

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.Ivor J.W. Oakley (Guisborough Evangelical Church
14-5-2000)

Matthew 5:3
(Bible Reading Matthew 5:1-12)

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Introduction

Those who think of Jesus as teacher regard the Sermon on the Mount as containing the essence of Christianity. It is more correct to say it is a perfect summary of the Christian character of those who have come and trusted Christ. Therefore it is very important for us to know what it teaches. In an extended introduction, making some preliminary remarks about this subject, we will approach the very controversial subject of who this sermon is for, and when it is to be carried out.

Firstly going to present a few of the views which are popular. Tolstoy, great Russian novelist, says this is blueprint for new society, to be taken absolutely literally and universally. Therefore end of all oaths – indeed abolish all law courts. Scrap police and certainly armed forces. Carry out to the letter – this will bring peace on earth.

Social Gospel view, very popular at beginning of 20th century. This is Christianity. Only thing that matters in 20th century. Get men to obey it. Then end of troubles and warfare. Perfect society. Forget all this doctrine, the miracles, cross etc. Shaken by two world wars, the optimism of social gospel has disappeared.

Roman Catholicism – much of what is written here is not for all Christians, only the spiritual elite, monks and saints. Lesser requirements from ordinary people.

Many Protestants take the view that the sermon shows God's high standards. Shows that our righteousness is just filthy rags and therefore need Saviour. Certainly "Greatest indictment of human nature in all literature", "No account of sin to match sermon". But this sermon gives far more than just showing up faults.

Dispensational view (held by many evangelical Christians) – the Sermon on the Mount is not meant for Christian Church or modern age. Applies when Christ returns and rules for 1000 years on earth. For kingdom age. Indeed whole of Matthew is for then. But there are parallels to teaching all over the New Testament. Elaboration of Christ's command to love one another.

Best interpretation. The Sermon on the Mount is for disciples of Jesus now. For those in God's kingdom, who have experienced his saving rule. Not meant as blueprint for all men to produce new society, dealing with social problems and abolishing war. It was given to disciples – see verses 1 & 2. It concerns how men behave and live when under God's control and authority. Good advice of Sermon – based on Good news of kingdom.

Certainly not teaching Salvation by works. But for those already saved and forgiven and who know God's power in life. **You are the light of the world... so let your**

light shine before men. (Matthew 5:14,16). This is underlined by the fact that the Sermon begins with the Beatitudes. Phrases begin **Blessed are..** and it is the people who are poor in spirit, mourn over sins, hunger and thirst for righteousness, who can live like this. So clearly the Beatitudes are description of Christian's character, by God's grace. Then rest of Sermon is about Christian's conduct. Only man with Christian character by grace, born again, new person, can live rest of Sermon. So Beatitudes describe the spiritual state of man who can obey Sermon. Character in Beatitudes is dependent on God's grace and power, therefore able to keep Jesus' teaching.

The Beatitudes are indivisibly whole. Very definite order, and the text for today is first and foundation Beatitude. When man is poor in Spirit, then he will mourn over sin and failures, and so he is meek and hungers for righteousness, causing him to be merciful. So pure in heart and therefore becomes a peacemaker, leading to persecution. Such people are the only truly blessed and happy people. This is description of all Christians in true sense, not a spiritual elite. All Christians display and manifest all these characteristics though in varying degrees. Not some are poor in spirit and others are meek or peacemakers. Basically this is Christ's character reproduced in the Christian.

None of these characteristics are from our natural tendency. Produced by Holy Spirit, and grace and power of God. Cut right across natural disposition. This is result of new birth. Show up very clearly and distinctly difference between Christian and non-Christian.

How the world despises people marked by the Beatitudes. Poor in Spirit? How unmanly. Self-confidence, self-reliance, bombast, arrogance – the main thing. These are lauded by people of world and heralded in the newspapers and media.

So we come to the first and foundation beatitude. **Oh the blessedness or happiness of the poor in Spirit.**

The Poor in Spirit

In the Old Testament the poor man was the man who was poor in spirit. Lives life in humble dependence on God. Acknowledges spiritual poverty and bankruptcy before God. Humble and contrite.

What this phrase does *not* mean is somebody naturally shy or reserved, lacking in courage. These are natural characteristics. Nor is it describing someone who is always emphasising how very humble he is, and all the time is very proud of it. It does not mean a man suppressing his personality and taking on somebody else's personality. Or somebody who likes being in the background because he is shy. Not somebody putting on act to impress people. Not humility of great scholar who is overawed by vast knowledge he does not know or enjoy.

