

Spiritual Bankruptcy

Matthew 5:1-3 - NCBC, May 19, 2019

Main Point: **Jesus' kingdom blessings belong to the poor in spirit.**

- **Defining terms:**
 - Blessed = approved or accepted; not cursed; "O how happy is my real position!"
 - Kingdom of heaven = God's reign or rule; Wherever submitted hearts enjoy fellowship with God
- **Poverty of spirit *is not*:**
 - Deficiency of finances (External)
 - Deficiency of truthfulness (Faked)
 - Deficiency of personality (Suppression)
- **Poverty of spirit *is*:**
 - Deficiency of pride or conceit (Humble)
 - Deficiency of self-reliance or self-trust (Faith)
 - Realization of my spiritual need (in God)
- **Poverty of spirit *receives*:**
 - Justification by faith alone (Righteousness)
 - Jesus' kingdom blessings (Acceptance)
 - Relationship with God (Eternal Life)
- **Poverty of spirit *comes by*:**
 - Beholding God's glory revealed in Jesus (2 Cor 4:6)
 - Assessing myself honestly before God (Is 6:5)
 - Asking God for the gift of a humble spirit (Ps 51:10)

Opening Announcements:

- Collection today for the Ecuador Short-term Team this summer. Help support our members as they travel on July 5– 14th to assist with medical and dental clinics

while sharing the gospel in Ecuador! Supply lists are available today for needed donations.
<<Yet Not I but Through Christ in Me>>



That beautiful song reminds me of **Galatians 2:20**, and it reminds me of the main theme of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The only kind of righteousness that will be accepted by God is the imputed righteousness of Jesus. Yet not I, but through Christ in Me!

Let's continue our worship now by opening our Bibles to **Matthew chapter 5.**



If you don't have a Bible, simply raise your hand as people are coming now with Bibles for you to use, and even take home as our gift to you.

While you're preparing to read the Beatitudes from **Matthew 5**, I wanted to just highlight one of the ways that God continues to grow all of us deeper together in our understanding of His gospel.

I am so thankful for each of the Adult Discipleship Electives that are currently offered during our 9:30a Sunday School hour every Sunday. We have been blessed with some amazing teachers who always come very well prepared to teach God's Word with passion and conviction. Every one of our classes this term has been exceptional!! I sincerely hope you are benefiting from this amazing teaching – either by attending in person or by listening online afterwards to the podcasts on our website.

It's hard to believe, but this first term of our electives only has 2 more weeks left after today, and the next 12-week term begins **Sunday June 9th**! Every 12 weeks our Adult Discipleship leadership team prayerfully assembles a

new offering of classes and teachers to help all of us keep growing deeper for the glory of God. So please note the listing of the 6 new classes that will all start on **June 9th**, and determine which one you'll plan to attend. You can sign up via our app, or by submitting the insert to the church office.

Now this morning we begin considering the Beatitudes – the shocking attention-getter that Jesus uses to begin the Sermon on the Mount.

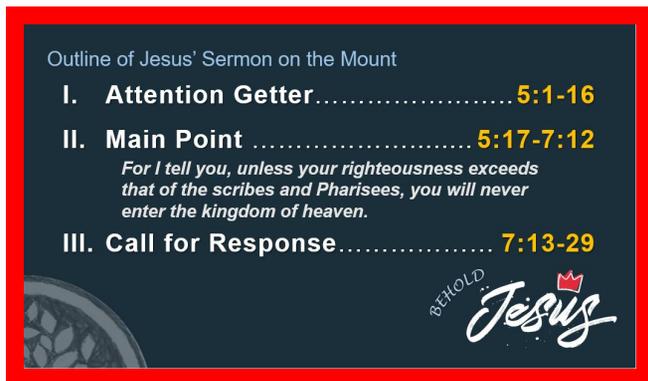
Remember,

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW				
1-3 Presentation of the King				
4-7 Proclamation of the King <i>Sermon on the Mount (5-7)</i>	8-10 Power of the King <i>Sending out the 12 Apostles (10)</i>	11-13 Rejection of the King <i>Kingdom Parables (13)</i>	14-20 Priorities of the King <i>Topsy-Turvy Values (18)</i>	21-25 Progress of the King <i>Olivet Discourse (24-25)</i>
Kingdom offered to Israel			Kingdom offered to all Nations	
26-28 Passion & Proof of the King				

the Sermon on the Mount is the first extended teaching of Jesus in **Matthew's gospel**, and it concludes the first of the 5 major thematic divisions in the book. So far in our study, Jesus has been presented as the long-awaited Messianic King in fulfillment of God's promises, and this sermon redefines what it means to really be righteous, or accepted, in Jesus' kingdom.

