

<b>Series</b>	Sermon on the Mount
<b>Study</b>	Study 1b
<b>Topic</b>	What Does it Mean to be Blessed
<b>Reference</b>	Matthew 5-7
<b>Speaker</b>	Dr Peter Ng

Let's deal with the first beatitude, **blessed are the poor in spirit.**

The Sermon on the Mount takes place on the mountain. Mountains are significant. Just like Moses Jesus is the new Moses and it's the new Exodus where God is rescuing the people for his own. Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills God's ancient promises and purposes. The Mountains are always a place of prayer and healing, visions and teaching, and also of the great commission. Take a look at Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah chapter two, and he talks about the final kingdom when the Lord comes.

*Isaiah 2: 1 ...in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,3 and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."*

So the mountains always cost as a spiritual place where God interacts with his people. And so Jesus very appropriately teaches from this mountain. He sits down and his disciples came to him. Now Jesus teaches not only disciples but the crowd in verse 28 of Matthew 7,

*Matthew 7:28 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,*

So the sermon here is for everybody and he opened his mouth and he taught. Using the words open his mouth to teach is a basically casting a tone of solemnity. He's going to announce something important. That's why the author, Matthew puts, he opened his mouth.

Now blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So Eugene Peterson is the one that best describes this in his commentary. He writes,

**Scripture does not present us with a moral code and tell us "Live up to this," nor does it set out a system of doctrine and say "Think like this and you will live well." Rather the biblical way is to tell a story and in the telling invite: "Live into this—this is what it looks like to be human in the God-made and God-ruled world; this is what is involved in becoming and maturing as a human being."**

It is like a mother reading a storybook to her child. She tells him about Superman; brave, powerful can jump tall buildings in single bound, yet loving man full of integrity and when you read this story about this wonderful superhero is, what she is actually subtly doing is certainly inviting the child to emulate Superman in his kindness, in his honesty and in his power. And this is exactly what the Sermon on the Mount is doing. This is inviting the crowd to be like this.

There's a difference between Luke and Matthew. Matthew writes blessed are the poor in spirit, where Luke writes blessed are you who are poor? So, which is it? Is it physically poor as Luke says or

poor in spirit, which is spiritually bankrupt with no merit of works before God, which means you're totally dependent on him. It's probably elements of both, but Matthew fills in Jesus' intent more explicitly.

You see our outward behavior will be an expression of how we feel about ourselves inside. I remember at our home during Chinese New Year our mother would always make sure that she would count up all the money from the ang pows from our relatives would have given to us, and we should make sure that you would return exactly the same amount if not a bit more to the children of our relatives, so that they would not get the impression that we are needy or poor or greedy for their money, wanting to take advantage of them. We were poor, but our self-esteem was based on our pride and our own self-sufficiency. We did not want any handouts from our richer relatives, not even in ang pows.

Jesus criticizes the church of Laodicea,

*For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked (Revelation 3:17 ESV)*

The church of Laodicea is spiritually bankrupt, but they don't know it. The rich young ruler, he cannot give up his wealth in order to follow Jesus because he can't see the true wealth in Jesus.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God moving in the same way. If all of the residents of earth, God had to pick up the litter, but he had to choose Abraham and Sarah, two old ducks. I would have chosen a younger version of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie if I wanted children to start a nation. But no God tells us that he chose Abraham when he was 75 years old when he entered the land of Canaan. Think about it. Abraham would have been on the pension for at least 10 years. The midlife crisis would have been past history for him rather than thinking of a new land and new life most of us would have been thinking in terms of a rocking chair in a restroom. Abraham fell flat, he laughed and said to himself, will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at age of 90 that's in Genesis 17:17. Sarah was 91 when Isaac was born in Abraham was a 100. God chose the couple with the least potential for life. What about the book of judges? When the Midianites was the invading Israel, God picked the judge Gideon to lead the fight. Gideon assembled a modest army of 32,000 men against an army of a 100,000, but God thought that was too many. He sent home 22,000 and yet that was too much. And he sent home everyone until, but only 300 and with this minuscule force Gideon prevailed.

God always chooses the underdogs because that's the only way he works. He will not work if you think you can do it all by yourself. What about the young King David. He was the anointed King in 1-Samuel chapter 16, but instead of sliding into the throne, he was hunted all over the countryside by jealous King Saul. God was teaching David, what it meant to be spiritually poor, to force him to depend entirely on the protection of God.

So you cannot see God's glory unless you recognize your own spiritually poor, utterly dependent condition. DA Carson summarizes,

**Spiritual bankruptcy is emptying ourselves of our self-righteousness, moral self-esteem, and personal vainglory**

Paul describes himself in Philippians chapter 3 in these terms. He is very proud of who he was in the

past because in the past his self-esteem was totally based on his physical attributes. He is privilege.

