

The Great Reversal: Poor in Spirit

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The blessings and favor of God only come through the path of Christlikeness. In God's Kingdom, true transformation happens from the inside out, beginning with sincere humility that recognizes one's own spiritual poverty apart from God.

Matthew 5

ILLUSTRATION

Not all sermons are created equal. There're many different types of sermons... For one, there's the rocking chair sermon. It goes back and forth, back and forth, but gets you nowhere... Then there's the casserole sermon – a little bit of everything, but nothing solid to chew on... And the battle of Jericho sermon. The pastor marches around the subject 7 times before it falls flat... And the Duracell sermon. It keeps going and going and going... And the oil rig sermon. If you haven't struck oil in 20 minutes, stop boring... Then finally there's the SF 49ers sermon. It starts out on a good note but ends on a disappointing note, never hitting the CHIEF application.

INTRO

It's true that we've all endured our share of boring sermons... I hope this isn't one of them, but the church has had its share. Charles Spurgeon once gave a commentary on boring preachers and dreary sermons:

"No anesthetic can ever equal some discourses in sleep-giving properties; no human being, unless gifted with infinite patience, could long endure to listen to them, and nature does well to give the victim deliverance through sleep."

If you were to walk into a first-century synagogue, you'd find a boring rabbi and a snoring congregation. The Jewish Talmud contains specimens of sermons taught by the rabbis. They consisted of the oral traditions and rabbinic interpretations of the OT law. **AT Robertson** sums them up,

QUOTE

"They are the driest, dullest collection of disjointed comments on every conceivable problem in the history of mankind..."

AT Robertson,

ILLUSTRATION

Here's my set. Could you imagine the weight of trying to live under that all on your own?

APPLICATION

Well, there's one sermon that, after 25 years of walking with the Lord, I never grow dull of hearing.

- Every time I read it it's new.
- It is constantly challenging and convicting me.
- It digs deep into my heart, my priorities, and my value system every time I read it.
- It is so profound that I feel as though I can barely scratch the surface of its meaning, and so simple that I can't argue with it.

It shouldn't surprise me because it was preached by the Creator of the universe, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Today, we call it "The Sermon on the Mount." Unlike the Talmud, which is 6300 pages long in today's print, Jesus' interpretation of the true heart of God's law and how it should be lived out is summed up in three

chapters of our Bible. In His short, succinct sermon, Jesus blows every other rabbi out of the water and gets right to the heart of the issue.

Daniel Webster, a 19th century United States Congressman said this of the Sermon on the Mount:

QUOTE

“The Sermon on the Mount cannot be a merely human production. This belief enters into the very depth of my conscience. The whole history of man proves it.”

Daniel Webster,

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

In this sermon, Jesus unfolds what we could call “The Christian Manifesto.” It’s the framework for the Christian life—a life that is surrendered to King Jesus and lives in and for His kingdom. The Sermon on the mount, specifically the Beatitudes has been incredibly misunderstood through the years.

- **SOCIAL MANDATE:** Some have relegated the beatitudes to merely a social mandate/gospel; that all people need to try and strive to live by these principles. Of course, if all people did embrace these, the world would be a better place, but Jesus was not trying to force an external, moral code on people. No. What Jesus reveals in this sermon is that a person who has embraced Jesus as king will begin to **BE** a different person from the inside out, not merely **DO** different things.
- **NT LAW:** Others have declared that the beatitudes are like the NT version of the OT law. In other words, the 10 commandments were the OT law, the Beatitudes are the NT law. But remember, Jesus, in this sermon, said that He didn’t come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. That the true heart of the law that we now embrace in Christ is to, ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.”***
- **THE CONDUCT OF THE KINGDOM:** I believe the Sermon on the Mount (including the Beatitudes), is God’s revelation of what life in His kingdom really looks like. The Jews had their own ideas about the kingdom of God. They had their own ideas of a physical, powerful kingdom filled with a certain kind of people. **Jesus redefines what the kingdom and its citizens will actually look like, and who it is so antithetical to what the godless world embraces and propagates.**

The world values self-confidence and self-dependence. God’s kingdom values self-awareness and utter dependence on God.

The world pretends everything is ok, even when it’s not. God’s kingdom values those who mourn for the brokenness within them and around them.

The world values strength and self-empowerment. God’s kingdom values strength under the control of humility.

The world values living for one’s self and one’s own pleasure. God’s kingdom values those who live for righteousness and death to their wicked passions.

The world value revenge. God’s kingdom values mercy.

The world disciplines people to manipulate and deceive in order to get ahead in life. God’s kingdom values a pure heart.

The world values self-preservation, even at the risk of war. God’s kingdom values those who seek for peace even at their own personal risk.

