off debts, a new house, or a vacation to Europe. This is not at all the meaning of the word “blessed” here. The blessedness here has nothing to do with things or possessions or achievements or physical, human delights. The word here refers to God’s blessedness of us, i.e., God’s approval of us. Here Jesus is not talking about how people may feel or their subjective state. Jesus is making an objective statement that God thinks of them as “blessed.”

These eight qualities are the responsibilities of the citizens of God’s kingdom. The eight blessings are the privileges of the citizens of God’s kingdom. When God rules the heart, this is what the disciple is. When God rules the heart, this is what the disciples receive from God: “blessedness.” “This means that our lives are fully satisfied with God. We are deeply

happy, joyous, inwardly content, and truly fulfilled. We participate in the life of God and this is the greatest reality we can know.” [Jerry Mercer, Cry Joy! Saying Yes to Life that Satisfies. Wheaton: Scripture Publications, 1987, p. 15].

God has met our deepest needs and we are self-contained. We do not depend on other people, circumstances, or events. We stand approved before the creator of the universe and that meets our deepest needs. We look to God for everything we need. This means that no one can be a threat to us because we are free from dependence on people’s feelings about us and we are free from circumstances and things. We are “blessed” even though we are persecuted (v. 10). Paul and Silas could sing hymns and pray to God even though they were locked in prison and had been beaten by unbelievers (Acts 16:22-25).

What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?

God’s approval and well being is with those who are poor in spirit. What does that mean?

To be poor in spirit does not mean to be poor spirited. It has nothing to do with whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. It has nothing to do with personality, biology, gender, or your DNA. To be poor in spirit then does not mean that you are lazy, that you lack energy, that you are a slouch in a slump.

To be poor in spirit does not mean that you view yourself negatively, that you have low esteem of your value as a person, that you are a worthless nobody who cannot do or be anything worthwhile to God or anyone else. You are precious. You are precious because God loves you. You know that God loves you because he sent his son to die for your sins (John 3:16).

To be poor in spirit does not refer to your attitude about yourself in regard to others or with others. It has to do with two things: (1) your view of inadequacy before God, and (2) your view of inability before God. This has to do with how you regard yourself before God, not before other humans.

Poor in spirit means that you recognize that before God you are totally inadequate to determine your own destiny, to save yourself. This means that you see yourself before God as a needy sinner. This means that you are humble before God. The word humble comes from the word “humus,” which refers to the earth, to rotting, decaying organic matter that makes good plant food. Before God, as sinners, that’s us.

Some examples of those who were poor in spirit

To be poor in spirit is the exact opposite of being proud before God. David was an energetic warrior, an activist, a man of God who was always on the move. God says he was a man after his own heart. David had humility before God. Listen to his words: [read Psalm 34:18 and Psalm 51:17].

Gideon was a man like this. He knew he came from the smallest clan of the smallest tribe in Israel. He was fearful and hiding out from the enemy. God came to him and said he was a worthy warrior, but he was humble when God spoke [read Judges 6:11-16].

Jacob was a man who learned to be poor in spirit. He wrestled with an angel at the brook Jabok. He wanted God's approval and blessing more than anything else [read Gen. 32:29]. Even though Jacob walked with a permanent limp from an injury during this wrestling match, he was happy because he was blessed of God.

Isaiah was poor in spirit. In chapter six of that majestic book of Isaiah, he saw the Lord, and he said, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips." He later wrote about the type of person God blesses. Hear him in Isaiah 57:15 and 66:1, 2 [read].

Simon Peter was impetuous, energetic, always on the move, but he was poor in spirit. He has fished all night and caught nothing. The next morning Jesus borrowed his boat to use it for a pulpit to preach to the crowds on the shore. At the end of the sermon, Jesus told Peter to launch out into the deep. Peter said, "Lord, we have fished all night and caught nothing, but nevertheless at your word, we will." Then Jesus told Peter to cast the net on the right side of the boat, and he and his helpers caught so many fish in the net that the net began to break. Peter then fell on his knees to the floor of the boat and confessed to Jesus, "Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:1-8). That's what it means to be poor in spirit. It means to recognize your spiritual inadequacy in the presence of the Lord.

Poor in spirit means spiritual inability

To be poor in spirit means that you recognize your inability before God. Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing. I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me and I in you and you shall bear much fruit" (John 15:1-6). Here is a peach limb that I cut off a new peach tree that I planted last week. The tree is flourishing, full of green leaves and growing, but this branch is dead. It is not that this branch will not bear fruit; it cannot bear fruit because it is detached from its source of nourishment. When we are detached from Christ, it is not that we will not bear fruit; it is that we cannot bear fruit. To be poor in spirit means that we understand and know

that without Christ we are nothing, nothing at all. We can only do what we do by the power of Christ working in us. All the glory belongs to God who strengthens us. We are simply servants. We are members of his body and all the strength and nourishment for the body comes from Christ, who is the head of the body. If we lose our connection to Christ, we can do nothing worthwhile for God that will endure.

