

The Sermon on the Mount

“The Beatitudes”

Part 1

“Blessed are the Poor in Spirit”

Matthew 5:3

Scripture Reading

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

Making the CONNECTION

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the great reformed preacher who pastored Westminster Chapel in London, England wrote...

“I am never tired of saying that what the Church needs to do is not to organize evangelistic campaigns to attract outside people, but to begin herself to live the Christian life. If she did that, men and women would be crowding into her building.”

Lloyd-Jones gets more specific about the Christian life, when he writes...

“If only all of us were living the Sermon on the Mount, men would know that there is dynamic in the Christian Gospel; they would know that this is a live thing; they would not go looking for anything else.”

Just a few pages later, Lloyd-Jones writes with even greater lucidity...

“Here is the life to which we are called, and I maintain again that if every Christian in the Church today were living the Sermon on the Mount, the great revival for which we are praying and longing would already have started. Amazing and astounding things would happen; the world would be shocked, and men and women would be drawn and attracted to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Another evangelical commentator writes...

“The life obedient to the principles of the Sermon in the Mount is the church’s greatest tool for evangelism.” (John MacArthur)

ENGAGING the Audience

Each of these respected pastors and theologians echo the same crux of the Sermon on the Mount...

The single most powerful testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a Christian life that faithfully displays holy character and conduct!

Listen carefully!

What the 21st Century evangelical Church needs more than anything else are genuine disciples of Jesus Christ who live lives of holy character and conduct.

The Church, along with her leaders and members, can continue to attend cutting-edge conferences, chase after and employ the latest technology advancements, build grand buildings and campuses, and implement new church growth schemes and programs; yet, doing these things will result in nothing more than chasing after wind if we are not first and foremost men, women, teenagers, and children who passionately strive to live lives of holy Christian character and conduct.

A close look at church history reveals that the great spiritual awakenings and revivals the Church has enjoyed did not happen because of conferences, technology, buildings, church growth schemes, or cutting edge programming. Rather, it was the result of Spirit-anointed, Christ-centered preaching of God's Word coupled with Christians living holy lives of godly character and conduct.

The Church and her leaders do not need more conferences. We don't need better technology. We don't need grand buildings and campuses (although they're nice). Nor do we need more church growth programs. We already possess far more tools and resources than when can possibly implement. Yet, our effectiveness within our culture is declining instead of growing.

If the 21st Century Church has any hope of being relevant in an increasingly hostile and lost culture, those of us who claim to have been transformed by the glorious grace of God must start living lives marked by Christian character and conduct.

"What do we need," you might ask?

We need the Sermon on the Mount. As Christians, we need to meditate on the greatest sermon ever preached. We need to allow Christ's Sermon on the Mount to transform our thinking about ourselves, the Kingdom of God, and what kind of character and conduct truly marks Christ-honoring living.

I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones. If we will come to the Sermon on the Mount with open ears and a willingness to be confronted, convicted, and transformed by its radical kingdom message, amazing and astonishing things will happen in our community and world.

Furthermore, when we listen to the Sermon on the Mount and allow its radical kingdom message to transform our character and conduct, Christians will stop asking the ridiculous question – *“What is the Church doing for missions?”*

You *are* the Church! We *are* the Church!

Nothing is more missional than you and I living a radical kingdom life that is marked with the character and conduct of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

Let this be both a challenge and a warning – given out of my love for you as your pastor. If you come and ask me what we’re doing for missions, I am going to ask you if you are living the Kingdom life that Jesus exhorts you to live in the Sermon on the Mount. I’m going to ask you if you are exalting the name of Jesus Christ by living a life of holy character and conduct presented in the Sermon on the Mount.

If the truth were told, we can financially support United Ministries, Light of Hope, as well as international missionaries all over the world. Make no mistake about it; these are wonderful and fruitful investments that we as church will definitely make – and are making. However, if we, the local body of Christ, are not vigorously striving to live out the Kingdom character and conduct presented by our Lord and Savior in the Sermon on the Mount – we are not a missional church. We are simply just one more church who gives money to missions.

Nothing is easier than throwing money at mission opportunities and claiming to be a missional church. Nothing is harder than proving you’re a missional church by being missionaries who live the Kingdom life Jesus proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount. Yes, it will be hard. But...because we have Christ living in us and thru us, it is possible.

