

Matthew
The Poor in Spirit
Matthew 5:3
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Matthew, chapter 5, as I said, “Today, we begin to study the Beatitudes.” For some twelve years, while I was in Los Angeles, I served as the managing director, overseeing the day-to-day operations of the ministry of *Grace to You*. And part of my oversight there included our international offices, at least we had them at that time. On my first trip to our office in India, I had the opportunity among other cities to visit the city of Mumbai. And one day, we had just a couple of hours and we toured some of the city sites, including a Hindu temple built just off the coast. There's a causeway that leads out to that temple, and that causeway was then, and still is, lined with beggars, most of whom were born into that caste. Many of them were deformed, some of them by birth, others of them by parents seeking to evoke greater sympathy from those from whom they would beg. My host, Chris Williams, explained to me that these people, lining this causeway out to this Hindu temple, spend every day of their whole lives there begging for a few coins to support that day's needs. They are born into the caste of beggars, they live as beggars, they die as beggars.

Now for us who live here in the US, that's really, honestly, hard for us to fathom. But today, we're going to learn from our Lord that while that is not true of us physically, it is very much true of every one of us spiritually. All true Christians are spiritual beggars. Jesus deliberately began “The Sermon on The Mount” with the Beatitudes, and the Beatitudes are crucial to correctly interpret this sermon. He begins with the Beatitudes because they identify those who are already His true subjects. If you're not already a follower of Jesus Christ, if the Beatitudes don't describe who you already are by God's grace, then you cannot live out the moral

imperatives in the rest of this sermon. This sermon is for those who are already Jesus' disciples. Those who aren't yet His disciples, that's true of you here this morning. You first need to respond to the Gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached. Look back at chapter 4, verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (here).'" You can get into my kingdom, He said, but you first have to repent, and the first Beatitude that we examine today tells us exactly what that repentance looks like.

Now last week, we learned "Four Guiding Principles for Interpreting the Beatitudes Correctly." Let me just remind you of them. If you weren't here, you can go back and catch up, but this is the big picture. First of all, we learned that "The Beatitudes describe all true Christians," and all eight of these Beatitudes, to some extent, describe every true Christian. Secondly, we learned that "The opposites of the Beatitudes describe every unbeliever." We know that because Luke tells us that the day Jesus gave the Beatitudes, he also pronounced, in addition to these blessings, he pronounced "Woes," and those woes are woes on unbelievers who demonstrate exactly the opposite of these virtues. Number three, we learned that "The qualities in the Beatitudes are produced in us by grace alone." God produces these in the life by giving us His Holy Spirit in the New Birth. The rest of this sermon can only be understood in the context of saving grace. And number four, we learned that "Jesus is the only one to perfectly live out the Beatitudes." He perfectly demonstrated all of them except the first one because Jesus was never a beggar in spirit; He was always spiritually wealthy.

Today, we begin our study of these eight spiritual qualities that mark every true Christian by, of course, considering the first Beatitude. Now, Jesus puts it first intentionally because it is foundational. Think of the first Beatitude, and really the second as well, as a kind of gateway into the Christian life. If you're a Christian, you are marked by this Beatitude, and this is how it

began. Let's read it together. Matthew, chapter 5, and verse 2 says, "He opened his mouth and *began* to teach them (that is his disciples), saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'" The point of that Beatitude is clear—all true Christians are characterized by an awareness of their profound spiritual poverty. Now, this Beatitude, as all of them, has two parts that we need to unpack. So, let's begin, let's look at the first part together.

It deals with "The Reality of Our Spiritual Condition," the reality of our spiritual condition. Verse 3 begins, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Now, you'll notice that this Beatitude makes two seemingly conflicting statements about us and those who are Jesus' followers. Notice we are both, at one time, "Blessed," and at the same time, we are "poor in spirit." Those don't usually go together. You don't usually say that someone is blessed and they're poor in spirit, but that's where Jesus begins. So, let's look at it together. First, Jesus says this about the reality of the spiritual condition of every disciple of his. Notice, first of all, we are "Blessed," we are blessed. Jesus begins all eight Beatitudes with this same Greek word, so it's crucial that we understand what it is that He means.