So when somebody compliments us on something we have done to minister to them, or somehow we have been a blessing to them or others, we can simply say, "Thank you very much. Praise be to God."

To be poor in Spirit is the opposite of pride. The Bible says that God hates "a proud look and an arrogant heart" (Prov. 6:17). "Those that are proud, God is able to humble" (Dan. 4:37). We know the Bible says that "pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

Jesus himself demonstrated being poor in spirit or humility for us. Jesus came to this sin-cursed, blighted planet to live among us. The Bible says, [read Phil. 2:5-9]. While here Jesus served others. He washed the disciple's feet and died for us all on a cross. "He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). He depended on his spiritual father God for everything. He said, "I can do nothing of myself. I came to do the will of him that sent me." He humbled himself before God the Father to totally obey his will, even death on a cross.

He now wants us to have the same attitude of heart. We will be blessed by the Father when we do. The blessing and approval of God the Father is far more important and eternal than all the accolades, applauses, and praises of men. The only thing that counts is the approval of God. What shall it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (Matt. 16:26).

The exact opposite of what Jesus wants if found in the Church of Christ in Laodicea in revelation, chapter 3. Hear what Jesus says to this church:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

This church was rich in spirit. They were self-satisfied and superficial. They thought of themselves as rich and having need of nothing. In reality, Jesus says, they are blind and naked beggars. Jesus says that he stands at the door of each person's heart and knocks. If a person will hear the voice of Jesus, and open the door to him, he says that he will come in and eat with him. We hear Jesus when we listen to his words, and we open the door of our heart to Jesus when we admit the truthfulness of Jesus'

words by seeing our own sinful inadequacy and inability, Jesus only has fellowship with those who are poor in spirit, not those who are rich in spirit.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven

But the person that God blesses is one that enjoys the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is now in grace and someday in glory. Jesus said that we are born again and enter the kingdom of God. This kingdom comes not with observation but it is within you, he said. The kingdom of God is the reign of God in our hearts and lives. No matter how big the storm on the outside, we have peace on the inside because God is with us and all is well where and when the Lord is present. We are in the kingdom now. We are enjoying the blessings and privileges of being with the king, Jesus. The Bible says that we have been raised to sit with Christ in the heavenly realms. We are living in God's kingdom now. We are reigning and ruling with Christ spiritually in God through God's Spirit and God's word. What greater blessing could there be than to be in God's kingdom to be with God, to have God's blessing and his approval?

The kingdom is ours now in grace but someday it shall be ours in glory to a far greater degree. We will live and reign with Christ eternally. Forever and forever and forever. God will safely and securely deliver us into his heavenly kingdom. We shall die but we shall be resurrected to eternal life in a body like unto Christ's body to live and save with God forever and ever.

Oh, what a tremendously magnificent blessing this is! O church, open your eyes, let your hearts rejoice, let your mouth sing his praises! We have everything God has to offer when we have Jesus. The kingdom of God is now and forever.

An encouragement to be poor in spirit

But it's only for those that meet the condition of being lowly in heart, of being poor in spirit. We must recognize our need for God for everything. In order to be a Christian, you must confess that you are a sinner, that you cannot save yourself, that you can only be saved by the grace of God at Calvary, and that you depend on another, Jesus, and what he has done for you there. "By his stripes you are healed."

The old song by Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages," speaks of this.

Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to they 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.

This is what it means to be poor in spirit. We are all beggars before God. Jesus will not save the proud and self-sufficient. Jesus says in this first beatitude: “O the bliss of the man who has realized his own utter helplessness and his own utter inadequacy, and who has put his whole trust in God.” [Wm. Barclay, The Plain Man Looks at the Beatitudes. London: Collins, 1963, p. 24].

Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) was a Roman Catholic priest who served for sixteen years as a missionary to the Tuareg tribe in the Sahara of North Africa. During this time he labored faithfully but never saw one convert. Yet his self-denial did not go unrewarded. During those long years, he reduced the language of the people to writing, produced dictionaries, and translated portions of Scripture. He was killed by passing marauders during a time of hostility. He wrote this following prayer that shows us how he was able to stick with his commitment, even though it appeared he was not accomplishing anything.

“Father,
I abandon myself unto your hands,
Do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you,
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Only let your will be done in me,
And in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul,
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
For I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
To surrender myself into your hands, without reserve,
And with boundless confidence,
For you are my Father.

[See Foucauld’s story on the internet in Wikipedia. I found it in Jerry Mercer, Cry Joy! p. 29].

If today you are willing to bow in your heart before God, you, too, can be saved. You recognize that you need Christ now, and then after he saves you, you forever recognize that you need him for everything. Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Whosoever will may come while we stand and sing.

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