



This morning, we begin our series through both Matthew 5 and also the first six chapters of the book of Daniel. Why are we doing this? Didn't we go through Matthew 5 a few years ago? Yes, we did. But the reason we're doing this series is because this year has been a very intriguing year, testing and trying us in various ways. I imagine everyone here at some point in the last year has asked the question, "How is God calling me to live for his glory in this given situation?" What we're doing in this series is getting back to the basics by going to Jesus' first Kingdom sermon. Then, after Jesus speaks of the "prophets" who were persecuted before us, we're going to go to Daniel to see how he and his friends lived during the exile. The reason for that is because the New Testament teaches us that we are to follow the examples and teaching of God regarding the sojourners and exiles. In other words, we aren't to live like Israel in Israel. We are to live like the Jews were called to live when they were exiled.

In merging Matthew 5 and Daniel 6, I think we get back to the basics and we learn what it means to live lives in line with Jesus and his Kingdom. We discover solid hope so we can persevere with love in this world, knowing our citizenship is in Heaven. As a result, it's my and the elders prayer that we truly shine the light of Christ to the world around us in radically different ways so that the world sees there truly is a Savior who is Lord over all and who will judge everyone. But now, he calls them to his arms for grace and forgiveness.

With this understanding, let's begin our journey through Matthew 5. We're jumping into the book, skipping past the first four chapters. You probably are quite familiar with them, and yes, we did go through this book a few years ago. But I do want to give a little bit of a backdrop before we study Jesus' words here. There are actually many different views people hold regarding the Beatitudes.

- 1) **Not applicable today.** Some believe that since this is Jesus' Kingdom teaching, it's not applicable at all for Christians today. This is a very hard dispensational view that believes there's no aspect of Jesus' reign today, and so the Sermon on the Mount won't be lived out until a future millennial kingdom. I do not hold this view, nor do I think it's tenable to hold it whatsoever.
- 2) **Describing Kingdom Personalities.** Another view is that this is describing various personalities that will be in Heaven. So, if you look at this earth and see people who are meek, they're displaying Jesus' Kingdom values. If you see people who are merciful – like Oprah, maybe – you can say they're living out Jesus' Kingdom values. Or, maybe you think a certain politician really cares for the community and does good for the area, this view would hold that type of personality is a part of the Kingdom. I don't find this view acceptable either because then we're saying non-believers, who do not have faith, actually please God. In addition, meekness for example (according to Scripture) isn't something you can conjure up. The world can mimic it in appearance, but it cannot be meek in God's eyes. It would be wrong to say, "Oh, that person might be in the Kingdom because they have this or that demeanor."
- 3) **Exhorting Behavioral Change.** Another prominent view, a view that I think I grew up thinking (whether it was taught to me or not) was that the sermon is talking about ways to become a

part of the Kingdom. This view isn't necessarily saying this about the whole sermon, but it's saying this about the Beatitudes (i.e. – the statements of blessings that Jesus gives). So, we read, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and we think, How can we become a part of the Kingdom of Heaven? The answer: just become poor in spirit enough, and then God will bless you. This view is insidious to me because it turns Jesus' words on their head and makes Jesus just like the Pharisees in his day who sought to create impossible rules for people to attain to so that they could be accepted with God.

You can hear all of this and then think, "Ok, so what do you believe is the correct view?" **Reveals the character and blessedness of Kingdom citizens.** I look at the Sermon on the Mount like an unscalable mountain. It's more glorious than Mt. Everest. It calls to the aching, broken human heart. But we all know that we cannot do these words. Instead, these words call us to the Speaker, Jesus himself, as the one who gives blessedness so that whoever comes to Jesus is given the identities that are listed in the Beatitudes as well as all the blessings that are listed here as well. You see, if you look at the Beatitudes as things to do in order to gain God's blessing, then you've actually turned away from Christ. **Ephesians 1:6** says that God has "blessed us in the Beloved." The Beloved is Jesus. So, if we have any interpretation that says we gain blessing apart from Jesus and that we gain blessing because we ourselves did something first to get it, then we're rejected Jesus.

