

The Messiah Has Come
Week 11
Matthew 5:1-4
“First Things First”

Introduction

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.” **Matthew 5:20**

There are many religious people in this world. And most of them, if not all, think that their particular brand of doctrine is the perfect prescription for pleasing their supreme deity of choice. Jesus would be more than happy to point out that belief as false. In His time on earth, He saw right through the hypocrisy of the human condition. He could see how man's feeble attempts to live up to God's standards, while convincing themselves they had done just that, was to-say-the-least unfulfilling, and ultimately, a road that leads to nothing less than depression and anxiety. You **CANNOT** live good enough to please God by your own efforts.

Many liberals today will argue that their “religion” can be described as living according to the standards given in Christ's famous “*Sermon on The Mount*”. In fact, many will say that this is all the Scripture they need. What they do not understand is that this wondrously famous sermon was not designed to save, it was in fact given to demonstrate our need for a *Savior*! Any who claim they can fully satisfy the requirements laid out in the sermon on the mount are simply fooling themselves.

Enter the Pharisees, that overly zealous group of self-righteous religious leaders, who fancied themselves as God's favorites. They were not only convinced that they fully obeyed The Law of Moses, but that they had surpassed that law. They took God's word and added list upon list of things that must be done in order to elevate oneself to God's perfect standard. And by doing so they heaped burdens upon the people's shoulders that no one could bear. And Christ had nothing good to say about them. (**Matthew 23:1-15**).

As Christ went about preaching and healing in His home region of Galilee, throngs of people were drawn to His power, which is understandable, considering that not only had no one ever taught with such authority, but also He had the power to heal diseases like had never been seen before. So obviously the word quickly spread far and wide throughout the land, bringing multitudes to see and experience for themselves this phenomenal teacher, Who claimed to have been sent by God Himself.

The people were distressed and were left longing for something to fulfill the emptiness inside themselves. They were poor and despised, feeling left out by those who claimed to belong to God. Not only were they oppressed by the cruel indifference of Rome, but also by the oppressive religious zealots, who were far more concerned with fleecing the flock than shepherding it. I can only imagine the shock wave that reverberated through the crowd that day on the mountain when the very first word out of Jesus' mouth was “*Blessed*” (makarios in the Greek). It was a word used to describe the supreme happiness only enjoyed by “*the gods*” or those who had passed on, leaving the cares of this world behind them. How the people that day must have longed to find lasting “*makarios*”.

As the sermon continued, it must have sounded strange to the people, for what The LORD described as prerequisites to lasting joy and happiness actually, on the surface, sounded to be exactly the opposite. After all, who wants to be poor in spirit, to mourn, or to be persecuted? I wonder how many in the crowd that day actually left in the middle of the sermon, or even after the first few words! But to do so would mean that they missed the point entirely. Jesus was sharing what life would be like, if a person could be somehow transformed from the inside out in such a way as to be happy, to have joy, as it were, regardless of ones circumstance or difficult surroundings. How happy a person could be, if they but understood the joy of becoming a citizen of the kingdom of heaven!

The sermon was also offered to those who thought they were doing “ok”, when it came to pleasing God. For Jesus took the *Old Testament* Law and elevated to heights never before imaginable. For you see, it is not enough just to obey the commands of God, but we must also obey them with the right heart attitude. Just because you haven’t committed murder, doesn’t mean you haven’t “murdered in your heart”, and just because you haven’t physically committed adultery, doesn’t mean that you haven’t committed adultery in your heart (***Matthew 5:21-30***). What a devastating blow Jesus’ words must have been to the sinner who thought God was pleased with him!

Today, we will begin to discover the actual intent behind the sermon on the mount, for it is impossible to live up to its requirements given here, without some type of divine empowerment. And that empowerment can only come by the indwelling of The Holy Spirit of God Himself. And in order to obtain this empowerment, one must become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. And that can only be done by the acknowledgment of its *King*. And this is why Christ began His sermon with what is commonly referred to as “*The Beatitudes*”. Today we will only be discussing the first two of them, namely; *Blessed are The Poor in Spirit*, and *Blessed are Those Who Mourn*.