The Greek word translated 'blessed' is not just some internal feeling. There's more to it than that. Scholars agree that Jesus is using a concept that is found often in the Old Testament. And so, let's go back for just a moment, before we get to the Greek word here that Jesus uses, let's go back to the Old Testament and look at two Hebrew words in our English text that are translated 'blessed;' "Two Hebrew words for 'blessed' in the Old Testament." The first word is '*barak*.' It refers to 'a divine blessing,' God blesses someone. For example, Genesis, chapter 9, verse 1, "And God blessed ('*barak*') Noah, and his sons." The second Hebrew word, which occurs some forty-five times in the Old Testament, and the concept that Jesus uses in the Beatitudes is '*esheré*.' This is the Greek word on which Jesus bases His comments in the Beatitudes, '*esheré*.'

This is not something God does to someone like ‘*barak*.’ We never see God ‘*esheréd*’ someone; that never happens. Instead, this is ‘a human conclusion about another person.’ You can see this clearly in one occurrence in 1 Kings, chapter 10, verse 8, where it says the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, “How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually *and* hear your wisdom.”

Now, as our Lord begins “The Sermon on The Mount,” He uses the same Greek word that the Septuagint **uses**. You remember the Septuagint; it is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. It was translated one-hundred or two-hundred years before the time of Jesus. The Septuagint was the Bible that they used most frequently in the first century. In the Septuagint, that Greek translation, Jesus uses the same Greek word that the Septuagint uses for ‘*esheré*, the Hebrew word in the Old Testament. And he uses the word ‘*makarios*,’ ‘*makarios*.’ That's the word ‘blessed’ in the Beatitudes.

Now, with both the Hebrew word, ‘*esheré*’ and its Greek counterpart, ‘*makarios*,’ the one Jesus uses here, there is “A human inspecting the life of someone else, and that human comes to one of three conclusions about that person.” First of all, they conclude “That that person is fortunate.” We use that word, “Boy, he's fortunate!” Well, this word is used like that. It means that person is “in desirable circumstances.” It's used this way in Acts 26, verse 2, where Paul is before Agrippa, and he says, “I consider myself fortunate (‘*makarios*’). “I'm in a desirable circumstance here because I'm giving my defense to you, King Agrippa.”

A second conclusion that a person can come to regarding this word is that “That person is happy—that person enjoys an inner sense of joy.” For example, in 1 Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 40, Paul is talking about widows in Corinth, and because of the circumstances in Corinth, he's

encouraging those widows not to be quick to remarry. That's not a direction for all time; he says that clearly in other places. But because of what was going on in Corinth in the first century and the persecution that was mounting there, he said this, “She is happier (*makarios*) if she remains as she is;” she remains a widow as opposed to remarrying, ‘happier and will have a greater sense of joy and peace inwardly.’

The third conclusion that this word, *makarios*, can be about is “That the person is highly favored.” That is, “The person is the privileged recipient of God's unique favor or grace.” You can see this in James 1, verse 25, where James is talking about those who obey God's Word. He says, “One who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it (that is, actually obeys it), not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” Clearly there is the idea of God granting favor, God granting blessing in that person's life.

Now, what does Jesus mean, then, in the Beatitudes? If those are the three sort of conclusions this word points to, what is Jesus saying? Well, in the Beatitudes, I think Jesus intends all three of those senses, and we'll see this as they unfold. He calls His true followers “blessed” (*makarios*) because, first of all, “We are in an incredibly desirable circumstance—we belong now to His spiritual kingdom,” and in light of the fact that we belong to His spiritual kingdom, “We are characterized by an inner sense of happiness and joy,” and, thirdly, “Both our circumstances and our happiness result from God's unique favor and grace.” So, all of those come together in this word, ‘blessed.’ Jesus is about to tell us, then, what constitutes a desirable life of spiritual prosperity, a life that is marked by inner happiness and joy, and all of that because the person enjoys the favor or the blessing of God. Jesus describes this spiritually prosperous life with eight qualities that we call “The Beatitudes.” The first of them, verse 3,

“Blessed,” and notice the word “are,” “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” For His followers, Jesus says this objective, desirable circumstance of being and belonging to His kingdom, of happiness because of that, and of divine grace, all of that is a current reality. “Blessed are the poor in spirit;” that's the reality of our spiritual condition—we are blessed.

