



**Matthew 5:1-3**  
**Who Does God Bless? Pt 1**

If you have come in here this morning, and you are at the end of your rope, if you are exhausted and spent, tired and frustrated, I want you to know: you're in the right place.

We're going to hear Jesus speak in the Sermon on the Mount, His most famous sermon, and we're going to find a message of encouragement and blessing for those who are willing to receive it.

Over a thousand years before this sermon was delivered God had called the nation of Israel out of Egypt, miraculously delivered them from centuries of slavery, and brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai where He spoke to them. The people actually heard the voice of God as He gave them the Ten Commandments. But it freaked them out and when it was over they told Moses "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exodus 20:19).

Now, once again, God is speaking to people from a mountain. But this time, it's the Son of God in human flesh, and the message is about what He has done for us, and the kind of life it makes possible. Last week we found Him calling people to "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," this morning we discover the blessings of those who are in that Kingdom.

**Matthew 5:1** 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:

**3** "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
**4** Blessed *are* those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.  
**5** Blessed *are* the meek,  
For they shall inherit the earth.  
**6** Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled.  
**7** Blessed *are* the merciful,  
For they shall obtain mercy.  
**8** Blessed *are* the pure in heart,  
For they shall see God.  
**9** Blessed *are* the peacemakers,  
For they shall be called sons of God.  
**10** Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This section of Scripture is called the Beatitudes. That comes from the Latin root *beatus* or blessed. We're going to spend the next several weeks working our way through each of these blessings, exploring what they mean, who they are for, and how they work out in our daily lives.

We need to begin by asking the question: **what is a blessing?** What does it mean to be blessed? Some people think of being blessed as being fortunate, but that sounds too much like it depends on chance or luck.

Some people think of being blessed as being happy but happiness often means an emotional state that is influenced by what's happening around you.

To be blessed the way the Bible uses the term, involves what's inside of you. It's about who you are in your soul, not just about what you have in your hands or what you feel in your heart. You can be blessed in the midst of tragedy, when you hunger and thirst for righteousness. You can be blessed while you mourn, when you're persecuted, or in the midst of your spiritual poverty.

When Jesus says these people are blessed, He's speaking of an unshakable, steady, peace rooted deep down inside of you that might not like what's happening around you, but can accept it, rise above it, move through it, and carry on.

Perhaps we could say it like this: to be blessed is an objective identity, not a subjective emotion. So don't think of blessedness as something you're going to 'feel' all the time. It's something you are more than something you have. That's a very important distinction because it means you're not going to lose your blessing, it's who you are, like having black hair or green eyes, or being six feet tall. When you are blessed, it is a permanent identity not a temporary bonus.

You need to know that, because I got all this wrong many years ago. I remember in my younger days being taught about the beatitudes and someone giving me a laminated bookmark with these verses printed on them and I remember thinking, OK, this all sounds good, this is the kind of life I need to live, this is what good people do. These are the rules you're supposed to play by. It's all pretty clear: this is who I need to be and it has good rewards – if I do these things I'll be blessed. I made it an if-then statement.

I don't think it was intentional, I'm not sure it was taught to me that way, but that's how I received it. And that's our natural tendency isn't it? Give me some clear rules to play by and I'll make this happen. Tell me what to do and I'll get it figured out.

But that's the wrong approach to these Scriptures. This isn't a list of do's and don'ts. It's a description of what life is like for those *who are already in the Kingdom of God*. This is a description of what life will look like as you follow God, this is the fruit that obedience will produce in your life and these are rewards you will receive as you follow God.

You don't sit down and ask: how can I be blessed, what do I have to do? You do these things because you are blessed, they naturally flow out of your life because "blessed" is something you are, not a bonus you earn. The behaviors we read about here are the result of a life that has been transformed.

So, we need to make **a very important observation**: when we read about the behaviors and conditions in the Beatitudes, we're not talking about natural tendencies. We're not talking about people who are just wired this way, who fit a certain kind of psychological profile or personality type as being mild-mannered and gentle.

Because, some people are that way, aren't they? We all know some people, who may even have never come to church a day in their lives, but they're just naturally good-natured and they've been that way from birth. They're not feisty, they're not fighters, everyone loves to be around them. They don't have to try to be kind or charismatic, they just are. But that doesn't mean they're headed for the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is not a list of good behaviors for little boys and girls or grown men and women without God, this is a description of what God is making of each of us. God blesses you because you're already in relationship with Him. The beatitudes describe the fruit that the Holy Spirit is producing through you as you yield to God.

