

Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-14-2010

Introduction

Last week we saw that the Beatitudes are a call to enjoy kingdom living to the fullest. Who among us does not want to do that? And God wants us to be fulfilled. The chief end of man is to glorify God *and to enjoy Him forever*. And as Billy Sunday said, if we are losing our joy, there is a leak in our Christianity somewhere. And so this sermon series is about plugging up those leaks and rediscovering that the joy of the Lord, which is our strength. If you missed the first sermon, I highly recommend that you listen to it because there are keys to understanding the beatitudes that I won't be covering again. I'm assuming in these next few sermons that you understand those principles.

Now this first beatitude gives the very first step that we take in becoming a Christian, and it is the very first step of daily entering into His kingdom power throughout the remainder of our lives. It is an attitude that joyfully says, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." The word for poor is not the word that describes a person who is cash hungry. It describes a person who has no property, no food, and is absolutely destitute. It's the *ptochos* poor. In your outline you have a picture of the beggar Lazarus, who was filled with sores, the dogs licking his sores, and Lazarus eating scraps thrown away by the rich man. Anyone who owns nothing is a *ptochos* poor. The Greeks despised this word *ptochos*. Plato banished the *ptochos* from his ideal community. He said, "There shall be no beggars (*ptochos*) in our state; and, if anyone attempts to beg ... he shall be driven across the border by the country stewards, to the end that the land may be wholly purged by such a creature." That's the word that Christ uses.

But the paradox in Christianity is that those who know they can contribute nothing are the very ones who have the faith to claim everything. The ones who have the humility to know their poverty are the ones who have the faith to claim all the riches of the kingdom. This first beatitude is the key that unlocks the riches of the kingdom. But before I open that up a little bit more, I want to look at some of the Satanic counterfeits that have kept people from true kingdom living. Satan is a master at twisting God's Word and keeping people in abject poverty. God's purpose is not to keep us in poverty (like Lazarus here), but to keep us from looking to the old bank

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account in Adam and to make us look every minute to our new bank account in Christ. So let's look at these counterfeits to the true beatitudes.

I. One Condition Of Blessing Is Poverty Of Spirit

A. *What Poverty Of Spirit Is Not – eight counterfeits*

1. Not a socialistic protest against material poverty

The first counterfeit is socialism. For the past 100 years this counterfeit savior has been masquerading as the great advocate for the poor. But far from bringing happiness and fulfillment, what has it done? It has generated envy, hatred, centralized governments, class conflict, and endless revolutions. Gutiérrez used this beatitude to argue for Marxist guerilla warfare against the ungodly rich. Though he rightly defined the word “poor” in the literal realm as being poor people like the first picture of Lazarus, he turned this beatitude upside down when he called it “a real protest against the poverty of our time.”¹ And I would say, “No! Christ is not protesting poverty in this verse – he is blessing some kind of poverty!” And yet this interpretation persists. Stephen Charles Mott said that while the Old Testament did not give favoritism to either poor or rich (and I'm glad he could at least see that), he claims that this beatitude shows that true Biblical justice does the opposite of what the Old Testament called for. He said,

Biblical justice is biased in favor of the poor and the weak of the earth. This partiality was nowhere more clearly and succinctly stated than in the prophetic Beatitudes of Jesus: ‘Blessed are the poor... Woe to the rich...’ (Luke 6.20, 24).

The first principle of justice in distribution is the correction of oppression.² How can justice ever be biased? That is the definition of injustice. Yet they insist on justice biased toward the poor. And these Liberation Theologians were not averse to using guns and revolution to achieve this forced redistribution of resources to the poor. This may surprise you, but this is a very, very common interpretation of this beatitude. William Hordern said,

...the Bible recognizes what Aristotle and others have missed--that the creative forces in society must come from the bottom of the social order, because the upper classes are blinded by the interests which they are defending and cannot see

¹ In *A Theology of Liberation*, pp. 301–302, he said “Only by rejecting poverty and by making itself poor in order to protest against it can the Church preach something that is uniquely its own: 'spiritual poverty,' that is, the openness of man and history to the future promised by God ... Only authentic solidarity with the poor and a real protest against the poverty of our time can provide the concrete, vital context necessary for a theological discussion of poverty.”

² Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 71, <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=60219045>.

the greater good for fear of losing what they have.³

What's his solution? Through revolution, the poor need to bring about the kingdom equality. Owen Whitfield was at least honest enough to recognize that the text didn't say this. But he hated what the beatitude really said. Here was his comment:

I say to you not blessed are the poor in spirit but rather: Blessed are the spirited poor. The poor won't inherit the earth until they get sassy enough to take it.⁴

And you might think that these liberal theologians don't represent the mainstream of the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. This use of the sword to force a redistribution of wealth has crept into even evangelical circles. Certainly many of them do not believe in Liberation Theology or in guerilla warfare, but they are just as keen to use the present government's guns to redistribute society's wealth. It's the same thing. How many evangelicals do you know who are opposed to government education, or Social Security, or Welfare, or Food Stamps. But those are all a form of forced redistribution of wealth. They are all advocating an injustice biased toward the poor.

Let me read from Ronald Sider, a Christian socialist who is honored and respected in most Reformed Seminaries, and certainly most evangelical seminaries. He comments on this verse, saying,

I want to argue that one of the central biblical doctrines is that God is on the side of the poor...⁵

...it [referring to Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20] reflects a situation where the rich were mainly those who had sold out to the incoming culture and had allowed their religious devotion to become corrupted by the new ways. If the poor were the pious, the faithful and largely oppressed, the rich were the powerful, ungodly, worldly, even apostate... Matthew has not 'spiritualized' Jesus words... [Jesus] did not mean that poverty and hunger are desirable in themselves. But in a sinful world where frequently success and prosperity are possible only if one transgresses God's law, poverty and hunger are indeed a blessing. The kingdom is precisely for such people."⁶

I am giving these extended quotes simply because these errors in one degree or another have filtered down into most denominations. If you believe in government schools, you believe in forced redistribution of wealth. I think Bastiat's book, *The Law*, demonstrated that so well. Farmers

³ William Hordern, *Christianity, Communism, and History* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1954), 107.

⁴ Robert H. Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 170.

⁵ The Christian Century, March 19, 1980, p. 314.

⁶ *Rich Christians*, pp. 129-130.

look to the Department of Agriculture for handouts. The Faith Based Initiative of George Bush has stolen money from American citizens and given them to churches and other faith based groups. Three times I have been offered hundreds of thousands of dollars if I would sell my soul by signing up for Federal programs. I finally sent a letter stating that I considered such gifts from the government as theft, and that it was unconstitutional for them to even be offering it to me. I have no longer received such offers.

But Socialism is a poison that has slowly been destroying the church of Jesus Christ. If you have even the smallest shred of this class envy, Satan is keeping you from the true blessing of kingdom happiness and fulfillment. It will forever elude you. Jesus is not saying, “Happy are those with class envy,” or “Happy are the financially discontent.” Those Christian socialists are anything but poor in spirit, and anything but happy and fulfilled.

But what about the financially rich? Can they be poor in spirit? Yes they can. I have a picture in your outlines of Joseph – a man who was truly poor in spirit when he was financially poor, and remained poor in spirit when he became rich. Scripture pictures at least some financially wealthy men like Abraham, Job, and David as being the truly poor in spirit. Now I should hasten to say that riches could easily rob you of that spirit, but it need not. Scripture says that you can be a materialist bound with the idol of mammon whether you are poor or rich, but when you become poor in spirit, you will be freed from the shackles that bind you.

For example, Psalm 34:6 says, “**This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles.**” David, one of the richest men in Israel, called himself a poor man, and the word used for poor in the Hebrew was *ani* or the poorest of the poor; the kind of poor that had to beg for a living. So it is the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek word in Matthew 5 - *ptochos* poor. Both words referred to those who had nothing. What’s going on with that? David is poor, yet he owns a kingdom? Exactly. That’s what the beatitude is talking about.

Here are some other Scriptures that use the same word: Psalm 40:17 says, “**But I *am* poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You *are* my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.**” David called himself poor and needy even though at this stage in his life he had a kingdom and all kinds of money and resources. Yet he was poor *in spirit*. It has nothing whatsoever to do with economic condition. Matthew 5:3 doesn’t say, “Blessed are the financially disadvantaged.” He did not say, “Blessed are peasants who can’t afford to eat.” He said, “**Blessed are the poor *in spirit*.**” More and more I am becoming aware of the fact that I can’t do

anything of value without Jesus. I can't shepherd without Jesus. I can't build the church without Jesus. In fact, any church that I may build, the gates of hell will prevail against it.

Here are some other examples of a wealthy person who was poor in spirit:

Psalms 69:29 But I *am* poor and sorrowful;

Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on high.

So he is not saying that he is staying in his poverty. He is praying or begging for riches which the Lord is pleased to give him.

