

Series: “More Than Happiness”  
(Part 1) “The Poor in Spirit and the Mourners”

Almost everyone wants to be happy. People have all sorts of ideas on how to find happiness. Books have been written, sermons preached. The next few weeks we’ll be looking at the *Lord Jesus’* prescription for happiness – as expressed in the beatitudes. The beatitudes are part of a collection of Jesus’ teachings called the Sermon on Mount, found in Matthew 5-7.

*All of Jesus’ teaching have to be understood against the backdrop of the Kingdom of God.* Jesus began His ministry by saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). With the coming of Jesus, God’s kingdom, or rule, was beginning to break into this world. This world, marked by sin and death, was being invaded by the first waves of the *new realm* – where God will rule completely. Although this kingdom won’t be established until Jesus comes again in glory, His arrival on this planet gave us a preview of what life will be like when God’s kingdom fully comes. *The beatitudes show us how to live so we can already begin to experience the joy and pleasure of God’s kingdom.*

All of the beatitudes begin with the word “blessed”. The Greek word is “makarios”. This word was used in pagan literature to mean the highest stage of happiness and well-being, such as the gods enjoy. It’s a divine, godlike joy! This word “blessed” is similar to our word “happy”, but it goes much deeper. Happiness depends on outward circumstances, how things are going at any given time. But the “blessed” of the beatitudes is a deep joy *not* dependent on circumstances. When we live by the beatitudes we can experience the joy of God’s kingdom *already!*

Actually, the translation “Blessed are the meek”, or “Blessed are the peacemakers” doesn’t capture the force of what Jesus is saying. It’s more like an exclamation point: *O the blessedness of the meek...the peacemakers...etc.!!!*

Today, we’ll look at the first 2 beatitudes, for they are similar. The first one says, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3). “O the blessedness of the poor in spirit!”

Jesus says a blessedness comes from being *poor!* Maybe you’re thinking: “That’s me! I’m poor, but I wouldn’t say I’m blessed by being poor!” Of course, Jesus is not talking about being poor in *material things* – but poor *in spirit*. To be poor in spirit means to recognize our spiritual poverty! The Greek word translated “poor” is a strong word: it means really, really poor!

The Bible confronts us with our spiritual poverty. God is holy. We are not holy. God is righteous. We are not righteous in ourselves. Isaiah 64:6 says, “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags...”. Think of a dirty, filthy rag, smelly rag! Maybe we’ve wiped off a greasy stove or a cruddy floor or shelf. That’s what our righteousness looks like to God! We can’t make ourselves clean and acceptable to God. We can’t save ourselves. It’s only when we realize our spiritual poverty and need for the Savior, Jesus, that we can have a relationship with God. As the gospel song says, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling”. No one walks through the door of the kingdom of God with a swagger, or a cocky attitude! Jesus says, “O the blessedness of those who recognize our spiritual poverty, for the kingdom of God is ours!”

The second beatitude ties in with this first one". Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). "*O the joy and blessedness of those who mourn!*" The Greek word "mourn" is the strongest word in the Greek language for mourning. It's the word used of mourning for the dead, the passionate lament and grief that can't be hid.

Isn't that odd? Those who are overcome with grief are happy! What does Jesus mean when He says, "Blessed are those who mourn"? *No doubt Jesus means mourning over our sins.* This is where this beatitude ties in with the first beatitude. When we recognize our spiritual poverty we will grieve over our sins and failures that break God's heart.

*In many ways today, the world isn't much into mourning over their sins.* A well-known church leader has suggested that the word "sin" has little meaning for most people in our culture. There is little sense of our falling short of some divine standards. There's a lot of moral relativism – no absolutes. Each decide for themselves what's right and what's wrong. A lot of people have the attitude, "I'm a pretty decent person, certainly no worse than most other people". Pop culture is filled with entertainers who live immoral lives with little evidence of any remorse...and millions of people idolize them.

But Jesus says, "O the blessedness of those who mourn, *for they will be comforted*". There is comfort because there is *forgiveness!* There is comfort because there is the *hope of change.* It's like someone with an addiction – be it alcohol, or drugs, or sex, or being addicted to one's cell phone! It's only when you quit making excuses and rationalizations, only when you stop blaming others, only when you grieve the fact that your life is out of control, that you've taken the first step towards recovery and wholeness.

Both of these beatitudes point out how necessary it is for us to come to a place of need – that we realize we need help and we need God. I like what Billy Graham once wrote: "In God's economy, you must go down into the valley of grief before you can scale the heights of spiritual glory. You must become tired and weary of living alone before you seek and find the fellowship of Christ. You must come to the end of 'self' before you really begin to live."

