

Session 03 Poverty of Spirit: The Foundational Beatitude (Mt. 5:3)

I. SERMON ON THE MOUNT: CORE VALUES OF THE KINGDOM

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement about a believer's role in cooperating with God's grace. It is a "litmus test" to measure our spiritual development and ministry impact. Jesus calls us to make it our primary goal to seek to be perfect by walking in all the light the Spirit gives us as we embrace the Beatitudes and help others do the same (Mt. 5:19, 48).
⁴⁸You shall be perfect [walk in all the light you receive] as your Father...is perfect. (Mt. 5:48)
- B. ***The 8 Beatitudes*** are being poor in spirit, spiritual mourning, walking in meekness, hungering for righteousness, showing mercy, embracing purity, being a peacemaker, and enduring persecution (Mt. 5:3-12). The Beatitudes define love, spiritual maturity, and the kingdom lifestyle.

II. POVERTY OF SPIRIT (MT. 5:3)

- A. To be poor in spirit is to be aware that we are in great need of experiencing spiritual growth in our heart, ministry, church, and society. This truth is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied truths in the grace of God. To be "happy" means to have a vibrant spirit.
³Blessed are the poor in spirit [those who see their need], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn [spiritually], for they shall be comforted. (Mt. 5:3-4)
- B. To be poor in spirit is to see ourselves as spiritually poor instead of spiritually rich, in terms of our ability to experience and impart spiritual life without the Spirit. It means seeing our deep need to be helped by God in light of how much God wants to give us; seeing our poverty-stricken state in spiritual things; and, thus, being aware of our spiritual deficiency and neediness.
- C. This virtue starts with the awareness of our need to receive salvation and then continues through our spiritual life. It is a deep awareness of our spiritual needs and deficiencies, especially in light of the call to be perfect (Mt. 5:48). To be poor in spirit means that we are aware of our spiritual deficiency in our obedience and love. We are aware of the need for our love to be developed. "Poverty of spirit" is how we see ourselves; "mourning" is how we feel about what we see.
- D. Poverty of spirit and meekness are closely related, but are not exactly the same virtue. Poverty of spirit acknowledges our lack before God and our inability to produce spiritual life on our own. Meekness is awareness of our lack before people; it includes using our resources to serve them.
- E. The way that we become poor in spirit is by gaining understanding of God's highest purpose for His people. We see how much God desires to do in us and through us. We are called to walk in love for Jesus and people and then to inspire others to this lifestyle as defined in the Sermon on the Mount. It includes having a vibrant spirit and being hungry for the Word, for a spirit of prayer, and for the release of the Holy Spirit's power through our words, hands (praying for the sick), and deeds. In other words, God wants to manifest his Presence in our lives and anoint us to inspire other people to walk out the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle as well (Mt. 5:19).

- F. We grow in this by seeing what the Scripture says about how much God will do in and through us, by reading biographies of what He did through others, or by receiving teaching that strengthens our vision to live for the fullness of the Spirit in our love, obedience, power, and wisdom. Expose yourself to teaching, writings, singing, and fellowship that presses in for God's fullness.
- G. Each generation receives a different measure of the Spirit's power according to God's purpose. Thus, we do not know exactly what the measure of breakthrough is that the Holy Spirit will give to each of us personally or corporately in this generation. Many lower their expectation and settle for less after years of not receiving the fullness of what the Scripture sets forth for God's Church.
- H. As our understanding increases, we discern the gap between what God wants to do through and in us and what we experience. We see that we cannot close the gap without the Spirit helping us in response to our seeking Him; we cannot experience more of His fullness without His help, so we set our heart to live in a way that positions us to receive all He has for us (Mt. 6:1-18).
- I. We are gripped by the reality that things are not good enough as they are, and that we do not have power in ourselves to correct things without a dramatic intervention of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we set our heart to reach for the fullness of His purposes for ourselves and others.
- J. This can be an offensive message because it makes people feel uncomfortable when they realize that they have a great spiritual lack and need to respond in specific ways. Many agree with the message in principle but are troubled by it when it touches them specifically and personally.
- K. Jesus addressed this as the root problem in the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-21). When a ministry (individual or corporate) becomes rich in finances, popularity, and influence they are tempted with spiritual passivity. The Lord spoke to Howard Pitman in 1979 that the church in the Western world was living like the Laodiceans, without knowing it.
- ¹⁶...you are lukewarm...neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke...be zealous and repent...²¹To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne. (Rev. 3:16-21)*
- L. In April 1984 I heard God's audible voice say, ***"I have a revelation for you. Call Bob Jones."*** Bob had had an open vision that morning in which he saw Joseph's dungeon, with a cupbearer and a baker (Gen. 40:2-19). They represented two types of ministry. The baker poisoned the king's bread; the cupbearer was innocent and was exalted to serve wine in the king's presence. The Lord showed Bob that the "poison in the bread" is ministry that does ***not produce humility***.
- M. ***Theirs is the kingdom:*** Theirs "is" the kingdom, not "shall be." Jesus promised that any who live poor in spirit would experience the kingdom realities. This includes having a vibrant spirit, feeling God's presence, and being a vehicle of His presence to others. Many feel a lack in these realities without ever connecting it to being poor in spirit. The kingdom belongs to us now. This speaks of experiencing more of the kingdom in a personal way.

