

WINNING THE GREATEST RACE (Part 3)

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Winning The Greatest Race is about receiving the prize at the finish line by running our race in the Spirit, not in the flesh. As we spend focused time studying and meditating on God’s Instruction Book in preparation for running to win, Jesus stretches our mind, causes us to revisit our attitudes and responses, and challenges our lifestyle when He states the first of the eight “Beatitudes” found in Matthew 5: 1-12. We must remember that Jesus gave them to His disciples, not to the unsaved world. His first Beatitude is, ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

First, what does Jesus mean by ***“blessed”***? It certainly isn’t a state of happiness that depends on circumstances such as the accumulation of money, material goods, fame or power. Nor is it an external happiness promised by the Pharisees as a result of obeying rules or following regulations such as giving, praying, fasting or other man-made exercises. Rather, it is used by Jesus in relation to submission and obedience to His teaching. It is the deep inner joy that wells up inside one’s soul as a result of living in a right relationship with God, others, and our self.

Next, what does Jesus mean by ***“poor in spirit”***? It certainly doesn’t mean one who is helpless, at the mercy of or paralyzed by life’s circumstances, or lacks the drive and enthusiasm for life. To be ***“poor in spirit”*** means to be empty of self, filled with the Holy Spirit and allowing God to sit on the throne of one’s life providing direction and guidance. In each of our lives there is a throne and a cross. When we keep ourselves on the throne, Jesus is on the cross. When Jesus is on the throne of our lives occupying the seat of authority, we experience the blessings of living in the kingdom of heaven.

If we substitute the word “ego” or “self” for the word “spirit” we can better understand what Jesus is saying. Those who have large egos and filled with themselves are proud, self-centered, self-seeking, self-assured and self-reliant.

Those who believe they are the master of their fate and the captain of their souls are headed for a fall and a life of disappointment and disaster (*Proverbs 16:18*).

Being ***“poor in spirit”*** is the exact opposite of being rich in pride. Those who are ***“poor in spirit”*** are humble (*Psalms 149:4*), selfless (*Philippians 2:3*) and model the attitude of Jesus when He prayed, ***“Not my will, but yours be done”*** (*Luke 22:42*).

Finally, Jesus says in this first Beatitude that those who are poor in spirit are blessed and will inherit the ***kingdom of heaven***. If we live in the kingdom of self we will never experience the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven. Why? Because it is reserved for those who are ***poor in spirit***.

Being ***poor in spirit*** is dying to self and living for Christ. It is foundational for the maturing of the believer and should be the bottom line characteristic of a follower of Christ. The Lord declares, ***“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word”*** (*Isaiah 66:2b*). The remaining seven Beatitudes, when followed, will help us to become more and more like Christ once this first one, being ***“poor in spirit”*** is followed.

Ask yourself:

- (1) Do I belong to the kingdom of heaven?
- (2) Does Christ sit on the throne of my life?
- (3) Is Christ my Savior, King and Lord?
- (4) Am I blessed?
- (5) Am I demonstrating a humble, selfless spirit to others?

Ask God:

O God, will You help me to empty myself, so I may be filled with You?