I think we can understand this even by looking at the progression of the book of Matthew. The book begins with the story of Jesus' birth. But even in the genealogy, Matthew highlights people who, in some senses, shouldn't be there. Not because they aren't in his ancestry, but because they were "problematic" from a societal perspective. Remember Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba? Then we enter into the story of Jesus' birth. Who's his mother? A young virgin named Mary. We know the problems she faces. Then we go into chapter 2. In this chapter, Matthew shows us a contrast between Jewish leaders who are troubled with the presence of Jesus and Gentile wise men who are seeking him. In addition, we have the powerful Herod who wants him dead and then the powerless children who are killed in Bethlehem. In chapter 3, some of these types of people gather together around John the Baptist. Many come to John wanting to be cleansed. They know their neediness. But then there are others. As Matthew puts it "many of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Does John baptize them? No. Instead, he calls them to flee God's wrath that's coming. Clearly, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were religious and even upright in their practices, are missing the truth. And so the story goes on with Jesus' baptism – and the announcement of God to focus on this Beloved Son. (Side note: do you notice that he's the Beloved, in whom we are blessed – like what Paul said?) Entering into chapter 4, Jesus conquers temptations by depending on the Spirit and then he calls disciples to himself. These disciples leave their fishing jobs and follow Jesus. And, as they follow Jesus, he begins to minister to many other people by healing them. There is a clear contrast being made by Matthew between the "put-together," religious and elite crowds versus the normal people who knew their neediness. The difference is that some trusted in themselves and others knew they had deep spiritual needs.

Then we enter into Matthew 5 and we get to the Sermon on the Mount. Let's read the first three verses of chapter 5 together: Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:1–3.

As I said earlier, this sermon isn't about what you can do in order to get God's blessing. Already in Matthew, the point is not what we can do, but who we need: Jesus. He's the Beloved. So, we look at verse 1 and we're told that the crowds were following Jesus and his disciples. So, Jesus goes up on to a mountain. When he sits on the mountain, his disciples came to him to listen. Where's the crowd? They're actually there, too. At the end of this discourse, in chapter 7, we're told the crowd was astonished at his message.

The awareness of the people should help us to understand this sermon a little better. Who is Jesus talking to? Is he talking to his disciples or to the crowd? Both. But who's his primary audience? I think his primary audience are his disciples – and he is allowing the crowd to listen in. The reason I believe that is because throughout the book of Matthew, the idea of the “crowds” is brought up at various points. The crowds are often “astonished” or “amazed,” but many times they remain neutral to Jesus. If you went through this series on Matthew with us a few years ago, we saw this, and one point of emphasis was that Jesus didn't simply want people to be amazed at him. He wanted people to turn to him and to depend on him.

So, all this said, Jesus' listeners are primarily his disciples who actually seem to have *believed on him*. Then we have an uncommitted crowd filled with people who have been healed and cared for physically by Jesus. They get to listen in on Jesus' first recorded sermon, a sermon all about his Kingdom. In a century where the Kingdom was taught to be for the religious elite and for those who can prove their worth, this message cuts all that down. Jesus doesn't come for those who are well. He didn't come for those who thought they knew where they were going. Jesus came for the lost and the sick. And, in being lost and seek, Jesus pronounces blessings on people like that! Wow. This is a sermon of immense grace.

Let's read verse 3 again: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**² Notice that Jesus begins his sermon using the word “Blessed.” In speaking to his disciples – those who have turned to Jesus to follow him, and those who were just fisherman – he says “Blessed.” The word “blessed” referred to being in the highest human state possible. It is appropriate to use the word “Happy,” but it's so much more than happiness. It's the state from which nothing can steal from you.

In our world, people long for happiness. They long for the so-called “good life.” We have our definitions of what the good life is. What's your definition? What's the good life? Having so much money, you just don't have to worry about what you're buying? Is it having your family all together, enjoying each other? Is it being able to be an influencer and having power and respect? What's the good life to you?

Jesus shows us that being in the Kingdom is being in the state of blessedness – and thus to be a citizen of the Kingdom is to be blessed. How amazing this must have been to 1st century listeners. These fishermen are blessed? What about those Pharisees and Sadducees that John the Baptist turned away? What about the religious leaders who were troubled at Jesus? We can think similarly in our day. Who do you think is blessed by God? Some might think, “Well, if you're a pastor, clearly you're blessed.” Or, you think that if you do things that you think matter, then you'll be blessed. No, Christian! If you have turned from your sins and turned to Christ, you are blessed! You are in the highest possible state of blessedness for a human being.

