

Sermon Title: Come to God on His Terms

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:3 (Sermon on the Mount #2)

Date: 6-14-20

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Come with me to Matthew Chapter 5, as we continue in the Sermon on the Mount. Today, we are going to cover the whole thing—*all* of Verse 3, from the beginning clear to the end of that entire verse. It is the first of the "Beatitudes." I'll warn you in advance: The Sermon on the Mount is full of the kind of spiritual material that many people find offensive, and I think the first two Beatitudes start the process with a very bold presentation of what Jesus says is *absolutely essential* for citizenship in His Kingdom—the very basis of spiritual life.

You know that the Sermon on the Mount begins with this section that we call the "Beatitudes," so a couple of preliminary issues: What is a "beatitude"? Hardly anybody uses that word, unless they're describing Matthew 5:3 through 12. The word "beatitude" comes from the French word *béatitude*, or the Latin *beatitudo*, which comes from the Latin word *beatus*, which means "happy" or "blessed." That's how the English word came to be; it's imported from Latin. According to my ten-pound dictionary, "beatitude" means: "Declaring perfect blessedness, or happiness, or a blessing."

Now, it moves right from that—in an English dictionary, interestingly—to talking about the concept of "beatification" in the Roman Catholic Church, but we are *not* talking about that. "Beatification" is the process that the Roman Catholic Church goes through of declaring a dead person to be among the blessed in Heaven, and then he or she is entitled to be venerated in the world, and usually, but not necessarily, that leads to "canonization," where that person is then declared to be a "saint"—which is different from what the New Testament teaches, which is that we are all "saints" (see Acts 9:32; 26:10; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 1:1, 18; 6:18; Phil. 1:1), we are all made holy in Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:2)—and once a person is a "saint" [in Roman Catholicism], they believe that person can actually help answer prayers.

So I just want to clarify: when we're talking about the definition of a beatitude, we're not going *there*—that goes beyond what the New Testament teaches. And this is just a side comment: In case you ever hear someone say this, or if perhaps you are in a discussion with Roman Catholic friends or family members, you can understand that this is one of the reasons why the Roman Catholic Church is accused of idolatry, because that idea of "beatification" and "canonization" leads to worshiping something or someone in Heaven other than God Himself (e.g., Rev. 19:10; 22:9). I'm not saying that to do anything except to help you understand: these "beatitudes" are not to be taken in that sense. They are called the "Beatitudes" because Jesus began this sermon with a series of declarations that certain kinds of people are "blessed."

So, that leads to the second introductory matter: What does it mean to be "blessed"? Well, the Greek word is not "beatitude," it is *macharios*, or plural *macharioi*, which literally means "happy" or "blissful"—or, "blessed" is a very good word for it. What does that mean? How would the people for whom this was written understand that? Well, when this Greek word was used outside the Bible, prior to the New Testament, both Homer and Heseod—classical Greek authors—used this term to describe Greek gods as being "blessed in themselves." In other words, this was *intrinsic* to what they believed was the nature of those gods: they were unaffected by the world of men, not subject to poverty or

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weakness or death. And from that pattern of the use of the word, we understand that when Jesus used it, and when Matthew was inspired by the Spirit to use it in the written form of his book, this word designates an inner state—an inward condition of "being" that is not the result of external circumstances; it's not subject to change produced by the vicissitudes of life or by outside forces. That's the way the word is used consistently through the New Testament. This is one of those Greek words that we who study and teach Greek appreciate, because it's only translated one way. The only way that *macharios*, this Greek word, is ever translated in the 47 occurrences of it in the New American Standard Bible, is "blessed." It's *always* translated "blessed."

So, you're going to notice that every beatitude begins: "Blessed are"—and that is significant. It is meant to say: This is your condition *now*. Blessed are those who *are this*. This is the case *right now*. You who may be checking it out in Greek, you're going to look and you're going to say, "Well, there's no verb 'are' there!" No, there isn't. Literally in the Greek, it says: "Blessed poor ones in Spirit." Well, that's a literary device that you can use in Greek where it *requires* you, if you're going to go into another language, to *put* the verb "to be" in there: "Blessed *are* those who..." "Blessed the poor in spirit." This literary device requires that you to add that verb in between the two words, and it's emphasizing that Jesus is saying: This is a fact *now* for those who fit this description; this is *not* some blessing that you're *going to get* in the future. There's going to be more *to it*—you'll see that in a few minutes. But when Jesus pronounces people *macharios*, or "blessed," He means: You have something only God can give, and it *is* your possession *now*.

