

The Upside Down World of the Kingdom 1-4-04

Matthew 5:1-12

¹Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them, saying: ³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV)

It's 27 A.D. This is still the first year of Jesus' ministry. He has moved from His hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum. He has called a number of His disciples to follow. They have witnessed Jesus healing every illness and demonic case brought to Him. Jesus and His disciples went from town to town on the northern Galilee to preach in the synagogues. The crowds were getting more and more numerous. People were coming from the surrounding territories as the word of Jesus' ministry spread.

By most men's standards, Jesus was a great success. He'd gone from being the son of an unknown carpenter in an insignificant village, to being one of the most respected rabbis in northern Israel. The crowds were sensational in number. His miracles were unequalled. But this is not the success that Jesus was after. He was not there to simply be well thought of or to gain this world's glory. He was on a mission. This day would forever mark Him as unique. He is about to declare to mankind the way God sees things. He is about to reveal the true meaning of life to those who will hear. It is so radically different from the expressions of any that have gone before Him that few will cling to His words. It is almost as if He intentionally blew the crowds away like chaff with His stark expressions of truth. Or we could look at it another way. He decided it was time to speak clearly to those who genuinely sought the truth.

It begins as He looks over the crowd. Something He sees causes Him to move up higher. He sees the heart of man and all the impure motivations that have brought people to Him, so He moves on up the mountain. It's as if He is asking, "Do you really want to hear what I have to say? Then you're going to have to make a little more effort."

The scenario is true of any group. Some have come for personal gain. Some have come out of curiosity. But some are there to hear and be changed. As I watch our lives I wonder how many are ready to hear the truth. The word goes forth and we hear with our ears, but our actions are not changed. We have not heard with a heart that is longing to know God's will, ready to receive and act regardless of the

cost. Sometimes I counsel folks by first challenging them to be like their Lord. After hearing their justification for not doing so, I will share the Scripture that declares God's will. When I hear another justification, I know that there is presently no intention of yielding to God's will and ways, only the insistence of continuing as they are. Are you truly hungry to hear? Will you make a little more effort to know God's will and come on up the mountain to sit at Jesus' feet? Or will you stay with the masses and move with them?

Notice that at first, only the disciples come to Him. They are the ones that really wanted to hear. By the end of the discourse, at the end of chapter 7, the crowds will have caught up to Him, but how much did they hear? The one who follows closely, who has a desire to hear and receive His words, hears more.

His whole discourse will set a tone that is so different from the world that we might call it the upside down world of the Kingdom of God. The world that is really upside down is man's world, that is, man's way of perceiving things. From God's perspective, Jesus will be sharing the right side up world of the Kingdom. Those who fought the Apostle Paul and his declaration of the gospel said, "These that have turned the world upside down have come here also." (Acts 17:6) In reality, Paul was an instrument of Christ to turn the world right side up.

As we go through the teaching that Christ presents here, we will see the contrast with the way the world sees things, and the way heaven sees things. They are almost always opposite. The war that rages over the souls of men is often fought over this view of how we see the world around us. If we swallow the world's perspective of purpose and pleasure, we will end up worshipping the things of this world. If we truly see the heavenly perspective, God has won the battle for our mind and heart. Your perception of the world directly affects how you live in it.

Jesus begins each of these life-changing revelations of what is real with the Greek word *makarios*. We translate it "blessed" or "happy". It is important for us to understand what this word means since it describes the person who has been won over to heaven's perspective.

In regards to this word, the Greek scholar Zodhiates writes, "Biblically, one is pronounced blessed when God is present and involved in his life. The hand of God is at work directing all his affairs for a divine purpose, and thus, in a sense, such a person lives before the face of God. Blessedness is sharing in the life of God, being favorably affected and influenced by God, which involves among other things, participating in the kingdom, recompense, forgiveness, freedom of conscience, the Holy Spirit..." (Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible) In the way that Matthew expresses it, he would say blessedness is participating in the kingdom of heaven. Paul might express it as being in Jesus Christ. My expression would be, "to be Divinely inspired and directed."

Let's look at the first state of blessedness that Jesus' taught and see how radical it sounded in the ears of His hearers. ³*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* The people in that culture looked up to the religious leaders of

Commented [notes1]: ⁶And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Acts 17:6 (KJV)

their day as the ones that had it all together. If anyone lived in God's presence and with God's favor on them, it was the Pharisee. No one would describe them as poor in spirit. In fact, they would say just the opposite. They would say they were rich in spirit. What in the world did Jesus mean by this?

Jesus told one of the churches in Asia Minor that they were rich. ¹⁷*You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. ¹⁹Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*
Revelation 3:17-19 (NIV)

This church thought they were rich in spirit, clothed in righteousness, and had spiritual vision. Genuine spiritual vision is to see our great need. We find our wealth in Christ, our value in Him. That is the genuine humility that attracts the power and working of God in one's life.

Listen to how the New Living Translation presents this verse, ³*God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them.* (Matthew 5:3 NLT) Recognizing how needy you are causes you to depend on God. Dependence on God produces God size results because it is entirely dependent on His will and His power.

