


Creative Living Bible Study



Secrets of Kingdom Living

Studies on the Beatitudes

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Secrets of Kingdom Living

Studies on the Beatitudes

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Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

The quest for happiness is the universal human longing from cradle to grave. But when we look at ways people pursue happiness apart from Jesus Christ, we see that most of these ways only lead to temporary happiness at best, followed by letdown, discouragement, and despair.

Jesus begins the famous “Sermon on the Mount” by describing the heart attitudes and character of the person who finds real happiness in the deeply satisfying and indestructible blessings that only faith in God can give (Matthew 5:1-12). This beautiful, simple, and profound passage, familiar to anyone who knows anything of Jesus of Nazareth’s teachings, is known as the Beatitudes (*beatitudo* is Latin for *blessedness*). Hidden in the depths of these few verses are the divine secrets of fulfillment and joy, making an understanding of the Beatitudes invaluable. Jesus names eight characteristics and eight blessings that belong to those who place complete trust in God.

Like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, the Beatitudes are to be taken as a whole, describing experiences and qualities the Holy Spirit gives to every committed believer. Jesus is not pointing to certain personality types as he speaks of meekness, for example. He

is speaking of the meekness that He wants all His followers to have, including those like the tough and self-confident apostles, Peter and Paul.

In the Beatitudes, we also see the contrast between worldly and Christian values. While the worldly person pursues self-promotion and self-gratification, the person who regards Christ as King will focus on serving God and people as Jesus did. Because of this, the Christian living for God's Kingdom will be the opposite of the worldly person in what they admire and seek and do. This clash with the world's values can lead to persecution for the follower of Christ, but even in this, Jesus promises great blessing.

It is important to note from the beginning that the word *blessed* means more than happy, because happiness is an emotion often dependent on outward circumstances. "Blessed" refers to *the final highest good and spiritual joy of those who are part of God's family and kingdom*. The rewards of this kingdom are enormous: living in God's presence now and forever in heaven, being filled with His righteousness and called His child, inheriting heaven and earth and all that belongs to Christ.

So the Beatitudes describe "kingdom members" where Christ is King and we are like Him: humble before God and man, blessed, happy, at peace. The surprising truth of this study is how we experience these blessings at the same time as we are "poor in spirit," "mourn," "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and are "persecuted for righteousness." It is also encouraging to know that these sufferings do not mean we are immature as believers, but rather that we are living the life common to all who have walked with God and experienced His divine blessing.

By the end of our study, you will be able to define each character quality Jesus speaks of in the Beatitudes, so let's begin with the definition of what it means to be "poor in spirit."

Blessed are the . . .

Poor in Spirit . . .

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

While the world promotes pride and self-sufficiency, Jesus says God's kingdom belongs to the "poor in spirit." Jesus is not referring to a personality that is fearful, downtrodden or weak, or to the impoverished of the world. He is describing a spiritual disposition of humility before God. To be poor in spirit is *to stand in awe of God's majesty, power and holiness and see ourselves as insignificant in comparison*. It is also *to be aware of our sinfulness before a holy God and to feel our need for His mercy*. With this humble disposition, the poor in spirit will eagerly submit to God's will and trust His promises.

While Jesus never sinned, He modeled this quality of humility before God when He left His glorious place as the Son of God in heaven and came to earth to redeem us (Philippians 2:5-8). As a man, Jesus submitted Himself completely to God's will in all He said and did, depending on God's power to carry out His Father's will (cf. John 5:30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:50; 14:10). The Scriptures record that He prayed continually to discern the Father's direction in His ministry, culminating with agonizing prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 22:41-42). He not only modeled perfect humility before God, the opposite of man's natural pride, but His complete submission, as we will see later, uniquely qualified Jesus Christ to be our redeemer.¹

Throughout the Beatitudes, Jesus also makes a subtle comparison of the truly godly with the proud self-righteous spirit of the Pharisees, the revered but hypocritical religious leaders of the day. They thought they were righteous because of their strict observance of religious laws and felt no need for God's mercy. The poor in spirit

who will inherit the kingdom of heaven, on the other hand, would say, “God have mercy on me, a sinner.” Painfully aware of his spiritual bankruptcy, he gladly embraces the gospel of Jesus Christ and is forever filled with gratitude that “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The mantra of the poor in spirit could be summed up as:

*Nothing in my hand I bring.
Simply to Thy cross I cling.*

To the poor in spirit, God responds in grace and love and increased revelation of Himself. Isaiah 57:15 states: “For this is what the high and exalted One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” As Charles Spurgeon put it, “The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves.”