But Jesus is not done. His second statement about the reality of our current spiritual condition is, frankly, unexpected. He says on the one hand, we are “blessed,” but then He says, we are “Poor in Spirit,” we are poor in spirit. Now, I want to start by making sure we understand “What This Does Not Mean,” because there's a lot of confusion about this expression, “poor in spirit.” It is not, “poor in spirit,” is not “A weak character that lacks ambition and courage.” Jesus doesn't mean that His followers are wallflowers always standing in the shadows, always standing in the background, doormats for everybody. Enemies of the Christian faith have, at times, interpreted this Beatitude like that, but that's not what Jesus means.

Secondly, it's not “A self-deprecating false humility.” There are people who display a kind of humility that they don't really feel. They talk about how bad they are, but their real goal is for you to say how great they are. That's not what Jesus is talking about here. These are not people who are always begging for a compliment, talking about, “Well, I'm just no good.” but “I'm hoping you're about to tell me how great I am.”

Thirdly, it's not “Financial destitution.” Luke's version of the Beatitudes omits the words “in spirit.” He simply says, “Blessed are the poor.” So, some, in the history of the church, have argued that there must be some virtue in financial poverty. But a basic principle of biblical interpretation is that the Bible's clear statements must interpret the unclear, and the statement

here in Matthew proves that Jesus' point is not about financial poverty, but spiritual poverty. In addition to that, if you have any question, read 1 Timothy 6, where Paul says to Timothy.

Listen, Timothy, I want you to tell the rich people in the church there in Ephesus, don't tell them to sell everything they have and take a vow of poverty. Tell them not to put their trust in their riches. Tell them not to be arrogant about what they have, and tell them to be quick, to be generous, to share, and to enjoy the good things God has given them (Paraphrase).

So, it's not about financial destitution.

Number four, it's not a "Vow of poverty." This is the Roman Catholic Church's interpretation, in some cases, and it's what many of them claim as their biblical authority for taking a vow of poverty. That's not what we're talking about here; that's not what Jesus means.

So now, let's consider "What it Does Mean." And I want to start with just "The meaning of the word 'poor,'" because that sets the foundation for understanding what Jesus is saying. There are two Greek words in the New Testament that are commonly used to identify 'the poor.' One of those words describes the 'working poor.' Think 'day laborers,' those who gather on street corners around Dallas and other cities, hoping someone will hire them for that day so that they'll have enough to meet that day's needs. And by doing that, they sort of eke out an existence day by day, truly living from hand-to-mouth. That's not the word Jesus uses here. The word that he uses here describes those who have to depend on others. In fact, the Septuagint uses it of those who rely on others in able to live. In classical Greek, from the time of Homer on, it was used for beggars. And that's how this word is often used in the New Testament. In fact, every time the

Gospels use this word, it is of those whose only hope is the generosity of others. Let me show you several examples. Turn with me to Luke; Luke, chapter 14, verse 12; Luke 14:12:

And He (Jesus) also went on to say to the one who had invited Him (to the meal), “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite (Here is our word.) *the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind...* (And he goes on in verse 14 to say.)...they do not have the *means* to repay you.”

That's the poor we're talking about; they can't invite you over to their house because they couldn't afford to feed you—they are destitute. Turn over to chapter 16. In the story of “The Rich Man and Lazarus,” we see this poverty described. Verse 20, here's our Greek word, there was “a poor man named Lazarus (who) was laid at his (the rich man's) gate.” And look at his poverty, he was “covered with sores and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.” Turn over to chapter 21, another picture of this word, Luke 21, let's start at verse 2.

He saw (Jesus) saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins (to the treasury there at the temple). And He said, “Truly I say to you, this (Here is our word.) poor widow put in more than all *of them*; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.”

She has nothing left; she's going to go home and die. The point of Jesus' story here, by the way, or this comment, is that the system of first century Judaism was taking advantage of widows. He says just before this, they “devour widows' houses,” Luke 20:47, and this is an illustration of

that. But the point is, this is her level of poverty. She has nothing left to live on. She's out of funds. James 2, verse 2, refers to “a poor man who comes into the assembly of believers in dirty clothes” (Paraphrase); that's the poverty we're talking about. So, in the New Testament, then, this word refers to those who must either be supported by others or become beggars. That's poor; they are beggars.

Now, let's consider “The meaning of ‘poor in spirit.’” “In spirit” here is used like an adverb. It means ‘those poor in the realm of the spirit,’ ‘the spiritually poor.’ It describes a person's attitude about himself as he compares himself to God. This is a person who is painfully aware that in the sight of God, he completely lacks all spiritual worth. But let's drill down on this a little more because it's such an important concept. To be spiritually poor consists of three realities. If you are “poor in spirit,” these three describe you. First of all, it means “To be spiritually bankrupt.” Romans, chapter 3, verse 10, “As it is written, ‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE. (Verse 12, they) ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS (to God); THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD; THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.’” To be poor in spirit means that you are spiritually bankrupt.