So, let’s make sure we understand what it “really” means to be a missional church. A missional church is a body of believers who believe nothing is more relevant and evangelistic than living lives marked by holy character and conduct. A missional church is a body of believers who live out the Sermon on the Mount.

Exploring the Sermon on the Mount

Having said that, let’s begin our journey with Christ and the greatest sermon ever preached. As we do so, may we all pray that the Holy Spirit transforms our lives for the glory of God.

In order to truly appreciate and understand the Sermon on the Mount, we must see the big picture. Before we can break down the Sermon on the Mount into its individual pericopes, we must be able to see it in its totality. Put differently, we need to understand its flow and structure. We need to see and understand the big picture.

The Sermon on the Mount comprises of three chapters. Jesus begins his sermon with what we know to be “The Beatitudes.” We must not miss how Jesus starts his great sermon. It is commonly agreed upon that the Beatitudes reveal the character qualities God expects a genuine disciple of Christ to display.

Only after Jesus reveals the qualities of genuine Christian character, does He move on and address Christian conduct.

So, the Beatitudes, which appear in Matthew 5:1-12, deal with Christian character. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount deals with Christian conduct. After the Beatitudes...

- ⇒ Chapter 5 deals with Christian living according to the Law of God.
- ⇒ Chapter 6 deals with Christian living in the presence of God.
- ⇒ Chapter 7 deals with the Christian living under the judgment of God.

This is very important to understand. Character always drives conduct. It is impossible for a Christian to conduct himself or herself in a Christian manner if he or she does not first possess Christian character. Honoring the Law of God and its demands, living victoriously in the presence of God, and standing in awe of the judgment of God are impossible without the Beatitudes – without the right character.

Thus, as we examine the Beatitudes of Christ, we must understand them to be the fuel of character that empowers us to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy and pleasing to God.

Unfortunately, if we are being honest, we’d admit how easily tempted we are as Christians to focus on our conduct without giving much, if any, attention to the transformation of our character. This is a common and tragic mistake. Here’s why. When we attempt to conduct ourselves in a Christian manner without first possessing Christian character, we ultimately give way to self-sufficiency, arrogance, and pride. Not only that, but inevitably we fall prey to legalism and its joy-sucking effects.

Therefore, Jesus intentionally begins the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes – a series of paradoxical blessings meant to reveal God’s standard of Christian character.

“Poverty of Spirit”

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus begins his list of Beatitudes by saying...

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

There are two things of extreme importance that I want you to see from the outset of the Beatitudes.

First, I want you to understand the word “blessed.” As we will see, each of the eight beatitudes begins with Jesus’ promise of being “blessed” if we exhibit the character quality He is about to address.

So, what exactly does Jesus mean by the word “blessed?”

The word “blessed” is derived from the Greek word that is translated into English as “happy.” Thus, some commentators and Bible translators define and translate “blessed” to simply mean happy. However, this interpretation is far too simple. Happiness is circumstantial. Happiness depends on our emotions and circumstances. Happiness is temporal and quickly flees from us.

A far better, and more literal, translation is “to be approved.” D.A. Carson writes...

“To be blessed means, fundamentally, to be approved, to find approval with God.”

Carson goes on to write,

“If God’s blessing means more to us than the approval of loved ones no matter how cherished, or of colleagues no matter how influential, then the Beatitudes will speak to us very personally and deeply.”

Thus, the blessing Jesus is teaching is that the Christian who possesses the following character qualities will enjoy the favor and approval of God. The Christian who displays the following character qualities will enjoy a level of unchanging happiness that is found only in the eternal approval and favor of the holy God.

Secondly, the first beatitude is the key that unlocks our understanding to the rest of the Beatitudes, as well as the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Without the first Beatitude firmly in place in our lives, it is impossible to fulfill the rest of the Sermon.

Listen carefully to what Martyn Lloyd-Jones says about the first beatitude...

“Poor in spirit...is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian and of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and all the other characteristics are in a sense the result of this one.”

Being “poor in spirit” is the key that unlocks the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. It is the foundation upon which Christ builds everything He is about to say.

So, what exactly does Jesus mean by saying “poor in spirit.”

Being **poor in spirit** has nothing to do with voluntary or involuntary financial poverty. Jesus is not talking about money. Jesus is talking about the attitude of our soul.