*5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*

That was what he was proud of. He based his self-esteem, he based it on all of his credentials. Look at his change in mindset and change in this foundation of his life since he met Christ,

*Philippians 3:7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

The most important person upon which he built his confidence in life is Christ Jesus. So here's a picture of us. This is our self-esteem. If our self-esteem is based on gaining and maintaining material possessions or power or influence that actually leaves us very vulnerable because we'll always be anxious cause somebody else will threaten our material possessions or our pride will over plan in order to keep our wealth. We'll get angry when somebody tries to threaten us and take things away, we cannot sleep at night. We're negative. We are trying to avoid risky behavior. So it actually influences the way we live.

All these feelings, places huge psychological burdens on us. We wake up in the morning. We're worried about our jobs because of the anxiety. We're angry at our colleagues because they actually threatened our promotion. We cannot sleep at night because we're worrying whether we can make out deadlines. We're over-planning. We are over negative. The need to personally build up the very foundations of our lives, the need to make our own lives meaningful to ourselves and our family and the society, not to mention the need to do good works to earn our standing before God places a crushing burden on us. That is why Jesus says to take his yoke, it is easier. You will find rest for your souls.

Hang on. Are we saying that we are exchanging one burden for another, after all he says, take his yoke. I'd rather take my own. However, Jesus is saying my yoke is easier and lighter. Not because the requirements of righteousness has been reduced but simply because Jesus is the one doing the heavy lifting. Jesus lived a righteous life that we would have lived, we should have lived and died the death that we should have died for our sins. Our yoke is simply to trust him and love him and respond to him. And that is all.

Apostle Paul experienced exactly this when he finally saw all his past achievements, all his meticulous law keeping and religious rituals for what they really were totally worthless when he counted them as rubbish. You see the only way he could take on Jesus' yoke and to be freed from his burdens was to embrace his spiritual poverty. You can't rest until you realize your whole life before Christ was a waste of time, otherwise you would still be carrying your own burdens.

Only when we let go, you see true value in life. We can really see and treasure the fact that we're chosen people, the royal priesthood, God's own possession, where we actually enjoy his love and he gives us spiritual fruit. If we keep on holding on to our own life, we will never see the real values in life. Matthew chapter 7 Jesus contrast two types of followers. One is like a tree producing good fruit, good character. The bad tree produces bad fruit. When we see how spiritual poverty we allow the Holy Spirit to come into our lives who will produce the good fruit within us. If we don't see our spiritual poverty, the spirit does not come in and it is us trying to manufacture good works.

*Matthew 7:22 (ESV) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and (we) cast out demons in your name, and (we) do many mighty works in your name?'*

It is them manufacturing good works by themselves. Imagine two people in the same church, both call Jesus Lord, Lord, and said the sinner's prayer and serve him. One exhibits Christian behavior and serves in an effort to earn his own salvation, trust in self and his work. The other twin recognizes he is spiritual bankrupt and trust only Christ. The first gentleman we'll have superiority complex because of his good works and fine behavior. He feels better than others. He's constantly finding fault with everybody else and is negative. The one who trust Christ feels unworthy to serve, but he doesn't deserve his place, but when he does serve he does serve with the strength of God, because he is relying on Jesus and not himself. He is always positive because he recognizes it is God's submission and not his own. Same thing with the parable in Luke 18 of the Pharisee and a tax collector, they both go to pray. One goes with the attitude of superiority. He treat others with contempt because he trusts in his own righteous good works, which is the basis of his high self-esteem.

Only the spiritually poor person who recognizes his poverty and then build his life and his self-esteem upon what Christ has done for him and nothing else, because of that firm foundation what you see on the outside is actually peace not anxiety because he depends on Jesus and not himself. You see courage and confidence because he depends on the Spirit's power and not his own works. There is immense love and joy as a result of spirit and this flows over into genuine service. Instead of serving to build up his own self esteem or to gain good works for self-salvation, only a personal like that can be a true servant.

Understanding of spiritual poverty enables us to process all of life situations. We see success and failure with a different pair of lenses. When we have success at our job or ministry, we recognize it as a consequence of his grace. Hence we value the success, but we're never boasting of it. We do not become proud because of it or use it to compare others. When we stumble in failure, we recognize it's the way God is humbling us to make us more teachable. His grace has made perfect in our weakness. We're work in progress and one day will be made perfect. Life in the kingdom begins with being poor in the spirit. We need to understand that experiencing true contentment and joy begins with letting go of our burdens of doing it ourselves.

Our self-esteem salvation must be based on what Christ has done, not what we have done. We need to be empowered to work, to glorify him, and only he can do that within us. We're able to love and serve others and not exploit them when we recognize that we are being spiritually poor and we depend on the love that's given to us by his Holy Spirit.

Finally it would be good to take some time to reflect on what we have learned.

- What does being spiritually poor mean to you?
- What are the things in life that make you angry or fearful or worried and why is it so?
- So when someone criticizes you while serving in church, how do you react and why? Why is it difficult to share in a group about your own spiritual struggles?