

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Much And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

October 3rd, 2021

Matthew 5:1-3

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to the Matthew chapter 5. We're starting something new today. Something good and something necessary. We're going to be taking a good long walk-through Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount. In the preface to his commentary on The Sermon On The Mount John Stott said:

“The Sermon on the Mount has a unique fascination. It seems to present the quintessence of the teaching of Jesus. It makes goodness attractive. It shames our shabby performance. It engenders dreams of a better world.”¹

Are you dreaming of a better world right now?

I know I am. I'm dreaming of a better world and I am dreaming of a better church.

The church of Jesus Christ has not exactly covered herself in glory over the last 19 months. In fact, I think it would be fair to say – at least in reference to the church in North American – is that the last 19 months have revealed that we are really good at belief and really bad at behaviour.

¹ John Stott, *The Message Of The Sermon On The Mount* in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 9.

And that reflects the priorities of the evangelical church over the last 60 years. We want to make sure that people get SAVED – so we talk about how Jesus died and rose again – we tell people how to pray the sinner’s prayer – we tell people what to say when they die and wake up at heaven’s gates – and all of that is GREAT!

And along the way we have treated the TEACHING of Jesus as if it were essentially irrelevant. And yet Jesus said:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46 ESV)

According to Jesus, there is no taking hold of Jesus that doesn’t involve taking hold of the TEACHING of Jesus.

So, let me ask you, is the Sermon on the Mount part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Most contemporary evangelicals don’t know how to answer that.

I’m asking you – this is not a rhetorical question – you don’t have to answer out loud, but I want you to wrestle with this: Is the Sermon On The Mount part of the Gospel?

We want to say, well, it’s important, but it’s not the Gospel. The Gospel is about how Jesus died and rose again for our sins.

But is that true?

Is that all the Gospel is?

Or is the Sermon on the Mount part of the Gospel?

Well, let me ask you another question: where do you FIND the Sermon on the Mount? If someone wanted to read it, where you send them? You would send them to THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW – or to THE GOSPEL OF LUKE. So what does that tell you? It tells you that the

Sermon on the Mount was part of how the APOSTLES thought about the Gospel – and it needs to be part of how WE think about the Gospel still today.

Now, to be clear, the Sermon on the Mount is not the HOW of the Gospel. It does not tell us HOW TO GET SAVED. It's not the HOW, it's not the WHO, it's not the WHAT - so what is it? What part of the Gospel is it?

According to the Bible, it's the WHY.

The Apostle Paul in Titus 2:14 says that Jesus:

“gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:14 ESV)

Are you seeing that? Jesus DIED so that we could LIVE as the people God. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones said exactly the same thing – he said:

“The Lord Jesus Christ died to enable us to live the Sermon on the Mount.”²

Do you understand that?

Jesus didn't come JUST to save us from hell.

Jesus didn't come JUST to erase the record of our sins.

Jesus came to do something BIGGER THAN THAT! Jesus came to make us a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation. He came to PRESENT US AS A LIVING SACRIFICE UNTO God.

This is what God wanted – this is what God has always wanted! Way back in Leviticus 18:2-4 God said to Moses:

² D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 12.

“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. ³ You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴ You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 18:2–4 ESV)

But of course, in the Old Testament, because of sin, we were never able to be the people God wanted us to be. We always ended up adopting the attitudes, behaviours, values and assumptions of the surrounding culture. We couldn't do it! We didn't do it, so Jesus came to do it for us and he came to do it through us. By healing our hearts, by filling us with his Spirit and by giving us THIS INSPIRED TEACHING – he came to make us the people we were originally created and intended to be – thanks be to God!

So this SERMON – that we're going to be looking at over the next several weeks and months – is a manifesto of the Kingdom of God. This is WHO WE WERE MEANT TO BE – and this is who we can be because of the life, death, resurrection, ascension and present intercession of Jesus Christ.

Are you hungry for that brothers and sisters? Man I am hungry for that. I believe this could make all the difference in the world. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones said here:

“The world today is looking for, and desperately needs, true Christians. I am never tired of saying that what the Church needs to do is not to organize evangelistic campaigns to attract outside people, but to begin herself to live the Christian life.”³

He goes on to say:

“If you read the history of the Church you will find it has always been when men and women have taken this Sermon seriously and faced themselves in the light of it, that true revival has come.”⁴

Do you want true revival?