While the world promotes self-confidence, self-expression, self-reliance and giving an impression of success, Christ tells us that inner happiness begins with abject humility and awe in God’s presence. To such a one, God pours out His mercy and guarantees the eternal blessings of heaven.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3

1. Describe the setting when Jesus gave the Beatitudes.

Matthew 4:25-5:2

Note: *beatitude* is Latin for “blessedness.” The word *beatitude* is not in the Bible. The Greek word in Matthew, *makarios*, means “happy” and refers to that which is the highest good.

2. a. What is Jesus' first promise regarding happiness?

Matthew 5:3

b. According to the commentary above, what does it mean to be *poor in spirit*?

3. a. How does the worldly prescription for happiness differ from what Jesus Christ says here?

b. How will the Christian who is poor in spirit be different from the worldly person in what he admires, seeks and does (with his time, talent and treasure)?

Poor in Spirit

Worldly in Spirit

4. a. None of the qualities highlighted in the Beatitudes refer to natural personality traits. What personality traits could be mistaken for being *poor in spirit*?

b. What personality traits could be mistaken for *not* being poor in spirit?

c. Jesus is saying that all personality types should be poor in spirit before God. What blessing does God want all to experience?

Matthew 5:3b

5. How do the poor in spirit see and relate to God, as displayed in these passages?

1 Chronicles 29:11-13

Psalm 33:6, 8-11, 20

Note: To *fear* the Lord is to stand in awe of Him.

6. a. A person who is poor in spirit realizes his/her own insignificance and frailty in comparison to God, with His infinite power and majesty. How is this reflected in the following verses?

Psalm 8:3-4a

1 Peter 1:24-25

b. Seeing God as He is and ourselves as we are, what is an appropriate response? Psalm 96:8a, 9

7. What is God's response to the poor in spirit?

Isaiah 57:15

Psalm 103:11-13 (17-18)

8. What blessings do the humble experience in their relationship with God?

Psalm 18:1-2

Psalm 18:35-36 (1 Peter 5:5b)

9. A person who is poor in spirit realizes his or her sinfulness and need of God's mercy. He knows he cannot depend on his own goodness to make him acceptable to a holy God. Jesus told a parable contrasting the difference between the self-righteous and the godly.

Read Luke 18:9-14.

a. What attitudes of the self-righteous man can we easily fall into (18:10-12)?

b. What was the perspective of the man who was poor in spirit in this parable (18:13)?

Note: Pharisees in Jesus' time were religious teachers and leaders who were most revered by the Jewish people. Jesus continually exposed their hypocrisy in His teachings. In the Beatitudes, as He described qualities of the truly godly person, He knew His hearers would recognize opposite traits in the Pharisees and other religious leaders, like the Scribes and Saducees.

c. How does God respond to the poor in Spirit whose cry is, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (18:14)?

10. a. What does the one who is *poor in spirit* understand about himself as he stands before a holy (absolutely pure) God?

Romans 3:23 (1 John 1:8)

Romans 6:23a

Note: *death* biblically refers to separation from God.

b. In His mercy and love, how has God provided for our need?

Romans 6:23b

Ephesians 2:8-9

c. How can a just God give such a gift?

Isaiah 53:5-6

2 Corinthians 5:21

Reference: Note 1, *Why...the cross?* p. 14.

11. a. When offered the gift of God's forgiveness in Christ, what is the response of the *poor in spirit*?

Acts 3:19

Note: To repent is to confess our sin and turn from it to do God's will.

John 3:16

Reference: Note 2, *whoever believes in Him shall not perish*, p. 15.

b. What does God promise the one who receives Christ and the forgiveness made possible through His cross? John 1:12-13

12. Forever God's child and cleansed from sin through the cross, what is the joy and hope of the *poor in spirit*?

Psalm 25:9

Psalm 48:14

Psalm 16:11

Matthew 5:3

SUMMARY

13. a. What is true about the Beatitudes in general that makes them invaluable to study? (See Introduction.)

b. How will the world respond to the Christian who chooses this prescription for happiness, and why will it respond in this way?