In our overview of the entire Sermon last week, we learned that **Matthew 5:20** summarizes Jesus' teaching: *Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes*

and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.



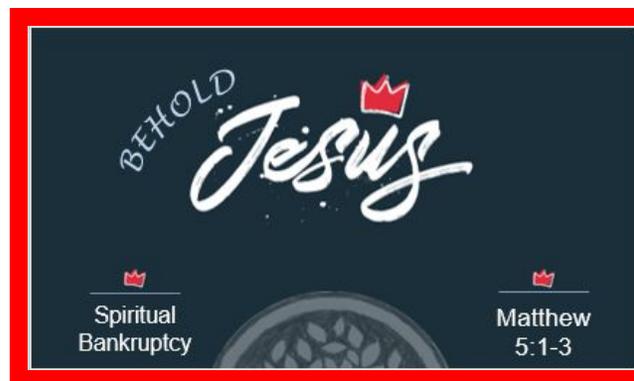
The main point from Jesus to the disciples is that you need to be given the righteousness of heaven before you can ever be accepted by God. You need to receive the imputed righteousness of King Jesus Himself – and this kind of righteousness only comes to those who believe on Jesus and His finished work for their acceptance with God!

There's no possible way for the most religious human effort to ever satisfy the intentions of God's law. God's kingdom is not made up of an external religion, but an internal relationship. Not a profession of faith, but an obedience of faith. Yet not I, but through Christ in Me!

So let's dig into the Beatitudes now. Jesus starts his sermon with 8 internal qualities that receive 8 different aspects of His kingdom blessings. These beatitudes are each gifts or blessings to kingdom citizens. Such inner righteousness comes from being saved and being born again by God's Spirit. After all, these beatitudes are

Jesus' own way of describing the fruit of the Spirit in His kingdom citizens.

Therefore, as we read and study these Beatitudes, may the cry of our hearts remain, "Yet not I, but through Christ in Me!"



Please stand as I read from **Matthew 5, verse 1**, in the English Standard Translation:

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

³ *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

This is God's Word. Please be seated. **Let's Pray.**

Jesus saw the crowds were coming to him. He knew word was spreading that God's Messiah was here.¹ Approximately one year earlier John the Baptist had

¹ Matthew 4:24

started preaching the kingdom of heaven was near. Jesus had already changed water to wine,² cleansed the temple,³ shared the good news of His kingdom with the Samaritans,⁴ and done many powerful signs and miracles throughout Galilee.⁵ Now it was time that He taught the crowds what was really so good about His kingdom rule.

The crowds expected God's king to set up an earthly kingdom. They expected political peace and financial prosperity. They were quickly stirred into a frenzy whenever Jesus healed diseases or cast out demons. Certainly God's king had come to give His people health, wealth, and favor among all the nations of the world!

But Jesus didn't want His followers to misunderstand just how wonderful the fulfillment of their kingdom hopes would be. He had good news to teach His followers! So *he opened his mouth and taught them*, starting with an attention-arresting, unexpected paradox:

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

In other words,

² John 2:1-12

³ John 2:13-25

⁴ John 4:1-42

⁵ Matthew 4:23-25



Jesus' kingdom blessings belong to the poor in spirit.

The happy blessings of God's sovereign reign belong to those who are weak, empty, and spiritually bankrupt. This is completely contradictory to the crowds' expectations. This is a great reversal of their hopes for national revival. Jesus' kingdom blessings belong to the poor in spirit?!