To be **poor in spirit** literally means “a personal acknowledgment of spiritual bankruptcy. It is the conscious confession of unworthiness before God. It is the deepest form of confession and repentance.” (D.A. Carson)

To be **poor in spirit** means “a complete absence of pride; a complete absence of self-assurance and self-reliance. It means a consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God.” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones)

To be **poor in spirit** is “to know one’s deep spiritual poverty before God and apart from Jesus Christ.”

This Greek word for poor literally refers to a person reduced to total destitution. It means to be begging poor.

John MacArthur writes...

“Until a soul is humbled, until the inner person is poor in spirit, Christ can never be dear, because He is obscured by pride. Until one knows how helpless, worthless, and sinful he is in himself, he can never see how the mighty, worthy, and glorious Christ is in Himself. Until one sees how doomed he is, he cannot see what a Redeemer the Lord is. Until one sees how own poverty he cannot see God’s riches. Only when one admits to his own deadness can Christ give him life.”

The approval and favor of God, thru His Son Jesus Christ, begins when we acknowledge our depravity, deadness, and complete spiritual bankruptcy. As long as you and I believe we offer God anything apart from Christ, we will never know the approval and favor of the holy God.

Living a holy and godly life begins right here. We can go no further in our spiritual journey until we come to grips with our spiritual depravity and deadness.

Evidences of a “Poor Spirit”

So, what exactly does “poverty of spirit” look like? We can know we are “poor in spirit” when we...

- 1. Confront within ourselves and acknowledge before the holy God that absolutely nothing good indwells us apart from Jesus Christ the Lord.**

When examining his own life, the Apostle Paul acknowledged...

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” (Romans 7:18)

Paul also admitted...

“The saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” (1 Tim. 1:15)

As a redeemed follower of Jesus Christ, Paul never lost sight of the sobering truth that there was nothing good in him apart from Christ Jesus the Lord. Even after becoming an apostle of Christ and the Church’s greatest missionary, theologian, and church planter – in the twilight of his life - Paul knew all too well his own internal struggle with sin and thus considered himself the “chief of sinners.”

A Christian with a poor spirit is a person who considers themselves the “foremost” of sinners apart from Jesus Christ.

- 2. Recognize and confess our spiritual depravity and complete unworthiness apart from the work of grace and faith God performs in us thru the ministry of the Holy Spirit.**

When Isaiah encountered the holiness of God, he confessed...

“Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people with unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5)

Isaiah had a healthy understanding of exactly who he was compared to the holiness of God. Isaiah knew that he was utterly unclean and there was nothing he could do to change his uncleanness. Thus, Isaiah bowed and trembled in the holy presence of God.

A Christian with a poor spirit is a person who, when confronted by their own sinfulness, bows and trembles before the holy God, knowing that only Jesus Christ makes them acceptable in the presence of the Most High God.

3. Personal sin produces a broken and contrite heart that employs confession and repentance.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

“This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” (Isa. 66:2)

A Christian with a poor spirit is a person who, when confronted with their sin, experiences a brokenness of heart that produces confession and repentance.

4. Christ, not the riches of this world, becomes our supreme pursuit and pleasure.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul described his post-conversion...

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For this sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.” (Phil. 3:7-8)

A Christian with a poor spirit is a person who views the things of this world as rubbish compared to the surpassing pleasure of knowing Christ and exalting His name.

5. Life’s primary passion becomes the praise and glory of God, not ourselves.

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.” (Psalm 115:1)

“O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.” (Isaiah 25:1)

A Christian with a poor spirit is a person whose supreme goal in life, work, and play is seeing the person and work of their Savior Jesus Christ exalted and praised – especially at the expense of their own praise.

6. Genuinely regard others as more important than us.

“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Phil. 2:3)

A Christian with a poor spirit is a person who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, delights in making more of others rather than themselves.

7. Possesses an attitude of serving others rather than being served.

“Have this attitude among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.” (Phil. 2:5-7)

A Christian with a poor spirit is a person whose life is marked with a Christlike attitude that embraces servanthood while, at the same time, refusing to cling to his or her own right and need to be served.

Are our lives marked by a “poverty of Spirit”?

Living a holy and missional life for the glory of God begins with each of us being “poor in spirit.”