14. What will being poor in spirit look like in your daily life?

15. What can keep you from being poor in spirit, and how can you counter this opposition to godliness in your life?

16. What blessings come from being humble before God? What in particular did Jesus point out in Matthew 5:3?

Note: If you have never personally received Christ into your life, please take a moment to learn how by reading Note 2 on page 15.

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 *"Why did Christ have to die on the cross?"* This is one of the most important questions of the Christian faith. The following explanations of three biblical terms answer this question.

a. Redemption is a biblical word meaning "to buy out" or "to set free by the payment of a price, or ransom" and refers to a slave being purchased out of slavery. Romans 3:24 says we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." As born sinners, we are in the slave market of sin, so to speak. But Christ, the only free man who ever lived (because He was sinless), paid the ransom price of His own blood to purchase sinners out of the slave market of sin and set them free to become sons of God. Only by the price of death can one be set free (Romans 6:23), and only one who is free (sinless as Christ was; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21) can buy a slave's freedom. By paying the ransom price of His shed blood, Jesus purchased the person who puts faith in Him out of the slave market of sin and sets him free to become a son of God (Galatians 3:13; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Galatians 4:4-5).

b. Propitiation is a biblical word meaning "satisfaction" and refers to the righteous demands of God being satisfied. God will not compromise His attributes of righteousness and justice that are legitimately outraged by man's deliberate violation of His will. But God's attribute of love motivated Him to provide a way to bring man back into fellowship with Himself without compromising His attributes of absolute righteousness and justice. God's holy character demanded that man's sin be paid for. Therefore, God came into the world in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because Christ was born without sin and never committed an act of sin, He qualified to bear the holy wrath of God the human race deserved as He willingly died on the cross for our sin. In so doing, He "satisfied" the just demands of God's holy character against man's sin. This act set God's love free to pour out grace on those who receive His gift of salvation. In this way, God is "just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

salvation. In this way, God is "just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

c. Justification refers to God declaring us "not guilty" and righteous in his sight, even though we are guilty of sin. God is able to do this because of the life and death of Jesus Christ acting as man's substitute. When God declares a person righteous in His sight, He does so on the basis of the life and death of the One who was acting on his behalf. "Jesus our Lord...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). When we put faith in Jesus Christ to save us from sin, God declares us justified, or not guilty, and righteous. We are justified by the death of Christ that paid the penalty for our sin, and we are justified by the life of Christ whose life of righteousness is also credited to us. This justification, which is all by God's grace and received by faith, brings us into fellowship with God as a child in His family.

2 *Whoever believes in Him shall not perish* (John 3:16). What does it mean to believe in the Son of God in order to have eternal life? As the Bible reveals from Genesis to Revelation, man is separated from his Creator by guilt from going his own independent way. Hopeless to fill the void in his heart for a relationship with God, he tries to reach God through his own efforts—living a good life, ethics and philosophies, human religions. Yet the separation and void remain. The price to save his soul cannot be paid by man, for "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) or spiritual separation from God.

The good news or gospel of the New Testament which fulfills all the foreshadowing and prophecy of the Old Testament, is that God, motivated by His great love for us, has Himself paid the price for our relationship with Him to be restored. He came to earth in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, and paid the penalty for our sin as He died on the cross in our place. This payment allows us to be acquitted of guilt and to enter the presence of a holy God once again.

Christ's salvation is a gift purchased by God, absolutely free of charge to us. "The *gift* of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23), and we are "justified *freely* by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

Our part is to simply turn from our old way of life apart from God and receive the gift of Christ's provision for our sin. With this step of faith, God pronounces us freely forgiven, clothes us with Christ's perfect righteousness and gives us a personal relationship to Him as a loving heavenly Father.

If you have never personally received God's gift of redemptive love by putting your faith in Christ, perhaps you would like to do that right now. The following is a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I need you. I am truly sorry for the way I have lived my life apart from you, and I want you to lead my life from now on. Thank you for dying on the cross in my place to pay the penalty for the sins of my life. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Please take control of my life and make me the person you want me to be.

Receiving Christ into your life unites you to Him. What is His promise to you in Revelation 3:20 and Hebrews 13:5b?