And right here, you may be thinking, “No. I have to do something to be blessed. Look at the Beatitude.” And my response is, “Yes, let's look at the Beatitude again.” I actually wish the English translators would

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:3.

translate the Beatitude this way: **The poor in spirit are blessed because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.** It's good that the phrases start with "Blessed" because Jesus is emphasizing the blessed state his followers are in, but often when we hear the word "for" we think that means that we get something because we did something. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for then when you've been poor, you get the Kingdom of Heaven." That's nothing less than works-based religion. Yet, the Bible teaches that we're saved by grace, not works! This is why I like the word "because" instead of "for," and just so you know, it's entirely legitimate to translate the Greek word that way. When we see it this way, we see *why* the poor in spirit are blessed. They're blessed not because they've earned the kingdom, but they're blessed because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. With these ideas, I want to now focus on the blessing of the Kingdom and then *who* receives the blessing of the Kingdom.

The Blessing: the Kingdom

What is the Kingdom? Some people believe there's a difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. Personally, I believe these are all synonymous terms. In addition, some people believe the Kingdom of Jesus only refers to a future millennial kingdom, but in Colossians 1, we read this: **He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.** ³

God has delivered us to the kingdom of his Son. In Jesus' Kingdom there is redemption and forgiveness of sins! How amazing. How beautiful. How glorious. This means that the moment you turned to Jesus for forgiveness of sins, the moment you trusted him and turned from your sins and turned from other things you love more than God – when you turned to Jesus – you entered Jesus' Kingdom. Do you know his Kingdom reign is happening right now? It's not yet fully realized, but he's reigning today. Jesus perfectly honored God and he then took the perfect punishment on himself that sinners deserved.

Jesus reigns now. And, Jesus will bring his reign to the earth someday! And when that reign comes about, there will be even greater redemption. Jesus will destroy sin, sorrow, shame, pain, death. Everything broken will be undone and there will only be forever restoration and glory with God and with one another forever.

Listen, if you know you're part of a Kingdom that reigns over all, how then ought that to shape your views of living in this life? What about the kingdom of the United States? The Scriptures say this nation, like all others, is a drop in the bucket. Don't put your eggs in the American basket. If Jesus' Kingdom reigns over all and you are in it, how much hope do you have to endure potential persecution and pain in this kingdom? If the Kingdom is yours, how does that encourage you even if you are treated like an insignificant citizen in this one?

Ventura, we need to get our minds and hearts focused back on the reality of Jesus' Kingdom! The Kingdom of God is the heartbeat of Scriptures. From the fall of Adam and Eve, those who believed the Lord journeyed towards a Kingdom whose building and Maker is God. They longed for a home that will never be broken. And, I believe that's a longing in every human heart. We want a home that will never crumble and will be of eternal joy. That's Jesus' Kingdom!

Now, you can say, "Who gets to be a part of that Kingdom?" The answer: the poor in spirit. But what does that even mean?

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 1:13–14.

The Character: the Poor in Spirit

Ok, so if we can just be poor enough in spirit then we can get into Heaven, right? No! That's not what Jesus says. The Beatitudes are statements of fact. The poor in spirit are blessed because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. "But, I want to be poor in spirit. So, I'll just try real hard to be poor in spirit." Trying real hard is exactly the opposite of being poor in spirit. You can't try to be poor in spirit because to be poor in spirit means that you realize you have nothing in you that can attain.

The phrase poor in spirit means to be spiritually bankrupt. It's like Psalm 130, where David says that if the Lord should mark people's sins, no one would stand. Or, it's like Paul in Philippians 3, where he states all his religious accomplishments and then says he counts them as dung! It's *nothing*. None of that made him spiritually mature or qualified. A man named Leon Morris put it this way: **The poor in spirit in the sense of this beatitude are those who recognize that they are completely and utterly destitute in the realm of the spirit. They recognize their lack of spiritual resources and therefore their complete dependence. . . . Jesus is pronouncing a blessing on those empty of any spiritual resource** (Morris, pp. 95-96; *The Gospel According to Matthew, Pillar Commentary*). The moment you think you can *do* something to get God's approval, is the moment you're not admitting your poverty of spirit. You're bankrupt. Do you know that? All of this reminds me of Isaiah 57:15: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."⁴

