

Matthew 5:3

Introduction

**What a happy estate have all those who are poor in spirit,
For it is to them that the kingdom of heaven belongs.**

I. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? (Old Testament background)

- A. At first, “poor” referred simply to those with literal _____ need.
- B. The poor were the _____ and so they were often the *oppressed* and the *afflicted*.
1. Psalm 37:14 – The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow to cast down the afflicted and the needy.
 2. Psalm 109:16 – He did not remember to show lovingkindness, but persecuted the afflicted and needy man, and the despondent in heart, to put them to death.
- C. The poor and needy had no other refuge but God, and so the poor and needy gradually came to be *synonymous* with those who _____ upon God _____.
1. Zephaniah 3:12 – But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.
 2. Psalm 70:5 – But I am afflicted and *needy*; Hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.
 3. Psalm 86:1 – Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; for I am afflicted and *needy*.
- D. In light of these things, it was the poor and the needy that God always delighted to _____! Not because they were *materially* poor, but because they were the ones who were poor in _____.
1. Psalm 34:6 – This *poor* man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.
 2. Psalm 113:7 – He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.
 3. Psalm 72:12-13 – For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, the afflicted also, and him who has no helper. He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and the lives of the needy he will save.
 4. Luke 4:16-21 – And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

5. Psalm 35:10; 69:33; 109:31; Isaiah 41:17-18

E. In the Old Testament, the poor in spirit are *specifically* those who recognize that they are _____, without any *resources* at all and so they can only come to God and cry out for His help.

F. In the Old Testament, the poor in spirit are *also* those who recognize that they are _____ of *getting* the salvation that they ask for!

1. Psalm 109:21-22 – But You, O GOD, the Lord, deal kindly with me **for Your name’s sake**; because Your lovingkindness is good, deliver me; for I am afflicted and *needy*, and my heart is wounded within me.

2. Isaiah 57:15 – For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the **contrite and lowly of spirit** in order to revive the **spirit of the lowly** and to revive the heart of the **contrite**.”

3. Isaiah 66:2 – “For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and **contrite** of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

G. **Jesus says in essence: What a *happy estate* have all those who *know and feel* their _____ *estate*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

II. What is our helpless estate?

A. It is our helpless estate in _____.

B. Revelation 3:17 – You say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

C. In light of the OT background, we can say that in the NT, the poor in spirit are:

D. Luke 18:9-14 – And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to

lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

III. Just *how* helpless are we?

- A. The poor in spirit are those who see their complete and total inability to be at all _____ in God’s sight.
- B. The poor in spirit are those who recognize and acknowledge the just punishment for their sin.
1. John 12:37-40 – But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?” For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, “HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM.”
 2. Acts 7:39-42 – Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to [Moses], but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, SAYING TO AARON, “MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT—WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.” At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But **God turned away and delivered them up** to serve the host of heaven.
 3. Psalm 81:11-12 – But My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So **I gave them over** to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices.
 4. Romans 1:24, 26, 28 – Therefore **God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them... For this reason **God gave them over** to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural... And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.

- C. We could say that the poor in spirit are those who know that they wouldn't even be poor in spirit unless God Himself had miraculously taken their unfeeling hearts of _____ and given them living, beating hearts of _____.
1. Ezekiel 36:26-27 – Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.
 2. Jeremiah 31:33 – “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”
 3. Romans 9:22-23 – “What if God, because He was willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made fit for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which *He* prepared beforehand for glory.
- D. It is not ultimately my *choice* or my *faith* that distinguishes me and sets me apart from the world. It is _____ – _____.

Conclusion

A. “Reformed” theology

1. Thou righteous and holy Sovereign, in whose hand is my life and whose are all my ways, keep me from fluttering about religion; fix me firm in it, for I am irresolute; my decisions are smoke and vapour, and I do not glorify thee, or behave according to thy will; cut me not off before my thoughts grow to responses, and the budding of my soul into full flower, for thou art forbearing and good, patient and kind.
 Save me from myself, from the artifices and deceits of sin, from the treachery of my perverse nature, from denying thy charge against my offences, from a life of continual rebellion against thee, from wrong principles, views, and ends; for I know that all my thoughts, affections, desires and pursuits are alienated from thee. I have acted as if I hated thee, although thou art love itself; have contrived to tempt thee to the uttermost, to wear out thy patience; have lived evilly in word and action.
 Had I been a prince I would long ago have crushed such a rebel; had I been a father I would long since have rejected my child.
 O, thou Father of my spirit, thou King of my life, cast me not into destruction, drive me not from thy presence, but wound my heart that it may be healed; break it that thine own hand may make it whole.
 (The Valley of Vision; The Cry of a Convicted Sinner)

2. I am an empty vessel—not one thought
Or look of love, I ever to Thee brought;
Yet I may come, and come again to Thee,
With this, the empty sinner’s only plea—
Thou lovest me.
(Martin Luther)
- B. At the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us as His disciples that we do not have the spiritual resources to put any of the Sermon into practice.
- ✓ “‘I am an empty vessel.’ If you will say that, *then* God will fill you with the life of Jesus Christ—supernaturally—and you will begin to live the standards of the Sermon on the Mount by the power of the One who gave them and who himself lived them perfectly in this world.” (James Boice)

Teaching our Children

- Q. What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?
- A. It means that we see and feel our *helpless* estate and so even though we don’t deserve it, we can only *cry out to God* for His salvation.
(Review and reflect on the Old Testament background for “poor in spirit”. See I. A.-G.)
- Q. What is our helpless estate?
- A. It is our helpless estate *in sin*. (**Read and reflect on the Scriptures under II. B. & D.**)
- Q. Just *how* helpless are we in our helpless estate?
- A. We are so helpless that it is impossible for us to be at all **pleasing** in God’s sight.
- Q. How does God judge those who are not pleasing in His sight (those whose hearts are stubbornly sinful and wicked)?
- A. God turns away from them and gives them over to keep on walking in their own wicked ways. These people will never see their helpless estate or cry out to God for His salvation.
(Reflect on the perfect *justice* of God’s *judgment* in the Scriptures under III. B.)
- Q. Why didn’t God give us over along with the rest of the unbelieving world to keep on walking in our own wicked ways?
- A. **PURE GRACE ABOUNDING AND FREE!!!** (**Read and reflect on the Scriptures under III. C.**)

Sing for joy! Praise Him! Fall down and worship!

“Blessed are the POOR IN SPIRIT, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”