Psalms 70:5 But I *am* poor and needy;

Make haste to me, O God!

You *are* my help and my deliverer;

O LORD, do not delay.

Psalms 86:1 Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me;

For I *am* poor and needy.

Psalms 109:22 For I *am* poor and needy,

And my heart is wounded within me.

All of these Scriptures show the foolishness of the socialistic interpretation. It is my contention that until socialism and class envy is repented of, one will never find the happiness and fulfillment that this beatitude promises. The poor in spirit have the kingdom, but the kingdom will forever elude socialists.

2. Not an inferiority complex

If Satan can't get us to envy, he will try to short-circuit this kingdom joy by getting us to have an inferiority complex. And what is so dangerous about this inferiority complex is that in some ways it does resemble spiritual poverty. But I want to demonstrate how an inferiority complex can be just as pre-occupied with self as pride is. The foundation for pride's arrogance is self. The foundation for inferiority's fear is self. One has an inflated view of self; the other has a deflated view of self, but they are still wrapped up in self as their only resource. Pride hangs on to self as a boast and inferiority hangs on to self as an excuse. Neither one is looking to the Lord Jesus Christ and all of His riches. But when you are poor in spirit you will abandon self and you will start to look to the resources that God has given to us in Jesus Christ. The enormous joy and resources of the kingdom will forever elude those who are preoccupied with self. Ironically, they have not yet become poor enough to stop looking to self. Just this past week I have had to be on my knees in repentance for being depressed over my inability to shepherd people through their pain. And the Lord was reproving me for failing to be poor in spirit, and thus failing to look to Him alone for our church's needs. It

is so subtle, yet it short-circuits our ability to enter into the fulfillment of this beatitude.

3. Not false humility

False humility is very closely related to an inferiority complex, but is really a third counterfeit. False humility fails to recognize the gifts, abilities, and growth that the Lord has already given. It thinks lower of yourself than you ought to think. Some people decline God's calling on their lives because they are not worthy. *But who is worthy?! No one!* Moses initially had a false humility when he tried to talk himself out of God's call to lead Israel. He came up with all kinds of excuses as to why he couldn't do it. And God kept telling him, that it's not about you Moses – it's about your sufficiency in Me. All you have to be is a believer united to God and clinging to God by faith, and you will have all the resources that you need. When Moses said that he stuttered and couldn't talk well, God says, **“Who made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”** And God did that with every other excuse. When Moses realized his inadequacy and it made him not want to take the job, God pointed to the fact that Jehovah is a the great I AM who can provide everything that Moses could need. Are you unstable? God says, “I am the Rock.” Are you thirsty? “I am the living water.” But you see, this false humility could have robbed Moses of the kingdom and its power. If he had allowed his inadequacies to keep him from doing God's call, think of all of the miracles and the fulfillment that he would have missed. He could have missed seeing God's glory, power, and friendship. We rob ourselves through false humility.

Another form of false humility brags about how humble I am. It fails to see any pride in its own heart. It fails to see any sin in its own life. But that is the ultimate pride – to fail to see your sin, your pride, and your lack of humility. That is not a person who is poor in spirit. That is a person who is full of himself. Someone once said, “Humility is like underwear - essential, but indecent if it shows.” The closer to God one is, the more of one's own pride that person sees. He recognizes that even in terms of the resource of *humility* he is poor, cannot supply his own humility, and needs to go to the Lord every day. This beatitude does not just start your Christian life; it must be foundational to the rest of your life.

4. Not one who suppresses his personality

Fourth, poverty of spirit is not suppression of one's personality. It doesn't deny the way God made us. In fact, the poor in spirit are precisely those who recognize that what they are, God has given and they will use God's resources to the best of their ability.

5. Not apathy about our own inadequacies, nor contentment with lack of happiness or lack of kingdom resources

Fifth, it is not apathy about our own inadequacies, nor contentment over the lack of happiness or lack of kingdom resources that we are experiencing. Some people simply do not care that they are bound in sin, or that they lack kingdom power. They don't care. But anyone who is a beggar kind of poor who doesn't know where his next meal is coming from *does* care – he is motivated to go to the source of life, finances, joy, and power. His desperation impels him to seek help.

So any time you see apathy about your Christian walk, you know that you are not poor in spirit. You need to learn to hate apathy. It is a wretched counterfeit that will rob you of God's blessings. If you were poor in spirit, you would be going to the Lord and withdrawing blessings from your heavenly bank account. Apathy is perhaps the worst counterfeit to this beatitude.

