

The Rock: 03-13-2022

A year with the master

Title: Blessed are..

Scripture: Matthew 5:3 / John 13 (black bible Pg. 759/846 ESV)

Theme:

Looking into the Sermon on the mount, the questions seem to be: Can we live this out today and what does it look like for the church and the world if we do?

Introduction:

We start a new series this week within our year long-look at Jesus. Honestly, we are going to park here for some time.

In all of the moments of the life of Jesus, none is more widely known, or contested as to when Jesus meant for us to "live these things out".

When Jesus sat down on the hill, or mountain, was He teaching what the world will look like when all things are new?

Was He teaching that we are to do our best to live this out now, putting into practice these things and God would be happy with us? As though this was some

sort of "new law" and program we could follow.

If that is the case we are lost before we begin the journey. I say that because no one could live these commands and challenges out, unless he were, well, Jesus.

-Matthew 5:1-2 (ESV)

"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:.."

Jesus never missed an opportunity to teach those who would listen. Even those in the crowds who were there simply to critique, and to learn enough to get angry at the things He said.

In looking at the very beginning of this sermon, one that perhaps took Him an afternoon or the morning to walk through, he seems focused and prepared.

Preaching in such a way that if we were to fully understand His desire is that we would experience a permanent and powerful life change.

That is my hope as we take time here, with a short break for Palm Sunday and Easter, to at least begin to grasp how Jesus is taking the "Law", written on

stone, and teaching all those who would listen, how to put it in their hearts and live it out.

Swindoll makes this comment on the Beatitudes:

"Through these words, Jesus -with penetrating insight-exposed the bitter veneer of all self-righteousness prevalent in His day...and in ours. He explained the true righteousness, which leads to deep-seeded joy."

-Swindoll's Living insights: Pg.85

The Story:

It shouldn't be any surprise when we hear Jesus speak the first words, that He talks about being poor.

-Matthew 5:3 (ESV)

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The unsettling thing about this statement made here in verse three, is that it is the only one of the beatitudes that requires an emptying from those who would obey it.

Becoming poor in spirit is what we are going to attempt to unpack this morning, because in understanding this beatitude,

we will have a better understanding of all that comes after it.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones in 1959 makes this comment from the pulpit as he taught through this:

"There is no one in the Kingdom of God who is not poor in spirit. It is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian and of the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and all the other characteristics are in a sense the result of this one..."

-Studies in the Sermon on the Mount Pg. 33

This then, becomes the foundation for everything else Jesus teaches. A posture of humility from and for those who look to be followers of Jesus in this world.

What Jesus is beginning to do here is to disciple all those who are within ear shot of His words. Teaching them what it means and will continue to mean to be a life-long follower of Jesus.

We all must start here, with the emptying of ourselves, and admitting that we come to God the Father, through Jesus the Son, with empty hands and poor in spirit.

Because only when we are empty can we admit that we need to be filled, to be

strengthened in our day to day living of that grace-filled life in a world which operates in the opposite manner than what Jesus is teaching here.

Being poor means being needy. Remember here that we are talking in the Spirit, not in our wallets. Sometimes we think that is what Jesus is getting at, that to have money is somehow bad. It is not and that is not what he is addressing here.

The point is for us to recognize our helplessness, perhaps even of our weakness. Something many of us do not like to do. But we must.

It is recognizing humility instead of pride. Pride of accomplishment, of being "self-made". We can be proud of what we do and have done in a right way.

Learning this is a hard thing in a culture of self, let's just be clear on that. To show these types of "weaknesses" is to be seen as a failure perhaps.

I am helped a great deal when I look back to the Bible and find someone like Peter for example. He really struggled with this concept.

Because at times we see Peter submissive and humble, ready to follow. Remember him being called by Jesus and his confession:

-Luke 5:8 (ESV)

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O LORD."

But then we see, and far more often from Peter, his inability to stay humble. Usually, it is Peter who is trying to correct Jesus.

Letting Him know that He ought to do things differently, or that He shouldn't go here, or do that. Always letting his mouth run before his brain kicks in.

The night Jesus was betrayed is a prime example of this, looking at Peter in the upper room discourse in John's gospel.

We find, once again, that Peter doesn't really understand the whole feet washing thing. In fact, many of us don't. We tend to want to start feet-washing ministries based on this moment, failing in every way to see what Jesus was actually doing.

Jesus is literally acting out before their very eyes what servant-leadership, of humility, of being genuinely "poor in spirit", looks like.

None of them get it in fact, and honestly, I don't think many of us would have either. Why? because it's easier to wash feet and "feel good" for a moment, than it is to actually empty oneself of

that pride of place, position and accomplishment.

-John 13:1-5 (ESV)

"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

It's an amazing picture, really. Think on this beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

If anyone in that room deserved to have His feet washed and to be served, it was Jesus the King, the Son of God.