A couple of ways that this word is used in the Old Testament—the Old Testament wasn't written in Greek, but when the Old Testament was translated into Greek, you see that this concept of "blessedness" is intrinsic to God. Psalm 68:35—"Blessed be God!" Psalm 72:18—"Blessed be the Lord God." Psalm 119:12—"Blessed are You, O Lord." (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted) So, "blessed" is a description of the very nature of God Himself.

And that same idea is portrayed in the New Testament: First Timothy 1:11 mentions "the blessed God," and then in that same book—First Timothy 6:15, Paul calls Jesus "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords." So this comes from God. He is, by nature, blessed—and so, we can be blessed by Him because of who He is.

Here's a remarkable statement about this blessedness that we enjoy, which comes from God: it's in Second Peter Chapter 1, Verse 4, where Peter writes: "For by these"—and you can look to the first three verses and find out what that means, but that's not what we're getting at for this morning—"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises"—so it comes from Him—"so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." What Peter is saying is *profound*: blessedness is inherent to God, but as His child—as His adopted child (Eph. 1:5), redeemed by His Son with His Spirit dwelling within you (Gal. 4:4-6; cf. Rom. 8:15)—you have received nothing less than what might be called a spiritual "family resemblance" to the character of your Heavenly Father.

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Now, mind you, I'm not saying anything like the false teaching of these days that says we become "little gods," or we are "deified"—that's blasphemous; that's wrong. But Jesus was clear in pronouncing that believers receive *from God* something only He can give (see Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:26), and it helps *us* represent Him in character (see Phil. 2:15; Matt. 5:44-45; cf. Phil. 2:13; Ezek. 36:27). No one can claim that kind of blessedness apart from God. You can't *achieve* this—it has to be given to you. You cannot be a recipient of the blessedness of these beatitudes if you're not a "partaker of the divine nature" of the Son of God by means of redemption. That's what Peter was talking about.

Peter wasn't the *only one* who said that. Paul declares, essentially, the exact same thing in slightly different words: Ephesians Chapter 1, Verse 3—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..." What's he saying there? This is intrinsic to God; God is blessed. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Now, I've just got to point something out to you. And I'll confess to you: it was a *really* close call in my mind, whether I was going to preach through Ephesians or through the Sermon on the Mount. I obviously chose the Sermon on the Mount. I reserve the right to get to Ephesians one of these days, but I want you to see that there's something very *similar* about that passage in Ephesians and our passage in the Sermon on the Mount.

That verse I just read to you—Ephesians 1:3—is the beginning of a most spectacular sentence; it's the longest sentence in the New Testament—it's 134 words long in Greek. If you ever wrote that for an English Composition teacher, he would rip you to shreds! But in Greek, there's a lot more precision, and as a matter of fact, you'll notice, I think in almost every English translation, nobody makes it into one sentence, because we don't *have* that many ways to connect relative clauses and portray participles and have this subordinate to that, and connected to that and all of this. But he says we have been "blessed...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"—*comma*—and then he goes on *all the way through Verse 14*, explaining what that means. Well, that's what Jesus is doing here in the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are those who are *this*," "Blessed are those who are *this*," and then He elaborates on what that means.

This passage, then—the Beatitudes, not just Verse 3—is, all at once, the *definition* of a Christian—it defines what kind of people belong to this relationship with God; it is also the blueprint of God's plan for shaping your character, because, as much as lies within you, you *want* to develop these characteristics and get better and better at them, to shape your character (Rom. 7:22; cf. Ps. 119:5, 35-37); and it's *also* the outline—or, the summary—of the attitudes of the kind of people who are going to enter Heaven.

That brings up something else: When Jesus spoke this—remember, He was in Galilee, it was at the height of His popularity, there were *huge* crowds of people who were there, and *among them* were Pharisees, and the Pharisees were the ones who *dominated* what was being taught in the synagogues; and Jesus is going to say: You need a righteousness which "surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20), or you're not even going to see *the front porch* of Heaven! You have to have something *they can't achieve*! If you asked anybody who was listening that day, "Who are the most righteous people around?"