At this point, I want to say that I believe Jesus is stating this first to the disciples who have already believed. Through looking to Jesus and depending on him, this poverty of spirit has come alongside of them. But they could wonder, "Is this what spirituality is?" We can wonder that, too. We can think that if we're going to grow spiritually, we have to be less bankrupt. Maturity means we won't be as dependent on God, right? We'll be able to say, "Hey Jesus, look at me. Look at what I can do on my own!" No. And I fear that many Christians daily live this way. Maybe you don't confess that you're doing things on your own, but in reality, you are. You're trying to fight sin in your own strength. You pray in order to impress God. You do, do, do, do in order to gain blessings that are actually already yours in Jesus.

The reality is that all of these beatitudes are in a present tense. The blessedness is ongoing. The characteristic isn't a one and done kind of thing, but something that goes on as well. That means, if you are a follower of Jesus, then your testimony continues to be one of "I need you." Every day, our prayers should be, "Lord, I can't, but you can." We confess with Jesus that apart from him, we can do nothing; but with him, all things are possible. So, I won't kill sin today. Honestly, in my flesh, I don't want to. That's poverty. But, because I have the Spirit in me, he fills me and gives me the desires and the ability to do what he has called me to do. That's exactly what Paul says in Philippians 2. Work out the salvation *for* it is God at work in you to will and to do!

This radically changes how we live as disciples of Jesus. Because we are now declared blessed, and we have been given the awareness of our poverty of spirit, we now are to live in the reality of his poverty. This is often how God teaches us. In most of the New Testament letters, we're told who we are: saints, spiritual, righteous, pure. Then we're told to live out that reality. The same is true here with "poor in spirit." We are to live out this reality always. If this gift has been given to us, and Kingdom citizens are

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 57:15.

poor in spirit, what a blessing that we can always depend on our Savior and on the Spirit to empower us for all things!

Oh, what joy! Jesus doesn't want people who prove themselves. He delights in proving himself to us. There's nothing we do to earn Heaven. Instead, we were gifted Heaven. And all who are gifted with the Kingdom are given poverty of spirit. Nothing in our hands we bring, simply to the cross, we cling!

But, if you ever think you can be poor enough in your own strength, you've missed it. No human can be aware of their poverty without the Spirit opening their eyes. Maybe you are in this position today. You're intrigued by this message. You want to know more about Jesus. Please talk to me or some other Christian, and we'd be glad to share with you what it means to turn to him for forgiveness.

But maybe today you say, "I know I'm a Christian, but I've not been living our my identity." You've been striving in your own strength. Maybe for you, you've tried to be "showy" in your spirituality. You want attention either from God or others for how spiritual you've been. You may even think God owes certain other blessings because you've been so good. You've forgotten you're already blessed, and you're actually seeking other things more than God because you want those more than God himself. Others of you, you think, "Oh yes, I'm very poor in spirit. Look at me. Look how bad I am." Do you realize that's not really poverty of spirit either? You're still trying to gain attention. It's like Jesus' illustration about the person who fasts, but makes it known they're fasting. They note their sacrifices and demeanor.

Christian, poverty of spirit means there's no way to accumulate reasons for God to value you or to listen to you or to bless you! Jesus has paid it all. He has done it all. To be a part of his Kingdom is to be blessed. You are blessed! By the way, this will then affect how you behave (like when I spoke of our prayers of dependence), and it will affect how we treat other people. Remember who Jesus is speaking to? Not the religious elite who were keeping everything in order. He's speaking to fishermen and a crowd of people, many of whom were sick and relegated in society. If we believe the poor in spirit are those in the Kingdom, do you think that'll affect how we reach out to *everyone* in society? Whether they are elite or whether they are the outcast? Jesus reaches to all. And the Bible teaches us that Jesus reaches to people today through his church.

Are you living your identity? Are you living your blessedness? Do you treasure the Kingdom? Have you forgotten? Do you even know and love Jesus? You are blessed, and if God says you are in the highest position possible, I pray you'd believe! This week, when tempted to rely on self and exert your own strength, remember again **The poor in spirit are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.** Look to Christ over and over again and live out your identity.