Do you want the church to come alive again and to be able to speak again with POWER and CREDIBILITY to the lost, hurt and broken people in this nation?

³ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 13.

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 14.

Then YES – pray for revival – but in those prayers – pray for the church to begin to HEAR and to BELIEVE and TO LIVE this Sermon on the Mount.

REAL CHRISTIANS are the only evangelistic campaign that we need.

REAL CHRISTIANS – VISIBLE, PUBLIC, SERMON ON THE MOUNT LIVING CHRISTIANS – are the best argument we can ever hope to make - to our kids, to our culture and to our country as to the reality and goodness and GLORY of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

So let's read it.

I hope you have your Bibles open now to The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5 verses 1-3. The Sermon on the Mount takes up all of chapters 5,6 and 7 in Matthew's Gospel but as I said, my plan is for us to go slow and to dig deep. So today we'll be reading the introduction and the first beatitude. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹ 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." (Matthew 5:1-3 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Most commentators agree that the Sermon on the Mount, as we have it in Matthew, is intended as a summary of the sort of preaching that Jesus was doing in Galilee at this early point in his earthly ministry. Turn back a page in your bibles to Matthew 4:12-17. Matthew says:

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:12–17 ESV)

Mark 1:14-15 says the same thing a little more succinctly; it says:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14–15 ESV)

So according to both Mark and Matthew, after the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus began a preaching tour in Galilee. He was preaching the Gospel of God. He was proclaiming the message of the Kingdom of Heaven.

That’s what this is!!!

The Sermon on the Mount is Matthew providing us with a SAMPLE and a SUMMARY of the sort of preaching that was characteristic of this entire preaching tour in Galilee! There were 204 villages in Galilee in Jesus’ day so if he hit most of them and if you were one of the disciples who joined the team fairly early on in this campaign then you may have heard this sermon preached more than 150 times. That’s why, by the way, there are slight variations in terms of how Matthew recorded it and Luke recorded it. Jesus would have changed it up a little bit each time – as any preacher will. By and large the only sermons I preach multiple times are my wedding sermons. There are only 5-6 passages in the Bible that typically get used at weddings so if you do 8 weddings year and you are at the same church for 15 years – then guess what? Some of you have heard me preach the same passage at a wedding a couple of different times, so I try to change things up a bit. A new illustration, a different joke, a new point – but the substance remains the same.

So it is here.

This is the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is who we were meant to be and this is who we were SAVED TO BE – thanks be to God!

Now, the Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes. A beatitude is a disposition produced by grace.

Let me say that again.

A beatitude is a disposition produced by grace⁵.

So these are not personality traits these are KINGDOM VIRTUES that are implanted and that grow over time in all truly saved individuals.

The people who live this way are described by Jesus as being “blessed”. There really is no English word that precisely corresponds to what Jesus is talking about here. We use the word “blessed” in contemporary English to mean something like “privileged” or “fortunate”, so if a guy buys a new Lamborghini he posts a selfie to Instagram with himself standing beside the car underneath the caption “Hashtag Blessed”.

Which is weird since the first beatitude is actually blessed are the POOR in spirit – which isn’t naturally illustrated by the purchase of a \$300,000 car. So that’s misleading to say the least.

Some translations opt for the English word HAPPY – but that’s kind of weak for what is being communicated here. We’re probably best to stick with the word BLESSED but then to redefine it according to the way it was used and understood in the Bible. D.A. Carson provides a really simple and helpful definition. He says:

“To be “blessed” means, fundamentally, to be approved, to find approval.”⁶

That’s why, in the Bible, we can BLESS GOD, and he can bless us. We can look at God and say: “GOD you are right! I delight in you! I bless you” And God can look at us and say: “I like your

⁵ As per D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 27.

⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 16.

attitude. I approve of that behaviour! That is exactly where I want you. Well done!” That’s what it means for us to be BLESSED in the eyes of God.

