

Matthew 5:1-12

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[0 : 00] And turn with me to Matthew chapter 5. And we began a series last week on the Beatitudes. I thought it would complement Romans and be different to Romans.

! And then I find I'm preaching pretty much exactly the same sermon this morning, this evening as I was this morning. So the Lord must be trying to tell you something. Let's pray. Guide us, O Lord, by your word and by your Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, that in your truth we might find freedom, and in your will that we might discover peace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. And so I want us to look tonight at really what does it mean to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're looking at that in Jesus' own words.

Matthew 5 verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Some of the culture is hostile to Christianity. Most of the culture couldn't care less, let's be honest. I don't know how you find that, but most of the people that I talk to about Christianity, they are apathetic.

[1 : 21] Indifferent. They couldn't care less. Why bother? For many people I know, God is simply just not relevant.

And I think we have to face that. For many people today, in their mind, God simply is not relevant. They would say to us, I don't need God. If you need God, well that's alright for you, but I don't need God.

I've got no felt need for him. I don't really feel the need of God. One of the things that Jesus has come to tell us, is whether you feel the need of God, or not, is irrelevant.

The fact is, you have a need of God. Whether you feel the need of God, is irrelevant. The fact is, you have a need of God. You're on your way home tonight, there's a guy who's in the gutter, drunk. And he's in the gutter, he's got a black eye, he is bleeding. But he doesn't feel the need of your assistance, does he? And when you go with him, to check whether he's okay, well, what's the reaction you'll get?

[2 : 34] You'll get an elbow, or a punch maybe in the nose. He doesn't feel any need of your help, does he? The drunk and the gutter. But that's only an indication, isn't it, of how far gone he is, in his drunkenness.

It's no indication of how things really are. It's only an indication of how much trouble that drunk is in. And the fact is, tonight, you might have come to church, and you sit in this building, and you say, well, I don't really feel any need of God.

And that's only an indication, of how out of touch with reality, you really are. Jesus says, the fact is, that you have a need of God, and until you recognise that, you'll never be, truly happy in the way that, the Beatitudes talk about.

Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, he says, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now what I want to do tonight, is I just want to clear up some misunderstandings, about what this verse is not about. And then I want to kind of, explain what it is about.

Karl Marx called, Christianity, the opium of the people. Why? Because it offered people, it's a pie in the sky when you die, and that hope of the future heaven, well, it kept them content, in their present, and that of course, is a total misunderstanding, and misrepresentation, of what Christianity is.

[3 : 58] Jesus does not say here, Jesus does not say anywhere, blessed are the poor, full stop. What he says here, can you see it?

Blessed are the poor in spirit. What does it mean, to be poor in spirit? It means to be impoverished, not in your circumstances, but in your relationship to God.

John Paul Getty, he was one of the richest men, in the 20th century, and when he came to die, he said this, he's a very, very wealthy man, he said, I've never known love, I've never had a friend. So was John Paul Getty, a rich man? Do you think he was a rich man? A man who could say that, surely he was a very poor man, spiritually.

John D. Rockefeller, said this, the poorest man I know, is the man who has nothing, but money. The poorest man I know, is the man who has nothing, but money.

[5 : 00] And there's a man like that, isn't there, that Marsha read for us, in Luke 12. And God calls him a fool. And why does God call that man, in Luke 12, a fool? It's not because he was rich.

He's no fool, because he made money. God doesn't call him a fool, because he's rich. Why does God call that man, a fool? Jesus says, that man was a fool, because he was poor, towards God. And he was poor, towards the things, that really matter, in his relationship, with God, and in his relationship, with fellow human beings. He was bankrupt.

Let me read to you, from Luke 12, he's a self-made man, in verse 16. At the land of a rich man, produced plentifully, he's arrived. This guy has made it, he's had a great year.

But where is he, where has he arrived, and what he has made? And then verse 17, he thought to himself, what shall I do?

[6 : 02] What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? And he said to himself, I will do this. I will tear down my barns, and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain, and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods, laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. First sign of madness, is talking to yourself, they say, don't they?

