

Who Are the Poor in Spirit?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Matthew 5:3

1. It is the opening verse of the Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes, the first of nine blessings.
2. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"
3. In Jesus' time, "blessed" was a common way of describing someone who is wealthy. "Fortunate" is an alternative translation.
4. This opening seems intended to shock the audience; it was a deliberate inversion of values of that day. Those who are considered the unfortunate and disadvantaged are actually the truly rich and blessed
5. Luke 6:20 simply has "blessed are the poor," with Matthew inspired to include "in spirit"
6. Psalm 33:18, 34:18 states it in principle, but not word for word

B. Meaning of the "poor"

1. The phrase "poor in spirit" occurs in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and seems to have been an important concept to the Qumran community.
2. It does not mean lacking in spirit, courage, the Holy Spirit, or religious awareness or zeal; rather, it is poverty that is not only a physical condition, but also a spiritual one. Only those who understand the true nature of real poverty and dependence on God are blessed.
3. Being poor physically or spiritually is not to be envied, but instead is the condition that opens and prepares one to be blessed by God
4. Note that Jesus does not talk about helping the poor; He is teaching the poor and the rich that being poor is not a curse
 - a. Matt. 11:5; James 2:5; Isa. 61:1
5. There are three uses of the "poor" in the New Testament:
 - a. Those who require the charity of others in order to survive, and those who are disadvantaged and forced to the fringe of society
Matt. 26:9-11
 - b. Those who willingly surrender their belongings as a work of faith
2Cor. 6:10, 8:9
 - c. Those in hardship in general and not simply economic poverty
Rev. 3:17

C. Meaning of the "Kingdom of Heaven"

1. Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 16:19, 28

D. Meaning of "blessed"

1. Blessed - makarios - "supremely blest; fortunate, well off, blessed, happy" (Strongs)

E. Each beatitude has a particular form:

1. A declaration of blessing
2. A description of condition or attitude
3. A disposition of the blessing

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE POOR IN SPIRIT?

- A. It is being destitute of what the world considers blessings and wealth; one who is unable or powerless to improve his situation on his own without aid.
 - 1. "In spirit" is one who is powerless to improve his spiritual situation on his own.
 - 2. Luke 18:9-14; 1Cor. 1:26-29; Matt. 20:29-34; Rom. 7:24

II. WHO ARE THE POOR IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

- A. Regarding the kingdom of heaven: Jesus is King and Jesus' disciples are His kingdom - Matt. 4:17, 23, 18:3; Luke 17:20-21
 - 1. The Sermon on the Mount is a description of those who will inhabit the Kingdom of Heaven - Matt. 5:2, 10, 19-20, 6:33, 7:21
 - 2. "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" reads in the original ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν literally "of them is the kingdom of heaven" or the kingdom of heaven is made up of them
- B. The poor are included there; in fact, they belong there
 - 1. John 13:12-17; Matt. 18:1-4; Mark 10:13-16; Matt. 19:23-30

III. WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR THE POOR IN SPIRIT?

- A. Recognize our complete dependence upon God's mercy - Titus 3:3-5
- B. We must consider everything loss to be in Christ - Phil. 3:8-11
- C. We must set aside ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus
 - 1. Matt. 16:24-25
- D. Consider the wellbeing of others first - Phil. 2:2-4; 1Peter 5:5
 - 1. The poor can do this; they have been doing it all of their lives.

Conclusion:

- A. "We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty. Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work." (Mother Teresa)
- B. But this lesson is for the poor. Even unbelieving ancients understood that the poor in spirit are blessed.
 - 1. "Poverty is the schoolmaster of character." (Antiphanes)
 - 2. "It is not the rich man you should properly call happy, but him who knows how to use with wisdom the blessings of God, to endure hard poverty, and who fears dishonor worse than death, and is not afraid to die for cherished friends." (Horace)
- C. Do you understand that the poor man who gives his life to God is far richer and blessed above the wealthy man who has given his life to things and stuff?
 - 1. Mark 8:36