III. OUR VISION FOR THE IMPARTATION OF GOD’S LIFE

- A. Two different words for *life* are used in the New Testament: the word for natural (animal) life and the word for God’s supernatural life—*zoe*. We cannot impart *zoe* through natural abilities.
⁶³Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man...you have no life [zoe] in you. (Jn. 6:53)
⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life [zoe]; the flesh profits nothing. (Jn. 6:63)
- B. Paul said that no good thing was in him apart from God’s grace. To be poor in spirit includes seeing ourselves rightly, specifically with regard to our natural abilities and dedication being unable to produce spiritual life; it starts with salvation, then grows in our heart and our ministry.
¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find...²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ! (Rom. 7:18-25)
- C. Having a strong desire to experience and impart the Spirit’s “*zoe* life” gives us urgency to press in to God for a progressive breakthrough in our heart and ministry and in the Church.
- D. Mistakes are made in the application of this truth. We are not to be comforted by externals in our quest for a deep spiritual breakthrough, e.g., big crowds, growing popularity, and human enthusiasm in meetings. I can enjoy this, but I do not mistake it for the impartation of *zoe* life that leads to people living a “Sermon on the Mount” lifestyle. Some confuse the outward, enthusiastic responses of people and a growing ministry influence for the impartation of *zoe* to the people.
- E. We press in to God, having confidence that He enjoys us and that our weak efforts and limited impact are valuable to Him and move Him. We are not to despise the smallness of our work and spiritual impact; neither must we despise growth, popularity, and human enthusiasm in our ministry, but we are certainly not to be content with it.
- F. To apply this rightly in the life of a believer, we must distinguish between our legal position and our living condition in grace. What Jesus’ work on the cross freely and instantly ***worked for us*** is what He now progressively ***works in us*** as we take up our cross in response to His grace.
- G. Many believers feel inferior to others when comparing their gifting, dedication, and achievements to others’ gifts, etc., but this is not the same as being poor in spirit. Furthermore, many believers feel condemned before God when they relate to Him based on their dedication, but neither is this the same as being poor in spirit.
- H. We must see God’s enjoyment of us and how He values the small things that we are doing, as we press in for a greater breakthrough in our heart and ministry, knowing that He has more for us. We are to feel confident in God’s love and to receive His esteem of our small effort, but without being content with the measure of the Spirit that we walk in and impart to others.

IV. NOT BEING CONTENT WITH ANYTHING LESS THAN GOD’S HIGHEST

- A. Jesus charges us to be very careful what we listen to or accept as the truth of Scripture. This is a most important text related to the understanding of what it means to be poor in spirit.
- ¹⁹The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful...²⁴Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. (Mk. 4:19-24)*
- B. Do not be content with outward responses to your ministry, but press on for the power to make the inward change, as seen in the Sermon on the Mount.
- C. Many evaluate themselves spiritually by comparing themselves with others. It makes them feel superior and successful. But we must evaluate ourselves by the Word of God. What is the standard of Christianity that you refuse to live without?
- ¹²We dare not...compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Cor. 10:12)*
- D. The Laodiceans were seduced by their popularity and the enthusiasm around them so that they no longer sought God wholeheartedly. This issue separates different types of ministries today.
- E. Believers in prosperous circumstances often lack this virtue. Feeling superior to others in their gifting and accomplishments results in self-confidence, which minimizes their need for God.
- F. We must continually press in to God for greater love, purity, healing, and evangelism, etc.
- G. The ear-tickling that Paul warned of is common today as a distorted grace message that seeks to make people feel comfortable. Most truths related to our walk with God are double-edged, having positive and negative aspects. The distortion of this message is in emphasizing the positive aspect and ignoring the negative. The net result is a message that is less than truthful.
- ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth...⁵But you be watchful in all things... (2 Tim. 4:3-5)*
- H. Do not let anyone put “kind but humanistic water” on your fire to press in for fullness. There are many well-meaning believers who use the Scripture in a non-biblical way in their desire to comfort others. The result is that they put the fire out in people by making them feel good.
- I. Often, those in prosperous circumstances lack this virtue. They feel superior to others in their gifting and accomplishments resulting in a confidence that minimizes their pressing into God.

*I recommend **Unrelenting Prayer**, by Bob Sorge, which develops the theme of being poor in spirit.*