And it's quite interesting, that here, I think there is this contrast. We don't see it so clearly. I will say to my soul. Now there's times as a Christian, when it's good to talk to yourself. But I think, as we read this parable, we often miss the force, of what Jesus is saying.

The Easterner, did his thinking in the crowd. Slightly different to the Westerner. The Easterner would normally, decide what to do, after hours of discussion, with his friends.

But this man, we're told, he thinks within himself. He doesn't sit at the gate, he doesn't talk it over, with the elders of the village, according to normal practice. He dialogues with himself.

[7 : 08] Why? Because there is no one else. No one that he can talk things over with. No one but himself. No one that he can trust.

No one that he can talk to. No one he can relate to. He's got nothing but money. That's the picture. It's all he's got. Plenty of money, but that's all he's got. He's a rich man, but in the things that matter, relationships with others, and relationships to God, he's bankrupt.

And God says to him, you are a fool man. That's God's verdict on the world that we live in. That's God's verdict on materialism. Makes no difference whether you're a capitalist or a communist.

The Bible says, if that's all you live for, you're a fool. The communist says, that matter is all that there is. And God says, don't be such a fool.

And the capitalist says, matter is all that matters. And God says, a plague on both your houses. Don't be such a fool. A man's life does not consist in the things that he possesses.

[8 : 19] That's not the essence of life. What makes human beings happy and fulfilled? Man's life does not consist in the things that he possesses.

There's something that matters more than matter. And that's your relationship to God. And unless you are rich towards God, unless you have a personal relationship with God, unless your relationship with God is good and right, whatever else you have, you're utterly bankrupt.

Have you come to realise that? Have you come to understand that? And Jesus says, if you have, you are blessed. Congratulations, Jesus says.

Blessed are the poor in spirit because they are the ones who realise that this life and all these things are not all that there is. Blessed are they who realise their poverty, not in the bank balance or in a state.

But blessed are those who realise their poverty in the realm of the spirit. Jim Elliot, he resigned from the rat race in North America to become a missionary and it famously cost him his life.

[9 : 40] But shortly before he died, before he was killed, he wrote these words in his diary. He was quoting Matthew Henry. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. And that's what poverty of spirit is all about. It is to recognise where your true riches lie, like Jim Elliot did.

He recognised that true wealth was to be found where true riches are to be found. And that's poverty of spirit. Jesus says, congratulations if you're there. So, to be poor in spirit is not to be, it's not blessed to be poor full stop.

But to be poor in spirit, but to be poor in spirit is not to be spiritually poor. Let me explain that. To be poor in spirit is not to be spiritually poor. When Jesus says, blessed are the poor in spirit, he's not kind of pronouncing a benediction on spiritual poverty and bankruptcy.

That's the state we're all in by nature. It's a wretched state to be in. It's not a happy state to be in. It's the reason for our unhappiness, our spiritual poverty.

[10:59] And Jesus says in Revelation that people, just like the folk who come to this church, people, kind of people who think they're themselves Christians, he says, do you know that you're wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked?

And all the time you think to yourself, well, we're rich, we're increased with goods, we've need of nothing. And so to be poor in spirit is to recognise the truth about yourself, to recognise that you are spiritually poor, not to be spiritually poor.

There's no blessedness in that. That's a wretched state to be in. But Jesus says, congratulations if you realise that. Happy is the man who's come to see that his greatest need is to be rich towards God.

Now when we use the word poor, we use it relatively. How many poor are there in this country? You know all the stats. We use it to describe people who are not very well off.

There's a poverty scale, isn't there? But the word that Jesus uses here is for people who are totally destitute. It's a particular word that he uses for poverty.

[12:09] It describes those who have no property, no place, no job, no source of income, nothing to eat. They're up to their years in debt and so if they were given any money, it would immediately be lost to their creditors.

According to Jesus, you and I are poor like that spiritually in our relationship with God. We're bankrupt. We cannot give God what he's got a right to expect from us. We are spiritually bankrupt and that is nothing to congratulate ourselves on.

