

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 19 February 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Beatitude Attitudes

Matthew 5:1-3

On the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel, there is a hill called Mount Eremos, which rises gently from the lake. Near the top of this hill, there is a little cave called Mughara Ayub; and from this spot, the view of the Sea of Galilee is magnificent. According to ancient tradition, it was in this very spot, just above the entry of the cave, that the Lord Jesus sat down and delivered the most famous sermon that He ever preached. Years after Jesus returned to Heaven, Matthew and Luke recorded this sermon in their Gospels; and since then, it has been printed countless millions of times, in thousands of languages, all over the world. We call it “**The Sermon on the Mount.**”

Now, we can't know for sure that this cave was the exact spot where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount; but it is very likely that Jesus did sit somewhere in this area, since it is just outside the ancient town of Capernaum, and since this little plateau can accommodate thousands of people. Can you imagine what it would have been like to sit in the bright sunshine, and to look out over the flower-covered hillside, and to hear the chatter of birds—and, in the midst of all this beauty, to hear the voice of the Son of God, as He spoke about the birds of the air, and the flowers of the field, and used the birds and the flowers as illustrations of the Father's loving care for His children?

Yet, despite these peaceful natural surroundings, there must have been some inner turmoil going on in people's minds. The things that Jesus was teaching were radical, and even counter-culture. What Jesus was teaching definitely contradicted many of the traditions of the Pharisees. As for the Law of Moses, Jesus' teachings didn't *contradict* the Law of Moses; but they did *elevate* God's requirements to a much higher level. Jesus spoke of the heavenly Father as a God who looks into the innermost heart, and who demands inner purity. This is *not* what the people were used to hearing!

You see, for all their lives, the people of Israel had been taught to keep the Law *outwardly*, and *mechanically*; but they had no clue what it was to have a *real relationship with God*. Most of them had no clue what it meant to be *inwardly converted*, because most of them *hadn't* been inwardly converted. They had no clue what real *purity of heart* was. The religious leaders of Israel had an outward, ceremonial “righteousness,” but their hearts were filled with wickedness. Yet, here was this rabbi named Jesus, speaking of a righteousness which far *exceeds* the righteousness of the Pharisees. Furthermore, the carpenter from Nazareth said that in order *to enter the Kingdom of the Messiah*, you must have this kind of righteousness. This was frightening stuff—and for a couple reasons! For one thing, the rabbis had taught them that *all Jews* will enter the Kingdom, simply because they are children of Abraham; yet, Jesus said that unless they had an inner conversion of heart, they would *not* enter the Kingdom! Secondly, the righteousness that Jesus spoke of seemed *impossible* to attain!

For many of the people, Jesus' words must have seemed sobering, and frightening. Yet, to Jesus' *true* disciples, this sermon, though challenging and convicting, was not beyond their understanding. They *had* experienced an inward conversion of heart since they had believed on Jesus; and though they were far from perfect, they knew that *they* were the “blessed ones” that Jesus was talking about. They knew that *they* were the citizens of the Kingdom—the ones who will one day “*inherit the earth.*”

In the next couple months, we will be examining the Sermon on the Mount. Christian, be prepared to be comforted—yet, at the same time, greatly challenged and convicted—by the Sermon on the Mount. Above all, prepare yourself to be *changed into Christ's image*. If you will let these words sink into your

heart and mind, they will radically transform your life. The title of this message is *The Beatitude Attitudes*.

Read Matthew 5:1-8.

I. The spiritual character of the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most powerful sermons that Jesus ever preached. Yet, what is it really all about? How should we interpret it? There are several *false* ways that people interpret this sermon; and they need to be exposed, because they are spiritually deadly.

