

Matthew 5:1-3

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Blessed are the poor in spirit

- Christ shows us we are spiritual beggars
- Christ gives us the kingdom of heaven

Introduction: Do you ever feel like it’s time to get away from the crowds and just head into the mountains? Relax, spend some time with close friends? Jesus did too. Matthew writes, “*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.*” This summer we’re going to take a spiritual hike up a mountain with Jesus and his followers so that he can teach us too. You might recognize the introduction to this famous sermon of Jesus. Blessed are the... Blessed are the... We call it the beatitudes, the statements of blessings of Jesus. And we all need blessings right? We ask for the blessings of good weather and fun vacations, meaningful work and salary increases, healthy families and happy friends. This summer we’ll see what blessings Jesus has in store for his people. Have a blessed summer!

So let’s look at the first beatitude of Jesus: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Do you get it? It’s a little strange, counterintuitive. Blessed are the poor in spirit? Our culture sure doesn’t say that poverty is a blessing from God. In fact we usually feel like God is blessing us when he gives us more, more money, more stuff, more blessings. When we are poor, we assume that God isn’t blessing us. But notice that Jesus doesn’t just say, “Blessed are the poor.” He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” The spiritually poor are blessed... but that makes even less sense. I can understand how Christ doesn’t want us to be attached to things or wealth, but blessed are the poor in spirit? I thought we were supposed to be spiritually rich? What does Jesus mean?

So is it good to be spiritually rich? I guess that it depends what you’re talking about. A young ruler came to Jesus once with a question on his mind. He knew he was physically rich. He thought he was spiritually rich too. He approached Jesus and asked, “What must I do to get eternal life?” What must I do... Do you remember the story? Jesus points him to the commandments - “Keep them.” “Which ones?” asks the young man. Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.” “Yes, I’m in,” thought the young ruler, “I’ve kept all these since I was kid.” I am spiritually rich! But then Jesus revealed his heart and his sin. “Sell all your possessions and give to the poor and you will have riches in heaven.” And the rich man went away sad. He thought he could buy his way into the kingdom of heaven with his own spiritual currency, but Jesus showed him that it wasn’t good enough.

Do you ever act or think a little bit like the rich young man? Do you find yourself joining in his self-righteous nod as you hear about what God demands of us? Yep, I’ve kept all of these commandments since I was a kid (at least as far as anyone here knows). That’s a pretty superficial view of God’s expectations. Do you get upset and walk away sad or upset like the young ruler when your spiritual poverty is pointed out to you by God’s word or his messenger? We don’t like to hear about sin because it makes us feel bad about ourselves. We all want to be strong in ourselves not poor in spirit. Just think about it. How would you react if someone told you, “You know, Christianity, is just a crutch for the weak.” You’d probably get upset. “How dare you say that. I’m not a Christian because I’m weak!” We want to avoid weakness

at all cost. We should be able to take care of ourselves. We need to have everything under control, and if we don't, we learn to do a great job pretending that we do.

As we compare ourselves with each other or with the rest of the world, we start to feel smug. There's a reason that I'm a part of this church and they're not. We start to think that the things we do are at least playing a subtle role in bolstering our relationship with God. As we look to the riches and the goodness of ourselves, we turn away from the riches and the goodness of our God. We're trying to buy our way into the kingdom of heaven, but that very effort threatens to disqualify us from entering it. Christ did not come to meet us half-way. He's not a crutch to just help us along to heaven. So let's stop treating Jesus like he's just an add-on to our lives. There is no way that we can pull ourselves out of the depth our sinfulness, so let's stop pretending that we can. Declare spiritual bankruptcy. Throw your sins at the foot of the cross and cry out, "Christ I have nothing good that I can offer you, so take my inadequacy, take my lustful thoughts, take my self-righteousness, take my sinfulness and bury it deep in your wounds, deep in the tomb."

And that's repentance that Christ works in us through his law. Christ shows us that we are spiritual beggars. We are poor in spirit. We all are. So when Christ told his disciples on the mountain, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," he was talking to you. All Christians are poor in spirit. We can't approach God and demand his acceptance, so God approaches us instead, working faith in our hearts, forgiving our sins, and making us rich.

Transition: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It's quite the paradox isn't it? Christ declares us spiritual beggars, poor with nothing to offer for our salvation. Yet he also says that we are rich. Christ gives us the riches of the kingdom of heaven. He makes us beggars who are rich.

Christ gives us the riches of the kingdom of heaven.

It isn't natural for us to recognize our spiritual poverty, but God's Word reveals our deep need to be rescued from our sins. Jesus also reveals to us today that through faith our emptiness is replaced with a gift. We have the kingdom of heaven right now. We have Christ living and ruling in our hearts. We saw in our Old Testament lesson that Adam and Eve left the glory and perfection of the Garden of Eden. They wanted to be rich in themselves and ended up terrified and hiding from God. But God loved them too much to let them continue to go their own way. Did you hear him pursuing them in the garden, calling out, "Where are you?" Sin ruined our relationship with God, so God planned a rescue mission. The king of the universe would leave the glory and riches of his heavenly throne to become what he was not, a beggar, a poor man, one of us.

The world didn't see him as a king. They wanted an earthly kingdom. They followed him for his miracles and earthly blessings, but his true purpose was much greater. He came to give us his spiritual riches. Our king gives us the perfect life that he demands. Then he took our sin and carried it to the cross. He became what he was not, so that you could become what you were not. The king goes out to his enemies and calls them back to be his people, his sons and daughters, heirs of the kingdom.

When king Jesus came to earth, notice that he didn't just give us an ambiguous treasure map for how to find the riches of his kingdom. Instead he leaves us with his Word that is clear and points to him as the only Savior from sin and death. He rescues us from the kingdom of the Satan, and gives us a new kingdom. He came to save us from our inadequacy, and our spiritual bankruptcy. He came to die for our sinfulness. He came to give us the blessings of the kingdom of heaven now. Did you notice that tiny little word in our beatitude for today?

Theirs IS the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven IS yours. You are a beggar but you are also rich.

It makes a difference in your life right now. Adam and Eve had to hide from God, but for you and I, there is no hiding, no fear. Instead we have confidence before God. Do Jesus' words change your perspective on blessedness? We're free to be losers in this life because Christ has already won. Here on earth our bodies are breaking and our bank accounts are shrinking, but when you know your future, it changes everything. In heaven there will be no lung surgery to recovery from, no depression to battle against, no broken bones to slow us down. God will take us homeless beggars and give us an eternal home where the streets are paved in gold and the city of God shines like jewels and crystal. There we will be rich beyond compare because there will be nothing that we need. Does that change how we handle our wealth and our money now? It's here today and gone tomorrow, but we have riches that will last forever. Being poor in spirit and rich in the kingdom makes us generous with our riches. It makes us glad to use it for the work of the church that shares true riches with people.

You are blessed. Maybe now you'll start to see blessings in places that you didn't before. God uses our failures point us back to the one who refused to fail. We're free to be losers in this life because Christ has already won. We're free to be poor because Christ has made us rich. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. You are blessed. Have a blessed summer.

Amen