

January 4, 2009

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Jesus' Humble Example

For the past several weeks, in our small group we've begun studying the Sermon on the Mount, which is Jesus' longest recorded message. So far we're still studying the first twelve verses which contain what are known as the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are a description of those that are happy or "Blessed". They are a description of the new life that the Spirit of God puts in us when we are regenerated. As such, they are a description of what true Spiritual life looks like, and of course our perfect example of that life is Jesus Christ. We're going to look this morning specifically at the first beatitude, the first characteristic of new life, and that is to be poor in spirit. What does it mean that if Jesus is our perfect example of each of these characteristics, that he was poor in spirit? Let's pray and then we will see what God's word tells us about the character of Christ.

(Open in Prayer)

We have 2 primary texts this morning so you can turn to both Matthew 5 and Isaiah 42 and keep a finger in each.

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

Isaiah 42:1-4 - "Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law."

Let's start with the beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What does it mean for Christ to be the prototype of being "poor in spirit"? First we need to

understand what this beatitude is describing. The first observation is that this description of poverty has nothing to do with material possessions; it's about a heart condition, a heart attitude. It's a condition of the person's spirit. Yet it's still describing "poverty", a lacking of something. So we need to ask ourselves – what is the poor in spirit person lacking? The person that is poor in spirit is lacking self-sufficiency – the ability to stand on their own spiritually. When we think about us as believers and us evidencing this characteristic, we talk about things like acknowledging our moral bankruptcy before God. We, as fallen human beings have nothing good that we bring on our behalf to please God – we can only bring the only thing our hearts are naturally capable of producing – sin. Jesus speaks of what our fallen hearts naturally produce in Matthew 15: "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person." We are poor in spirit when we acknowledge our complete lack of anything good to offer God, when we acknowledge and believe that we have no standing spiritually and that He must give us grace if we are to live spiritually.

So, given that definition of poor in spirit, how can Jesus possibly serve as an example? He certainly is not in the same position we are; he is the perfect and spotless Lamb of God, without sin in everything he did on this earth. He did not have the same corruption of heart that is the sin that evidences itself in our lives, in fact there is not even a hint of the corruption that is in our hearts. His heart was completely good – he could and did love God with all his heart, strength and mind! But, while Jesus is the Son of God, while Colossians 1 speaks of him being the "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation", of the fact that "by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Though he has that preeminent position, his words throughout the New Testament do not speak of his self-sufficiency but of his dependency. They speak of his dependency on God the Father. John 6:38 says "For I have come

down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me". Jesus' will is wholly subservient to what the Father desires.

Before we go any further, perhaps I should briefly clarify one thing, and that is the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible says that God is one, that there is only one God. But it also speaks of the three different persons of what we call the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three are united in purpose but serve different functions toward the same goal. Outside of the Godhead, Christ is pre-eminent over all, lacking nothing. But within the Godhead he is completely and totally obedient and in agreement with the Father's will. Jesus speaks repeatedly of the Father sending him: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me" (John 6:57). In John 5(19-27) we read

¹⁹So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²²The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

²⁵"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

This is a beautiful description of the unity and community found in the Trinity. Look at Jesus' words, how he describes his commission from his Father: how He "shows him [Jesus] all that he himself is doing", how he "has given all judgment to the Son", and even how he has granted the Son life in verse 26. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself".

Think about also the names that God has given us to refer to He and Christ as – the Father and the Son. Surely that picture is intentional - everything that God has given us is to tell us something of what He is like. These titles help us to understand the subservience and obedience that Christ has for the Father. And yet despite this relationship we know that they are part of one Godhead, united in purpose – God’s glory! Jesus points that out here as well, that “whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him”. It’s impossible to say you’re giving honor to God without giving honor to the Son because the Son is the embodiment of God’s will! He is everything that God has desired him to be, sent him to be.

We also see Christ’s dependence on the Father through the record of Jesus’ prayers in the New Testament. There are numerous times when Jesus is said to have gone to a private place to pray. He needed time alone to talk with the Father and spend time with him as well. One of his last prayers, the High Priestly prayers in John 17 even mentions Christ following the Father’s direction, when he prays “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do”. And then he petitions his Father: “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed”. He is asking the Father to return him to the Father’s presence, back to his position before he so humbly and obediently came to this earth. By the way he petitions his Father, we can see his dependency on him, the way he relies on and trusts Him and His sovereign will.