6. Poor in spirit is not simply spiritually poor

Very quickly, let me cover three more counterfeits. And I got these three from Thomas Watson's fabulous commentary. Thomas Watson points out that being poor in spirit is not the same as being spiritually poor. Any person who is without grace is always spiritually poor, but he doesn't realize it. Revelation 3:17 says, "**and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.**" How could they not know that they are spiritually poor? It is because Satan puts a veil of blindness on their eyes. Satan doesn't want any of us to see our spiritual poverty because once we do, we have the key that unlocks the treasures of the kingdom of heaven. When you are poor in spirit you recognize your poorness and flee from it into the arms of the Savior. There are a lot of people who are spiritually poor, but they are not poor in spirit.

7. Poor in spirit is not the same as "poor-spirited"

The seventh thing that poor in spirit is not: being poor-spirited. People who are poor-spirited are no fun to be around. They are greedy, not generous, mean, cranky, and have no ability to overflow with supernatural

joy and generosity into the lives of others. A person who is poor in spirit is able to drink so deeply of Christ that he will have plenty left over for others. A person who is poor in spirit is generous-hearted, not poor-spirited.

8. Poor in spirit is not taking a Roman Catholic “vow of poverty.”

And finally, being poor in spirit is not taking a Roman Catholic vow of poverty. These are people who leave their estates behind and live in a monastery. But these people escape from the earth rather than learning how to inherit the earth (which is the third beatitude). And so it is a counterfeit.

B. What Poverty Of Spirit Is

1. It is an inward perspective on life

So what is being poor in spirit? We’ve already hinted at some of what it is, but let’s give three more indicators: First, the word “spirit” indicates that the kind of poverty that is being referred to is an inward attitude of life. It is the spirit’s perspective on life. The spirit itself is poor. Irrespective of our outward circumstances, there is something inside of us that makes us look at life from a perspective of neediness. David had riches, a kingdom, a victorious army, and prestige – yet he said that he was poor and needy. This is what made him so powerful. He didn’t trust in the outward riches. He trusted in the Lord. That meant that God could trust David with more riches.

2. It is an absence of self-reliance

The second facet of poverty is seen from the word “poor.” There is a total absence of self-reliance. Last week we saw that there were two types of poor. The *peneis* poor were partially self-reliant. They needed loans, grants or some kind of help to be able to keep their farm, or their house. They didn’t have enough money to make ends meet, but they were not *totally* reliant on others. But the word used here is *ptochos*. Many times it is just translated as beggars; people who had to totally rely on others for everything. They didn’t have a house to live in. They are the ones in Christ’s parable that are brought in from the highways and hedges to sit in the banquet. So just the definition of the word shows that there is an absence of self-reliance. They have been brought to a place where they recognize that there is nothing to rely upon in themselves.

3. It is having a steward’s heart

The third facet of this poor man is seen in the paradox that the person remains poor, but he has the kingdom. He has nothing, but he has

everything. **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” is in the present tense. That means that at the very moment that they are poor in spirit they possess the kingdom. Now what kind of a poor man has that? There is only one kind of poor man that qualifies in meeting this statement: it’s a steward.

And the concept of stewardship holds all three facets together. A steward was a slave who therefore owned nothing. But unlike other slaves, a steward was a slave who was entrusted with an estate, a household or with other responsibilities. Unlike the other slaves, a steward had the full use of all kinds of things in his possession.

Joseph is a good example of a steward. He was elevated from being a mere slave to being Potiphar’s steward. Everything Potiphar had except for his wife was placed into his hands and he treated it as if it were his own. He handled Potiphar’s estate for Potiphar’s benefit; it was Potiphar’s but he handled it as if it was his own. And so he was truly poor, and yet he had the enjoyment of all kinds of things. Now let’s begin to apply this concept of poverty to kingdom living now – and this is Roman numeral II.

II. Developing An Awareness That We Are In The Kingdom

A. Being In The Kingdom Is Not An Illusion

I think it is first of all important for us to be convinced that kingdom living is not an illusion. This is not just a theory. It is not just a frame of mind. There is a reality that Christ has given to us a kingdom. Notice that Christ doesn’t say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will in the future inherit the kingdom,” but “theirs is [present tense] the kingdom of heaven.” When we pray, “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are praying first of all that God would change human hearts to be poor in spirit, so that they can be stewards of that kingdom.