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they would have said, "Any Pharisees in the crowd? They're the ones!"—because the Pharisees loved to demonstrate how righteous they truly believed that they were (e.g., Matt. 23:5-7). And so, Jesus is very much, in a *frontal way*, attacking self-righteousness in this passage.

So, these Beatitudes are *ingredients* of discipleship; they are *marks* of discipleship; they are *ideals* of character—but they *define* the people who are part of the Kingdom of Heaven. As we begin our study through these pronouncements of blessing, get ready for some incredible ideas! You're going to be impressed, and your mind is going to be stretched, by Jesus's skill in teaching by way of paradoxes. He loves to say this kind of thing. As you work through the Beatitudes, you're going to see Jesus talk about wealthy paupers, happy mourners, unaggressive conquerors, lusting saints—and I chose that word on purpose to confuse you, so that I can explain it when we get there—self-enriching benefactors, realistic visionaries, victorious peacemakers, and winning losers. He's stretching people to understand what He was saying.

Now, if you were overviewing the Beatitudes, you would notice: the first four primarily involve your response to God, and the rest of them—four more or five more, depending on how you count them—they have more to do with your relationships to other people. So as I said, we're going to go *all the way* through one verse today.

First question: Who is Blessed? Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 3—"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The operative word there is "poor"—that's the key word. It's a very strong word. It's a word that means: "shrinking from somebody or something," or "cowering," or "cringing like a beggar." It describes a person who is reduced to begging and has *no* sense of self-worth at all. What's interesting is to see that this is one of two words that occur in the New Testament that are both legitimately translated "poor." They both mean the opposite of "rich," but with an important distinction between the two.

The other word for "poor"—not *this* one—the other word for "poor" means: "one who is described as serving himself in the sense that he has to work hard by his own labor to eke out the necessities." It's somebody who is *barely* making it; there's no savings account, there's no wealth of resources. He works hard for a living, works long hours for a living, can't get a day off. If he quit working, he would soon have serious needs, or he would be begging. But the word that's used *here* is to describe a *different* shade of need: this is the person who *can't* achieve anything *except* by begging—the person who *can't* even work for a *minuscule* living, not self-sufficient in *any* way. He lives *not* by his own labors; he exists *completely* on the generosity of others. The other kind of poor—that may be somebody who has nothing extra. We would say: "They live well below that the poverty line," their wages are not sufficient for them to have much. But the one who is poor like this word translated "poor"—as in "poor in spirit"—has nothing at all; it is the *depth* of destitution. So those who are blessed are those who are recognizing that they are totally dependent upon the mercy and the grace of God. I bring nothing to the table. That's what it means to be "poor in spirit." Absolutely nothing that can help your spiritual condition before God.

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It's significant that Jesus chose this word, and that the Holy Spirit chose to have Matthew use this Greek word, for this first description of "blessed" ones; it is so *exactly* antithetical to *everything* that the Pharisees said and did. He chose it on purpose. You are blessed—in this sense—when you have been brought into the family of God, and you are His own true child, and you realize that apart from Him, you have nothing; you have no hope; you are totally empty. You realize your complete reliance, your complete dependence on Him, and that without Him, you are nothing. So understand, this is saying: You need God. He doesn't need you. He's not looking for "a few good men." That's not who He's recruiting. He's looking for those who understand: "I don't deserve to be with You! I have nothing to offer."

Now, there *are* people who have earthly blessings, there are people who are wealthy, who are also godly. There was Abraham. There was Job. There were others in the Old Testament. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, the ones who took care of burying Jesus—they were materially wealthy. Matthew may have been fairly wealthy; he had a career as a tax collector before he became one of Jesus's disciples. Philemon, in the New Testament, was a wealthy man. It is possible to be wealthy, humanly speaking, and spiritual—but that's the exception rather than the rule. And likewise, a person can have absolutely nothing by way of earthly possessions, but be the opposite of the attitude described by this word, because there are a lot of people who have no money, and they are money-lovers; all they *think* about is how to get money, and how to maintain things, and their possessions own them rather than the other way around.

So Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are recognizing that they are beggarly poor," and then the next phrase: "in spirit." What does He mean? Well, He's telling us what kind of poverty He's talking about. Not the realm of things on Earth, but it has to do with the spirit—the inner man, the real you.