As we have been seeing, Jesus is our ultimate example in this area also. ⁵*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!* Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV) When Jesus realized He was God incarnated as man, He did not insist on equality with God. Instead He humbly obeyed every instruction from God. He was poor in spirit, realizing that, as a man, he had a great need to hear and obey His Father. (John 8:28-29) Living as the ultimate example of this verse in Matthew, He was blessed. The kingdom of heaven was His. The presence of God was evident in His life. He lived daily in communion with the Divine and as His instrument in the earth. Jesus demonstrated godly humility. It was not the kind that is a doormat, but the kind that recognizes their need for God, and yet, also sees the importance of their life in the hands of God. Jesus' life was the truly blessed life, a life constantly before the face of God! That is the testimony of Jesus. Wouldn't you like it to be yours? You must be poor in spirit for the kingdom of heaven to be yours.

Commented [notes2]: ²⁸So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."
John 8:28-29 (NIV)

Jesus gave us an illustration of this teaching. ¹⁰*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

¹⁴*"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* Luke 18:10-14 (NIV)

Who was rich in spirit and who was poor in spirit? Who was blessed with the presence of God? Which man had the kingdom of heaven? Who does God promise to exalt? The one who is poor in spirit, who humbles himself before God, will be exalted by God. He will find himself before the face of God.

Don't we tend to think about it like those in Jesus' day? We tend to think that some person who goes off and meditates for hours, who prays half the day, and does sacrificial deeds for the rest of the day is the person who surely knows the presence of God in their life. Perhaps, but we've missed the thing that God is looking for, a heart that recognizes its great need for Him. The tax collector knew he needed God's mercy.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about an affliction that troubled him greatly. He prayed three times that God would heal him. God's answer was this, "... *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" 2 Corinthians 12:9 (KJV) God wanted to bless Paul, so He made him poor in spirit. He showed him a way to rely totally on Him. Then the strength of God, the presence of God, and the fruit of the Spirit can really come forth.

During Israel's restoration, when Zerubbabel was worried about whether or not he could complete the rebuilding of the temple, the Lord spoke to him a powerful message that is just as good for us today as we endeavor to rebuild this place of worship, "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*" Zechariah 4:6 (NIV) Recognize you can't do it. Recognize that God can. See that if anything is going to last, it isn't going to be your puny efforts but the work of the Spirit of God in those who are poor in spirit.

The church gets into so much trouble when we come up with good ideas. Listen to this prayer of the Apostle Paul for the Philippians. "*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best...*" Philippians 1:9-10a (NIV) emphasis mine
The good is always out there, but the best must be discerned. God has a plan and method. Our part is to discern what is best. We can always come up with good ideas, but the ones that will really have God sized results, come from the Spirit of God at work in those who know they need to look to Him.

It is the recognition that we are poor in spirit that first brings us to Christ. It is that same recognition that keeps us dependent on Him day by day. Now that you get the idea behind what Jesus is telling us, you have to ask yourself if you have allowed this way of seeing the world to be your perspective. Is your idea of the person living before God the person who most recognizes their need for Him?

I can imagine two other perspectives, because I have had them at some time in my life. One is not to care about the condition of your spirit, the need of your spirit. The

presence of God and the knowledge of His sovereign protection and guidance is not there at all. In fact, there is just the opposite, the dread of impending doom. "What ifs?" abound. Life is uncertain as the momentary pleasure you happen to be chasing at that time. That is spiritual nihilism.

The other is rich in spirit, thinking that you are attaining some greatness on your own. Through pride, you think your spiritual insights are the only correct ones and because you are so special, God serves you. The spiritually rich live for the pride of life and respect of men. Thank God reality soon catches up with us in the form of painful experiences and shows our spiritual pride to be worthless in times of real need.

Then there is this state that Jesus exemplified and taught was the way of being in possession of the kingdom of heaven, recognizing you are poor in spirit. It is recognizing things as they truly are. As you knock on the door of heaven, and seek God's guidance, and ask for His presence, He fills your life with His goodness. (Matthew 7:7) That is being blessed! Is that how you go about life? Is the kingdom of heaven yours? Are your daily struggles something you are trying to deal with in your rich spirit, or do you recognize you can't really do anything because of the poverty of your spirit so that you turn to your heavenly Father and give it to Him?

Commented [notes3]: ⁷"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
Matthew 7:7 (NIV)

Are your goals and dreams those that the Lord has for your life? Because we are poor in spirit, we recognize that even our goals and dreams must be from Him if they are to have real significance and value, if they are to be compatible with the kingdom of heaven. To the poor in spirit, heaven is where your hope, treasure and heart are. Yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps as you've been considering the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit, you've recognized that you've been dealing with life from one of those other ways that I mentioned, and you want to make the change. But it is such a different mindset from the way you've been seeing life. What can you do to make the switch? Here is the wonderful thing about being poor in spirit, you recognize that you can't. So, you simply and honestly begin by telling the Father that you are starting to realize how needy you are. Then, as one of His needy children, you come to Him and ask for His help to continue to see how great your need is. But just as importantly, ask for a revelation of how all-sufficient your heavenly Father is. Ask Him to help you turn to Him for every question, every need, and every circumstance that comes your way. Ask for help to recognize you are poor in spirit. You will be blessed. The presence of God will be with you. Yours will be the kingdom of heaven. It is Jesus' declaration of the way things really are.

This is the first of Jesus' list of the state of being blessed. You must start here with recognition of being poor in spirit or you cannot hear the rest of the blessings. You will take them as some kind of work that you do rather than that which God can do in you. It is the beginning of spiritual growth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.