Here is the man who is face to face with God in all his glory, power and holiness. Light cuts him down to size. All is well when he compares himself with others, but when face to face with God he is nothing. The things he boasts of – education, money, natural gifts, achievements, and moral stature – seem unimportant, trivial. Compared

with God's utter purity and God's claims on him – how guilty, ashamed, conscience-stricken. Absolutely nothing, and less than nothing. Small, sinful and unworthy. Awakens to fact that he is a beggar, weak, and bankrupt, no ground for pride. Before, in arrogance, worldly self-reliance, self-confidence and boastfulness, he was like the people of Laodicea **I am rich, I have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing** (Rev. 3:17). Now wakes up to fact that he is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. Eats very huge piece of humble pie.

Always the case when someone comes face to face with God. Every thing is changed in his presence. Becomes humble, contrite and God-fearing. All arrogance and self-importance is gone. Reduced to nothing in himself. Becomes like helpless little child. Holds out hand to lean on God, saying "I am nothing, so ashamed of self, desperately need you, don't leave me". Instead of boasting of personality, appearance, good character, the good impression he makes – at least on the outside – he realises how foolish, trivial and pathetic he is before the living God of heaven and earth. When man really meets with God and faces him, he is broken and devastated.

This was the attitude of Moses when summoned to serve the Lord – felt unworthy and inadequate (Exodus 3). Isaiah cried **Woe to me. I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips... and my eyes have seen the king, the Lord Almighty** (Isaiah 6:5). Peter, who was naturally aggressive and self-assertive, said **Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man** (Luke 5:8). Paul, with all his great natural gifts and powers, admits **I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling** (1 Cor. 2:3). Even Christ himself, while on earth, though still God, he lived as man, and said **The Son can do nothing by himself** (John 5:19), hence his prayer-life.

So "poor in spirit" is total absence of pride, absence of self-assurance and self-reliance. Nothing in God's presence. Nothing here we can produce or manufacture. Not achieve in selves. Not natural gift. When face to face with God – conscious we are nothing in God's presence. Utter submission and dependence.

Need to look at God and the Lord Jesus Christ, his demands in his law and his claims in totality on life. Then realise how helpless we are in and of and by ourselves – this is poor in spirit.

Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

"Heaven" – Matthew writing to Jewish readers, uses word "heaven" because Jews often used the word instead of "God". (Other evangelists referred to "Kingdom of God"). God's rule which brings salvation. God begins by pulling us down, and then raises us up. Empties first, then fills. Condemns, and then releases. Convicts and then converts. When low views of self – high views of Christ.

Humble, lowly and submissive attitude is key to all blessings of saving rule. Nothing for the self-confident, arrogant and self-sufficient. First blessing is salvation itself. Then all the blessings of knowing him – his sanctifying power, direction of lives, infilling by his spirit, companionship and support. Heir of God, joint heirs with Christ. Then being part of kingdom in life to come. Resurrection from the dead. Wearing resurrection body like Christ's. Seeing him face to face. Forever with the Lord. Reunion with his people. Also eternal blessings of nearer presence.

Oh the blessedness and happiness for those who are poor in spirit if this is their inheritance. Find out that God's best gifts are kept on lowest shelves. Only when we bend low do we gain them. But must be end of self and finding all in Christ.

Bishop Taylor Smith, to another preacher, "Here's a good text for you tomorrow **Lord by this time he stinketh** (John 11:39)". "I couldn't preach on that". "Why not? I preached it in an English Cathedral a few months ago. Had a great time with it.". "What did you say?". "Three points: (1) Dead body cannot save itself; (2) Only deteriorates, getting worse and worse; (3) Christ alone can do anything about the matter. After the service ended I went to disrobe. The Dean followed me in and locked door. He said "Bishop, your text upset me greatly. You stressed that men are dead in sin and cannot save selves. Get worse and worse. All men need to be born again. Bishop, it is true, but I did not know that till tonight. I need new life" Result later – he was rejoicing but some of his colleagues did not understand what had happened to him, for he was so different".

Conclusion

Do you know what it is to be poor in spirit? Before God – nothing, brought low, broken, all things you were proud of seen as the dross they are. This is the point where each real relationship with God begins, and also secret of how that relationship can continue to become fruitful. Christ died for you so that you could have new life, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so live out the Sermon on the Mount.

The more we take this condition seriously, the more blessing and happiness. Best form of evangelism. People need to see complete difference Christ makes. The Church is most effective when it is most different from the world. People become curious and attracted to message, though may hate it at first.

Need to come to Christ for broken heart. Strength and self-confidence are stumbling blocks. When we are broken before God, there is hope. All God wants is our weakness, not strength and self-reliance. G. Scroggie, in early years of ministry, reached the end of self. Knew he was a failure, not succeeding in ministry. Climbed hillside, stood under the shadow of a tree. Outlook was bleak. "My world was falling to pieces. Then he took me, blessed and broke me, and ever since has used me to feed hungry multitudes." O that we might be nothing, that Christ may be all.