Just as truly as Joseph was in Potiphar’s house, we are in Jehovah’s kingdom. Just as surely as Joseph had the enjoyment of Potiphar’s things, God delights in blessing us with the riches of His kingdom. Just as surely as Joseph invested Potiphar’s assets in such a way that Potiphar’s household prospered, so too we have responsibilities to bless the kingdom. Now if you don’t think that you are in a kingdom, you will not have the faith to take certain actions. That’s why dispensationalists for the most part avoid long-term efforts and avoid social action. Their thought is: “Why polish brass on a sinking ship?” But if the ship is not sinking, then our actions will be different.

So do we presently have kingdom blessings? Yes, Paul says, “**all things are yours**” (1Cor. 3:21). If you need it as a steward, you can claim it. All things are yours. But if you cease being a steward, nothing is yours. God told the Corinthians, “**And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work... Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything...**” (2Cor. 9:8-11). And in context he was talking about money. If we are lousy stewards, the kingdom will be hurt because we are called stewards of the kingdom. If we are good stewards like Joseph was, the kingdom will be advanced. If we are ignorant of the enormous assets of the kingdom for which we are stewards, we cannot possibly take our stewardship seriously. Ephesians 1 tells us not only that Christ has been exalted to the right hand of God where He sits on His throne, but also that *we* are sitting there in Jesus, and *we* have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. We possess it now. It is there for the taking. God has placed His church in stewardship trust over the blessings of the kingdom.

What about responsibilities? Do we presently have kingdom responsibilities? Yes we do. Here are the kinds of questions that we need to ask: How does God expect our children to fit into His kingdom plans? After all, Galatians 4:2 calls parents stewards - they are stewards of the children. 1 Corinthians 4:1 calls Pastors stewards of the Word of God, and I am accountable to God for how I handle the Word. If I fail to bring to the Word to you out of fear, God will remove my stewardship. Titus 1:7 calls us stewards of God’s household. 1 Peter 4:10 says that every believer is a steward of the gifts and talents that God has given to him. There are passages that say that we are stewards of our money, of our families, of our labor at work and of everything we own. And that stewardship is explicitly tied to the kingdom in the Gospels.

B. Power lies through the realization of helplessness

But there is not only the reality that Christ is on His throne, and that He has sent His Holy Spirit to empower us, and that He gives us every kingdom resource that we need, but point number B says that our power and authority rests in realizing our helplessness. You’ve got to hold those two together. God will never entrust this power to those who insist on being owners rather than stewards; or even to those who are *peneis* poor: half

owners rather than stewards. Christ told His disciples, “Without Me you can do nothing.” When they tried, they fell flat on their face.

Now Joseph was truly a steward, but because of the false accusation of Potiphar’s wife, Potiphar treated him as if he had abandoned stewardship and was beginning to act as an owner. And what happened? He lost his power. God takes away our power the moment our attitude concerning poverty changes. True power comes through the realization that we are poor - that all good that I have is because of God’s grace. I think of Peter who was walking out on the water. When he kept his faith in *Christ’s* ability he was able to walk on the water. He had real power. He was able to do the impossible. But when he began to focus on his own abilities he began to sink. Our Christianity sinks or walks by whether we see our success in ourselves or whether we see our success as coming from God. Christ told Paul, “**My strength is made perfect in weakness.**” Power comes through the realization of our weakness. And so this first beatitude is critical. You cannot skip this first rung of the ladder.

The trouble is, this is the very opposite of the world’s way of thinking. And the church has been brainwashed by the world. Think of the self-esteem movement. It says that the only way that I can be adequate in life is to think highly of myself. Christ tells us the opposite. The only way you can be adequate in life is to realize that you are a poor beggar; that you are totally inadequate apart from Christ’s grace. Not self-esteem, but Christ esteem will give you the confidence that you need.

C. True wealth cannot consist in possession of things

Another implication of this passage is that true wealth does not consist in possession of things. Now that may almost seem like a contradiction to what I have said earlier, because we have just finished saying that Christ is not talking about the physically poor or materially poor. But what we need to realize is that material poverty does not go far enough. The poor man may still covet as much as a rich man. But when one is spiritually poor; when one has given up being a possessor and is now a steward, he relinquishes his rights to the outward possessions. It doesn’t mean he loses his possessions, but he now treats them as a steward would treat them; he now treats them as God’s property.

And so this beatitude is telling us of the blessedness of owning nothing. And this can be applied to everything. For Abraham, the ultimate test of whether he was truly poor in spirit, was when God asked for Isaac. Scripture says that God was testing Abraham; testing his loyalty. Would Abraham be possessive of Isaac, or would he continue to act as a steward?