When I was working on the materials that I wrote for training pastors and missionaries and church planters over in Russia, one of the courses they asked me to write was on training leaders and leadership development and leading to ordination and all of that, and I found out, by people who had spent a lot more time there than I had, that the Russians primarily used one passage as their part of God's Word that they use to define: "Who do we think is worthy to be a shepherd of the flock? Who do we think is the kind of person we want to lead others?" The passage that they use, interestingly, is not from First Timothy or Second Timothy or Titus or Paul's words to the Ephesian Elders—they *do* get around to those, but they go to Isaiah 66, Verses 1 and 2, and it gets right to the core of what Jesus says is essential for you to be a member of the Kingdom of Heaven. Isaiah 66:1 and 2—"Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,' declares the Lord. 'But to this one I will look'—and the implication is, "This is the one that I look upon with favor"—"to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.'" God was reasoning with Isaiah, and having Isaiah point it out to Israel, that the place that He would choose to dwell wasn't a building, it was with the *person* of humble heart—the one who is *contrite* about his sin! (see Ps. 51:17; cf. Ps. 38:18; Ezek. 6:9)

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Put a bookmark there, because that's the *second* of the beatitudes—contrite about sin. Our fallen nature teaches us to be proud, to be selfish. The Spirit of God teaches us to recognize: we come to Him first and foremost recognizing that we are *beggarly* poor. Want to see it in contrast? In Proverbs 8:13, the Lord says: "Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate." James 4:10—"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." (cf. Prov. 29:23; Matt. 23:12; 1 Pet. 5:5) You come in humility. You come realizing: you don't bring anything to this party! You're the one with all the needs.

Or, maybe you want to consider the words of Jesus when He dictated those letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, and things weren't all hunky-dory in all of them. He calls for them, in many cases, to turn around. Look what He says to the pseudo-believers in the church at Laodicea: Revelation 3:16 and 17—"So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold"—you could be zealous for Me, you could just reject Me, but you're in-between, you're claiming to believe, but you're not acting like it—"I will spit you out of My mouth. Because 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." I have a feeling I might know what passage John Newton read the day before he wrote: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." You've *got* to come understanding: God is not saying, "Oh, I hope, I hope, *I hope* he finally believes in Me! I could really *use* him! We *need* people like that!" No, He's being merciful to the sinner.

Now, look at the Content of This Blessing. Who is blessed? The one who recognizes he is beggarly poor. What does the blessing include? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The pronoun there is very significant: the word "theirs." Greek has a way of doing something that we don't do in English. Their verb forms include person and number, and so you don't have to have a pronoun—you include it with the verb. Often, they add unnecessary pronouns, or you might think they're repetitive, but the point is: they are there for emphasis, and such is the case here. "Theirs *and theirs alone* is the kingdom of heaven." No one else will ever take part in the Kingdom of Heaven—like He's going to say, later in this chapter. To those who believed that they were righteous? You need a righteousness that *totally exceeds* what they have. You need a righteousness you can't achieve! (see Jas. 2:10; 3:2; cf. Ecc. 7:20) You need something that only a beggar could receive.

This time, there is a verb included. Not only the emphatic pronoun, there *is* a verb included: the word "is" is also significant. It means that this is a *present* procession and a *continuing* reality. Jesus is not saying, "Come to Me, you are weary and heavy-laden, and *someday*, way off in the future, I'm going to give you rest!" No, He says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs"—*right now*—"is"—*and always will be*—"the kingdom of heaven." Yes, it's future—there's a *great* blessing in the Kingdom of Heaven! The Kingdom of Heaven itself, as a literal rule on Earth—that comes after Jesus comes again (Rev. 20:4-6; cf. Zech. 14:1-9; Matt. 25:31-34), but the fact is: for Christian, there is not one millisecond that the Kingdom does not belong to you; you are already part of it.

