

Jesus spoke on a mountain about the poor in spirit Sunday 16th March 2014

³ ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat.5:3)***

Beloved in the Lord,

In God’s economy a rich man can be poor and a poor man rich.

Today we continue our study on Jesus sermon on the mount, and we will look at the first of the Beatitudes or Blessed statements.

Last Sunday we learnt that this word blessed encompasses all the good that we receive from our Heavenly Father. We saw that this meant His good favour or His good will toward us.

So the first Blessed statement that Jesus makes talks about the poor in spirit:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Commenting on this, Martin Luther pointed out that this statement would have cut deep into the thinking of the Pharisees and religious leaders, for they linked blessedness with riches, with prosperity. (By the way the prosperity gospel is nothing new.) The Pharisees and religious leaders were puffed up; they were proud and boasted that they were rich in spirit. They boasted of their righteousness.

It is vitally important that we understand right from the outset that Jesus is talking about spiritual matters here and not worldly goods or possessions. You can be rich in possessions and totally bankrupt spiritually, in fact many people are. On the other hand you can be bankrupt or poor in the worldly sense and be incredibly rich spiritually.

So what is Jesus really talking about here? What does it mean to be poor in spirit? In my understanding it is to present to God an empty vessel for Him to fill. To not be reliant upon your own “spirituality” or your own “righteousness” or your own “goodness”; but to simply rely upon God’s incredible grace and love.

I think that Daniel puts it really well in a prayer recorded for us in Daniel chapter 9:18

“O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion.”

The one who is poor in spirit, does not rely upon himself, but totally surrenders to God’s grace, to His love and compassion.

When you pray, on what basis do you draw near to God? Do you trust in your own merits, on your track record, on your own perceived goodness, or do you fall prostrate before Him and cry “God be merciful to me a sinner”?

Jesus told a parable about two men who came to the Temple to pray. We read in 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: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ 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. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ 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!’ ¹⁴ 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.”

This parable is so poignant in its message. We see that the one who was rich in spirit wasn't blessed; but the one who was poor in spirit was.

Which one are you? Which one is me? It is important to regularly do some self examination because this parable ends with a solemn warning: ***“for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”***

It is better to humble yourself than to be humbled by God.

The poor in spirit are blessed. The one who empties himself, who humbles himself, who does not rely upon self, but who comes to Christ with a broken and contrite heart is blessed.

We read David's words in Psalm 51:17 ***“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”***

When we come to God humbly, when we know that we can come only because of Jesus sacrifice for us, because of His blood shed for our sins, then we are blessed indeed, for then we are poor in spirit.

The poor in spirit have the greatest treasure imaginable and way beyond imagination. Listen again to our text:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

What a tremendous statement! The poor in spirit have the Kingdom of God.

Earthly possessions, earthly wealth will disappear. When you die, all that you possess will remain here and be someone else's. Oh, but what you have stored up in Heaven, that remains forever.

Not only that, you already have the Kingdom of God in the here and now. You have God's Holy Word – The Bible. Jesus Christ Himself dwells in your heart through the Holy Spirit. You

have God's provision through His mighty and wonderful promises. You have God's own protection. God provides for all your needs. You have an indescribable peace and joy in your heart that transcends all human reasoning. You understand that this world is not your home. You know the transient nature of your possessions. Your perspective in life is different, your outlook is different.

Martin Luther says it so well regarding this verse. He writes: "While we live here, we should use all temporal goods and physical necessities, the way a guest does in a strange place, where he stays overnight and leaves in the morning. He needs no more than bed and board and dare not say: "This is mine, here I will stay." A guest understands that the furniture and house and all that he uses are not his.

The poor in spirit are free. When you are free you understand that this world is temporary. You are passing through as a guest. Nothing really ties you here as you are just passing through.

Paul writes:

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." Philippians 3:20-21

When you really understand this truth, then your possessions serve you and you do not serve them. You are free to live and free to die. This is a tremendous richness that no silver or gold can buy.

This is why further on in The Sermon on the Mount Jesus says: ***"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*** (Matthew 6:33)

When God's Kingdom is your priority, then God takes care of the rest. He has promised it and Paul reiterates this truth in his letter to the Philippians: ***"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*** (Phil.4:19)

How many needs will God supply? All of them! Such is our God. He loves us. He supplies all of our needs.

Let us humbly bow before Him and empty ourselves of all our foolish pride. Let us confess our sin knowing that repentance leads us to God. Pride does the opposite, the lifting up of oneself distances you from God in a flash.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The choice is ours. We can choose to empty ourselves, to present to God an empty vessel for Him to fill, and in so doing we receive the Kingdom of Heaven or we can chase the world and lose it all.

Let us take Jesus as the best example. Not only did He teach God's Word, He lived it. I close with Paul's words to the Philippians:

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.