One false interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount is that **it is a list of principles that you must follow in order to earn your salvation**. Many people casually read Jesus' sayings in **Matthew 5-7**, and assume that "If I just keep the 'golden rule,' I'll make it into the Kingdom. If I live by the Good Book, and keep my nose clean, and 'do unto others as I would have them to do unto me,' then I'll be all right." Perhaps this is what *you* have always thought. Perhaps you think that since you've lived a pretty good life, and since you've always tried to "do a good turn" to others, God will accept you into His Kingdom. My friend, this is *not* what Jesus was teaching! In fact, it is a deadly lie!

The Bible says that *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. God's standard of righteousness is so high, that we cannot possibly attain it. For example, one of the things that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount is that if you are angry with your brother, and call him "*raca*" (which means "stupid," "dummy," or "moron"), then you are in danger of hellfire! Jesus also said that if you look on a woman in lust, you have committed adultery with her in your heart. On those two counts alone, who does *not* stand guilty before God? Who has attained to *that* standard of righteousness? It's one thing not to kill, or not to commit adultery (outwardly); but who has *not* "killed" in his heart, or committed adultery in his heart? Not one of us! That is why we need a righteousness that is *not* our own!

Read Romans 3:19-24.

My friend, if you think that you can make it into the Kingdom by keeping the Law, think again. In **Romans 3:19**, Paul says that the *whole world* stands guilty before God. *All* our mouths are "stopped." Even our seemingly "good" deeds are corrupted by selfish motives (such as the desire to impress others). There is no excuse that we can offer to God for our sin. God's Law condemns us, and declares every single one of us to be "guilty." God's Law shines the spotlight on our hearts, and exposes the wickedness that is hidden in them. *Others* may not be able to see the hidden sin in your heart; but God does: and there is no good deed that you can do to blot it out. That is why none of us can be justified in God's sight by trying to keep the Law. God's standard is absolute holiness; and we can't come remotely close to attaining it. The Scripture says that "**All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.**"

This is exceedingly bad news: yet, God also has exceedingly *good* news for us. The good news is that there is a Saviour! The good news is that Jesus is "***the righteousness of God,***" for us. Look again at **Romans 3:21-22** again. (**Read Romans 3:21-22.**)

My friends, Jesus is the perfect Righteousness of God. We have all broken God's Law; but Jesus kept God's Law perfectly *for us*. He also took the punishment for *all* our sins, in our place, on the cross. This means that if you *place your trust in Him*, and in *His* righteousness, His righteousness will be stamped onto *your* moral account, as though it were yours.

How's *that* for an exchange? Jesus took all your sin upon Himself, as though it were His, and paid for it in full; and in exchange, He will put His perfect *righteousness* on *your* account, as though it were *yours*. God, the righteous Judge, will accept Jesus' perfect righteousness on

your behalf—if you will simply receive it. All you have to do is repent of your sin in your heart (be sorry for it, and desire to turn from it), and simply *ask* Christ to save you of all your sins. If you will do this, He will forgive you, and save you, and accept you into His family!

Read Romans 4:5-8 and 6:23.

Now, what other false interpretations are there of the Sermon on the Mount? Another false interpretation is that this sermon is a **guide for social reform (for the “salvation of society”)**. The idea is that “If everyone would follow these principles of good living, what a wonderful world it would be! In private life, in public life, in the business world, and in international relationships, we would have a utopia; and everyone could hold hands and sing ‘Kumbyya.’” However, there’s a problem with this interpretation. The problem is that this is *not* what Jesus was saying! Jesus wasn’t talking about “building a better society, so that we can make the world a better place”; He was talking about *being personally righteous before God, because you’ve been saved*. Society *would* be much better if many more people had the kind of righteousness that Jesus is talking about in this sermon; but this kind of righteousness is not possible without being *saved*. (And most people don’t *want* to receive Jesus’ gift of salvation.) The sad fact is that we live in a fallen, rebellious world. As long as we still live in a fallen world, most people will choose their sin instead of choosing Jesus’ righteousness; and society will continue to be filled with wickedness, perversion, selfishness, and corruption.

So, what *is* the right interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount? Well, to understand this sermon rightly, you must understand to whom Jesus was speaking. He was speaking to His *disciples*. (Read Matthew 5:1 again.)