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Remember Colossians 1:13—you've been delivered from "the domain of darkness" and "transferred...to the kingdom of His beloved Son." Present tense, right now. Remember, we pointed out last time how Matthew put his Gospel together, and he reached back and talked about the ministry of John the Baptist, and how John came as the "forerunner" of the Christ (Lk. 1:17), and what he preached, and then what Jesus preached? Matthew 3:1-2—"Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' " He was about to introduce the King, so, "Turn to the King!" That's "Repent"—turning, changing (see Is. 55:7). Then Jesus comes along, after Matthew has explained the ministry of John the Baptist and then Jesus's temptation in the wilderness. Matthew 4:17—"From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' "

And I pointed out to you, and I need to remind you that the way Matthew arranged his Gospel is not *strictly* chronological; it's logical. And the message of John the Baptist, the forerunner, is: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The message of the King is: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And then, the way Matthew puts his Gospel together, this sermon—which he puts early in his Gospel, even though it came a fair amount *later*, after John the Baptist and after Jesus began His ministry; it came about, actually, about the end of the second year of Jesus's ministry—this is Jesus *expounding* on what they meant by "Repent." From the days of John the Baptist, through the ministry of Jesus, through the ministry of the Apostles, and through nearly two millennia in the church, the call is always: "Repent, *in light of* the good news of salvation." (see Mk. 1:15; Acts 17:30; cf. Heb. 9:14).

Now we have the fullness of that good news: that Christ died, He was buried, and rose again; He died for our sins (see 1 Cor. 15:3-4). But what's the message? Well, look at it: Peter preaches in the Book of Acts, and on every occasion that his sermons are recorded in Acts, he preaches the gospel and then he says: "Repent" (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31). In Acts, Paul preached repentance to the Gentiles on Mars Hill—Acts Chapter 17. He reminded the Elders of the church at Ephesus, when he was on his third missionary journey—he's been doing this now for a long time, and he reviews to them how, wherever he went, he had constantly called Jews and Greeks to repentance. He says that same thing in his testimony to King Agrippa in Chapter 26, that he preached repentance in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, and to the Gentiles, "that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (vs. 20).

In Romans, the great book on the gospel, he introduces the gospel as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16), and then in Romans 2:4 he writes that the gospel leads to "repentance." In Second Corinthians Chapter 7, Verses 9 and 10, after all the bobbles and booboos of the believers in Corinth, he commends them because they had been bearing "fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8). In Second Timothy Chapter 2, Verse 25, Paul says the goal of all the teaching and preaching is to reach out to people, that "God may grant them repentance." To the members of the seven churches in Revelation, over and over again, Jesus says: "Repent! Get back to the basics." (see 2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Ezek. 33:11)

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Since the invitation of the gospel is *always* "Repent," we can understand: this sermon is here—the Sermon on the Mount—for us to understand so that we know what God wants from us, and so that we know what kind of a message we should be preaching to unbelievers (see Lk. 13:3, 5; cf. Ps. 7:12).

The Kingdom of Heaven is *coming!* You can have a fascinating discussion about, "What if the Jews had accepted the King, and not crucified Him?" Well, that's theoretical—a nice thing to entertain yourself with. The point is: they *did* crucify Him, He died and rose again, and He gave us this glorious message. And we look forward to the Kingdom! We're going to see in this sermon, Jesus says, "Pray...in this way: 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' " (Matt. 6:9-10). So what He's saying is: "Yes, there is a coming kingdom, when I return. But those who, right now in this age, are 'poor in spirit' are those who *will* be in the Kingdom, and they will rule with Christ." "*Theirs* is the kingdom!" *Theirs and only theirs.* *Theirs* and nobody else's. There are no honorary invitations. There are no sponsor's exemptions into this thing. There's one way in (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). We possess this *position* as part of the Kingdom of Heaven now. We will, in the future, be *co-regents* with Jesus (see 1 Cor. 6:2-3).

Look what He says about us now: Revelation Chapter 1, Verse 6—"He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever." And then, look what Jesus says He has done for people "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9): "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10). And to all those who "overcome"—that's the word that Jesus used several times in those seven letters to those seven churches; the ones who turn from their worldliness that dominated especially that apostate church in Laodicea—look what He says to them in Revelation 3:21—"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

So He's saying: "Poor in spirit? You belong to the Kingdom of God *now!* In the future, that Kingdom is manifested on Earth—the King is here, you reign with Him." Colossians Chapter 3, Verse 4—"When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."—referring to the glory of the Kingdom (cf. Matt. 25:31-34). Paul again says, in 2 Timothy 2:12—"If we endure, we will also reign with Him." You're thinking, "When is that going to work out? When is that going to happen? *How* is it going to work out?" Well, Revelation Chapter 20 is where it describes the thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth, after He returns in Chapter 19. Revelation Chapter 20, Verse 6—"Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." (cf. Dan. 7:18, 22, 27; Rev. 2:26-27)