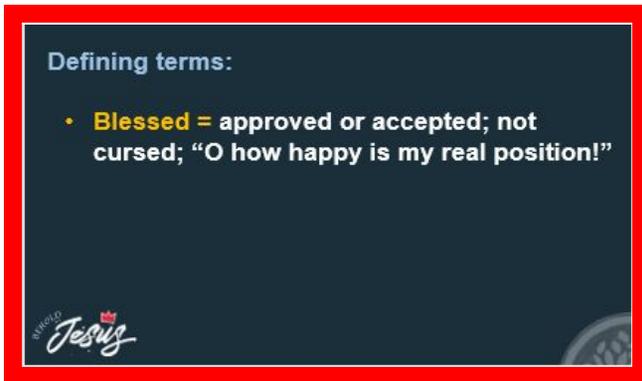
Now before we can appreciate how this opening pronouncement must have shocked the crowds, we need to,



Define a couple of important terms.

First, you will notice that 8 different times in **verses 3-11**, Jesus pronounces a blessing upon a particular inward character quality which results in some form of kingdom blessing.

So when He says *blessed*, what does this mean?



For Jesus, to be **Blessed** means to be **approved or accepted** by God. It is the opposite of being **cursed**. In **Matthew 23** Jesus pronounces 7 “Woes” or curses on the religious leaders. That’s the opposite of being blessed. To be blessed is to realize **“O how happy is my real position** before God!”

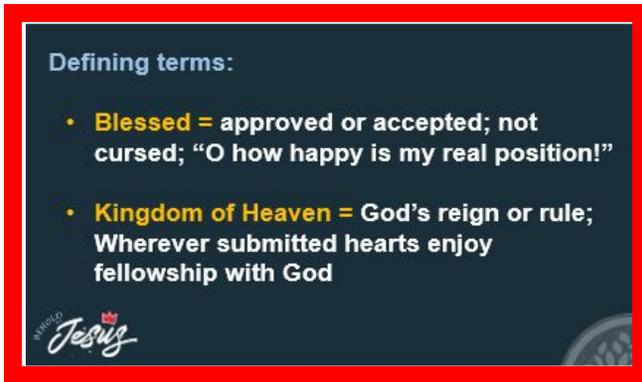
In other words, *blessed* does not describe the happiest feelings or the most contented subjective emotions. No. The blessed person is the one who has been objectively accepted by God, and is now living in the most joyful state of God’s full approval.

Therefore, please understand that the Beatitudes are not telling us what to do in order to be saved, but rather describing who we become after we are saved! The Beatitudes are not prescriptive, but descriptive! They are not imperatives which tell Christians how to live, but indicatives that tell us who we are in Christ. These beatitudes paint a portrait of the inner righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself – the only kind of perfect righteousness that God can ever approve!

So listen carefully – King Jesus is teaching His followers that the greatest fulfillment of their kingdom hopes is internal – not external. Each of these beatitudes are stunning paradoxes – God approves and accepts the weak, the hurting, the grieving, and the excluded. God only fills those who know they are empty. God only gives life to those who realize they are dead. God only gives His approval and acceptance to those who know they can never earn it!

Listen – the Sermon on the Mount starts by describing the one who is blessed, the one who has been accepted into God’s kingdom. This is the unshakeable, certain, and deep satisfaction of the heart who has been born again by the Spirit of God. There is no greater possible blessing than enjoying the rule of God over your heart!

Now we must also define,



The Kingdom of heaven. Notice **verse 3 and verse 10** both describe the results of salvation's inner righteousness using the exact same words:

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

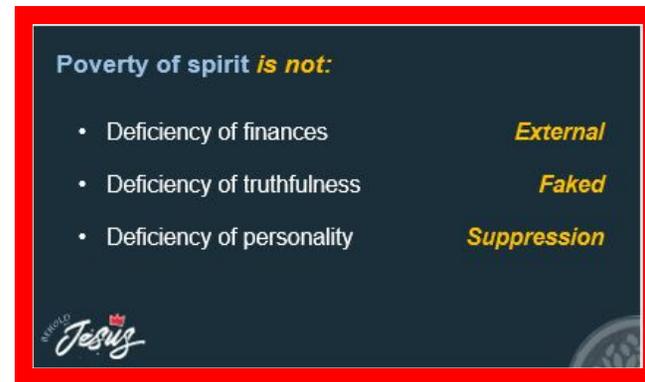
In other words, the kingdom of heaven bookends the 8 beatitudes – serving as an *inclusio*, marking the theme of everything bracketed in-between. Therefore all the beatitudes are describing the inner qualities *and* blessings of those who have been saved – those who have been granted entrance to the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven refers simply to **God's reign or rule; Wherever submitted hearts enjoy fellowship with God.** It is not a physical place, as much as it is the activity of God in human hearts who find joy in submitting to Him.

