BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Matthew 5:1-16

Key Verse: 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The main theme of Matthew’s gospel is the kingdom of heaven. The first message of Jesus was, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*” (4:17) We call Matthew 5:1-7:27 ‘the Sermon on the Mount.’ The Sermon on the Mount is a parallel to Moses giving the law on Mount Sinai. Jesus’ sermon does not start with “Do or Do not, or you should…”, but rather “Blessed are those who…” The Sermon on the Mount provides Christians with a blueprint of future life in the kingdom of heaven. So, some call it ‘the heavenly constitution.’

This sermon starts with the Beatitudes. We call the beatitudes “Eight Blessings.” The word ‘beatitude’ comes from ‘*bēatitudo*’ in Latin, which means ‘happiness.’ The word ‘Blessed’ *makarios* in Greek, also means happiness. So, the Sermon on the Mount is a message of happiness. This happiness is not a temporary and physical satisfaction which comes from possession and achievement from this world, but is a permanent, deep, and spiritual fulfillment which comes from the kingdom of heaven. Let’s see how Jesus taught his disciples the secret of this blessing.

First, Blessed are the poor in spirit (3). Let us read verse 3 altogether. “***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***” Who are the poor in spirit? They are spiritually in need. The poor in spirit are those who seek God earnestly, realizing their utter helplessness, and put their whole trust in God. D.A. Carson said about this, “To be poor in spirit is not to lack courage but to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It confesses one’s unworthiness before God and utter dependence on him.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, p 132) Who are the poor in spirit in the Bible? **Hannah** was desperate to seek God’s presence in her life. She cried out in the temple day and night, realizing her helplessness in seeking God’s favor. **David** realized his nothingness before the constant threat of death by King Saul. If he had wanted, he could have removed his enemy. But David feared God and spared Saul’s life because Saul was God’s anointed king. Between his conscience and his demand for justice David realized his helplessness and came to God in desperation for his help.

Poverty is not a shame, but a channel to meet God. Suppose you do not have even one dollar to buy milk for your crying baby; you will seek God desperately. Brokenness is not a failure, but a chance to experience God’s healing. When your heart is broken, you seek for God’s healing and comfort. Loneliness is a space for God. When you feel lonely, it is a time for God to enter in you and fill your space. Then, the kingdom of heaven is yours. D.A Carson said, “The kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit; it is they who enjoy Messiah’s reign and the blessings he brings. They joyfully accept his rule and participate in the life of the kingdom.”

Those who are poor in spirit always pray. They sing the hymn, “I Need Thee Every Hour.” Through prayer they seek God's presence. Through prayer they have constant fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Those who are poor in spirit also read the word of God and meditate on it day and night. Their souls are always thirsty for the word of God as deer pants for water. Those who are poor experience the kingdom of heaven in their hearts. Who are the rich in spirit? The rich in spirit are proud in heart. They think that they don’t need God. They depend on their ability, achievement, possession of this world, not on God. Woe to those who are proud in heart, for pride goes before destruction! (Pr 16:18)

Second, Blessed are those who mourn. (4) Let’s read verse 4. “***Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.***” Mourning is the expression of sorrow. The Bible says that there are two kinds of sorrow; Godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret; worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Cor 7:10) Those who do not overcome worldly sorrow fall into depression. Godly sorrow is the grieving over others’ sins and my own sins. In the book of Numbers **Joshua and Caleb** tore their clothes as the expression of their sorrow when his people became fearful and rebelled against God after hearing the report about exploring the land. (Nu 14). They grieved over their unbelief.  **David** lamented over his sin of adultery after he had been rebuked by Nathan. He confessed his sins with tears and asked God’s forgiveness. It is written in Psalm 51.

Our God is the God of comfort. He comforts those who are mourning from tragedy and misery of life. Our God comforts those who are mourning for their sins. **Jesus** comforted the weeping widow who lost her only son. Jesus also comforted the erring Peter who disowned Him three times. Jesus promised his disciples to send the Holy Spirit as Another Comforter. These days **the Holy Spirit** comforts us unlimited by time and space. Romans 8:26 says, “*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God*.” We often do not know how to pray and what to pray for when we are in extreme sorrow. We just don’t understand what happened. But God will let us understand the reason why. We understand that in all things God works for good for those who love him and have been called according to his good purpose. (Ro 8:28) We are comforted when we see Jesus who was hung on the cross. Even though he was a sinless Son of God, he became a man of sorrow and familiar with sufferings. He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. By his sorrow, we are comforted. By his wounds we are healed.