You can understand that Dirk and I don't go over every detail of the sermon before we come together for worship; otherwise, he wouldn't have picked this passage to read before one of the songs that we sang, but it's a *perfect* illustration of exactly what Jesus meant by someone "poor in spirit"—it's this parable of Jesus in Luke Chapter 18, Verses 9 through 14. Listen to this: "And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in

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themselves that they were righteous"—that's the Pharisees! He said this in public; the disciples were there, other true believers were there, but He said this *specifically* to the Pharisees. "Guys, I'm talking to *you*! I want to describe how *I* view *your* religion!" He "told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt"—which they did. He said: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." They hated the tax gatherers; they viewed them with contempt because they thought the tax gatherers were the sellouts to Rome, and they regarded them as the *lowest* of the low, *to be* regarded with contempt. Here's what happened: "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself..." Oh, my goodness! This is *God* in human flesh, saying to these people: "Here's what I think of your religion: You are calling *yourself* God. You're praying to yourself!"

Luke's account continues: " '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"—social distancing, before it was cool...The point is: the Pharisees always wanted to be *seen*; the humble one *didn't* want to put himself out in front. But he, "standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven"—remember the meaning of "poor": "shrinking back"—"but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' " I love the way he worded that! Not, "Oh, yeah, I have some faults...Help me with my weaknesses." No! "God, I have *nothing* to bring to this! Be merciful to me, the sinner!" Jesus says, "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." (cf. Prov. 18:12; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs *and theirs alone* is the Kingdom of Heaven!"

Now, how do you live out that concept of "poor in spirit"? I mean, do we always hide in the corners? Do we always just beat our breasts? No, we have to live in a real world. But how do you live this out? Let me make some suggestions to you. First, realize: This isn't something that you can do by yourself (Jn. 15:5). That's what the Pharisees did—they "trusted in *themselves* that they were righteous." Now, eventually, it would be written: "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). But they *thought* they were righteous (see Rom. 9:31-33).

Remember the Essenes that I told you about last week? They were sort of the precursors of all the monastic movements that have come along over the centuries. They were the ones who left town, moved out to the country, wore dingy, simple robes, and lived in a stone compound of their own making, never interacting with anybody. And you know what? It didn't make them righteous! It didn't accomplish the purpose. You can't make yourself "poor in spirit" by trying to focus on being "poor in spirit"—you just have to *be* "poor in spirit." And if you're *working* on your *manifestations* of poorness in spirit, you're just being selfish in another way! You're just trying to show off, just like the Pharisees. What you need to do is focus on God. "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" Read His Word. Learn from Him. The only accurate, the only helpful view of yourself that you will ever discover comes from seeing yourself in light of who God is. (see Is. 6:5; Lk. 5:8)

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Remember awhile back, we read James Chapter 1 in our daily studies? The Word of God is like a mirror that shows you who you are when you look into it (cf. Heb. 4:12).

A second thing that you can do to live out being "poor in spirit" is: starve the flesh. It's pretty unlikely that you're going to develop a "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6)—that's Beatitude #4—or that you're going to see your own spiritual destitution if you're spending most of your time and energy and resources to indulge your desires. Teach yourself to say "No" to meaningless things (Prov. 12:11; 28:13); say "Yes" to the things that enhance your understanding of God (Ps. 119:37-38; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:1-2; cf. Ps. 27:4).

Thirdly: ask God to help you. Remember that parable? The tax gatherer cried out to God: "Be merciful to me, the sinner!" I don't have any hope! We are far better off when we stop asking God to bless our plans, and we start seeking His guidance, we start to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). Where does that come from? Oh, yeah—the Sermon on the Mount!

Let me suggest some of the evidences. How do you recognize that you're "poor in spirit"? I borrowed this list from somebody else, smarter than me. The first one is: You are weaned from yourself. Your focus is on God and on *His* glory (Ps. 115:1). Your focus is on others and serving *their* needs, instead of how things affect you (Rom. 12:10).

Number 2: You're lost in the wonder of Christ. The more you get to know your Savior, the more you are aware of your need, the more thankful you become (Phil. 3:8-10).