Anytime Jesus taught publicly (even to a small group), there was always the possibility that there were lost people present—people who *thought* they were disciples, but who really weren’t. (Judas Iscariot was one of them!) However, when Jesus went up the mountain that day, the group that went with Him were His disciples. There were probably some false disciples among them; but the core group were Jesus’ followers. Throughout this sermon, Jesus kept addressing them as “ye” and “you.” He said, **“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you.”** He said, **“Ye are the light of the world,”** and **“Ye are the salt of the earth.”** He was speaking to those who had already believed on Him, and were saved.

What is the point, then? The point is that Jesus was speaking to people *who were already citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven*. In **Luke 6:20**, Luke tells us that Jesus specifically said, **“Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God.”** Jesus was speaking to people who already had the spiritual quality of being **“poor in spirit”**; and the Kingdom was *already* theirs. Jesus wasn’t telling them, “Be this kind of person, and you’ll *earn* your way into the Kingdom.” No, He was saying, “*Since* you are a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, this is what your life should look like.” What we see in **Matthew 5-7** are the principles and practices of *saved people*, as they await the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. They aren’t citizens of the Kingdom *because* they have these spiritual qualities: rather, they have these spiritual qualities because they are citizens of the Kingdom! God has converted them from the inside out. This change isn’t their own doing; and it isn’t by their own self-reformation. It is the work of *God* in them. Jesus said, **“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”** The Lord is the one who does the converting! You and I must simply receive His gift of salvation by faith, and then *let Him* do the changing.

II. The power for Kingdom living

Brethren, before we look at the first statement in Jesus’ sermon, there are a couple things that we need to understand about the spiritual qualities that we’ll be reading about in the Sermon on the Mount. First, we need to realise that as long as we are in this mortal body, we will never perfectly attain to the holy standards that Jesus put forth in this sermon. **First John 1:8**

says, ***“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*** For now (while we are in this body), we will have a sin nature to deal with; and as long as we have the sin nature, we will stumble and fall from time to time. *However*, this does *not* mean that we can excuse ourselves from holy living! Sometimes, we tend to develop a lax, casual attitude about our sin—the attitude that “We’re all sinners, and God knows that we’re not perfect; so, He understands when we sin. It’s O.K.” No, my friends, God *doesn’t* understand; and it is *not* O.K. A casual attitude toward sin is *not* a Beatitude Attitude; it is a carnal, fleshly attitude. God has given us the power to overcome sin; and He does *not* lower the standard for us. As we study the Sermon on the Mount, you will never find Jesus saying, “Now, I understand that you all are sinners; so, here’s a lower standard of righteousness to which you might be able to attain.” No, He says, ***“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”*** Again, being ***“perfect”*** is not a *requirement to be saved*, because *none* of us could be saved if we had to be sinless in order to get into the Kingdom. However, perfection is what God wants us to *strive toward* in our daily walk. What we see in **Matthew 5-7** is the blueprint for living for those who are citizens of the coming Kingdom.

How, then, should we strive toward this holy standard? **Through the power of the Holy Spirit!** Folks, I *cannot emphasise this enough*. You are going to hear me saying this again, and again, and again, over the next couple months. Many Christians are living in almost continual spiritual defeat, because they have not learned how to submit to the Spirit of God daily, and to be controlled by Him. Many Christians are controlled by their fleshly lusts; and they are trying to fight against their flesh in their own strength. In other words, they’re trying to fight the flesh *in the power of the flesh* (and they don’t even realise it). My friend, this will never work. “Fighting fire with fire” doesn’t put the fire out: it simply makes the fire bigger! The *Holy Spirit of God* is the One who gives us the power that we need to overcome sin at the point of impact, and to live as citizens of the Kingdom should live. You may be *doing* all kinds of acts of service to God (such as reading your Bible daily, going to church every service, going out soul-winning, or teaching a Sunday School class); but doing these acts of service does not empower you to live for God. The power is in the Holy Spirit. If you are submitted to *His* control throughout the day, He will give you the power to serve Him; and your service will not be a drudgery. Your service will be joyful and fruitful, because it is *not you* trying to do it in your own strength; it is the Spirit of God who is doing it through you, as you submit to Him, and rest in Him.