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit (vs. 1-3)

When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. Then He began to teach them saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” **Matthew 5:1-3**

I had someone ask me just this past week, “Why do you think Jesus waited to begin His sermon until after His disciples came up to where He was?” I just love questions like that, it gets the heart racing and the expository blood pumping! *The Bible* doesn’t say why Jesus didn’t begin the sermon on the mountain until His disciples gathered around Him. But I do have a theory, just a theory mind you, as to why. I believe it was because they were His main audience. They were the students in His classroom. The word “*disciple*”, in the Greek, means “*student*” or “*learner*”. So what good teacher would begin his class lecture before the students even got there?

If you are a disciple of Christ, then He doesn’t want you to miss anything about the kingdom. And that is what the sermon on the mount is about; how *His* subjects are expected to behave in *His* kingdom. If Christ is your LORD and Master, then He has every right to tell you how to live. And He wants to be sure that you are included in on all that He is doing. That, I believe, is why He waited on His followers, and that is the same reason that He wants to keep you in the loop, as it were.

Remember the story in *Genesis*, when God set out to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (***Genesis 18-19***)?

The men got up from there and looked out over Sodom, and Abraham was walking with them to see them off. Then The LORD said, “Should I hide what I am about to do from Abraham? Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of The LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how The LORD will fulfill to Abraham what He promised him.” **Genesis 18:16-19**

Did you catch that? God refused to act without telling Abraham, His *friend*, what He was about to do. Why? Because He had chosen Abraham, and He wanted him to be included in what He was doing! And you might say to me, “Yes pastor, but that was Abraham, and he was special, *The Bible* calls him “a friend of God” (***Isaiah 41:8***). Ok, then what about the words that Jesus spoke to His disciples the night before He was crucified?

I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father. You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask The Father in My Name. He will give you. **John 15:15-16**

And I believe that is why He waited until His friends were seated and in place before He began teaching. He doesn't ever leave out His friends! And if you are a Believer in Christ, then He will not leave you out either!

Now to the first beatitude:

Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. **Matthew 5:3**

The words that Jesus used for "poor in spirit" (*ptochos* and *pneuma*) literally mean someone who is completely destitute within. The best way I have heard it described is "someone with the spirit of a beggar inside themselves". There are many words for poor or poverty in the Greek, but *ptochos* speaks of someone who is in such desperation that they have no means of helping themselves. This is the state of every one who would wish to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no possible way for you to do anything to enter in, for it is beyond your power to do so. So much for all those people who think that God will be impressed with their goodness! The Scripture is clear:

There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers venom is under their lips... **Romans 3:10b-13**

Paints a pretty grim picture does it not? And this is exactly what the sermon on the mount was intended to do, to expose our hearts for how they really are! And when that is done, we realize how helpless we are to save ourselves. We become poor in spirit, destitute and desperate for the salvation we need. And that leaves us only one option; to run to Jesus!

The first step to being saved, to enter into the kingdom, is to realize that you need a Savior. To be poor in spirit is to realize that without Christ you have no hope whatsoever. It is this reality that drives us to our knees to cry out for His mercy and grace. You will never be saved until you realize you *need saving*! The good news is... Jesus promised that those who bow before Him and ask for His forgiveness will be blessed ("Markarios"), or happy, beyond their wildest imagining. No matter what is going on in the life of a Believer, the joy that comes from being right with God never fades away. This is why Christians seem so strange to the world. Our joy and our journey, if you will, begins with brokenness! We will find the riches of true happiness, when we first see our own abject poverty.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn (vs. 4)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. **Matthew 5:4**

Happiness that comes from brokenness and mourning? "How is that even possible?", the disciples must have thought when they heard that! But that is what Jesus taught on the mountainside that afternoon. I wonder if those who didn't walk away after the first beatitude didn't consider doing so after this one. So how does this even work? Maybe I can answer that question with an illustration.

Many years ago, I did something so incredibly stupid that I still to this day can't believe I did it. I used to be a loan officer at a bank before I went into ministry. Part of my many functions there was to do construction loans for people who were building new homes. In the construction process the person gets

an up front loan, but the money is only dispersed as the work on the home is completed. One Friday afternoon at the bank, I was swamped with all kinds of different things. I had a big closing deadline that was fast approaching, along with many applications in the pipeline that I was trying to decide whether or not to approve, as well as an endless string of phone calls that I needed to return....

