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Blessed are poor in spirit

This week we begin considering the nine *blesseds*, or beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. In brief, Jesus' sermon describes the way for people of God, for those who are in His kingdom through faith in Jesus.

The first of the nine is,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God” (3).



Let's start at the beginning with the word *blessed*. The word here first referred to being without cares and worries, and then came to describe a state of well-being, of happiness. Some people don't care for the word *happy* being used here because of different ideas of the word today. True happiness, the happiness the beatitudes speak of, is a state of being that goes beyond a response to our situation, or beyond being accepted or approved. It is part of being and living as God created us to be, having received God's goodness and being rightly related to Him and others. It describes a state of steadfast delightful certainty from God that does not go up and down with the breezes and storms of life. True happiness comes from being in and living out the kingdom of heaven.

That brings us to the phrase, “the poor in spirit”, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” What does it mean to be *poor in spirit*? There are several New Testament words for poor. This one was used of destitute beggars who were so poor and unable to provide for themselves that they depended on others. Jesus tells us, “Blessed, truly happy are the totally destitute beggars, the helpless poor in spirit.”

What does that mean? Jesus is not speaking of those without a home, food and money, nor about those with low self-esteem. He is referring to our spiritual nature, to how we see ourselves and relate to God. In essence, He tells us “Happy are those who know and see themselves on their own as having nothing to offer God, as being spiritually bankrupt.” These people understand there is no way they can save themselves, and so then come to God, trusting in His grace through Jesus.

The contrast between humble, poor in spirit people and those who are not is clearly pictured in a story Jesus told to and about people who trusted in what they did and looked down on others.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and began praying this in regard to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, crooked, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to raise his eyes toward heaven, but was beating his chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other one; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 18:10-14

The humble ones are blessed, are truly happy because they have humbled themselves before God, have received His grace, and now are in His kingdom. That is the only way we can be right with God, and the only way we can truly be happy. Remember, true happiness is a state of steadfast, delightful certainty from God that does not go up and down with the breezes and storms of life. Any other way is a perpetual roller coaster of highs and lows based on breezes and storms of life, on the circumstances, achievements, emotions. Living in the kingdom, in part, is described by the apostle Paul this way,

“those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17).

The poor in spirit have been saturated to the core with God’s love, really live, have true happiness, reign in life rather than being victims, having every sin forgiven and so having peace with God and freedom from guilt and shame ... *and so much more!*

Yes indeed, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

Pastor Lyle