The world longs for comfort and ease. God’s kingdom values difficulty and persecution as a pathway into a greater blessing.

This sermon deals with the heart of the law, not merely the external practices of it. It is God's personal commentary on what the law means.

QUOTE

The Sermon on the Mount is not a New Testament Law – or a moralistic code of behavior. Rather it's the outgrowth or byproduct of a life connected with Jesus.

BEATITUDES

The beatitudes are the introduction to the sermon on the mount, and their placement in the sermon are not by accident.

- *The Beatitudes provide the umbrella for the rest of the Sermon. How will you deal with the smaller issues in life if you haven't embraced the overarching framework of life in the kingdom?*
- *How can you appropriately deal with marriage if you haven't learned how to be poor in Spirit? How can you appropriately deal with your enemies if you haven't embraced meekness? How can you deal with the pains of life if you haven't learned to mourn in the context of Christ? How can you rightfully deal with lust and hate, adultery and murder, if you haven't embraced hungering and thirsting for righteousness? How can you deal with persecution if you haven't accepted the blessing of it? How can you deal with conflict if you don't have the heart to be a peacemaker? How can you effectively deal with the sinners surrounding you if you haven't experienced mercy and had it birthed in your heart?*

APPLICATION

The Beatitudes provide a litmus test for what kingdom you are really pursuing and seeking to be part of. The kingdom of God, both spiritually now and physically later, awaits those who through rebirth and newness of heart, embrace and embark on the kind of life that Jesus describes in the Beatitudes.

- If in these studies, you find yourself kicking against the principles that Jesus puts forth, that is because your flesh is still very much alive and resistant to the way of the kingdom. It still wants the kingdom of comfort, temporary pleasure, and earthly security. We all have that inside us.
- Jesus told us, "Broad is the path that leads to destruction, and there are many who find it. Narrow is the path that leads to life, and few there are that find it."
- The Beatitudes enforce the principle that in order to truly find our lives, we must lose them for Christ's sake.

[Matthew 5:1-2 NKJV] 1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

- Matthew is specific that Jesus went on a mountain. There are some small hill/mountain ranges along the sea of Galilee. Today, you can go to a place that may have been the general area where Jesus taught this sermon. **[image] It's beautiful and overlooks the sea of Galilee. *Interestingly, the Old Covenant also came on a mountain (Mt. Sinai). There God could not be seen or touched. He came at a distance with His perfect law. On this mountain, God comes in an accessible way bringing forth the true heart of the law.**
- **Mountains were places where revolutionaries hung out. Jesus was a revolutionary, not bringing the revolution of the sword. Not merely modifying some aspects of the current kingdom of the world. He brought in an entirely new ideal that was completely antithetical to what existed and was natural. At both mountains, God brought forth something that would completely change humanity.**
- There were multitudes gathered following Jesus as was a regular occurrence, but the sermon given seems to be directed by Jesus specifically to His disciples, those who followed Him. The crowd, hearing the sermon by osmosis, would have seen the clear expectations of what it would look like to truly follow Jesus as one of His disciples.
- **Jesus sat** – this was a typical rabbinic position of teaching. When Jesus' disciples saw Jesus sit down, that meant He was about to download some wisdom.

The eight beatitudes (some argue there are seven and some nine) follow a very poetic format. It's the same format that is used in some of the Psalms and prophets. (EX: Psalm 1: **Blessed is the man who walks not in**

the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in it, he meditates day and night... He shall be like a tree firmly planted.) In fact, many of the beatitudes are simply restatements of Old Testament scriptures in a New Covenant context.

The format begins with declaring a specific characteristic and then explaining the blessing that comes out of living and embracing that characteristic.

THE LIFE THE BEATITUDES PORTRAY

If we looked at merely the combined outcome of the beatitudes, we would find the ideal life; the life that would be the pinnacle of happiness and blessedness. If we left out the first halves, we would be left with this life:

- *A person to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven, who is daily comforted, whose inheritance is the earth itself, who is continually filled and never unsatisfied. A person who has received mercy, who sees God and experiences the benefits of being a son and daughter of the King of the universe!*
- That sounds like a happy life! That sounds greater than riches that fade and pleasures that never satisfy. How on earth does one obtain a life of such blessing and happiness?
- By the exact opposite methods that anyone without Jesus would naturally pursue.

BLESSED

Each Beatitude begins with the word, “Blessed.”

Blessed (*makarios* – Greek) – In its simplest form, it could literally be translated happy. Truly the world pursues happiness, but maybe not in the same way Jesus does.

