

# The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Blessed And Poor In Spirit

Text: Matthew 5:3

**INTRODUCTION:** Being blessed in today's culture has some kind of material attachment to it. The Greek adjective used here (49x in NT) has two major ways of being used in the NT. First, a person is "happy or fortunate" because of life's circumstances. 1 Corinthians 7:39-40 "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. <sup>40</sup> But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God." Here is Paul's response, in chains, before Agrippa "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews" (Acts 26:2 NKJV).

Second, the word conveys the idea of being favored, blessed. This is true of the individuals who receive divine favor, blessings, as we see in the Sermon on the Mount. Mary is proclaimed blessed because she believed the report of Gabriel. Those who persevere in trials, James 1:2 "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." 1 Peter 3:14 "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled." You're blessed if you are a doer of the word, Matthew 24:46 "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing."<sup>1</sup> James 1:25 "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

Dr. Bill Mounce makes this comment "In most of these contexts, the word takes the form of a pronouncement. That is, though the present situation of those facing trials is difficult, they are encouraged by the prospect of future consolation and reward (blessing) from God and thus are able to face the present with courage and hope."

**Q - How does this come into play in the Sermon on the Mount?** Given the fact we have unpacked the biblical definition of blessing, we must apply it to the text.

## **I. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT**

Let's define what the word poor is not. In this context it does not refer to materially poor. Classical Greek used the word to refer to a person deduced to total destitution, who crouched in a corner begging. This term means "begging poor" which was even more than

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<sup>1</sup> NKJV

## The Gospel of Matthew

just poor. It is used in Luke 16:20 to describe the beggar Lazarus, “**And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate.**” It’s also used for the ordinary poverty, but not beggars totally dependent upon handouts. Luke 21:1-2 “**And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. <sup>2</sup> And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins.**”

**Q** - Does this mean one is blessed by being materially poor? The context is clear that Jesus is referring to spiritual poverty not material poverty. The Scriptures do not teach that materially poverty is the path to spiritual poverty. In Matthew 5:42 “**Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you**” if material poverty was the path to spiritual blessedness, then the task would be making believers poor not helping financially.

Jesus often had nowhere to lay his head, cf. Matthew 8:20, but He and His disciples were not destitute nor beggars. Paul was beaten, shipwrecked, left for dead, stoned, imprisoned, and often economically hard pressed, but we see he neither was a beggar. It was an honor to work for his own ministerial expenses, Acts 20:34 “**You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me.**”

No New Testament believer is condemned for being rich or wealthy. Joseph of Arimathea, Philemon and Nicodemus, were wealthy. In 1 Corinthians 1:26 “**For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.**” They weren’t rejected because they were wealthy or esteemed, it’s they trusted in those material things more than Christ, 1 Timothy 6:6-17.

## II. Humbleness And Why Its First

To be poor in spirit is to recognize one’s spiritual poverty apart from God. There are no saving resources in themselves and they can only beg for mercy and grace. They know they have no spiritual merit, and they can earn no spiritual reward. Pride is gone, self assurance is gone, and they stand empty handed before God. Thus, the definition of poor in spirit. Therefore, this is the place of salvation, when we know we are helpless and need the mercy and grace of God. Isaiah 66:2 “**But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.**” Psalms 34:18 “**The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.**” Psalms 51:17 “**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.**” Cf. Luke 18:9-14

## The Gospel of Matthew

Pride has no part in the kingdom of heaven and until one is humble he won't be saved. In the church today there is little emphasis on humility. Until a person knows how worthless they are they will never know how glorious and majestic Christ is. We see plenty of books on how to be successful, happy and achievers, but little on humility.

### III. HOW DO WE BECOME POOR IN SPIRIT AND HOW DO WE KNOW WE'RE THERE?

Humility is first in this sermon because pride is a killer. Proverbs 16:5 *"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished."* Here is the state of the Church of Laodacia and their spiritual pride, *"Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (Revelation 3:17)

**Q** - How then do we become poor in spirit? Humility is not a human work, it's a divine work of God to help us see we cannot change ourselves, and we are hopeless without God's grace and mercy.

First, turn your eyes off yourself and look to God. Second, starve the flesh of anything that feeds pride. Rather than looking for praise, accolades, and popularity, stay away from them. Third, we can ask God for it. David did in Psalms 51:10 *"Create in me a clean heart O God."*

There's a few things we can note when we seem to be poor in Spirit. First, we are weaned from ourselves. Not relying upon our own wisdom, accomplishments and pride. We can say with Paul in Galatians 2:20 *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."* Second, it will lead us to be lost in the wonder of Christ. Third, we will see that our circumstances are God's plan, even if they are difficult. Because we deserve far worse, He is faithful to see us through, 1 Peter 4:16 *"but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."* Fourth, we will spend time in prayer as a poor beggar asking for God's help and mercy.

Finally, God has granted His kingdom to those who humbly come to Him. In giving up our own kingdom, we can inherit God's.