

One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." [Isaiah 57:15] "For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." [Isaiah 66:2]

Such was the change that took place in Saul the Pharisee, so that he became God's greatest apostle because he realized how bankrupt he was and yet God saved him. It was this same spirit created in Lazarus that made him look to God. C.H. Spurgeon once gave this example of an artist who wanted to paint a beggar and went to that part of town where they were plentiful, and offered a handsome sum if the person would appear in his studio to be painted. The man instead bought himself new clothes and shaved and appeared at the house of the artist. So it is with many. Grace comes with riches for beggars but they try to make themselves fit for it, and thus are unfit. Spurgeon says, "The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves".

Jesus says those who have been made poor in spirit are the ones alone to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs. But this privilege is not something that will come at death, like Lazarus entering heaven. NO, it is something that is enjoyed here and now, and will be enjoyed in perfection in glory. For now such enjoy forgiveness of sin, and communion with God. Now this hope of glory motivates them in all they do. But a day is coming when they alone will possess it, when all who are proud of themselves and have never seen their sinfulness, and have mocked God will be cast out forever to suffer the eternal wrath of God against sin. But those who are poor in spirit have found a refuge in the Cross of Christ, and they will be in glory with Him forever. Have you come to see your need of a Savior? You cannot hope to be in heaven with sin still upon you, for heaven is a place where only righteousness dwells. Sin cannot be removed by your reformation today, for that can never undo a single past sin. May the Spirit of God work this in your heart, and may you from the heart identify with this hymn writer:

*Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy 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—A.M. Toplady.*

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Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

The text on which this message is based is from Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" with which our Lord begins the Sermon on the Mount.

Blaise Pascal, the 17th century mathematician and religious thinker, once said, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they use, all men tend towards this end. Some go to war, others avoid it, but all have the same desire in view. The human will never take the least step but towards this object. It is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves." How true this is. Our Lord here tells us those who are truly happy. I pray you will give me your attention, while we explore these words of our Lord. Notice at the outset our Lord is giving us the state of the person who is blessed, and not describing an action which he has to perform in order to achieve it. The beatitudes are of this nature.

What is meant by the term **blessed**? Some translate it by the word 'happy' and even though that is permissible, it is not the best. For the word 'happy' suggests a subjective state, where we feel good about ourselves. This feeling can change with circumstances, and therefore it is a happiness that is temporal. The word 'blessed' is an objective state and speaks of our relationship with God. It is used of God, and this certainly does not depend on circumstances, but it is an objective reality that is true always.

Let me give you but one example that illustrates this difference. In Luke 18:10-15 we have the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. They both went up to the temple to pray, and the Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, saying I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, or even as this publican. We can see from his words that he was feeling pretty good about himself. Now listen to the prayer of the Publican who, "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a [the] sinner". In the original there is a definite article before the word 'sinner' as if he saw himself as 'the' sinner. Now if we were to judge by feeling, we would have said the Pharisee was 'happy' but if we judge how they stood in relation to God, then we have to listen to what our Lord said, "I tell you (speaking of the Publican) *this man went down to his house justified rather than the other*".

A person's state of blessedness cannot be judged by his outward state. Appearances are deceiving. I am sure all those who passed by the beggar Lazarus sitting at the rich man's gate would certainly not have concluded that he was the 'happiest' person in the world. Nor would they

have desired to exchange places with him. Yet he possessed something, that when life was done, he was carried by the angels to heaven, whereas the rich man descended into the pit of hell. For he possessed what our Lord here speaks of, namely, 'poverty of spirit'.

What is meant by the phrase, **the poor in spirit**? This is not a natural state with which people are born, for if this was so, we who do not possess it can only despair. There are many who take hold of a word and run, without considering what qualifies it. This is certainly done here, as many take this to mean those who are materially poor will one day be rewarded by God in the hereafter. Some are not content with this interpretation, but rather demand that we fight for the rights of the poor now. They see our Lord's words as revolutionary and proclaim Jesus as the Liberator of the oppressed. Others have applied these words calling them to renounce wealth, and have fled to be hermits and monks in order to win the kingdom. Others apply the phrase to those who have a low image of themselves, that they will be lifted up. In all these interpretations you notice it is how we appear in relation to other people. But there is a qualifier '**in spirit**'. It is those who are poor in spirit in relation to God that our Lord speaks of.

