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Poverty and Mourning in the Capitol (The Sermon on the Mount) Matthew 5:1-12

Entering any elected office in our state requires certain qualifications such as citizenship, age, and residency. In the "greatest speech ever given" – the Sermon on the Mount – Jesus proclaims the important truth that in order to enter God's Kingdom, we must first possess certain qualifications. As He lists these qualities, He begins with two seeming paradoxical statements: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit", and "Blessed are those who mourn". As the rest of the Beatitudes build upon these first two, we should carefully consider what they mean for us.

Jesus introduces His teaching with these well-known words:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:1-2

The rest of the Beatitudes as well as the rest of Jesus' sermon build upon these first two statements so we should carefully consider what it means to be poor in spirit and to mourn in the capitol and in our lives.

"Blessed are the Poor in Spirit"

What does it mean to be Poor in Spirit? The word for "poor" is a strong word that means a total lack of this world's resources or goods. It describes a beggar. It is not just poor; it refers to one who is "beggary poor". But here Jesus is not talking about physical or material poverty. Jesus says we must be poor **in spirit**. He is saying that if we would be truly blessed and part of God's kingdom, we must realize we are desperately poor in our own spiritual resources and that we must have help from outside sources.¹ He is speaking about a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and of self-reliance. He means we have a consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God. "It is just the tremendous awareness of our utter nothingness as we come face-to-face with God."¹ We must realize we have no resources or abilities within ourselves to come to God or be right with God. We must rely completely upon His grace as He gives to us that which we cannot earn or do not deserve.

"Poor in spirit" must be the attitude of those who would come to Christ for **salvation**. Salvation begins when we understand our sinful condition and our need for a Savior. This is what Christ did on the cross as God

provided the payment for our sin. It is something God had to do, something God had to provide. It is when we recognize our own helplessness that we are willing to come to God and accept what He has done for us. "Poor in spirit" must also describe the attitude of those who would seek to **grow** in Christ and **serve** Him. John wrote in the book of Revelation to a group of believers who had lost sight of what it meant to be poor in spirit: **"...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 3:17-18

"For Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"

What is the promise of the kingdom? "Theirs" is an emphatic word, literally, "theirs, and theirs alone". Only those who recognize their spiritual poverty can become God's children and part of His kingdom. Jesus describes the blessing, promise, and reward for those who are poor in spirit: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This certainly speaks of the blessings of an eternity in heaven. It also speaks of the blessings we find of belonging to God's kingdom here and now. Today we can experience the joy of fellowship and worship. We can begin to experience the joy and blessing of beginning to live out the attitudes and actions found in The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.

How do we become poor in Spirit?

This brings us to an important question, how do we become poor in spirit? I believe there are two simple ways:

Look at God. When we begin to see God for who He really is and what He is really like, we cannot but help

become poor in spirit. If we can merely glimpse His absolute glory, holiness, and perfection, it will immediately open our eyes to our own failures, lack, and need. Note Peter's response to Christ when he got a glimpse of Jesus' real power and glory through the miracle of the catch of fish: **"Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man"**. (Luke 5:8)

Look at the Cross. When we look at the cross we realize it was God's provision for us of that which we could not provide for ourselves. Looking at the cross will open our eyes to how sinful we are and how great our debt is when we realize it was our sin that sent Christ there. A genuine understanding of our own spiritual poverty will certainly lead us to the next of Jesus' beatitudes.

Blessed are they that Mourn

We noted previously how The Beatitudes go against the grain of the world's ideas about happiness and success. None of Jesus' statements is more striking than "blessed are they that mourn". This seems totally contradictory. Jesus claims those who would be blessed, genuinely happy, or fortunate, are those who mourn. How can this be? Jesus is not talking about "grim, cheerless Christians" who have no joy in their lives. Neither is He speaking of those who merely mourn over the trials and difficulties of life or the results of sinful choices. Jesus is talking about mourning over sin. "Poor in Spirit" is the intellectual understanding of our need and our condition before God. "Mourning" is our emotional response to the same truth. When we see ourselves for what we are, our emotions will be stirred to mourning.

Let us never forget that the heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed, as in the greatness of the Person sinned against. (Valley of Vision)

For They Shall Be Comforted

The promise of blessing and genuine happiness for those who mourn is that "they shall be comforted". It is when we begin to genuinely mourn over our sin that we are willing to turn to God for His salvation and forgiveness. It is only then we can find comfort. Once again, "they" is emphatic, meaning literally, "they and they alone, shall be comforted". Believers are the only people in the world who can be genuinely free from the guilt of sin. When we mourn over our sin and turn to God for forgiveness through the work of Christ on the cross, then we find the comfort of knowing our sins are forgiven.

Perhaps one of the greatest illustrations of this is the life of King David recorded in the Old Testament. In Psalm 32 and 51 we find David dealing with sin in his

life. He was guilty of the terrible sins of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11). When confronted about his sin, he mourned over them, repented, and found forgiveness. He wrote of the blessing and comfort of knowing that his sins were forgiven in Psalm 32:1: **"How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!"** He writes of how he found this blessing and comfort: **"I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin."** David, though king of Israel, demonstrates for us what it means to mourn over sin and find the comfort forgiveness provides.

There is tremendous application of these truths for the lives of those working and serving in the Capitol community. These two beatitudes are the foundation for the rest. The attitudes of gentleness, hunger and thirst for righteous, mercy, and the rest can only be expressed by those who have had their hearts changed through faith in Christ. THAT only happens when we recognize our spiritual poverty, mourn over our sin, and turn to Him.

What Does this Mean for Us?

If you are not yet a believer, you should understand these paradoxical sayings of Jesus are meant to lead you to salvation. You must recognize your condition before God, that you have nothing within yourself to commend you to Him. This will lead you to mourn over your sin before God and turn to Him for forgiveness.

For believers these qualities must be a constant part of our lives if we are to grow in our relationship with Christ and our service for Him. We must remember just as with salvation, when living and growing in the Christian life (sanctification), we have no strength or resources within ourselves. We depend upon His strength and work in our lives. Believers should also continue to mourn over sin. While our sins may be forgiven, we will continue to struggle with temptation and sin in our lives until we reach heaven. We should continue to mourn over our sin until that day comes.

True happiness and blessing can only be experienced by those who recognize they are poor in spirit, mourn over their sin, and turn to Christ for forgiveness.

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays

8:00 AM Government Org. Conference Room (East Wing)
12:00 PM Senate President's Conference Room