To be bankrupt, doesn't it, maybe some of you experienced it, it's a desperately unhappy situation to be in. The person who is bankrupt is desperately unhappy.

They're under an obligation to pay and yet they're unable to do so. They're really caught. It's a terrible state. She ought to pay her debts but she cannot pay her debts.

that's exactly where you and I are. Before God, that's what the Bible says. God has made us. We are his creatures.

[13:16] We are under certain obligations. We are under an obligation to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. we owe that to him. But none of us in honesty tonight can say that we've done that.

None of us have lived that way. We're spiritually bankrupt. And yet we are accountable to God. That comes out so clearly, doesn't it, in Luke 12. Do you remember what God said to that rich fool?

He said, tonight your soul will be required of you. And that word is a technical word. It's the returning of a loan. Tonight your life will be required of you.

The man's so busy with his accounts, that's the picture, he's so busy with his accounts that he'd forgotten he was accountable himself. Accountable to the God who had given him the life that he had lived.

And so tonight are you aware that you are accountable to God for the life that you've lived. That your life will be required of you.

[14:29] And so what does Jesus mean? What does he mean when he says blessed are the poor in spirit? He doesn't mean blessed are the poor full stop. He doesn't mean blessed are the spiritually poor, for that's a wretched state to be in.

What does he mean when he says blessed are the poor in spirit? I think I've told you the story before is that the actress, she's an aging actress and she goes to the west end for a head shot, you know, to get her photograph done.

And she says to the young photographer, she says, young man, I hope you're going to do me justice. And the photographer looks at her and says, it's not justice that you need, madam, it's mercy.

It's mercy. And that's what you and I require from God. It's what you and I stand in need of before God, not justice.

If you think that you're going to be able to pull yourself up to your full height on the day of judgment and say, God, well, here I am, you must be delighted to have someone like me in your kingdom. The Pharisee in the parable in Luke 18 went into the temple and he said, well, I thank you that I'm not like other men.

[15 : 46] I do this and I do that and I don't do this and I don't do that. I go to church, I give to charity, I do loads of good, I'm a really decent man, I'm an upright member of society. And you want to be pretty pleased to have me in your kingdom, God, and Jesus says, that is not the man who went home that night right with God.

No, he says it was the other man, which man? Well, it's the guy at the back of the temple who couldn't lift up his eyes and look God in the face, the man who was so conscious of his poverty and of his bankruptcy that all he could do was beat on his breast and cry out to God, be merciful to me, be merciful to me, I'm a sinner.

And Jesus says it was that man who went home right with God, that is the man. And in the next breath, Jesus says everyone who exalts himself, everyone who puffs himself up will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be lifted up.

Everyone who humbles himself, everyone who recognises they've got nothing to offer to God, nothing to commend themselves to God, that is the person who will be exalted in the kingdom.

And that's what it means to be poor in spirit. The hymn writer says, isn't it, just as I am, poor, wretched, blind, sight, riches, healing of the mind, yea, all I need, in thee I find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

[17 : 25] Is that how you've come to the Lord Jesus Christ? If you haven't come in that way, you haven't come at all, conscious of your needs, not for justice, but for mercy.

And that's the first step to putting you, putting right your broken relationship with God. It's difficult, isn't it? It's so humbling. there's nothing that you can do to put it right.

It's humbling to admit that you've got nothing to offer God except the sin for which you desperately need is forgiveness. And that is poverty of spirit, and Jesus says that is blessed.

why is it blessed? Why is that attitude of mine blessed? Well, because it drives us to Christ, doesn't it?

the man who's seen and the woman who's seen their absolute spiritual bankruptcy, that person who understands Romans 3, who realises that what he needs is mercy alone, and realises that there's nowhere else to go except to Christ.

[18 : 46] Thomas Watson, the puritan, wrote this, he that is poor in spirit, is a Christ admirer. He has high thoughts of Christ.

He sets a high value and appreciation on Christ. He hides himself in Christ's wounds. He bathes himself in his blood. He wraps himself in his robe.