So these beatitudes are GOD APPROVED actions, attitudes and behaviours and today we are looking at the first one. In verse 3 Jesus says:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3 ESV)

So what does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Definition:

Obviously we want to start with the Old Testament. Jesus was a Bible reader and he was preaching to Bible readers so that’s the original frame of reference for this saying. This kind of language was used in passages like Isaiah 57:15 which says:

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a **contrite and lowly spirit**”” (Isaiah 57:15 ESV)

So God approves of and is present with people who have a contrite and lowly spirit. He says something similar in Isaiah 66:2:

“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is **humble and contrite in spirit** and trembles at my word.” (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

Ok, so God is on TEAM HUMBLE, TEAM CONTRITE AND LOWLY IN SPIRIT – which is why the Book of Proverbs says:

“It is better to be of **a lowly spirit** with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.” (Proverbs 16:19 ESV)

You want to be LOWLY in spirit because that puts you in good stead with your Creator – so even if all your earthly allies are poor and weak – humanly speaking – it doesn’t matter. Because you enjoy the favour of Almighty God!

John Stott summarizes all these Old Testament references saying:

“The ‘poor man’ in the Old Testament is one who is both afflicted and unable to save himself, and who therefore looks to God for salvation, while recognizing that he has no claim upon him.”⁷

That’s what it means to be poor in spirit.

I love that definition!

The person who is poor in spirit is AFFLICTED. He is AGITATED in his spirit. He has fallen under CONVICTION. He has DESPAIRED of his own righteousness. He knows that there is nothing he can do to EARN or WARRANT HIS OWN SALVATION so he casts himself upon the mercy and compassion of Almighty God. That’s what it means to be POOR IN SPIRIT - have you ever been in that place my friend?

A couple of weeks ago we had the privilege of witnessing the baptism of two of our young people and they both gave outstanding testimonies as to the work of God in their lives as young believers. Do you remember what Broderick said in terms of how he came to the place of salvation? I’m quoting this, with his permission, he said:

“I had an overwhelming feeling of regret as I was ashamed of the way I was living my life and I didn’t lose that feeling. It actually got worse. I felt sick to my stomach, I couldn’t sleep, I didn’t want to eat. After four days of feeling like that I booked time off work, I went to my parent’s house and spent three days there praying, begging and crying out to God to save me: to forgive me for all my sins that I have committed against him and to wash my soul with his blood. On the third day of being at my parent’s house praying to God to forgive me, I felt all the weight lifted off my shoulders and a peace in my heart.”⁸

Are you hearing that? That is POVERTY OF SPIRIT! That is the starting point for all TRUE LIFE in the Kingdom of God! There is NO ONE in the kingdom of God who is not *poor in spirit*!⁹ This is the foundation! All other kingdom dispositions flow from here.

⁷John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 38-39.

⁸ Broderick Fockens, Baptism Testimony, September 12th, 2021. Used with permission.

⁹ As per D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 33.

Illustration:

Alright, definitions are great but illustrations can be even better – particularly when they come from no less an authority than Jesus himself. In Luke 18:10-14 Jesus tells a story about a man who was poor in spirit. He says:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10–14 ESV)

Isn't that helpful? In that 4 verse illustration we see what poor of spirit IS and we see what poor of spirit isn't.

According to this picture to be poor of spirit IS to know yourself a sinner. To be poor of spirit IS to know that you have fallen away from God. To be poor of spirit IS to beat your breast, to own your sin and to call out for mercy and grace from God.

That's what it is - and we also see what it isn't.

To be poor of spirit is not to think yourself morally superior. To be poor of spirit is not to rely on your religious exercises and observances. To be poor of spirit is not to be confident and satisfied in yourself.

That is to be a Pharisee. That is to be damned and away from God.

Folks like that need to be knocked down before they can be lifted up. We forget that that was one of the things Jesus came to do but it was, do you remember how Simeon the prophet greeted baby Jesus in the temple when he was just 8 days old? He said to Mary and Joseph:

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many (Luke 2:34 ESV)

He’s going to knock some people down SO THAT he can lift them up because the Kingdom of Heaven can only be entered and enjoyed and experienced by those who are poor in spirit. D.A. Carson says helpfully here:

“Poverty of spirit is the personal acknowledgment of spiritual bankruptcy. It is the conscious confession of unworth before God. As such, it is the deepest form of repentance.”¹⁰

‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ (Luke 18:13 ESV)

Have you ever been to that place?