But poor in spirit also consists of a second reality, and that is, it's “To know that you're spiritually bankrupt.” You see, every human on this planet is “poor in spirit,” utterly without spiritual resources before God. But what marks a true Christian is the awareness of that poverty. Like Paul in 1 Timothy 1, verses 15 and 16, true believers see themselves as the chief of sinners (“foremost”) totally undeserving of anything from God. So, to be poor in spirit means “To be spiritually bankrupt,” and “To know that you're spiritually bankrupt.”

And thirdly then, “To beg God for grace because you know you're spiritually bankrupt.” Those who are poor in spirit, listen carefully, if you're a Christian, those who are poor in spirit stop treating God as if He were irrelevant, and instead, they acknowledge before God their desperate need of Him. Turn over to Luke 15; Luke 15, I think this attitude of poor in spirit is powerfully illustrated in the story of “The Prodigal Son.” You remember the story, verse 11 of Luke 15:

And He said, “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ (So, before the father died, this ungrateful wretch of a son demanded his inheritance.)...the younger son gathered (verse 13) everything together and went on a journey...and he squandered his estate with loose living. (He prostituted his inheritance; verse 14.) Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. (Now don't miss the point here, this is describing sinners, the worst of sinners, how they take God's good gifts, and they just abuse them. They prostitute them, and eventually, they use it all up, verse 15.) So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. (That's the worst for a young Jewish man.) And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. (Now here's where the poverty in spirit begins.) But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” ’ ”

Folks, that's poor in spirit. It's when you begin to realize, when you come to your senses and you look at your life and you say, “God has been so generous with me. Look at what He's given me,

and I've abused all of those things, and I've misused them, and all I can do is come to Him as a beggar. I deserve nothing from Him.”

And let me encourage you that God always responds in grace to those who acknowledge their true condition before Him. If you doubt that, look at verse 20, this is Jesus telling the story. Look at how the father responds to the prodigal.

“So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off (In other words, the father's watching; the father's looking, eager for him to come.), his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father (He began his speech.), I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said (No, listen.) to the slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’” And they began to celebrate.

Folks, this is the celebration of God over sinners who acknowledge their spiritual poverty and come to Him. If you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ, this is your story, the story of the prodigal is your story. You've used all of God's good gifts against Him; you've abused them, misused them in so many different ways. If you will come to your senses, acknowledge your spiritual poverty, and come to the Father in your heart, He will run to meet you.

Now, what is the opposite of “poor in spirit?” What's the attitude of those who are not in Jesus' kingdom? Instead, they're still in Satan's kingdom. Well, Jesus tells us in Luke's version, Luke,

chapter 6, verse 24, He says, “But woe to you (judgment on you) who are (spiritually) rich.”

You see, unbelievers wrongly think that they are spiritually rich. I don't mean they don't acknowledge sin; most will admit that they commit some sins, that they've done some bad things. But listen carefully, unbelievers will never admit to their absolute spiritual bankruptcy. They will never admit that even their best and most righteous acts are filthy and unclean before God.

Jesus states this very clearly. He says this to the unbelievers in the church in Laodicea. Listen to what He says in Revelation 3:17, this is Jesus to unbelievers, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.’” And Jesus says, “You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” That's the reality of unbelievers. They're always filled with moral and spiritual pride; they are self-reliant; they are self-confident; they are self-sufficient; they are self-righteous. But the true Christian realizes, “I am nothing; I have nothing, and I can do nothing that will please God.” The true Christian realizes he can never meet God's standard. You see, this first Beatitude makes a crucial point, and that is, the only way that you or I will ever get into the kingdom of God is for Him to give us that entrance without our earning it or our merit. Matthew 25:34, “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come...inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” In other words, it's not based on anything you've done. God, in His grace, prepared it for you. Or take Luke 12:32, Jesus says, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.” Or Colossians 1:13, God “transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” James 2:5, “God chose...(us) to be heirs of the kingdom.” You see, the first Beatitude underscores that we can get into Jesus' kingdom by grace alone, through faith alone, but our rescue begins when we recognize our need.

