

Blessed Are...

Just after all the disciples sat down Jesus opening words are nine repetitions of “*blessed are...*” These are now called the “*beatitudes*.” Ten short verses each dealing with a special quality and the reasons why they create blessedness. They are called “*beatitudes*” not because they are “*beautiful attitudes*,” but because the Latin word “*beātītūdo*” means “*the state of blessedness*” and simply found it’s way intact into our language. The Greek term used and translated “*blessed*” in our translations could also be translated happy:

makarios (mak-ar’-ee-os); *makarios*...supremely blest... fortunate well off...(Strong p. 46)... *blessed, happy*: ...In congratulations, the reason why one is... blessed..”(Thayer, p. 386)

In content beatitudes, which are common in both poetry and prose throughout the centuries, reflect the sorrows and afflictions, the aspirations and ideals, of the Greeks. Practical Greek philosophy breathes in them. Orientated to earth, the Gk. mind first draws its happiness from earthly goods and values. Thus parents are extolled for fine children, mothers for admirable sons (cf. Luke 11:27), the bridegroom for winning an excellent bride. ... Praise is naturally accorded to those who have found the great happiness of love. It is accorded also to the wealthy whose possessions give them a good position in life, but even more so to those who also have a good understanding or who are free from tribulations. If regard is had for inner values, he is extolled who has attained to fame, honor and manly virtue. Kittel; TDWNT 3107

As Messiah, Christ and King, Jesus proclaimed the characteristics God sought in those who would be welcomed into his kingdom. This is the term used by the Greek’s in that day to give honor and praise for the success, happiness and contentment they bring. Beauty, wealth, power, athletic ability, mental achievement, or even good fortune were praised with this term. Although we no longer use the word in our culture we do exactly the same thing. Today we honor such people with: Olympic gold/silver medal; School valedictorian, Military honors, a Nobel peace prize, a County Fair’s blue ribbon. All convey honor. It is a wonderful experience to be so honored. Jesus revealed the things that will bring the equivalent with God.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 1 Cor 9:24-25

The honor that secular things bring to man in this world, Jesus used to motivate in the spiritual. While many work to achieve the perishable honor from men(*the glory of men*), God offers greater honor(*the glory of God*).

for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. John 12:43

who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; Rom 2:6-7

God has promised eternal life to those who live to receive glory, honor, and immortality from him. This is the very heart of the “*blessedness*” Jesus promised. God has always honored men like this. Abraham was his friend, Daniel greatly beloved, there was no one like Job in all the earth, and David was a man after God’s own heart. The true blessedness of these attributes not only brings praise from God, but each also brings its own reward.

Poor in spirit ... theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Mourn ... shall be comforted.
Meek ... shall inherit the earth.
Hunger/ thirst for righteousness ... shall be filled.
Merciful ... shall obtain mercy.

Pure in heart ... shall see God.
Peacemakers ... shall be called sons of God.
Persecuted for righteousness...the kingdom of heaven
Reviled and persecuted...great is your reward in heaven

Just as the valedictorian receives as great a reward from the knowledge gleaned than from the honor bestowed, so also the blessedness of these qualities bring their own reward. Though man may scorn them as weaknesses, Jesus bids us look at them more closely and then embrace them. God sees these things as among man’s greatest achievements.

Those who seek the highest praise from God and want to see themselves as pleasing in His sight will memorize and take the necessary steps to master these things. Each brings its own reward, and those with such qualities are the real heroes. The best in the field of humanity. Each one stands out in the sight of God!

... The Poor in Spirit(1)

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

For Millennia, the Word had watched human infants grow into adults. He watched those who like Cain had an unrealistic sense of their own wisdom, power and importance and could never be brought to submit to God. He also watched those men and women who recognized their own condition and position in this world. Created in the image of God, but fallen far short of what they could be and aware of their poverty and destitution. Such knowledge led them to trust in the Lord with all their heart and look to him before making any decision.

When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, he wanted to make it clear to us how important it is to be “*poor in spirit*.” Hence though Jesus had two words for poor to choose from, he did not use the one for those who had to work for a living, but the poor with an impediment or problem that left only begging to live.

“ptochos... reduced to beggary, begging, medicant, asking alms... 2. poor, needy, ... in a broader sense, destitute of wealth, influence, position, honors, lowly, afflicted...” (Thayer, p. 557; 4434)

Whereas *penes* denotes one who has to earn his living because he has no property ... *ptochos* denotes the complete destitution which forces the poor to seek the help of others by begging. ... It is the fate of a *ptochos* to have nothing ... but that of a *penes* to live frugally. (Kittel TDWNT; 4434)

Thus, blessed are those who are spiritually “*destitute of wealth influence or position*.” Blessed are those who recognize that they are “*reduced to beggary*” and can only “*ask alms*” for their spiritual life. They cannot work to earn a living, they can only beg. For these alone was the kingdom of heaven designed. After looking at a few parallel passages it is much easier to see the characteristic Jesus was describing.

Thus says the LORD: Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist, says the LORD. But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. Isa 66:2

The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Ps 34:18

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— these, O God, You will not despise. Ps 51:17

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Isa 57:15

As we look at the synonyms in these passages we gain a clear perspective of what it means to be poor in spirit. First, it is a “*poor and contrite spirit*,” who “*trembles at My word*,” has a “*broken heart*,” and a “*broken spirit*.” It is important to see that the Spirit uses heart and spirit interchangeably: “*broken and contrite heart*,” and a “*contrite and humble spirit*.” When our heart/spirit is broken, contrite, humble, and trembles at God’s word, we fit Jesus description of being poor(destitute) in spirit.