I think we often neglect to think of Jesus’ humility. We can think of his names like: the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King of kings and Lord of lords, Mighty God. We see pictures of him in Revelation as riding a white horse, destroying his enemies. His eyes are like a flame of fire and from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. And yet Christ has other names as well: suffering servant, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, the lamb of God. Earlier in Revelation, before John sees Jesus riding a white horse, he describes his appearance as “a Lamb, as though it had been slain”. Think of the amazing seeming contrasts that are evidenced in Christ. A conqueror and yet he conquers by being killed.

We can ask ourselves the question: 'What does Jesus' humility have to do with the gospel?' The answer: **It is the Gospel!** There would not be good news without Christ's humble obedience. As 2 Corinthians 8:9 says "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Philippians 2:5-11 says "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus humbled himself, for our sake and for the sake of being obedient to His Father, to be born on this earth in the likeness of men. His continued obedience and humility led him to live a sinless life, enduring all the sinful humanity around him, and suffered and died taking the punishment for sin for everyone that the Father had given to him.

Philippians 2 is a loaded passage, but let me just make a few observations. First, Jesus was "in the form of God". This statement does not have anything to do with appearance, but rather the underlying reality – Jesus is divine. This is a statement of his deity, before he was ever incarnate.

But then it says that he "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped". A more easily understood way to say this might be that he did not hold on to or cling to this status and the privileges that were His. As we saw in his statements in John, he willingly obeyed, his will being in perfect submission to the Father and took the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Just as Matthew 20:28 says "even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This also says that Jesus “made himself nothing”. What does it mean that he made himself nothing, or as the literal Greek says that he “emptied himself”? What did he empty himself of? We know first of all what he did not empty or remove from himself – and that is His identity as God. The Father still proclaims these same words when Jesus is baptized: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Mt 3:17). Clearly Jesus did not somehow give up his divine status. He did though give up his heavenly status. He condescended to take the form of a servant and be born in the likeness of men. Hear what Jonathan Edwards says of Christ’s condescension in his sermon the Excellency of Christ: “Yea, which is more, his condescension is sufficient to take a gracious notice of the most unworthy, sinful creatures, those that have no good deservings, and those that have infinite ill deservings. ...His condescension is great enough to become their friend, to become their companion, to unite their souls to him in spiritual marriage. It is enough to take their nature upon him, to become one of them, that he may be one with them. Yea, it is great enough to abase himself yet lower for them, even to expose himself to shame and spitting; yea, to yield up himself to an ignominious death for them. “ What an amazing truth that the King of the Universe would come as a babe so that he could die for sinners as vile as you and me.

J.I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* says “We see now what it meant for the Son of God to empty himself and become poor. It meant a laying aside of glory; a voluntary restraint of power; an acceptance of hardship, isolation, ill-treatment, malice and misunderstanding; finally a death that involved such agony – spiritual even more than physical – that his mind nearly broke under the prospect of it. It meant love to the uttermost for unlovely human beings, that they through his poverty might become rich. The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity – hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory – because at the Father’s will Jesus Christ became poor and was born in a stable so that thirty years later he might hang on a cross. It is the most wonderful message that the world has ever heard, or will hear.”

Isaiah 42 gives us further insight into Christ’s humble and gentle nature, let me read it again: “Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul

delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.”

First, think of the difference between the picture of Christ this verse portrays and the Jewish expectation of the Messiah. Their picture was one of a conquering warrior; Isaiah describes him as not even crying aloud or lifting his voice. Their picture was one of political vanquish, crushing their Roman enemies, Isaiah describes him as not so much as breaking a bruised reed or quenching a burning wick. Their picture was one of bringing forth justice by force; instead he brought forth justice by dying the most ignominious death imaginable. He was a conquering warrior and he did crush his enemies, just not in the way expected.