Jesus put it this way in Mark 2:17, “Jesus (He) said to them, ‘It *is* not those who are healthy who need a physician (doctor), but those who are sick; (He said.) I did not come to call the righteous, (I came to call) but sinners.’” You see, listen carefully, Jesus never saves those who are righteous or think they are. Turn with me to Luke 18; Jesus tells a story here that makes that crystal clear, Luke 18, verse 9:

He (Jesus) also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and they viewed others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector (These are at opposite ends of the cultural and religious spectrum.). The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I’m not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ (He is full of himself. He is confident that he is righteous in himself, verse 13.) But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast (chest) saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’”

It's an interesting Greek word that Jesus uses there because what he literally says, what this tax collector says is, “God, be propitiated to me, the sinner; let Your wrath be satisfied against me.” You see, he's there at the temple praying at the hour of the sacrifice. Just close to him, that animal is being slain in the place of guilty sinners. And he is saying, “God, let the death of that innocent substitute satisfy Your wrath against me. God, be merciful to me, the sinner.” And notice what Jesus says, verse 14, “I tell you, this man went to his house justified (That is, he left the temple declared right with God forever based on grace.) rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself (The one who acknowledges his spiritual poverty like that tax collector, who beats on his chest and says, ‘God, I have

nothing, I'm here as a beggar, show me mercy.' Jesus says that person.) will be exalted" (He'll receive a right standing before God.).

To be "poor in spirit" then *is* "To be a spiritual beggar." It is "to know that you're a beggar," and "It is to actually beg God for His grace" like the tax collector. That's "The Reality of Our Spiritual Condition." We are both "blessed," and we are "poor in spirit."

Now, that brings us back to our text and to the second part of verse 3, the second half of this Beatitude and it tells us "The Reason for Our Spiritual Condition," and it's focusing, not on the "poor in spirit," but the reason that we are "blessed." The second half of this statement is telling us the reason for our condition of 'Blessed.' Jesus declares that those who are spiritual beggars and who know they're spiritual beggars and who therefore beg God for His grace are in a desirable state of spiritual well-being. They are internally happy because they are under the favor and grace of God. And then He finishes this Beatitude by explaining why.

Verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for (because, here's the reason, they are in this enviable, desirable circumstance; the reason they're blessed; the reason is that) "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now as I pointed out last time, six of the Beatitudes come with a promise of future blessing, Beatitudes 2 through 7, verses 4 through 9. But 2 of the 8, the first 1, the one we're looking at, and the last 1 are not promises of future blessing. Instead, they are affirmations of present reality. They both make the point that those who display these qualities are already in Christ's spiritual kingdom. Notice what Jesus says. "They're blessed because 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'" In Greek, if you want to emphasize a word, you change the word order and you place it first in that part of the sentence, which is exactly what Jesus does here. We can translate it like this. "For theirs, and theirs only, is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of

heaven belongs only to the poor in spirit. What is the kingdom of heaven? Well, we've already looked at this. Let me just remind you, the kingdom of heaven is the same thing as the kingdom of God. And by the way, that's clear when you compare this first Beatitude in Matthew with Luke's version, Luke 6:20, He says, "Blessed *are* you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." So, for the same Beatitude, Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven," and Luke uses "kingdom of God." They mean the same thing.

And we've learned that these two phrases describe two distinct aspects of the kingdom. There's a future aspect of the kingdom, a future millennial and eternal reign of Jesus on this planet on a new earth forever. But there's also a present spiritual aspect of the kingdom. True Christians belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom today, right now. To enter Jesus' spiritual kingdom is to be spiritually saved. It's to be rescued. It's to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, and that's what Jesus was saying. "If you're poor in spirit, if you recognize your spiritual bankruptcy and you have begged God to show you mercy, then right now, today, you already belong to His spiritual kingdom." "Blessed are the beggars in spirit for theirs is the kingdom." It's an amazing statement!