Have you ever been to the place where you are HORRIFIED to discover what you are capable of? Have you ever been to the place where you are ASHAMED of your own instincts, desires and inclinations? Have you ever been to the place where you stop trusting yourself and you decide finally and totally to trust in Jesus!

Because that is the place of salvation.

That’s where it all begins – but that isn’t to say that we start there and move on from there – no, according to the Bible, we start there and we CONTINUE there because that is the place of life and blessing. Every day we wake up and we look in the mirror and we say: “You know what? I don’t trust you. You make bad decisions. You have inordinate desires. You lie to yourself. You can’t be the Lord of me. So I’m going to die to myself and follow Jesus.”

That isn’t just a decision you make at the start of your Christian life – that is a decision that you make every day of your Christian life. The Apostle Paul said:

“I die every day!” (1 Corinthians 15:31 ESV)

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 17.

Every day I have to decide who I am going to listen to, who I'm going to trust, who I'm going to rely on. And every day I choose Jesus.

That is the person who is approved by their Creator. That is the person who is going to be blessed in this life and in the life to come – thanks be to God!

Application:

Alright, now before we leave this text I want to ask a very practical question: what are we supposed to DO with this information? You've heard this sermon – you've learned what it MEANS to be poor in spirit, you've seen poverty of spirit illustrated in the parable that Jesus told – so you understand this now – but what are you supposed to do with it?

Again, Lloyd Jones is helpful here. I should probably warn you that you are going to be hearing a lot of quotes from Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones over the next few weeks and months. Outside of the Bible, the book *Studies In The Sermon on the Mount* by Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones has had a greater impact on my life and ministry than any other book I can think of. When I first read it, it hit me so hard, I actually doubted my salvation. It made me realize that being a Christian is about more than being smart enough to memorize a few formulas about the Trinity or the correct way of describing the atonement of Jesus Christ. It told me that there was a WAY of LIFE that went with those TRUTHS. Lloyd Jones PRESSED THAT REALITY HOME ON ME – because the Sermon on the Mount had pressed that reality home on him. He says in the introduction to his commentary:

“These beatitudes crush me to the ground. They show me my utter helplessness. Were it not for the new birth, I am undone. Read and study it, face yourself in the light of it. It will drive you to see your ultimate need of the rebirth and the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing that so leads to the gospel and its grace as the Sermon on the Mount.”¹¹

Are you hearing that? That's exactly what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5. He said:

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 13.

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV)

Listen, Christian – to BE A CHRISTIAN – TO BE A LITTLE CHRIST – is to have the Spirit of Christ living within you – correct? Therefore, USE THIS SERMON – use this description of the Gospel of the Kingdom OF HEAVEN – to TEST yourself, to see if Christ is truly being formed within you.

Take every piece of this message – take this first part about ‘blessed are the poor in spirit’ – and use it as the TEST it was meant to be. Lay it as a lens upon your life. Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. Ask yourself brother – ask yourself sister – am I poor in spirit? Do I despair of my own righteousness? Do I distrust myself? Am I broken, contrite and lowly? Have I been afflicted? Do I look to Jesus for mercy, grace and guidance?

WHO TRULY IS THE LORD OF MY LIFE?

Because in the heart of every kingdom man or woman the answer is patently obvious: Jesus!

Jesus is the one I trust. Jesus is the one I listen to. Jesus is the one who guides me – now and forevermore.

Are you in that place?

If you are – then you are blessed. God approves of you. And he is going to help you and grow you and use you. And in the end he is going to give you the Kingdom of Heaven.

But if you are not in that place – then what a kindness it was for God to bring you here today! What a clear and compelling piece of evidence that he has not given up on you. He is speaking to you right now through his Word. He is saying come. Come, ye sinners, poor and needy! Come, ye thirsty; come and welcome! Come, ye weary, heavy laden! Come! Come unto Jesus and be saved. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.