The Greek writer, Homer, used it to describe the rich man immune from the cares of common-folk. How he would pay for groceries? or this month’s rent? never crossed his mind. Happiness was freedom from worry.

- *NOTE – the birthing document of our nation, the declaration of independence, declared that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right endowed to us by our creator. The authors of that statement were biblical men. They didn’t consider happiness in a carnal, self-pleasing type of way. No, they believed that we had the right to pursue the things that would make for the good of all people. Pursue humility and holiness, righteousness and servanthood... those are the things that bring true happiness and contentment.*

The word in the context means so much more than happy. It can also be translated as “favored.”

- Or in other words, ***“This is the one to be envied because he or she is favored by God. God smiles down upon these ones.”***

In other words, imagine you were looking at two people: One had everything you could hope to have in this world but was full of themselves, not recognizing their need for God. The other was barely making it, suffering through difficulties, and hasn’t seemed to make too much of their life, but they have a deep awareness of their depravity and are trusting in God for everything.

- The Beatitudes tell us that the second person is the one to be envied. They are the model for true happiness and favor from God.

QUOTE

The pursuit of human happiness apart from the pursuit of God ends up producing misery instead of lasting joy.

Josh,

[Matthew 5:3 NKJV] 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Attribute - Poor in Spirit

DEFINITION

Poor in Spirit – to see oneself as spiritually needy; To have a humble and accurate view of one's own sinful nature.

COMPARISON

Compare to someone who is physically poor:

- Physically poor means to not possess the resources to obtain what you need or want.
- You are dependent on the generosity and resources of another in order to get what you need.

To be poor in Spirit:

- The recognition that you are spiritually bankrupt and in need of grace from the ultimate giver.
- You are fully aware of your dependence on God for His resources.

If you asked a poor person to describe their financial picture, what would they describe?

If you asked a person, “describe to me who you are on the inside. Describe to me the state of your spirit?” What would be the natural answer?

It is one thing to say, “I am weak and unworthy.” It’s entirely another thing to actually believe, “I am weak and unworthy.”

The first is the appearance of humility the second is poorness of spirit.

ILLUSTRATION

A famous sculptor spent a lifetime studying Jesus. He wanted to sculpt His statue. When the project was finished, he invited a friend for a preview. The artist ripped off the canvas – his buddy just stood there in awe of the most beautiful sculpture he’d ever seen. There was Jesus with His arms outstretched, His face looking down. After a long silence, the man asked, “I’ve got one question. Why is Jesus’ face turned downward?” The sculptor replied, “When I studied the Son of God I quickly realized to see His face you’ve got to be on your knees!” “Blessed are the poor in Spirit...”

ILLUSTRATION

In the Bible, we see beautiful examples of poorness in spirit.

- *It’s former Egyptian royalty who looks into the whispering flames of a burning bush and says, “Who am I? I am unworthy.”*
- *It’s a man hiding in a winepress, who when called upon by God to lead said, “This is impossible! I come from the lowest family in the lowest tribe!”*
- *It’s a shepherd boy turned king who says, “Lord, who am I that you should consider me.”*
- *It’s a prophet with status and reputation who, when in the presence of the Almighty cried out, “Woe to me, for I am a man of unclean lips!”*
- *It is an elite apostle with a rash and naturally rebellious personality, when in the presence of Jesus declares, “Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.”*
- *It’s a thief hanging on a cross who says, “We are here because we deserve it, but this man has done nothing wrong. Lord remember me when you enter your kingdom!”*
- *It looks like a King, who though equal with God, humbled Himself to become a slave to the point of death for the sake of others.*

QUOTE

(Being poor in spirit)... is the tremendous awareness of our utter nothingness as we come face-to-face with God.

QUOTE

The message of the day is, “you have something in yourself that will make you great.” The message of the kingdom is, “though you have nothing in yourself, God is great and wants to do great things in you.”

APPLICATION

There will be no boasters in heaven, only those who are overcome with a sense of gratitude that God’s grace extended to them.

- The poor in Spirit has moved past the carnal need for recognition and self-promotion.
- They don’t need to find their identity in some person thinking highly of them or their accomplishments.
- They are so overwhelmed by how an infinite, Holy God would choose to be intimately acquainted with them, that their need for human affirmation is overshadowed by the affirmation of God.

APPLICATION

I’m not suggesting that being poor in spirit is the same as self-pity. It’s not something where we go around living in insecurity, using false humility to obtain affirmation from others.

One can be poor in spirit and at the same time confident, bold, and courageous, but their confidence comes from who God is and what God can do, not in themselves.

ILLUSTRATION

God’s economy always works based on how we see ourselves on the inside, not merely what we do on the outside.