If you’ve never read this passage before, you may be wondering what a bruised reed or a burning wick signify. The Hebrew word for bruised here means “what is cracked” (or half-broken) and then “burning” or “smoldering” in other translations, that which is burning feebly or very nearly extinguished. So, both terms mean something that is not functioning as it should, perhaps reaching the point of being worthless. So what are the reed and the wick that are broken? These references are not to any particular person or group, but rather to any person that is in this circumstance – that is bruised, and broken or that is smoldering, your fire about to go out. This refers to any believer that has weakness – namely all of us! This is an amazing description of Christ’s patience with us, of his tender, pastoral care. John Calvin remarks on this passage: “Isaiah ascribes to Christ that forbearance by which he bears with our weakness, which we find to be actually fulfilled by him; for whenever any spark of piety is seen, he strengthens and kindles it, and if he were to act towards us with the utmost rigour, we should be reduced to nothing. Although men therefore totter and stumble, although they are even shaken or out of joint, yet he does not at once cast them off as utterly useless, but bears long, till he makes them stronger and more steadfast”.

Isn't this verse a description of all believers? Are we not all bruised reeds? Are we not all shaken or out of joint? I say "we" meaning believers here, because while the flame on the wick is small, it's a miracle that there is a flame at all! Faith often starts out as a small glimmer, as a small flame. Often it grows and dims as we encounter various trials that God sovereignly places in our path to strengthen us and cause us to lean on him. Yet Christ is patient with us, and is gentle and kind in sanctifying us and doing whatever is necessary to continually draw us closer to Him. He does not grow tired and weary of our weakness as we are so likely to do of each other.

This shows Jesus' tender compassion, his incredible love for the elect, but it also shows again his humility and meekness. In Matthew 11 Jesus says "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son choose to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light". Jesus says, come to me, I am meek and lowly in heart. I am trustworthy to deal with you patiently and kindly, come to me and I will give you rest. We also see again that Jesus says that "all things have been handed over to me by my Father". And yet though he is preeminent over all things (Col 1), he does not stand by that right. Rather his character is one that displays his tender compassion and mercy to his children rather than wrath. If there was ever anyone that had the right and power and authority to avenge a rebellious people, Jesus surely has it. He is the only one that does. Yet even when he endured false accusations and great suffering on the cross, first Peter tells us that "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly".

Application:

To conclude in application to our lives, how does Jesus' humility and character affect how we live each day? I have three points of application and then we will be done.

1. First, I 'd strongly encourage you, wherever you are in life, to consider deeply the character of Christ. Consider how he humbled himself to come to this earth, to be accused and brutally killed by sinful man, consider the purpose for which he did this. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ this morning, I implore you to consider the great need you have of a Saviour. Consider how unlike Christ you are, how self-centered you are. Consider how you work and strive to please yourself and not the God of the universe that created and owns you. Turn away from that sin and turn toward Christ, that he might be the tender shepherd of your soul.
If you are a believer this morning and are one of God's children, Consider the great love that Christ showed for His children in the way he lived on this earth and especially on the cross. Consider how Christ's humility displays the gospel, how he did not count equality with God as something to be grasped but joyfully obeyed the Father's plan. As Hebrews 12:2 encourages us, "look to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."
2. The second point, strive to emulate Christ's humility toward others, in patience with them and service to them. We have in Christ an amazing example of how to live with offensive, sinful people. I Peter 2:18-21 says "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. " When you are faced with suffering in this world, when you are suffering unjustly, consider Christ. Consider how he suffered at the hands of evil men. Of

course Jesus didn't just stop there at endurance of unjust suffering. He did not come just to endure until the suffering was past, he came to love and to serve men. As Christians, as little Christs, we need to live lives that do the same. For the joy set before us we need to endure the sufferings of this world, but we also need to love and serve those around us. We need to point the lost to Christ, to love and support and encourage our brothers and sisters in the church. When we fail to do this, we are failing to demonstrate the gospel. We are failing to proclaim that we believe the gospel. If I believe that Jesus came and suffered for me as wicked as I am, and yet I am not willing to serve my brother or sister or neighbor across the street, what does that say about what I truly believe? I encourage you to examine yourself closely that you would strive to live in accordance with the glorious gospel of Christ.

3. The last point of application I want to make is this: trust in God to complete the good work he has started in you. Rejoice that He is the one that will sanctify you and bring you to the day of Christ Jesus. Look at how the passage we read in Isaiah 42 ends; after describing Jesus' handling of the bruised reed and the faintly burning wick, it says "he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice on the earth". Despite our weakness and propensity to stumble, he has none of that. He will never grow weary or discouraged, but will continue upholding you with his powerful and tender arms. I pray that you will rest in Him, trusting the only One who is trustworthy with your soul.