He sees a spiritual dearth and famine at home, but he looks out to Christ, and he cries, show me thyself, and this sufficeth.

There's one word that sums it up, isn't it? All that Jesus is saying here, and it is the word grace. Do you remember, children, the hand of grace? God's riches at Christ's expense.

That's how Paul defines grace, isn't it? 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

[19 : 59] how do you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Where do you see it? What does it look like? What is this grace? You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, for your sake, he became poor, so that through his poverty, you might become rich.

That is grace. He was rich, wasn't he? he was adored by the angels of heaven, he was the king of the angels. He enjoyed an unbroken relationship with his father in heaven, unbroken fellowship, and communion in the Godhead, he was rich in the truest sense of the word.

And what did he do? He came here, he left it all, he left his father's presence. The king of the angels got off his throne and became a little lower than the angels.

He impoverished himself. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing. To in the very nature of a servant that through his poverty, you and I might go to

where he was.

That you and I might have God's riches at Christ's expense. You see, what does a bankrupt man need? A bankrupt man needs a benefactor.

[21 : 26] He's somebody who is rich, somebody who is prepared to come with his riches and step in and assume the liabilities. That's what God's son has done. He was rich and he came, why did he come, why did he step into this world?

He came in order to assume your liabilities and mine, to live that life that you and I should have lived, that we haven't. To die that death that you and I deserve, to die is the punishment for our sin, that death with hell mixed into it.

He died that death upon the cross, that is how poor he became. He emptied himself. He lost what he'd always known.

He cries on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, the cry of dereliction? We can't fully understand it. God's love. And through that you and I are brought to God.

The wonderful thing about the gospel is it's not just negative, but it's a positive thing. It isn't just that our debts and our sins have been liquidated, that's part of it.

[22 : 42] The gospel isn't just great news because the slate has been wiped clean, that's great, but it's not all, is it? We've been made rich. And so the gospel isn't back to square one again and off you go.

But we've been made rich through his poverty. And so Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is a fresh brand new start.

No, he doesn't say that. Blessed are the poor in spirit for the slate is wiped clean, the debts are cancelled, they can start over again, that's not what he says, is it?

Look at what he says, he says, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And not only are their debts paid, but they are rich. You are rich tonight in Christ.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What is the kingdom of heaven? Do you know what Paul says in Romans, he says, the kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink.

[23 : 48] It's righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That's the kingdom of heaven. And that's what distinguishes the kingdom of heaven from all other kingdoms. Look at who's growing up there.

Lots of people, they would never go abroad. They would never go abroad because the reason they wouldn't go abroad is they wouldn't like the food. They're afraid of eating the food. Foreign food doesn't agree with me, they'd say.

He doesn't agree with me. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven, you don't have to worry about the food. The kingdom of heaven has got nothing to do with food. It's nothing to do with those external things.

To be in the kingdom of heaven, it doesn't matter if you eat pork or not, people ask me that. To be in the kingdom of heaven is a matter of righteousness and joy and peace. It is to be really rich.

It is to be rich with those things in your heart that you really need. to be in the kingdom of heaven. How do you get into the kingdom of heaven when it's all a matter of grace?

[24 : 52] Jesus says this. Jesus says to you tonight, fear not little flock, it's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. That's an amazing statement isn't it?

What are you? A little flock of silly wandering sheep. That is all we are. We are not tonight a great important group of people that God can't do without.

And he really must have you in his kingdom. No. We are a silly flock of sheep, that's all. And we've gone into our own way.

We're like sheep we've wandered off, says the prophet Isaiah. And that's what we are, a flock of silly wandering sheep. And God does not need you to enhance his kingdom.

The glory of the gospel is that he wants you to enjoy it. Fear not little flock. Fear not silly wandering sheep.

[25 : 53] Fear not little flock. It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. It's all of his grace. And there's nothing you can do to merit it. There's nothing you can do to commend yourself to God.

You are nothing. You have nothing. You can do nothing to make yourself fit for the kingdom. God matter of our father's God. is a