- In many ways, it might be argued that King David was more morally corrupt and disqualified than his predecessor, King Saul. King Saul disobeyed God’s command by not destroying the Amalekites, and he disregarded the Lord when he sought out the services of a witch. He operated out of insecurity and outward pressure, but never an inward conviction.
- David lied about the state of his own mental health to save his bacon. He took another man’s wife sexually, impregnated her, and then plotted her husband’s murder so he wouldn’t get caught and he could keep what he wanted.
- ***Yet David is the one who receives the title, “A man after God’s heart.” Why?***
 - Because David was poor in Spirit. His response to his sin was one of humility and repentance. “Against you and you alone have I sinned! Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me!”
 - Saul was haughty, prideful and self-driven. He had no care or awareness of his own wandering from God. To him, God’s rules were just a bunch of burdensome red tape he had to go through to get what he wanted. In King Saul’s heart, King Saul was God. In David’s heart, God was God.

Being poor in Spirit is not perfection, but an honest recognition of my imperfection in the sight of God.

2

The Blessing - Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

APPLICATION

We don’t often think of the people in power being the same people that think very lowly of themselves. Usually, it’s the confident people that rise to positions of great authority, but it’s the opposite in Christ’s economy. Jesus exalts and lifts up those who are lowly and humble.

This is the first beatitude both in order and in priority. For the kingdom of heaven cannot be had until one is first poor in Spirit. It is only humility and a recognition of self-depravity that can bring someone to the doorway of God’s kingdom.

- The one who is haughty in Spirit and bent on a life of self-dependence will never come to the place of recognizing and acknowledging their sin and their need for God.
- Not only that, but the one who has come into the kingdom must always seek to live in an awareness of the desperate need every single day.

QUOTE

In God's kingdom, it's the spiritual peasant who becomes the royal heir.

Josh,

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN - PRESENT AND FUTURE

When you see the phrase, "kingdom of Heaven," realize it's synonymous with the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Christ in other places in Scripture.

- Despite all the debate regarding the kingdom, there is one thing that is agreed upon. Whatever the Kingdom of Heaven is, it's a real kingdom ruled by a real king who is Jesus.
- The scripture seems clear to me as to the nature and timing of God's Kingdom.
 - God's Kingdom has always existed. It was expressed in the Garden of Eden, it was expressed through Israel under the Old Covenant, it is currently expressed in the church as Jesus spiritually rules and reigns in the hearts of those who follow Him, and it will be expressed in the future when Jesus returns to the earth and physically rules the world.
 - The 1000 year kingdom of the future will be the fullest and most complete expression of the kingdom because all sin and sinners will be subjected to the iron rod rule of Jesus.

This beatitude, along with the rest, makes a promise that is both a present promise and a future promise. What does it mean in the present? I believe Andrew Murray describes it beautifully.

QUOTE

"What is the Kingdom of God presently? It is that spiritual state in which the life of God and of heaven is made accessible to men, and they enter into its enjoyment here on earth." -Andrew Murray

BIBLE VERSE

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love...

APPLICATION

But not only will humility expose you to the riches of Christ now, but you're future in the kingdom is an incredible one!

- The Bible teaches us that our future in the kingdom is one where we will experience the world as God originally designed it to be under the rule of Jesus.
- Revelation 19&20 paint a beautiful, literal picture of Jesus returning, Satan being bound, and the nations experiencing the blessings of Christ.
- What is your future in that? Paul tells us:

BIBLE VERSE

[1Corinthians 6:2-3 NKJV] 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

One day, the poor in Spirit will sit as judges over the entire world. The point?

QUOTE

God will not allow people to rule in His future kingdom who won't submit to His present kingdom.

INVITATION INTO HUMILITY

The quest for “poorness of Spirit” begins with the act of humbling oneself before God.

3 times the scripture exhorts us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God...

- Perhaps you have come today and the only king you’ve allowed to have authority in your life is yourself. You don’t let anyone else tell you if you’re good or bad, you just decide based on your own standards. You haven’t seen any need for God in your life because you’re going to do it all yourself. My friend, the person who captains their own ship will end up sailing into a sea of pain and judgment that they won’t be able to navigate themselves out of.
- It’s only when one’ humbles themselves and becomes poor in Spirit that they can begin to find God’s strength.

Perhaps you have walked with Jesus for many years, but you are still a very self-reliant person. You don’t like the idea of being led by the Spirit. You still think that you’re pretty great and that’s why you’re successful and wealthy. You see Jesus as a nice part of the life that you’re building for yourself. If that resonates with you, surrender it all today. Confess to Christ that you want Him to be the source and you can’t do it on your own. In doing so, you will find the unseen blessings of His Kingdom becoming a reality in your life in new and spiritual ways.