Now, as I say, when Jesus preached this sermon, He was preaching to believers. Yet, at the time, these believers were *not* indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It wasn’t until a couple years later, at the Feast of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit came to live inside believers. The Holy Spirit *couldn’t* come to live inside believers until Christ had paid for our sins on the cross.

Read John 7:37-39.

The permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a wonderful blessing to every believer. It is a provision of the New Covenant that God promised to the *nation of Israel* in **Jeremiah 32**. When the 1,000-year Kingdom begins on earth one day, literally *every Jew on earth* will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They will also dwell in the land of Israel, in true peace in safety. (This is the *other* promise of the New Covenant.) For now, the *physical* promise of Israel’s living in the land in peace has not come to pass, because Israel, as a nation, has not yet believed on Jesus as their Messiah. However, in the meantime, the *spiritual* promise of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit has been extended to *all* believers, whether they be Jew or Gentile. The moment you believe on Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside you; and He gives you the power to overcome sin, as long as you submit yourself to His control.

Read Ephesians 1:12-14 and 5:18-27.

For nearly 2,000 years now, the Holy Spirit has been indwelling believers from the moment of salvation. For this reason, it's hard for us to imagine what it would have been like *before* the Spirit came to indwell believers. As Jesus was preaching to His followers on the mountain that day, He was commanding them to be holy, as the Father is holy; yet, how *could* they live holy lives without the Holy Spirit living inside them? Here's how.

Read John 14:16-17.

Please notice what Jesus told the disciples about the Comforter (the Holy Spirit). He said that the Holy Spirit "*dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*" That word "*with*" is key. Believers before Pentecost had the Holy Spirit *with* them, and *near* them; and they "*knew*" Him. They had a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was "*with*" them, and near them, and by them; He just wasn't living "*in*" them—yet! They *did* have the power, by the Holy Spirit, to be poor in spirit; to be meek; to hunger and thirst after righteousness; to be merciful; to be pure in heart; to be peacemakers; and to rejoice in the midst of persecution.

Now, if the believers *before* Pentecost had the power to live as citizens of the Kingdom, how much more do *we* have the power to live as citizens of the Kingdom, when we have the Holy Spirit *living inside us*! The indwelling Holy Spirit gives us a level of light and understanding that believers before Pentecost didn't have. Folks, I don't think we fully realise what we have in the Holy Spirit. He is our *power*! As we gaze into the "mirror" of God's Word, and see the holy image of Christ in its pages, we are given the power to be changed into Christ's image (to become like Him), from one level of glory to another; and it is all by the "*Spirit of the Lord.*"

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

III. Beatitude Attitude #1: poverty of spirit (v. 3)

(Read verses 1-8 again.) You'll notice that at the very start of this sermon, Jesus used the word "*blessed.*" He said, "***Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***" The word "*blessed*" is translated from the Greek word *makarios*, which describes a "blessed or happy condition." By the way, our word "*beatitude*" is translated from the Latin word for "happy," or "blessed." That's why we call these eight statements "The Beatitudes." Jesus is saying that believers who have the spiritual quality of "poverty of spirit" will have a "blessed," "happy," and "joyful" life.

Now, the "blessedness" that Jesus is talking about doesn't depend upon "whether things are going my way." That's obviously not the case, because Jesus says, "***Happy are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***" The blessedness that Jesus is promising does *not* depend upon circumstances. It *endures*, even when others are reviling you, persecuting you, and saying all manner of evil against you falsely. Wouldn't *you* like to have that kind of blessedness? Wouldn't *you* like to have real happiness and joy, regardless of what is happening around you? If you live the Spirit-controlled life that Jesus is describing in this sermon, you *will* have this kind of joy and happiness in your life. Even when the world is falling down around you, you can have the joy of knowing that one day, you will rule and reign with Jesus in His Kingdom.