What would be our temptation? It would be to allow Isaac to take God's place in the temple of our heart and to take ownership of Isaac – “You cannot take him!” But Abraham did not do that. As a good steward, he recognized that Isaac was not his to possess, and though he had enjoyed Isaac's presence for these many years, Abraham was willing to give him up. And what did God do? God gave Isaac back to him. As is characteristic of God, when we lose our life, we gain it. When we give up all, we gain. Look at Mark 10:28-31

Mark 10:28 ¶ Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

Mark 10:29 ¶ So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

Mark 10:30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.

Mark 10:31 But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.”

God gives back the very things that we give up when we put Him first. He gives back a hundredfold when we have a steward's heart. So Abraham was poor in spirit, yet it is important to realize that he still had the enjoyment of flocks, camels, herds, goods of every form. His poverty was not the absence of things, but the refusal to be governed by things. Matthew 6 doesn't say that we can't make use of mammon or riches, but it says we cannot *serve* mammon and still be serving God. Psalm 62:10 says: “**If riches increase, do not set your heart on them.**” Luke 12:15 says “**A man's life does not consist in the abundance of things which he possesses.**”

D. Liberty comes through surrender.

The fourth way in which we develop an awareness of kingdom living is through surrender. True liberty comes through surrender to God. This is what made the philosopher Nietzsche despise the Sermon on the Mount. He felt that Christianity was deficient because of its emphasis on kindness, love, humility, meekness and forgiveness. He said that a successful person had to show power, initiative and strength and even arrogance. He had an ardent disciple called Adolph Hitler who once said, “Love is weak, hate is strong.” But Christ tells us that the Hitlers who live by the sword will die by the sword and will lose their soul, while those who live and die by love inherit the Kingdom of God and find fulfillment and happiness.

III. Cultivating Poverty of Spirit

A. Accept God's Estimate of Yourself. (Matt. 5:3; 7:7-11)

Let's quickly end by looking at the three ways we can cultivate this poverty of spirit. You can see those three ways in the section of the Sermon on the Mount where Christ gives an exposition of this beatitude. That's Matthew 7:7-12.

First step - accept God's estimate of yourselves, and His estimate is two-fold: 1) you are poor and 2) you have a kingdom. Or, as Matthew 7:7-11 words it, you must ask, and you have a generous Father. So the first side is that you are poor, needy, and need to pray. The second side is that you have a kingdom and a generous Father.

Keep reminding yourselves of both facts because it is so easy for us to deny one or the other. If you focus exclusively on the fact that you have a kingdom you may become proud in your accomplishments; you may become self-sufficient and prayerless, complacent. But if you focus exclusively on the fact that you are poor you may develop a false sense of humility; you may resist taking on tasks that God calls you to, you may develop fear and insecurity. But when you see yourself as both poor and having a kingdom, both needing to pray and having a generous Father, you will realize not only that without Christ you can do nothing, but you will also realize that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Let's go ahead and read Matthew 7:7-11. In this section Jesus is showing us how to be poor in spirit and how to inherit the kingdom.

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Matthew 7:9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Matthew 7:10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?

Matthew 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

I love that "how much more." Accept God's estimate of yourselves, and it is two-fold: you are poor, but have a kingdom; you are needy, but have a generous Father.

B. Pray in dependence and total faith (Matt. 7:7-11)

The second way you can cultivate a constant awareness that you are poor in spirit is to pray. In fact, that's the bulk of Christ's exposition of this

beatitude. And in Matthew 5:3 it is hinted at in the word *ptochos*, which means poor, or beggar. And a beggar prays; he asks. You will never learn how to be dependant upon God if you are prayerless. E. M. Bounds said,
 Praying is humbling work. It abases the intellect and pride, crucifies vain glory, and signs our spiritual bankruptcy, and all of these are hard for flesh and blood to bear.