Therefore Jesus wants His followers to know that the Kingdom of heaven is both already, and not yet. It will not be fully realized until all sin has been removed from our practice, and we have been glorified in our eternal state.⁶ But yet even now, as we follow Christ on this earth, we can begin to experience the blessings of Christ's perfect righteousness in us as we submit to His Spirit and obey Him by faith.

Now let's look closer at **verse 3** by exposing some common misconceptions.

Blessed are the poor in spirit... We must realize that **Poverty of spirit is not** speaking about,



Deficiency of finances.

In **Luke 6:20's** version of this teaching, Jesus says, *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* But Jesus says here in **Matthew 5:3** that God

⁶ 1 John 3:2

approves of those who are *poor in spirit*. In **verse 6** God approves of those who *hunger and thirst ... for righteousness*. There is nothing inherently spiritual about financial poverty. In fact financial poverty can harden a person's heart towards God just as much as wealth can.⁷

To be poor in spirit is not so **externally** focused as to refer to financial deficiency.

Neither does poverty of spirit require a **deficiency or lack of truthfulness**. To be poor in spirit is not a false humility that moans and groans around in self-pity saying, "I can't do anything right!" God does not approve of this kind of **Faked**, showy humility that merely regrets the disappointments created by my own failures.

In other words, to be poor in spirit is not self-hatred. Poverty of spirit does not express itself in self-mutilation or self-harm. Because every attempt at self-crucifixion still keeps self as the primary focus. And this is the opposite focus from those who are truly poor in spirit. Poverty of spirit is always honest in its humble self-assessment. As C.S. Lewis said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less."⁸

So then, poverty of spirit is not external, faked, nor the suppression your personality. When Jesus says that

God approves of the poor in spirit, He is not referring to those who have a **Deficiency of personality**.

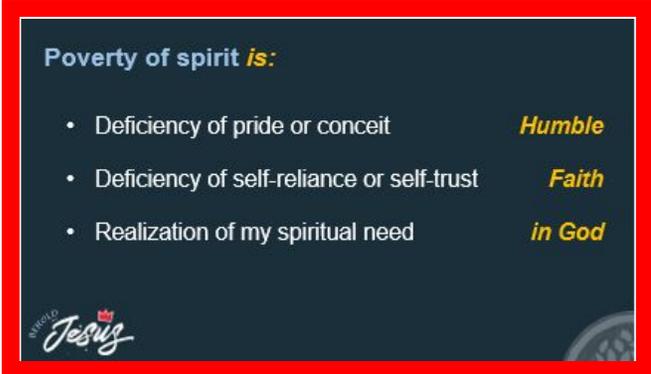
Some wrongly believe that to be a Christian means that we must be nervous, our shy, or timid, or bashful. But poverty of spirit doesn't mean that you possess a backward countenance. Christ-like humility does not prohibit courage, or loudness, or confidence, or boldness. God's kingdom is made up of all kinds of different personalities – and being poor in spirit doesn't mean that we have to suppress our unique God-given personalities.

So then let's cut to the chase. When Jesus teaches,

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

How should we understand what it means to be poor in spirit?

First, **Poverty of spirit is:**



Poverty of spirit is:

- Deficiency of pride or conceit **Humble**
- Deficiency of self-reliance or self-trust **Faith**
- Realization of my spiritual need **in God**

SAVED BY Jesus

⁷ Proverbs 30:9

⁸ *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Tim Keller

A **Deficiency of pride or conceit**. To be poor in spirit simply means to be **Humble**. To recognize that I am completely and utterly destitute in the requirements of spiritual righteousness on my own. To be poor in spirit means that I realize my own **Deficiency of self-reliance or self-trust**. My only hope for righteousness is outside of me and my own sufficiency. The poor in spirit freely admit that the only way they will ever be righteous enough to be accepted by God is if they receive the righteousness of Jesus which comes by **Faith** in Christ alone.⁹

To be poor in spirit is to recognize your own complete lack of spiritual resources, and therefore to completely cast yourself upon the mercy of God alone. God blesses, or accepts those who are poor in spirit, meaning they **Realize their** profound and desperate **spiritual need for God**.