Look at what we discover in Psalm 32 about what it really means to be blessed:

**Ps 32:1** Blessed *is he whose transgression is forgiven,  
Whose sin is covered.*

**2** Blessed *is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,  
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

This is saying you are blessed if you are able to stand before God innocent of all sin because Christ has paid your debts. You are blessed if you have gone from being an enemy of God, to a dearly loved son or daughter. You are blessed if God has forgiven your transgression, and covered your sin through the sacrificial work of Christ on the Cross.

The blessings we see here in Ps 32 and the blessings we see in the Beatitudes come from God. And He gives them to His children - to those who are in a relationship with Him as they manifest the behaviors He wants to produce in their lives. The blessings and the behaviors are all bound up together and they both come *from God into* your life, you don't trade the behaviors in for the blessings.

Which means there's another mistake you can make when you read the Beatitudes: you can read them like a description of a Christian superhero team: you have Mercy-Man, Meek-Girl, and The Peacemaker - different people in the church who excel at certain behaviors.

But you have to know: this isn't a collection of super-powers you find in *some* Christians, they're traits you should find growing in *all* Christians. The Beatitudes are normal for life

in the Kingdom of God; this is average citizen stuff. This is what we're all expected to be like, or to be becoming like.

Is there anyone who belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven who does not need to be merciful? Is there anyone who should be proud in spirit? Is there anyone who should not be making peace? Is there anyone who stay impure in heart? Of course not. The traits we find here are traits that should be found in all true Christians in increasing measure as we mature in Christ.

So here's the really great news about all of this – if you struggle with pride or rage and anger, if being meek or merciful doesn't come naturally to you, if that's not your "personality type" that doesn't mean you can't ever have these blessings, they're not always going to be just out of your reach.

It means you don't look much like the King in that area of your life and He wants to work on that, crafting you into a well-rounded citizen in His Kingdom. And the longer He is at work in you, the more you're going to look like this. As we said last week, no one is irreparably stuck or broken. No one is exempt from change.

And then, think back to what we discovered in the book of Ephesians:

**Eph 1:3** Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

If you belong to Christ, and He is the source of every spiritual blessing, then, my friend, you have all of these things. You will be comforted and filled, you will obtain mercy, you will see God, you will be called children of God, and you will inherit the earth, because you possess the Kingdom of Heaven. You have a right to all of these things.

So let's be clear on this from the beginning – the traits described here are traits that should be found in all Christians, because they are the fruit that God is producing in our lives as we obediently submit and follow Him, the beatitudes are a description of the behaviors He produces in us, and the blessings we receive as we follow Him.

And it all begins by being poor in spirit. So what does that mean?

Well, let's start by stating what it does not mean: it does not mean that you're financially poor. The Bible speaks of the dangers of riches, of trusting in your bank account instead of God, but it never says physical poverty is a good thing. That's not what God designed us for - He placed Adam and Eve in a lush, productive, garden where their needs were met each day as they did fulfilling work.

Some people have this idea that impoverished people are inherently morally or ethically superior. That poor people are good people by nature. It's not true. There is no inherent blessing in being poor.

Paul the Apostle famously tells the church in

**Philippians 4:11** ... I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

The notion of the pious poor is a myth. There's no scale that shows the less money you make, the more spiritual you are. Paul says he was able to have it made or lose it all as long as he had Christ. If God blesses you with money, use it well, for His glory. You're going to have a lot to answer for one day, and don't assume that simply being poor or having less would make you more spiritual because plenty of poor people think they could be better spiritually if only they had a little more money.

I love the old musical *A Fiddler on the Roof*, where Tevye, the Jewish father says: "Oh Dear Lord, *you made many, many poor people*. I realize, of course, that it's no shame to be poor. But it's no great honor either!" And he goes on to sing his famous song, dreaming of what life would be like "If I was a rich man."

He says if he was rich he wouldn't have to work hard, he'd have a nice house, his wife could just tell the servants what to do, he would spend his days giving wisdom and advice to others. And,

If I were rich, (he sings) I'd have the time that I lack  
To sit in the synagogue and pray,  
And maybe have a seat by the Eastern wall,  
And I'd discuss the learned books with the holy men  
Seven hours every day  
That would be the sweetest thing of all

So, here's a poor man, saying if he was rich, he would finally have the time that he lacks to sit and pray. Doesn't that go against our modern notions that somehow if we could just get rid of more of our stuff and quiet down the pace of our life we would suddenly be able to grow spiritually?