In other words, Bounds is saying that prayer not only flows from a poor heart, but also, the more we engage in prayer, the more we sense how poor we really are. So he is saying that it is a pre-requisite to praying, but praying also powerfully reinforces it. J.C. Ryle also spoke of those two dimensions. He said,

All the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality about their religion, they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is praying."⁷

... not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian. He cannot really feel his sins. He cannot love God. He cannot feel himself a debtor to Christ. He cannot long after holiness. He cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again. He has yet to be made a new creature. He may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope, and knowledge, and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk if he does not pray.⁸

Wow! Are you poor in spirit? Do you pray? Poverty of spirit and prayer go hand in hand as Christ's exposition makes so clear. Now we saw last week that we will be growing into these beatitudes over a lifetime, but it ought to distress us when our lives are prayerless. Without prayer and fasting, it is extremely unlikely that you will live out the happiness, fulfillment, and power of the kingdom that Christ desires for you. J.C. Ryle said,

Bibles read without prayer; sermons heard without prayer; marriages contracted without prayer; journeys undertaken without prayer; residences chosen without prayer; friendships formed without prayer; the daily act of private prayer itself hurried over, or gone through without heart: these are the kind of downward steps by which many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual palsy, or reaches the point where God allows him to have a tremendous fall. . . You may be very sure men fall in private long before they fall in public. They are backsliders on their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world.⁹

If you are to be stewards of the kingdom blessings; if you are to experience the tremendous blessing of owning nothing, then you have got to be men and women of prayer.

⁷A Call To Prayer, p. 13.

⁸Ibid., p. 16.

⁹Ryle, pp. 40-41

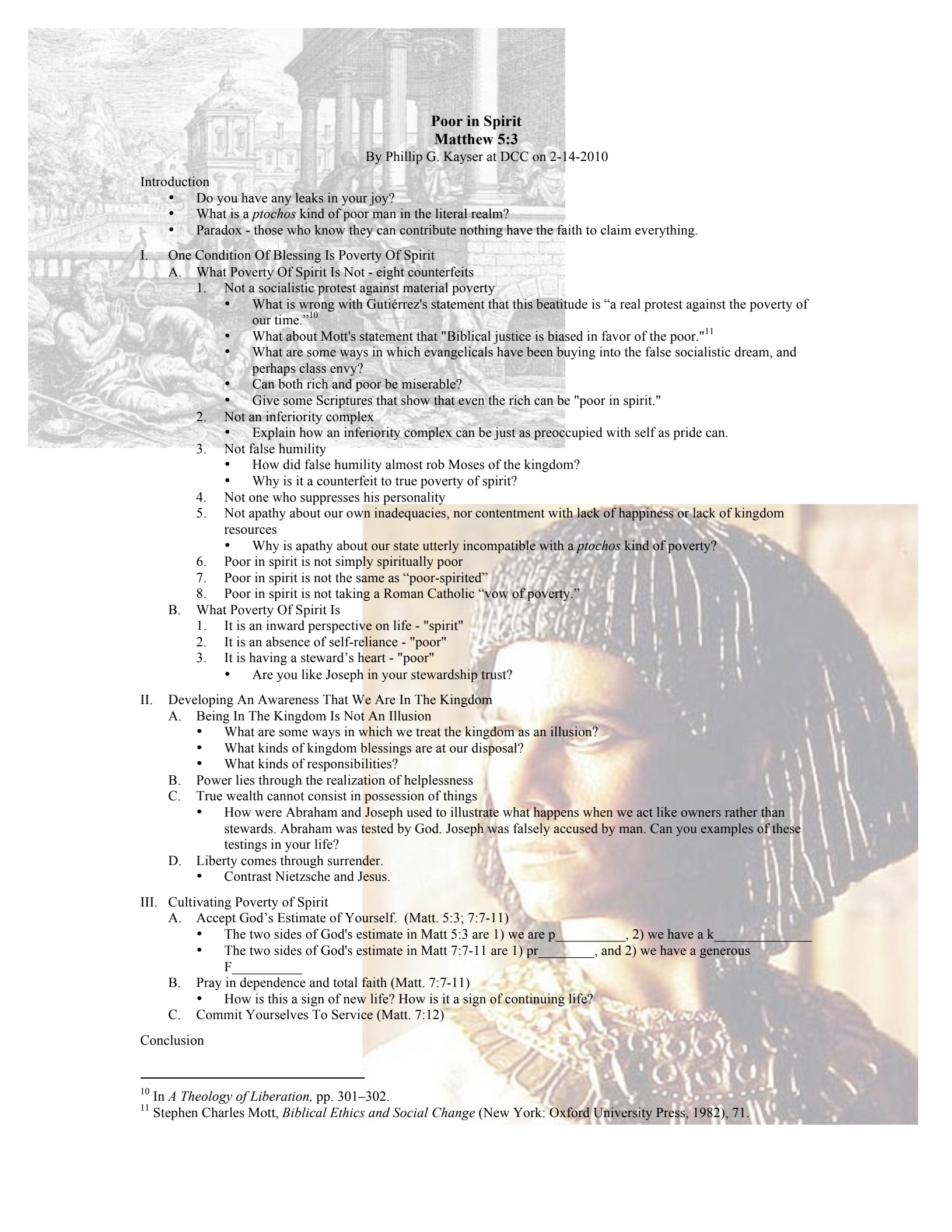
C. Commit Yourselves To Service (Matt. 7:12)