Now, altogether, Jesus made eight of these "*blessed*" statements; but *this first* one ("***Blessed are the poor in spirit***") is the foundation of all the others. In fact, it is the foundation for this whole sermon. You cannot have any of the spiritual qualities that Jesus talked about in this sermon until you first become "*poor in spirit.*"

What does it mean to be "*poor in spirit*"? It means to acknowledge that you are spiritually bankrupt before God. It means to agree with God that all your righteous acts are like a pile of "*filthy rags*" in His sight. It means to be *broken* in spirit because of your sin, and to be truly

sorrowful for it, and to desire to turn from it, and to be delivered from its power. Jesus makes it clear that *no one* can enter the Kingdom unless he becomes broken in spirit about his sin. Brokenness over sin leads the sinner to repent, and to ask God for His gift of salvation.

Read Luke 18:9-14.

True citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven are broken about their sin. This brokenness begins at the moment of salvation, when a sinner turns to God; and it continues throughout the Christian life. Brokenness over sin is something that should characterise every true child of God. When King David repented of his sin with Bath-sheba, he told God, ***“For thou desiredst not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”*** David knew that offering up sacrifices of animals upon the altar meant absolutely nothing unless he was truly *broken* over his sin. A ***“broken and a contrite heart”*** is what God desires.

What reward lies in store for those who are ***“poor in spirit”***? Jesus says that ***“theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*** The ***“kingdom of heaven”*** is that glorious 1,000-year Kingdom that Christ will establish when He returns to earth. Though this kingdom will be located on earth, it is called the kingdom ***“of heaven”*** because it will be of heavenly origin. The Son of God will literally come down from Heaven, with His resurrected saints and angels, to establish it. Those who are ***“poor in spirit”*** (those who have been saved by God’s grace) will literally rule and reign with Christ in His Kingdom. The Lord said, ***“He that overcometh, and keepeth my works until the end, to him will I give power over the nations.”*** In John’s vision of the throne room of heaven, he saw the saints praising God, and declaring that Christ has ***“made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth.”***

Are you ***“poor in spirit”***? Have you acknowledged your spiritual bankruptcy? Has there ever been a time when you humbled yourself before a holy God, and admitted that your own righteousness can’t save you? Have you, with a humble, broken spirit, asked Christ to save you from your sin, and to come into your life? If not, I urge you to do so! God’s Word promises that ***“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”***

Perhaps you have already humbled yourself, and have asked God to give you His gift of salvation. If so, you are His child; and nothing can change that. However, don’t *ever* forget that apart from Christ and His righteousness, you are spiritually bankrupt. In order for Christ to work His righteousness in your daily life, you must continually acknowledge your own spiritual bankruptcy, and ask Christ to give you His spiritual riches. Every day, as you begin your day, you must humble yourself before God. You must get very real with God, and say, “Lord, I know I am nothing without you. I know that in me is no good thing. I know that in myself, I am wicked and sinful. Lord, please show me any hidden sin in my life today, so that I may repent of it, and receive cleansing. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in *your* way. Lord, I submit myself to you. I want *your* will to be done in my life today, and not mine. Lord, please give me the power to overcome sin today. Give me the strength to overcome temptation at the *very moment* when it rears its head, and is ready to strike.”

Brethren, *this* is poverty of spirit. *This* is how a believer should live. As long as you are allowing the Spirit to control you, you will be “poor in spirit”; and there will be no room for self-righteousness, or for a critical, negative, or complaining spirit. Self-righteousness is just the opposite of Holy Spirit-control. When you are controlled by the Spirit, you won’t be talking about others’ faults: instead, you will be serving others, and “washing their feet.” When the Holy Spirit is in control, you will esteem others better than yourself.

