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

“Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the gentle,
for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed Living

for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

If we take God’s word—and specifically the New Testament—as a handbook for Christian living, then there surely is no portion of Scripture more at odds with the world’s contemporary standards and principles than that part of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes. This should not surprise since, indeed, they were concepts equally as foreign to the time in which they were uttered by Jesus.

The verses we call the Beatitudes are not evangelism; they are not a template for salvation, outlining what someone must do before gaining entrance to the Kingdom. They do not, in and of themselves, outline New Testament doctrine; the believer who lives his life strictly according to the counsel of the Beatitudes—no more, no less—would be on thin doctrinal ice.

The Beatitudes are, however, a succinct, easily understood portrait of a Spirit-filled life. The verses represent God’s perspective on a Spiritually-healthy believer’s heart, and it will be to our profit to understand them more fully. Toward that end, for the next few weeks we will be considering these few golden threads that have been woven into the multi-hued tapestry of God’s word.

The Highest Good

Any consideration of the Beatitudes must begin with a clarification of the word that begins each verse in most translations: “Blessed.” The Greek word so translated is

makarios. Some people, and paraphrases such as *The Living Bible* and the J.B. Phillips *The New Testament in Modern English*, prefer to update the Greek with the word “happy,” as in “Happy are the poor in spirit...” But this is too thin; the word encompasses much more.

As for “happy,” it will not do for the Beatitudes, having been devalued in modern usage. The Greek “describes a state not of inner feeling on the part of those to whom it is applied, but of blessedness from an ideal point of view in the judgment of others” (Allen). (D.A. Carson)

[Makarios] means more than mere happiness. The word conveys the idea of congratulation, rather than describing a state. The person to whom these beatitudes apply is to be envied. (Guthrie)

There is a deep, profound, Spiritual joy that is far superior to any amount of superficial happiness. It speaks of God’s riches poured into a life, of a clearer understanding of one’s role in the Kingdom, of intimate communion that need not always be revealed in one’s face.

It is this sort of blessedness that is described in the Beatitudes. And it is a blessedness to be envied.

Those who stand for higher standards than current conventions are always seen as critics who are best disposed of.

(Donald Guthrie)

Spiritual Poverty

Our God-space

Man is born with a capacity for God, but with no guarantee that that space will be filled with Him. The Son of God was manifested on earth as a *human being*, not as a chickadee, or camel, or slug. He came as a person, because it was with people that God desired a higher relationship—not slugs. So it was in people that God instilled this holy capacity.

We begin empty. The person who never fills that void with the gospel of Christ—the truth that He, and He alone can save—will die apart from God, thinking all the while that their God-space had been filled with something better.

Brokenness

But there *is* nothing better, and Jesus says that those who are truly blessed are the ones who have acknowledged the emptiness inside their souls, and that it is a space Christ alone is able to fill.

“Poverty” is the cry of the broken, repentant heart. Though he was the great king of Israel, and could purchase anything he desired—even another man’s wife—David later acknowledged his own spiritual pov-

erty and wrote

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

Behold, You desire truth in
the innermost being,

And in the hidden part You will
make me know wisdom.

Purify me with hyssop, and
I shall be clean;

Wash me, and I shall be
whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You
have broken rejoice.

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

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
(Psalm 51:5-10)

Admitting one’s spiritual poverty is a sign of humility; refusing to make this admission is a sign of pride. Jesus illustrated the difference with a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector.

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: “Two men went up into

“You’re blessed when
you’re at the end
of your rope.

With less of you there is
more of God
and his rule.”

(*The Message*)

the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

(Luke 18:9-14)

A Heart Filled to Overflowing

The arrogant man, always expecting that he is owed more than he has, shakes his fist in God’s face and cries out, “I don’t deserve to be treated like this!” But the humble man, aware that he, in himself, is bankrupt, lifts up open hands to God and, with bowed head and grateful heart, cries, “I don’t deserve to be treated like this.”

To be “poor in spirit” is to understand that in ourselves we are utterly unworthy before God, deserving nothing, but that through Christ we are granted the right to stand before Him with confidence. To be poor in this world is to have an empty purse; to be spiritually poor is to have one’s heart filled with God.

*Jesus, I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,
And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power,
Thou hast made me whole.*

*Oh, how great Thy loving kindness,
Vaster, broader than the sea!
Oh, how marvelous Thy goodness,
Lavished all on me!
Yes, I rest in Thee, Beloved,
Know what wealth of grace is Thine,
Know Thy certainty of promise,
And have made it mine.*

*Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,
I behold Thee as Thou art,
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless,
Satisfies my heart;
Satisfies its deepest longings,
Meets supplies its every need,
Compasseth me round with blessings:
Thine is love indeed!*

*Ever lift Thy face upon me,
As I work and wait for Thee;
Resting ‘neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus,
Earth’s dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father’s glory,
Sunshine of my Father’s face,
Keep me ever trusting, resting,
Fill me with Thy grace.*

(Jean S. Pigott)