Tevye, this poor Jewish peasant living in rural Russia sums up all of his thoughts by saying:

"Lord who made the lion and the lamb,  
You decreed I should be what I am.  
But would it spoil some vast, eternal plan  
If I were a wealthy man?"

He's not singing of what a wonderful thing physical poverty is or how helpful it is in fostering his relationship with God. No, he's looking to be delivered from it.

So what is Jesus getting at when He says blessed are the poor in spirit? He's speaking about the sense of dependence that the poor experience; they cannot make important things happen for themselves and their families and they know it.

Around 20 years ago the World Bank did a massive study of poverty globally and they asked poor people, the people they are trying to help: what does it mean to be poor? And they discovered that poor people, really poor people, people trapped in generational and systematic poverty, living day to day, talk about poverty differently than most people in the West. They describe being poor as a lack of power, a lack of influence, dependence on others, vulnerability, not a lack of material stuff.

They say things like this: "For a poor person everything is terrible – illness, humiliation, shame. We are cripples; we are afraid of everything; we depend on everyone. No one needs us. We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of."

And: "When I don't have any [food to bring my family], I borrow, mainly from neighbors and friends. I feel ashamed standing before my children when I have nothing to help feed the family. I'm not well when I'm unemployed. It's terrible."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, truly poor people tend to describe their lives in terms of shame, hopelessness, and powerlessness. They feel like they have no ability to change things or make an impact. They feel trapped.

This is the picture Jesus has in mind here when He says blessed are the poor *in spirit*. Not blessed are the poor. No one wants to live in abject poverty, no one should live this way physically. But blessed are the poor *in spirit*. Blessed are those who see themselves as spiritually impoverished, having no power or control, no influence or ability to break out of their own spiritual condition; no ability to reach Heaven by their own merit.

Jesus told a story that illustrates the point perfectly. Can you turn with me to:

**Luke 18:9** Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

This man thought he was spiritually rich. He was trusting in all the things he was able to do and had been doing. He thought he was a really good person. He felt entitled. And so there he is telling God all the really great things he's done and putting down someone else in the process. Meanwhile,

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank studied quoted in When Helping Hurts.

13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus is saying, the tax collector, who stood before God, aware of his spiritual poverty, aware that he had no right to stand before God, seeking mercy instead of boasting in his accomplishments, was the one who was heard and was the one who was truly righteous.

Matt 5:3 "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Which of these men are you most likely to identify with?

Do you see yourself as spiritually poor? Do you think you bring anything to the table, any bargaining chips to negotiate with God? Do you think, when you face Him, that you're going to need to tell Him about the good things you've done? Is there anything you think you're going to need to remind Him of as He considers your life? Or are you able to sing the old hymn

Rock of Ages, cleft for me  
Let me hide myself in thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.

Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfil thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the Fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

This is spiritual poverty. This is a recognition that I don't bring anything to God except myself and my needs. And if I can do that, I receive the Kingdom of God and all of the blessing that come with it. Blessedness is not a reward for religious behaviors, it springs out of God's grace for those already in relationship with Him. He initiates, we respond, and blessing is the result.

So I want to close this morning by pointing us all to a Psalm, something we can come back to over and over again whenever we need to find a way to encourage or express our spiritual poverty, our need for forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Turn with me to Psalm 51, a Psalm written by King David after his infamous sin with Bathsheba and the death of her husband which he also orchestrated.

**Ps 51:1** Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin *is* always before me.

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done *this* evil in Your sight—  
That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,  
And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me hear joy and gladness,  
*That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.

13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners shall be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,



*And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.  
15 O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.  
16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;  
You do not delight in burnt offering.  
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise.*

*18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.  
19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,  
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.*

David lived in the days before Christ in the days when people brought things to Temple to sacrifice to God. From the blood of bulls and goats, to the first fruits of their crops, they brought offerings to God at the altar in the Temple. But they knew it wasn't enough, they knew it all just pointed forward to something greater.

So today we can echo the cries of his heart, we can identify with his desire to be cleansed, to be forgiven, to be delivered. We can identify with him and agree with him, that there is something we need from God that we cannot find on our own.

But we also have something much, much, greater than David – we have a sacrifice that has already been made. We don't need to bring our own bull or goat or even a small dove from our house or flocks:

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling.

We are blessed because we are spiritually poor – we don't bring our own animal to be slain, we rest in the shed blood of the lamb of God.