That is when it happened. A lady called me for an advance on her construction loan for thirty thousand dollars. I approved the advance and started filling out the necessary deposit to put the funds in her construction account. As I was doing all of that, I had a few more phone calls coming in while simultaneously attempting to finish my loan documents in time for my closing. So in essence I was doing about ten things at once. It was pure chaos that day. And I was thankful that it finally came to an end, and I went home.

That evening something started nagging at me. An unsettling feeling that I had failed to do something. I began to retrace the days events in my mind... Then it hit me... I didn't remember looking up the lady's account number for her construction deposit. But I remembered making the deposit, so where did I put the money? A sickening feeling came over me. Surely I wouldn't do that?! Would I? What account number could I have possibly put that money into without looking it up. There was only one account number that I knew from memory... and that was *MY ACCOUNT NUMBER*! A quick phone call to the after hours banking service confirmed my fears. Let me make this plain, I put thirty thousand dollars of someone else's money in my own personal checking account! I was sick. And I just knew I would be fired as soon as it was discovered.

My mind started racing through a million different scenarios. I knew I was fired, that wasn't even in question. But what else could happen? I had committed bank fraud. That was a federal crime! No one would believe it was an accident, when I tried to explain the circumstances. I was on the phone and scrambling to get everything done, and I mistakenly wrote my own account number in the blank deposit slip. Nobody on earth would buy it. I was going to jail... for decades. I would miss my kids graduation and marriages. Would Sandi wait for me while I languished away in some federal penitentiary wearing my orange jumpsuit? My life was ruined!

At first, I thought of trying to cover up my mistake by going in quietly on Monday and transferring the money back to where it belonged. But that wouldn't work, the transaction was on permanent record. There was no way of hiding it. I knew that I could not make it go away quietly, and I also knew that I was going to go insane if I had to wait all weekend carrying around all this dread. So I decided to take action, right then and there, I called the bank president at home, which was something I had never done before.

The bank president's name was Dean Hamilton, and he was like a second father to me. I was terrified to tell him, because I had great respect for him, and my carelessness would cause him to lose any respect that he might have had for me. The thought of him being disgusted and furious with me made my predicament even worse. But reluctantly, I made the call and confessed to him what I had done. And that's when something amazing happened!

Mr. Hamilton told me that he *believed me*! And he said, "Don't worry about it Scott, everyone makes mistakes. We will transfer the money back on Monday, and it will be fine." I cannot tell you the relief that came over me in that moment. Not only did my boss believe me, but he forgave my transgression instantly and worked to help me to fix it! I went from absolute panic and guilt to knowing that the man I worked for and respected, valued me and had no intention of losing me. My service mattered to him! I cannot describe to you the joy that brought to me. Now read the verse again:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

Now listen to me. Jesus knows full well how bad you've messed up. You can't hide what you've done, for its all written down in your permanent record (**Revelation 20:12**). But when you come to grips with who you really are, and what you've really done, that's when the beggar's spirit takes hold. And then, we become broken over our sins. We mourn, not only for the consequences we face, but even more so in the knowledge of how we have sinned against a Holy God. We have become a source of disappointment to Him. So what do we need to do next? We make the call. We get on our knees, confess what we've done. We don't excuse it, we don't try and sugar coat it, we get real with The Father. And you know what happens next? He forgives it, and He fixes it! He does this, because He loves you

and does not want to lose you. You have value... to Him! Blessed are those who mourn, for they ***will be comforted***. And that is how that mourning leads to happiness!

These two beatitudes (the word means blessedness) are the beginning steps one must take in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. To see Christ the King as He is and hear of His righteous standards sheds light upon our own filthiness and degradation. We realize that there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. Nothing that we can offer to a holy God as a payment for what we have done. We are broken and mourn over our sinful choices. And we come to Him, asking to be forgiven, even though we do not deserve it. And not only are we comforted, but He helps us to *fix the problem*! And that is how brokenness and mourning can lead to blessing.

You cannot live by the standards set forth in the sermon on the mount, but God desires to help you fix that. So, first things first, run to Jesus and let Him heal your broken heart and turn your mourning into joy!

And that is why it is called "*The good news of the kingdom of heaven*".

If we say "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ***1 John 1:8-9***

TRUTH!!!