Lloyd Ogilvie, author, pastor, former Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, told how someone came to him and asked, "Do I have to go through a *crisis* to admit my need?" Lloyd responded by saying that he's coming to the place where he thinks the answer is "yes" – that most of the people he knows living vital Christian lives had to come to a place where their emptiness and insufficiency was exposed. He related how this very man who asked him this question didn't realize that a crisis was already brewing in his life! This man's son rejected the dad's values, morals and way of life. The man's busy life had brought him professional recognition, but he had not taken the time to build a relationship with his son. His son was admitted to a New York hospital for drug addiction. A doctor in that hospital shattered this man's self-sufficient attitude when he said to the father point blank: "The trouble with your son is that he doesn't know what it means to be a man. Either you didn't know yourself, or you never took time to give your son a pattern of what living is all about."

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” “Blessed are those who mourn.”* See, these first 2 beatitudes are getting at that self-righteous, self-sufficient, I-don’t- need-God attitude that can keep us from God and the new life in Christ.

Illust. When I was growing up there was a boy who lived on the same block where I lived. He was perhaps 4 or 5 years younger than me. I watched him mature into a tall, handsome young man. I graduated from high school, moved away and went on to school, and lost touch with him. Tim went on to college, and one night there was a fire in a dormitory. Tim was burned. He had extensive smoke inhalation. It was touch and go for a while, but he survived. He was in the hospital for about a *year*. Tim’s dad was a good-looking, intelligent professional man. I was always somewhat intimidated by him because he was so suave, composed. After the fire, he was interviewed by a local newspaper reporter. Tim’s dad said something like this: “You can become so hardened...one night after the fire I sat in our den, alone, and wept.”

Is there a place in our lives where we know we have failed? Beneath the mask we wear to make people think we’re fine, are we painfully aware of our fears, our struggles, our weaknesses? Do we grieve over the person we want to be, but aren’t? This regret over our failures and sins and inadequacies can be the beginning point of our coming to Christ and having a new life with God through Him!

But the second beatitude, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,” goes further than just our mourning over *our own sin and need*. *I believe Jesus also meant we are to mourn over the hurt and suffering and sin in the world.* Jesus Himself did this. He wept over the city of Jerusalem – because so many of His own people were blind to who He was and how He came to save them. Luke relates this event: “As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God’” (Luke 19:41-44).

What do you think are the things that cause the Lord Jesus to weep today? No doubt those who ignore or reject Jesus as their Savior (like those back then), including some of our friends, neighbors, and family members. Wars that still kill and maim millions - not just soldiers, but innocent men, women and children. Those forced from their homes, into refugee camps. Do we mourn the millions of youth who soak up hours of video games and social media and soccer and baseball tournaments, but who have no experience of church or the Bible or the faith we proclaim? Do we mourn the lying and the corruption of those in politics, who put personal gain and party loyalty above the good of the country?

By now you may be thinking, “Wait a minute, Harry! This is depressing! I can’t cry all the time over all the sadness and heartache in the world! I’ll go crazy!” Actually, there was a young man in a church I served who had mental problems because he took to heart all of the problems in the

world. I'm certainly not recommending that! We can't cure the world. We can't fix everything. But maybe we can do *something* about *some* of the things that grieve the heart of God.

As an old man walked the beach at dawn, he noticed a young man ahead, picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Eventually he caught up with the youth, and asked him why he was doing that. The young man answered that the stranded starfish would die if left there until the morning sun rose. "But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish," the old man said. "How can your effort make any difference?" The young guy looked at a starfish he was holding in his hand and then threw it into the safety of the waves. "It makes a difference to this one," he said. I can't do everything. But maybe I can do *something* about those things that grieve God's heart!

*Blessed are the poor in spirit.* What's the promise to those who recognize our spiritual poverty and need for God? *For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* God's kingdom is ours, and is already beginning to take root in our lives, and changing us.

*Blessed are those who mourn.* What's the gift given to them? *For they shall be comforted.* When I grieve over my sins, and turn from them, I find forgiveness!

And how are we comforted when we mourn over the hurt and sorrow and sins of the world? Here are a couple of thoughts.

When we're a Christian believer, and see things from a Christian perspective, we understand that even though the world situation is messed up now, *someday* all of the evil and hurt in the world will be gone ....when God's kingdom fully comes. It's like we mourn now, but we know ultimately there will be joy. In Luke's rendering of this beatitude, this idea, I believe, is expressed: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh" (Luke 6:21). When God completely rules, this weary world will give way to the exquisite joy and laughter of God's kingdom!

There is another way we can find comfort when we mourn the sin and suffering in other peoples' lives. Isn't it true, that if in some way we can reach out in compassion and help to relieve just a little of the suffering of others, it will make us feel good, and bring comfort and satisfaction to our own souls.

*O the blessedness of the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! O the blessedness of those who mourn, for they shall be comforted!*

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