You see in reality, all sinners are spiritually poor – for there is no sinner who possesses the adequate resources in their own efforts to truly enter the kingdom of heaven. But not all sinners *realize* their need. Not all sinners *admit* and *acknowledge* that trusting their own flesh will only lead to eternal judgment and death.¹⁰

The way of this world is to believe in yourself! Pursue power, comfort, success, and recognition!! You can trust

your education, you can trust your accomplishments, you can trust that you are superior to so many others – there's no one you can trust more than yourself! So believe in yourself! Trust yourself. After all, a good God will understand that you've made a good effort! You are far more religious than most...

But to be poor in spirit is to honestly see yourself as you truly are before a holy and all-righteous God: lost, hopeless, helpless, and completely dependent upon God's mercy. To be poor in spirit is to understand and embrace the biblical doctrine of your own sinful depravity.

Like the prophet in **Isaiah 6:5**, poverty of spirit cries out, *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”* Like the tax collector in **Luke 18:13**, the poor in spirit cries out, *“God, be merciful to me a sinner!”*

Please don't miss the shocking paradox of how Jesus begins this sermon. He's saying, if you think you are good enough to enter God's kingdom, then God curses you. Only those who know they aren't good enough are those to whom God will give His kingdom righteousness!!

If you want to be accepted by God, you must only boast in your weakness. It is your spiritual pride and trust in your greatest strengths that will keep you from entering God's kingdom. Only your admission of your spiritual inabilities will lead to the greatest spiritual blessings!¹¹

⁹ Romans 3:25

¹⁰ Jeremiah 17:5-6; Psalm 1:4-5; Romans 8:8; Ephesians 2:1-3

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

In other words, this means that the very first beatitude of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount trumpets the wonder of salvation by Divine Accomplishment! **Matthew 5:3** preaches the doctrine of justification by faith alone! The opening to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is a heart-stopper: Only those who forsake their pride and repent of their spiritual strengths will ever receive the blessing of being accepted and welcomed into God's kingdom!

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven is a radical, topsy-turvy paradox that teaches that repentance of sin and faith alone in Christ alone is the only way to be saved!

For only the poor in spirit *receive*:



Justification by faith alone. Not by works, lest they would boast.¹² But they are blessed simply because of the

¹² Ephesians 2:8-9
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grace and mercy of God that grants the perfect imputed **Righteousness** of Jesus Himself to their account.¹³

You see, the poor in spirit believe that through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and through His resurrection from the dead, He accomplished a great reversal. A great transaction of unmerited substitution was accomplished when Jesus went to the cross as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world.

Jesus' kingdom blessings, meaning primarily that sinners like you and me can receive joyful **acceptance** by our holy Creator, are lavishly granted to all who simply turn from trusting their own spiritual strengths, and become poor in spirit.

To humbly believe in God alone for your righteousness is to be poor in spirit, and thus receive **eternal life**, which is an everlasting joyful **Relationship with God** as your Father, and you as His beloved child.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' emphasis is on "Theirs alone." Only the poor in spirit, and not the others, receive all the benefits of entrance into God's kingdom.

So let me pause and ask you a question from Pastor Tim Keller: are you middle-class in spirit?¹⁴

¹³ Titus 2:11-13; 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁴ "Life in the Upside-Down Kingdom," Dr. Tim Keller, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol 17:3, Spring 1999, 48-53.