His IS the Kingdom -yet, He emptied Himself. Paul, in writing his letter to

the Philippians, a place I go to often, makes that very clear:

-Philippians 2:5-7 (ESV)

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

Jesus literally took on the form of a servant. A station no King ever took. He did so to show them and us what it really looks like in God's economy to be rich - Become poor!

Poor in spirit is a very difficult thing for a prideful people. "I can do this myself!" "I only pray and need God when I am at the end of my abilities and then He can step in and help. You know, those times when I can't figure it all out by myself."

That is actually prideful in spirit, not poor. For myself at least, and I think perhaps for more of us that we care to admit, I am much more like prideful Peter than I am humble Jesus.

-John 13:6-9 (ESV)

"He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

This guy can't make up his mind. First, it's don't wash my feet, and then it's "wash my head, hands and feet" -In other words: "if that's what it takes, I'll have the entire bath please."

The pride and fickleness of Peter frightens me, because I can see so many of us in him. It is also an encouragement, because Jesus shows such grace and patience, even to today.

Peter is going from one extreme to the next, all the while missing the great lesson. That it is not about your effort and skill, but rather about God and His gift.

His gift of Jesus, of forgiveness and grace, and of His kingdom. Step away from self-reliance and independence.

To truly understand the sermon on the mount, and these beatitudes specifically,

we have to start with an emptying of ourselves. Realizing that we can never do any of this on our own.

Jesus emptied Himself, humbled Himself and put Himself in a place of need and a posture of service, showing us that we have to rely on God the Father through the Holy Spirit to enable us.

It is a surrender actually. One thing we do not wish to do, because surrender, in our mind, is an indicator of defeat, an admission that we cannot actually do what we thought we could on our own.

Being poor in spirit means just that, however. Realizing that we have to actually be emptied of ourselves in order to inherit the Kingdom of God, and becoming filled with the Holy Spirit.

An important observation here. We aren't to empty ourselves and become someone else. As though changing our clothes or coats will make us a different person.

Again, quoting Lloyd-Jones, because he says it far better than I could:

"Poor in spirit -you see it perfectly in a man like the apostle Peter. Peter is naturally aggressive, self-assertive, and self-confident - a typical modern man of the world...But look at him when he truly sees the Lord (the text we saw earlier)

'Depart from me...' But observe that he never ceases to be a bold man; he does not become nervous and diffident. No, he does not change in that way. The essential personality remains and yet he is [now] poor in spirit at the same time."

-Studies in the Sermon on the Mount Pg. 40

This is important for us to get. Too often we think we have to get rid of who we really are (our personality / character) in order for these beatitudes to work that is not true.

It is a submission thing. Recognizing that no matter who we are or what our personalities are, we must empty ourselves before God. Creating a genuine humility, rather than this "pride in disguise."

It is a surrender of self, in order that God draw out the genuine self, created in God's image.

God then does with us, what he did with Peter. He makes us who He knows us to be. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit and walking in this way, we become so much more useful in the Kingdom and His work.

Jesus's prime concern for us is our spirit, our posture before God. Our

poorness of spirit is a declaration, by us, of our need for Him.

What an upside-down way of being, isn't it? Think on this, as you observe the world and all that is going on.

The push and the promotion of self-reliance and independence and personal strength to carry it through. I don't need anyone.

Looking at Peter, each time this becomes the case for him, we discover failure. Why? Because in declaring his strength to stand, he ends up falling in his prideful weakness.

We see this in John 13:

-John 13:36-38 (ESV)

"Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."

Anyone who knows the story, knows that before the sun came up, Peter denied that

he even knew who Jesus was, not once, but three separate times.

Peter went into wholesale collapse when trying to operate in his own strength. Full of pride in his spirit, that he would hold the line.

Let's end on the positive though, because that is always the best! Because we see that in God's goodness and grace, the story doesn't end there in abject failure.

We see Peter, in his writing of his second letter to the young church. Some 30 years after this event, see there is hope for us all. He writes a simple thing, but one that we should not miss:

-2 Peter 1:1a (ESV)

"Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ..."

I am a servant first, and an apostle second. In fact, I am a better apostle because I recognize the poverty of my spirit-and that has driven me to my knees, so I can be lifted up and filled with the Holy Spirit, understanding just what the Kingdom of God is all about.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." I do not find it accidental that this older

and wiser apostle writes his two letters as he does.

Reflecting back on his life with Jesus, remembering this sermon preached so many years before, perhaps even, remembering the upper room and the servant leadership Jesus showed there.

Peter was a human being, just like we are. Please remember that. Now, an old man and near the end of his race, he is reflecting back over his life.

One full of service to Jesus and to the church, he realizes some of the choices he had made were less than stellar, but he has learned.

He sits, puts his pen to paper and writes from his heart and experience:

-1 Peter 5:1-7 (ESV)

"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading

crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

A disciple and life-long follower of Jesus, teaching and discipling other life-long followers of Jesus how to live and walk out being poor in spirit and at the same time inheriting the Kingdom of God.

What a lesson for us all...