Most of us here know about John Bunyan, the tinker from Elstow, England back in the 1600’s, who became a Baptist pastor, and who wrote the book *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Early in his life, John Bunyan was a swearing, blaspheming, vile man, who delighted in mocking God.

However, through a series of sobering events in his life (including seeing a Christian friend die right in front of him during the English Civil War), his mind began to turn more and more toward God. His soul was filled with deep conviction of sin; and he had horrible nightmares about hell, and demons tormenting him. He began to read the Bible; and as he learned a decent amount of biblical theology, and cleaned himself up morally, he became rather proud of himself. Yet, he still wasn't sure that he was saved. Finally, one day, while he was sitting on a bench on the street of Elstow, waiting for customers to buy his wares, he overheard a conversation between four women, who were sitting on some steps across the street, and sewing together. Their conversation went something like this:

“Was not Reverend Gifford extraordinary last Sunday?” a petite, middle-aged lady said to the others. ‘Oh, indeed! The Lord is so gracious and compassionate that he would even look upon us in love,’ another responded. ‘We are blessed to have such a gentle yet spiritual man to be our shepherd.’

“John immediately felt compelled to walk over and engage with them in conversation, especially since he knew a great deal of theology and Bible. But before he could stand up, he overheard something—something that forever changed his heart.

‘I am so wretched,’ one of the women said, looking down as if she were about to cry. ‘I have been outwardly professing the Christian religion, but in my heart, I am terribly sinful and prideful. I am honouring God with my lips, but my heart is far from him. I hate my sinful flesh!’ ...She looked up at the rest of the women, and then up toward the sky. ‘Forgive me, Lord!’ She burst out into uncontrollable tears, and the other ladies moved closer, and wrapped their arms around her.”¹

That conversation changed John's life! After hearing this, John said to himself, “*I am undone and broken...her sin is my sin.*”² He went home, looked up to heaven, and prayed a genuine prayer of repentance; and when he got up from his knees, he knew that he was forgiven.

I don't know whether that woman who prayed that day was an unsaved woman who *got* saved, or whether she was a saved woman who wasn't walking with the Lord, but who got right with Him that day. One thing seems certain, though: those other three women were *saved* women, who were there at the right place and time, to help that woman with her spiritual need. Little did they know how powerfully their conversation had affected John Bunyan! Now, what if those three saved women had *not* been “poor in spirit” that day? What if they had been sitting around gossiping, and tearing other Christians (or even non-Christians) apart with their tongues? Would John Bunyan ever have been saved if he had heard such a conversation? We don't know, of course: God may still have prevailed upon him. However, there is a good possibility that he would have been turned off to the Lord, and would never have been saved; and if so, there never would have been a *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, or any other of the wonderful books that have touched millions of lives. Think of that! Because four women were “poor in spirit” on a little street in the village of Elstow, multitudes have found Christ as their Saviour!

Conclusion: Being “poor in spirit” is *extremely* important, brethren. You had to become “poor in spirit” in order to *be* saved in the first place; and now that you are saved, you must *stay* poor in spirit if you are ever going to have a victorious Christian life. Christian, don't allow self-righteousness and pride to creep into your heart. By the power of the Holy Spirit, cast down every vain and prideful thought!

As we close, I would also ask: “Have you been saved?” Have you humbled yourself to admit that you need Jesus, and His righteousness? Of are you like a furniture salesman that Brother Mick once knew,

¹ Brian H. Cosby, *The Journey of a Pilgrim* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), pp. 69-70

² *Ibid.*

who put shoe polish over his rotting furniture to make it look shiny and new to the customer, when, in reality, it is good for nothing except firewood? I have news for you, friend: *your righteousness* is like rotten, shoe-polish covered furniture! Your righteousness may look good to others; but to God, it is worthless; and it will *not* get you to Heaven. Repent and believe on Jesus today, and allow Christ to give you *His* gift of righteousness. Let *Him* replace your spiritual poverty with His spiritual riches!