Tears are fruits of our repentance. Today we have lost tears in our messages and testimonies. I don’t mean that we should be emotional, but spiritual and more sincere in our repentance. Public confession of sin disappeared in church. Instead, all kinds of programs for social gathering and entertainment are replaced. We need to restore tears in our prayer, tears in our sermons, and tears in our testimonies. God says in Isaiah 66:2, “*These are the ones I look on with favor; those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my word*.” Amen!

Third, Blessed are the meek. (5) Let’s read verse 5. **“*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.****”* Who are the meek? The meek are not the week, but the gentle and humble, like Jesus Christ. (Mt 11:29) The meek are strong in self-control and dependence on God. Who is the meek in the Bible? **Isaac** in the Old Testament was meek. He dug wells for his family and for his animals. But his bully neighbors came and threatened to chase Isaac out, claiming that the well belonged to them. Isaac did not quarrel with them, but he moved away and dug another well. The wicked neighbors came again and stopped up the well with dirt. Isaac moved away and dug another well. The same story was repeated until the neighbors stopped following him. Isaac did not fight against them, not because he was powerless, but because he trusted in God who would provide and give him final victory. Later, the bully neighbors came back and apologized by asking him to make a peace treaty with them. **Moses** was a humble man. Once, his leadership was challenged by his people, his elders and even his family members. But Moses did not fight against them. Instead, he knelt down before God and prayed. Moses trusted in God. Isaac and Moses are the shadow of Jesus Christ, who was gentle and humble. Although he was the Son of God, he became obedient even to death on the cross. He did not open his mouth, but became the sacrificial Lamb of God. Psalm 37:11 says, “*But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity*.” Who is the meek among us? I believe that M. Isaiah Lim is meek because he is humble and gentle. Those who are meek will inherit the kingdom of heaven as well as the earth. M. Isaiah Lim received EIU as his inheritance.

Fourth, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. (6) Look at verse 6. **“*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*.”** Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are similar to the poor in spirit. Both of them need God’s fulfillment. But those who hunger and thirst for righteousness focus on Jesus, who is God’s righteousness. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that Jesus Christ is God’s righteousness, holiness and redemption. Sinners cannot make themselves righteous, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Ro 3:23) Jesus died for our sin, and through faith in him we become righteous before God. We can have a right relationship with God only through Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. So, Paul said in Romans 3:24-25, “*But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify*. *This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe*.” Those who are hungry and thirsty for Jesus Christ will be filled through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit enables us to experience his love, power, and his presence. The Holy Spirit fills us with heavenly joy and peace.

Fifth, Blessed are the merciful. (7) Look at verse 7. “***Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***” Mercy is a compassion or forgiveness which forbears punishment. You show your mercy when you cancel the debt of others. You show your mercy when you forgive your enemy. God shows his mercy by canceling his punishment on sinners. The Bible says that our God is merciful. Moses called to God before he received new stone tablets on the Mount Sinai, “*The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness*…” (Ex 34:6) God demonstrated his mercy upon undeserved sinners by canceling the debts of our sins. So, we, the recipients of God’s mercy, must show our mercy to our brothers and sisters. Those who are merciful to others are happy people, because God’s mercy fills them all the days of their lives. By practicing God’s mercy, we also share Jesus’ divine nature in his holiness and righteousness. Forgiving and loving are good medicine for our soul. However, bitterness and hatred are poison, which lead to death.

Here the word “Blessed” in Hebrew means, ‘as the one who has been already blessed,’ not ‘as the one who seeks blessing.” As those who have been already blessed by God, let us seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness as first importance. In conclusion, blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those hunger and thirst for Jesus, blessed are the merciful. We’ll study the rest of the blessings next week. Amen!