This is what Jesus stressed in the parable that contrasted a Pharisee who thought he could work and a publican who begged.

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Lk 18:9-14

The “humble, contrite and broken and poor in spirit” publican went home to his house justified. The proud, full, and working Pharisee did not. He went home unforgiven! He went home unjustified and far from God’s kingdom because he did not have the humble, contrite poor and broken spirit which he should and would have had if he saw himself clearly as God saw him.

God demands that His people recognize their total need for Him. He is our God. He created us from the dust of the earth. He is the source of all things. Those who come to Him should tremble and admit that without God and his power and wisdom we would have nothing. Our food, clothing and shelter, and very lives are in

His hands. But though we are greatly indebted to Him for all physical blessings and should humbly thank Him for them, our deepest destitution and need comes from sin. We have not measured up to His expectations and desires. We have fallen far short of our potential. Compared to what we could be we truly are mere beggars:

But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. ... 8 But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand. Isa 64:6, 8

God has always felt compassion and mercy upon those with a broken heart because they see their “filthy rags.” Those with a deep love for God who seek perfection but fall short because of their weaknesses will feel broken hearted. They will have a contrite spirit leading to daily sincere repentance and humble confession of wrong. These are the very people God draws near to. This is exactly what David admitted when he spoke of his own poverty: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart-- these, O God, You will not despise. Ps 51:17*

God is always pleased when we bring our broken hearts to Him. He will never despise or look down upon genuine repentance. Those who live day by day in the humble realization that they cannot live up to God’s standards are the ones God promises to dwell with in fellowship.

We must all cultivate this great spiritual paradox. We can only be blessed when we admit we are cursed. We can only be filled when we admit we are empty. We can only become rich when we admit our destitution. Only when we glory in the Lord will our own glory become great. This was Jehovah’s great counsel to all:

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord. Jer 9:23-24

So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' Lk 17:10

As the time drew near and the kingdom was at hand, Jesus revealed that the doors of God’s kingdom would only open to those who felt their own spiritual destitution. The Holy Spirit through Paul explained how God weeded out the proud and arrogant from those who were poor in spirit.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — 31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." 1 Cor 1:18-31

God placed things within the gospel that would only draw those who recognized their spiritual poverty. Those with the attitude of the Pharisee in Luke 18 will never enter the kingdom. Unless one is a beggar and accepts what God gives exactly as he offers them they will reason themselves out of ever entering the kingdom. We see this today with baptism. Multitudes upon multitudes will never enter the kingdom because they are not poor enough in spirit to do exactly what Jesus said must be done. Even after entering the kingdom God put many things in the gospel to test our humility and trembling at his word. Such poverty of spirit is our greatest strength. After being a Christian for decades Paul still manifested this poverty of spirit and stated that it was the truest mark of spiritual maturity.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press

toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. Phil 3:12-15

It is here that an important question must be considered. Are we poor in spirit before we enter the kingdom and rich after we enter. Should this poverty of spirit be exchanged for a sense of wealth after obedience? Since Jesus died to make us rich, are we now rich in such a way that we no longer have poverty of spirit?

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. II Cor 8:9

Since Jesus used the present tense “blessed **are** the poor in spirit,” the expectation is continuous action in the present moment. So the moment we stop being poor in spirit we no longer fulfil the condition of the command. But more important than grammar are the multitudes of examples of those who lost their humility and contrition. Saul began his reign poor in spirit but soon was so lifted up with pride could no longer admit wrong(I Sam 15). This also happened to Solomon, Jeroboam, the Pharisees and all others who lost their poverty of spirit. Only those who remain poor in spirit will allow God to direct the churches work and mission and to follow God humbly. The gospel not only screens out the worldly who are not poor in spirit, it also screens out those who become proud after they enter.

It is right therefore that we remain poor in spirit in our own eyes. We all made Jesus death necessary through our sinful rebellion. Only God’s divine power made the second chance we have been given possible(II Pt 1:3-4). Our gratitude is purified and deepened when we see that without His grace and love we are still destitute. Our comfort and happiness must come through Him, not through self-righteous misconceptions of our own value. These conclusions will be validated and strengthened in the next verse: “*Blessed are those who mourn.*”

Study Questions

T/F

- ___ 1 The word “blessed” describes someone who is supremely blest and thus fortunate or well off.
 - ___ 2 God never promised to give glory honor and immortality to man.
 - ___ 3 The word “poor” means that you had no means to make a living and had to beg.
 - ___ 4 A sinner is very wealthy in the sight of God?
 - ___ 5 When we accept baptism we passed one of God’s great tests of our character and enter the kingdom.
 - ___ 6 Once we become a Christian we no longer need to be poor in Spirit.
 - ___ 7 Paul believed that he had reached perfection in this life.
 - ___ 8 Jesus was rich, but made himself poor so he could make us rich.
 - ___ 9 All our righteousness are like filthy rags.
 - ___ 10 The Pharisee was poor in spirit and went home justified.
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- 10 What did Isaiah say is necessary if we want the Lord to look upon us(Isa 66:2)?
 - 11 What did Holy Spirit say is the best attitude for a sinner wanting to approach God(Ps 34:18; 51:17)?
 - 12 Who did Jesus say will not be justified even though he prays to God(Lk 18:9-14)?
 - 13 What qualities in these verses describe being poor in spirit?
 - 14 After watching proud and arrogant servants treat him with contempt what did place in the gospel to keep such people away from his people(1 Cor 1:18-31)?
 - 15 Let not the wise man glory _____ neither let the mighty man glory _____, let not the rich man glory _____. but let him that glories glory in this, that he has understanding, _____ that I am Jehovah for in these things I delight, saith Jehovah. Jer 9:23-24