To be poor in spirit is to admit that God owes me nothing. The only thing I deserve from God as a rebellious sinner is His just wrath and eternal punishment. But because of His merciful command, I cast myself on His grace, and rely completely on the finished work of Jesus Christ for His acceptance of me. “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling!”¹⁵

But to be middle-class in spirit is to believe that while I’m not perfect, I’m better than some. I’ve made good effort. I’ve done some good for God. So God owes me something. To be middle-class in spirit is to believe God shouldn’t ever let bad things happen to me. To be middle-class in spirit is to see Jesus as just a good example – not your substitute that accomplished every part of your righteousness for you – but just your example that showed you how to do it. Jesus helps you out at times when you need a little extra... but for the most part, the middle-class in spirit sees their Christianity as a cooperative partnership where their righteousness is mostly their own doing, as they follow Christ’s good example, and rely on His help every now and then.

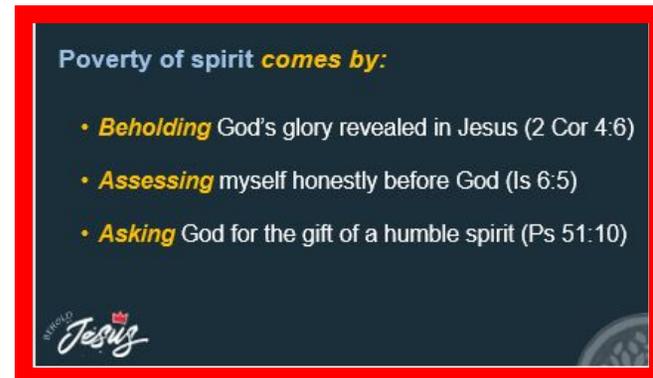
Loved ones, only the poor in spirit are blessed and accepted by God. *For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Repent today of proud middle-class spirituality. You must humbly embrace your fatal spiritual diagnosis if you are to be saved.

¹⁵ Lyric in the hymn, “Rock of Ages,” Augustus Montague Toplady.
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So we have learned that poverty of spirit is the first result of having a heart that is born again. It is the inner characteristic of those who receive Christ’s righteousness. And since all of the beatitudes are descriptive of who Christ makes us to be, and not prescriptive of what we are to do, then the question becomes, how can we grow in humility? Since we know that the Scriptures command us to be humble and repent,¹⁶ how should we cultivate a greater poverty of spirit in our own hearts?

From our study of **Matthew 5:3** we can understand that **Poverty of spirit comes by:**



Beholding God’s glory revealed in Jesus, Assessing myself honestly before God, and Asking God for the gift of a humble spirit.

You see, you will never become poor in spirit by looking at yourself. No one can humble himself by his own will-power or self-reflection. For if you look at yourself,

¹⁶ James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:5-6

you will either see your failures and envy others through inferiority, or see your accomplishments and provoke others through superiority.¹⁷ But either way, the longer a sinner looks at himself, the more his view of Christ is obscured!

Therefore look to Jesus dear friend!! Behold – look at this – He was forsaken so that you could be accepted and blessed by God! He hung on the cross in the place your sins deserved, so that you might be welcomed and cherished and adopted by your Heavenly Father! Gaze upon the glory of our merciful God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ!

As C.S. Lewis once wrote, “The real test of being in the presence of God is that you either forget about yourself altogether or see yourself as a small, dirty object. It is better to forget about yourself altogether.”

It is a Divine Accomplishment of God’s grace for a sinful heart to be emptied of his pride and his self-love. Nothing but a direct confrontation with the all-supreme King of Heaven will produce poverty of spirit.

Therefore, humble yourself through biblical study of the character and nature of our great God. Study His justice, His mercy, His goodness, and His power. Study His glory and His wisdom, study His compassion and His patience.

And then make sure that you are not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think with sober judgment, according to the faith that God gives you in His

¹⁷ Galatians 5:26

Word.¹⁸ You must have a clear understanding of the biblical doctrines of your sinful depravity if your pride is to be humbled. You must come to see your spiritual strengths as genuine obstacles to your dependence on God’s grace. You must consider your sins as first, worst, and most when compared to others.¹⁹ And you must not practice the sins of partiality.²⁰

The poor in spirit will never be racist, nor will they care to spend more time with the rich or the powerful or the world’s most elite. They will joyfully fill their homes with the poor, and the weak, and the sick, and the excluded. For after all, that is who they understand themselves to be according to an honest, biblical assessment.