How should you and I respond to this first Beatitude? Well, let me give you several ways I think we ought to respond. First of all, in light of what we've seen here, let me encourage you to examine yourself to see if you are still in Satan's kingdom. How can you know that? Well, you can know that if this Beatitude doesn't describe you, if you're not a beggar in spirit. In other words, ask yourself this, "Do you think that you are good enough for God? Do you think you're essentially a good person and that God ought to let you into heaven because of who you are? Are you convinced that your good deeds somehow make you acceptable to God? Do you think that your good deeds outweigh the bad? And one day when you stand before God, and He asks

you why He should let you into His heaven, you plan to point to yourself. You plan to say something you are, something you've done is the reason God should let you into heaven.” Listen, if that's true of you, then Jesus doesn't say “Blessed are you;” He says, “Woe to you, judgment on you.” For like the rich man in Jesus' story, you're getting all the comfort you're going to get right here, right now. You're not a beggar in spirit. You don't belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom. You're not a true Christian. You're just part of the crowd attached to Jesus like many who heard this sermon when He delivered it. Friend, let me just say to you, “I don't care what you think you are. If this Beatitude doesn't describe you, you are not in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.”

There's a second implication, and that is if you know you're not a Christian, or in light of what we've studied together this morning, you seriously doubt that you're a Christian. What do you do? Where do you go? Well, you begin right here with this first Beatitude. You need to acknowledge to God your spiritual bankruptcy. You need to acknowledge to God that you're a beggar before Him. Acknowledge your total lack of personal righteousness and beg God to forgive you and to give you the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You need to respond like the tax collector in Jesus' story. He told you exactly how to respond. You need to be afraid to lift your eyes to heaven. You need to beat your chest and say, “God, show me mercy. I'm here like a beggar pleading with You to forgive my sin.” Jesus said, “Despite that man's sins, he left the temple right with God.” And you can leave this place this morning right with God if you'll respond like a beggar in spirit. There's a hymn that has been sung for a long time. Unfortunately, that hymn has often been abused and misused in the invitation system, but its message really summarizes what it means to be poor in spirit. Listen to what it says.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind;
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come!
That's what it means to come as a beggar in spirit.

There's a third implication, and that is for most of us here this morning, if you've acknowledged and if you continue to acknowledge that you are a spiritual beggar before God, you have cried out to God to show you mercy, to forgive your sins, then be encouraged. Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to you right now, today!" Many Christians lack real assurance of their salvation. Here is Jesus' word of assurance to you. If you are painfully aware of your spiritual bankruptcy, if you know you have nothing to offer God to make Him accept you, and if you have come to Him as a beggar, like the tax collector in Jesus' story, you are in Jesus' kingdom! How did that happen? How did that happen? It's because Christ overcame our spiritual poverty at the cross.

Listen to how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 8:9, I love this. He says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was (spiritually) rich (with all the glory of heaven), yet for your sake He became (spiritually) poor." Not only did He become one of us, become fully human, but "He was made sin," 2 Corinthians 5:21, "for us." He took on our poverty, our spiritual bankruptcy on the cross, so that you, through His poverty, might become spiritually rich. Christian, here's the amazing thing. Although we will never inherently be anything but beggars, God has adopted us as His children, and He has added us to His will! Do you understand that? We share the inheritance with His only begotten Son. Romans 8, verse 17, "If (you are) children (of God), (then you are) heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with (Jesus) Christ." So, we're beggars; you'll never be anything but a beggar for all eternity. You'll never

have anything inherently to offer God. It'll always be grace! But because you're His son, His daughter, you inherit everything with Jesus Christ. No wonder Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor (beggars) in spirit, for (because) theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our time together this morning. Lord, we are always encouraged by Your Word, but we are overwhelmed by what we have studied this morning. Lord, we who deserve nothing from You, we who are truly beggars, we are beggars, but Lord, we thank You that You brought us to know our poverty. By Your Spirit, You opened our eyes to see that reality, and by Your grace, You welcomed us, invited us, commanded us to come and to throw ourselves on Your mercy. And Father, we thank You that You are just like the father in the story Jesus told, that the moment our hearts turned, the moment that repentance grew out of our hearts because You had placed it there, the moment that You began that new life in us, Lord, we just acknowledged our spiritual poverty before You, and we begged You to show us grace. And You did! Lord, we thank You, we love You, we praise You.

I pray You would use this Beatitude to bring assurance to those who are truly Yours. If they truly acknowledge their poverty and have begged You for that forgiveness and for that cleansing to change them, then Lord, help them to trust the promise of Jesus that to them belongs the kingdom of heaven.

And Lord, for those who don't, may this be the day that they come to their senses, that they see their poverty and Your wealth in Jesus Christ. And may they run to You today, and as they run to You, Lord, You will run to them. We pray that would happen even in this room this morning, in Jesus' name. Amen.