The third thing that will nurture a poverty of spirit is given in Matthew 7:12. And again, remember that this is the last verse on Christ's exposition of this beatitude. He says, "**Therefore**, [in other words, in light of your privileges in prayer] **whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.**" There is nothing like serving others to make you realize that you need Christ dwelling in you to successfully do so. There is nothing like trying to love the unlovable to cast you on the Lord for His love to flow through you. There is nothing like being generous with those that you wish were generous to you to make you realize that you are poor. There is nothing like seeking to live out the Scriptures to make you realize that apart from Christ's grace you cannot do so. But this should drive you to prayer for God's provision, and prayer should drive you back refreshed into service.

There may be other ways to cultivate poverty of spirit, but these are the three that *Christ* highlights. Continually remind yourself of God's estimate of you (you are but a steward but have a great kingdom), remind yourself of your need for pray, and remind yourself that you need to be committed to selfless service. And as God deepens your poverty of spirit, may He also deepen your sense of fulfillment and possession of His kingdom blessings. Amen.

Conclusion

Children of God, I charge you to realize afresh that without Christ you can do nothing. But I also charge you to realize that you have a kingdom and that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Amen.



Poor in Spirit Matthew 5:3

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-14-2010

Introduction

- Do you have any leaks in your joy?
- What is a *ptochos* kind of poor man in the literal realm?
- Paradox - those who know they can contribute nothing have the faith to claim everything.

I. One Condition Of Blessing Is Poverty Of Spirit

A. What Poverty Of Spirit Is Not - eight counterfeits

1. Not a socialistic protest against material poverty
 - What is wrong with Gutiérrez's statement that this beatitude is "a real protest against the poverty of our time."¹⁰
 - What about Mott's statement that "Biblical justice is biased in favor of the poor."¹¹
 - What are some ways in which evangelicals have been buying into the false socialistic dream, and perhaps class envy?
 - Can both rich and poor be miserable?
 - Give some Scriptures that show that even the rich can be "poor in spirit."
2. Not an inferiority complex
 - Explain how an inferiority complex can be just as preoccupied with self as pride can.
3. Not false humility
 - How did false humility almost rob Moses of the kingdom?
 - Why is it a counterfeit to true poverty of spirit?
4. Not one who suppresses his personality
5. Not apathy about our own inadequacies, nor contentment with lack of happiness or lack of kingdom resources
 - Why is apathy about our state utterly incompatible with a *ptochos* kind of poverty?
6. Poor in spirit is not simply spiritually poor
7. Poor in spirit is not the same as "poor-spirited"
8. Poor in spirit is not taking a Roman Catholic "vow of poverty."

B. What Poverty Of Spirit Is

1. It is an inward perspective on life - "spirit"
2. It is an absence of self-reliance - "poor"
3. It is having a steward's heart - "poor"
 - Are you like Joseph in your stewardship trust?

II. Developing An Awareness That We Are In The Kingdom

A. Being In The Kingdom Is Not An Illusion

- What are some ways in which we treat the kingdom as an illusion?
- What kinds of kingdom blessings are at our disposal?
- What kinds of responsibilities?

B. Power lies through the realization of helplessness

C. True wealth cannot consist in possession of things

- How were Abraham and Joseph used to illustrate what happens when we act like owners rather than stewards. Abraham was tested by God. Joseph was falsely accused by man. Can you examples of these testings in your life?

D. Liberty comes through surrender.

- Contrast Nietzsche and Jesus.

III. Cultivating Poverty of Spirit

A. Accept God's Estimate of Yourself. (Matt. 5:3; 7:7-11)

- The two sides of God's estimate in Matt 5:3 are 1) we are p_____, 2) we have a k_____
- The two sides of God's estimate in Matt 7:7-11 are 1) pr_____, and 2) we have a generous F_____

B. Pray in dependence and total faith (Matt. 7:7-11)

- How is this a sign of new life? How is it a sign of continuing life?

C. Commit Yourselves To Service (Matt. 7:12)

Conclusion

¹⁰ In *A Theology of Liberation*, pp. 301–302.

¹¹ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 71.