Finally, Jesus wants the crowds to know, that you only become poor in spirit by asking God to give you a circumcised heart. A new and cleansed heart by the power of His Spirit – on the basis of the finished work of Jesus the King on our behalf. To be granted the righteousness of God Himself simply as a grace gift by faith, is the greatest joy possible to man!

¹⁸ Romans 12:3

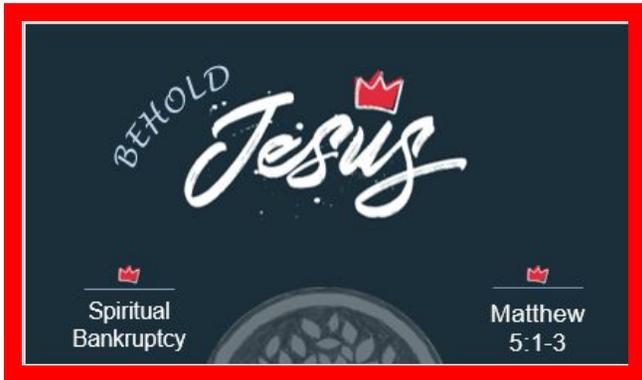
¹⁹ Matthew 7:3-5

²⁰ James 2:1-13



For **Jesus' kingdom blessings belong to the poor in spirit.**

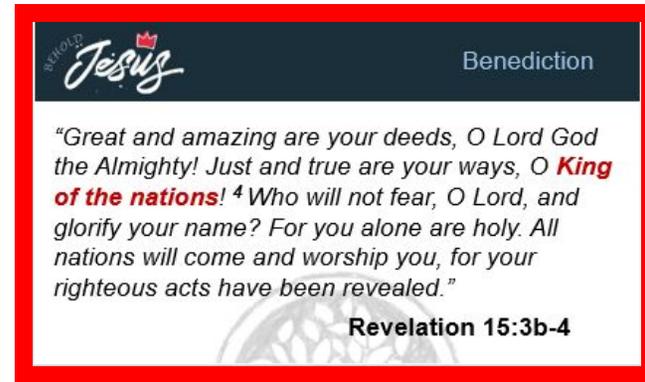
O church, may we hear the teaching of King Jesus, and may the cry of our hearts remain, "Yet not I, but through Christ in Me!"



Let's pray.

<<Give Us Clean Hands>>

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



*"Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O **King of the nations!** ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

Recommended Resources on Spiritual Bankruptcy:

- Psalm 1:1; 32:1-2; 34:6; 40:17
- Proverbs 16:5, 19
- Isaiah 6:5; 57:15; 61:1; 66:1-2
- Zephaniah 3:12
- Matthew 19:23-24
- Luke 1:53
- John 15:5
- Romans 3:10-12, 19; 12:3
- 1 Corinthians 1:26-29
- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
- Philippians 3:7-11
- James 4:10
- 1 Peter 5:6-7
- Revelation 3:17
- <http://www.newcityindy.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/Upsi-de-Down-Kingdom.Tim-Keller.pdf>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/blessed-are-the-poor-in-spirit-who-mourn>
- “Present Pain, Eternal Gain” Sermon on Luke 6:17-26 by Pastor Kevin, November 5, 2017
- “The Humble Boldness of Love” Sermons on Galatians 5:25-6:6 by Pastor Kevin, August 20 & 27, 2017
- *Humility*, CJ Mahaney
- *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Tim Keller
- *Pride and Humility*, Stuart Scott

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Matthew 5:20. How does the first Beatitude found in Matthew 5:3 help set the tone for the main point of Jesus’ sermon?
2. Read Luke 18:9-14. Which person do you most relate to in this parable, and why? How do you really feel about yourself as you think of yourself in terms of God, and in the presence of God?
3. Read Matthew 5:3. Are you “poor in spirit” or “middle-class in spirit”? What cost would be too much for you to pay for your identification as a disciple of Jesus? Where is your true treasure found?
4. Read Matthew 5:3. What does it mean to be blessed by God? Do you believe you are blessed by God? How come?
5. How do you seek to cultivate humility in your relationship with God? Pray that God will increase your faith by giving you a more biblical understanding of your own sinfulness and His glory.