

Table of Contents

Preface		6
Blessed are the Poor	Matthew 5:3	7
Blessed are those who Mourn	Matthew 5:4	17
Blessed are the Meek	Matthew 5:5	27
Blessed are the Righteous	Matthew 5:6	37
Blessed are the Merciful	Matthew 5:7	47
Blessed are the Pure in Heart	Matthew 5:8	57
Blessed are the Peacemakers	Matthew 5:9	67
Blessed are the Persecuted	Matthew 5:10	77
Rejoicing in Persecution – On Christ’s Account	Matthew 5:11,12	87

BLESSED are the POOR

Additional reading:	Luke 6:12-26
Suggested singing:	Psalm 72:1,7; 147:1,2

People who know anything at all about the Bible know the fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel account. There is a good possibility that many of them have, at one time or other, memorized the words of our text: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Words that are very familiar take on a certain meaning for us; we usually have a pretty good idea about what it is they say. However, people find it difficult to express (in a few words) just what they "hear" Jesus say in this first beatitude. What did Jesus really say when he spoke the first beatitude to the crowd that had gathered? What did he mean? And, what does that mean for us today?

As you know, the Bible must always be read in context. That is why it is important when reading a passage of scripture to remember such questions as: When was this spoken? And: To whom was this word addressed?

The beatitudes are part of what we refer to as "The Sermon on the Mount". That is the idea you get when you read the opening words of chapter 5 of Matthew. "Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the

mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them”.

The way Matthew writes that gives you the idea that Jesus specifically climbed up a mountain in order that he might preach to the crowds from there. The mountain in question is something like Hamilton’s mountain⁴, not at all like a Mount Everest. The land slowly rises from the Sea of Galilee to a high plateau from which it then rises some more. This was a wild and desolate country at that time, and it was a place to which Jesus retreated more often for private prayer or personal fellowship with God.

Luke, who writes about this same event, says also that Jesus “went out to the mountain”. (Luke 6:12-13) Luke then goes on to tell us that Jesus went there to do two very important things before he spoke his sermon. First, Jesus went there “to pray”. And, second, Jesus appointed twelve of his followers to be his disciples, who (minus one) would eventually become his Apostles.

It is important that we keep that in mind. You see, by the time Jesus preached this sermon, a number of things had already happened in and to his ministry. Not only had his fame spread throughout the land by this time, but also (as becomes very clear from the sermon itself) the break between Jesus and the Pharisees had already taken place. The word as preached by Jesus was not at all like the teaching of the Pharisees. It was evident to all that Jesus had taken a sharp, clear position against the Pharisees and against their teachings; and the people loved it! The crowds were still responding very positively to Jesus’ words; to his teaching. “The large crowd listened to him with delight”, writes Mark. (Mark 12:37, NIV). They sensed that Jesus “was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” (Matthew 7:29)

But the response of the crowds would also eventually change. In the Gospel of John, chapter 6, we read that the crowds began to leave Jesus. When Jesus began to speak of his suffering and death, the crowds turned their backs on him. That’s when Jesus asked his disciples whether they too were going to leave him. That tells us that Jesus preached his

4- Ed. note: Hamilton, Ontario. This “mountain” is actually an escarpment (cf. Niagara Escarpment)

understand Jesus' word either. The church spiritualizes it. She takes off the sharp edges. It is more comfortable and more convenient that way. But Jesus says: "It is true: 'Blessed are the poor'. Even the desperately poor! If indeed they belong to the company of my people because, 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. Yes, theirs is the life that is life eternal!" He keeps on saying that to all who love him, who draw their life from him, who serve him with whatever they have and are. And they are certain: They are blessed, today and forever.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do the Beatitudes in Matthew and Luke refer to the same event? How are the circumstances the same? Different? Can you reconcile the differences?
2. Summarize in your own words who the "poor in spirit" are.
3. Why is incorrect to say the "poor in spirit" are the "spiritually poor"?
4. How does this beatitude apply to us if we are not "poor in spirit"?
5. Do the "poor in spirit" receive their blessing now already? What do they receive?
6. What is our responsibility to the poor in our congregation? In our country? Throughout the world?
7. Do you commit your material blessings to the Lord and to his Kingdom? Are we called to "Give till it hurts"? Does Psalm 15:4 apply here?
8. What is the teaching of the "Social Gospel"? Though it is not taught in our churches, has it found a place in (y)our hearts?