Number 3: You're not complaining about your situation. When you realize: "I have nothing to offer!"—well, therefore you have *nothing*, on your own. Therefore, anything you *have* is because of God's goodness to you (1 Cor. 4:7; cf. 1 Chr. 29:14). Understand that, since you don't *deserve* anything, whatever God provides for you is a gift of His grace! (see Gen. 32:10) And, walk with Him for a while and you find out that what He gives you is sufficient for each day (see Matt. 6:11; cf. Prov. 30:8-9). Do you realize: every single time you complain, every single time you grumble, you are insulting God? (see Ex. 16:7-8) Who is in charge of your life, anyway? (see Prov. 20:24)

Number 4: You see the best in others. To be "poor in spirit" doesn't mean you're always putting yourself down. It means that you are realizing you esteem others "more important" than yourself (Phil. 2:3). "Poor in spirit" isn't the upside down self-righteousness of telling everybody what a worm you are all the time—it's lifting *them* up.

[Number 5] Something else that will happen if you're "poor in spirit"—you spend more time in prayer. A beggar is always begging. That doesn't mean we "beg" God—don't stretch that analogy too far. But it means: You don't have anything! So, what you have has to come from Him—you have to *ask* Him for it (Matt. 7:7-8). The "poor in spirit" knock at Heaven's gate for every blessing and for every need. And when you're "poor in spirit," you learn to want what your Father wants for you, because He knows what you *need*, not just what you want.

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[Number 6] Something else that is hand-in-hand with being "poor spirit"—you take Christ on *His* terms, not yours. You don't want Christ *and* your old pleasures (see Jer. 7:8-10). Jesus is not an aftermarket add-on accessory. He is "our life," says Colossians 3:4. You don't want Christ *and* your old morality. You don't want Christ to meet you halfway—"I'll give You all that I can by my self-sufficiency, and *then* I'm going to trust in You." You understand: "I don't *have* anything! I don't *have* any self-sufficiency!"

You know, there's a *very good offer* here, in the gospel. It's a free gift—it's a "free gift" of "eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23), and *there's no fine print!* "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest... for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29; cf. Is. 45:22; Jn. 5:24; 6:35; 11:25-26; Rev. 21:6; 22:17). "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and...He was buried, and...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This is the gospel we preached; this is the gospel that you believed, "unless you believed in vain" (vs. 2)—because if you believe anything else, that's a waste of time (see Gal. 1:8-9).

Under all of that is the concept of "poor in spirit"—that's the foundation. Now, there *are* two choices about the gospel. Number 1—take it. Number 2—leave it. There is *one way*—there is *only one way* (Acts 4:12). You're in, or you're out (Matt. 12:30). You are part of the Kingdom of God, or you're part of the kingdom which is called "the domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13; cf. 1 Jn. 3:10).

[Number 7] And finally, if you're "poor in spirit," you praise and thank God for His grace. If you are beginning with *nothing*, then you're overwhelmed with gratitude for *every good thing you get*. Every single thing you have *is* a gift from God. You know, our *dog* thinks that way. Whatever we give him, he's really happy with it! Will he take more? Sure! But he understands—"I don't have a checkbook! I don't have a car! I can't go get my own food! I totally depend on you." I'm not trying to call you all schnauzers, but I am begging you: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20) through Christ (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:22; cf. Rom. 5:1). There is one way to come to God. Do you understand now, why I titled this: "Come to God on *His* Terms"? "God, I have *nothing*. I have no hope. I have no righteousness. I have offended You. I need Your grace. Be merciful to me, the sinner."

Let's pray:

*Father, thank You for these marvelous words from Your Son. Thank You for this written Word. Thank You that it contains all the words of life, everything we need for life and godliness, everything we need to know You. Father, maybe someone here listening still thinks, "I'm a pretty good person!" Oh Lord, wipe that from any of our thoughts. We're not good. Only You are good. Maybe we aren't quite as overtly evil as somebody else who we would prefer to compare ourselves to, but Father, we come as beggars to the only One who can meet the need of our souls. Thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ. Please don't let anyone within the hearing of my voice go another second without trusting in Him for the free gift of eternal life. And then, for all of us: Have Your way with us, we pray. Put this message of Your grace on our lips, and then give us many opportunities to pass it along to others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*