The world, my friend, despises 'poverty of spirit' and places great premium on self-reliance, self-confidence, assertiveness. Who then are the poor in spirit? In the Old Testament we have indications they are those who realize their own poverty, that they are sinners before a Holy God, and stand in need of his mercy. They appeal not to their own goodness, of which they have none, but to God's compassion. They are those whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit of God, that they are undone, they have sinned against a Holy God and are under His wrath. They see themselves as utterly poor and in need of God's grace to be shown to them. They do not look to themselves but to God alone. They not only see their past sins, but they realize that they possess a nature which pollutes the best of their works. It is not only that they have sinned against God, but they are sinners from conception. This is what the worldly person denies vehemently. He may acknowledge that he sins, if he is willing to call it that. But he cannot accept that all his works are as a filthy rag.

This spirit is born in us when we are brought to see how we have broken all of God's Ten Commandments. Listen to the description given of all mankind, before God changes them by His grace. *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."* [Psalm 51:5] *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* [Isaiah 64:6] *"Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not know."* [Romans 3:13-17] These last words are written by the apostle Paul, who as a Pharisee thought he was blameless as to the Law before the Spirit opened his eyes and revealed his bankrupt state before God. It is the same apostle who now writes about himself, *"This is a faithful saying, and*

worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." [1 Timothy 1:15]

So one who is poor in spirit has been brought to see his sinfulness and how empty he is to please God. In fact in his state outside of Christ, he is a hell deserving sinner. He is taught to flee to the only refuge God has provided in His Son, who bore the punishment of our sins. John Calvin summed it up like this, "He only who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God, is poor in spirit'. Have you been brought to see your utter unworthiness before a holy God? It does not matter what others think of you for appearances are deceiving. It does not matter that you are praised by men, so were the Pharisees in Jesus' day, but our Lord described them as sons of the Devil! Have you come to see that every day you have lived, you have not given to God the glory for your existence and for His sustaining you? You have robbed God of His worship. You have denied His claims over you. You have served yourself, and have denied Him service, to one who is your Maker. Is this not sin? May the Spirit of God open your eyes and bring you to own your poverty and lead you to seek His mercy today.

If we can think of one stage in man's history when he was truly blessed, it was when Adam and Eve enjoyed fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden. They realized they were creatures and so dependent on their Creator. This spirit of dependency and trust did not long remain. They became proud in their spirits and sought to do without God. Pride led them to be as gods. Instead of experiencing a higher status, they became cursed. Instead of occupying heaven, they were now destined for hell, unless God should intervene to save them. If man is ever going to be restored to this blessed state of peace with God, it will be when he is again brought to utterly depend on God, and realize how great his sin really is. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit works in the heart of those whom God has chosen to show His kindness throughout eternity.

Let us now consider what Christ promises to those who are 'poor in spirit'. He says 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. Let us pause to realize how paradoxical this is. For men associate kingdoms with those who are powerful and strong. Yet it is not so when it comes to spiritual realities. It is not those who are full of themselves or by their might seek to bring in the kingdom that will be heirs to it; but those who have come to see that they are utterly destitute of any qualification for the kingdom of heaven. There are many when asked why they think they are going to go to heaven will often say they have done thus and so. Others say that they have not done anyone any harm. Very few will admit they are not going to heaven because they have lived a life apart from God.

The Bible makes it clear only those in whom God the Holy Spirit has worked this poverty of spirit will be heirs of heaven. For in heaven there will be no boasting. All of us by birth deserve to go to hell. We not only are born in sin, but every day we incur debts by failing to render God the service and obedience that is His due. If we were to tally our daily sins, they would mount up to heaven! It is as we are brought to own this that a change is wrought in us that makes us blessed in God's sight. *"For thus saith the high and lofty*