



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH  
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



## Vantage Point

Tim Badal | September 29, 2013 | Matthew 4:23-5:3

### The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 1

We're beginning a new series entitled "The Upside-down Kingdom, Looking at lessons learned from the Sermon on the Mount." We're going to begin a seven-month study of the three chapters that contain the Sermon on the Mount. You can find the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through Matthew 7.

As we embark on this journey, an introduction is necessary and introductions are tough. It is daunting to preach sermons based on the greatest Preacher of them all. Many have said the Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon ever preached. I know you guys have heard some good ones in your time here, but mine don't compare to the lessons we are going to learn. It is also humbling to take what Jesus is teaching His people and share it with you, helping you glean some of the truths that will come from this.

We need to know a little bit about what's going on in this passage—the settings and times of Jesus' life. Where did this scene happen in His ministry? Who were the people involved?

We're going to look at the first section of His sermon—the **Beatitudes**—as a whole, then we're going to look at the first of the eight Beatitudes that God gives through His Son Jesus Christ. We're going to learn about what it means to be poor in spirit.

You'll notice the title of this message is "Vantage Point." Some years ago I watched a movie by that title. It surrounded the events of an assassination attempt of a world leader and an explosion in a big town square where people were assembled to hear this world leader speak. What was different about this movie was that in the beginning, it replayed the same seven minutes from different perspectives. At the end of the seven minutes when the explosion took place and chaos began to ensue, they would rewind and do a different scene from another person's vantage point. They'd start with a newscaster, then a spectator in the crowd, then the secret service agent. Every time they'd rewind and start from a different vantage point, we would learn more and more about the story.

My desire is to look at the Sermon on the Mount from various vantage points. We'll look at this passage from different vantage points of who the listeners were, what Jesus was dealing with in the political context, within His environment, what Jesus was trying to accomplish. Then we'll bring it back around to the first Beatitude, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit...*" If we're going to understand this series, it is absolutely necessary to understand the first Beatitude.

Follow along in your Bible as we look at Matthew 5:2-16.

<sup>2</sup> *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

<sup>7</sup> *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

<sup>8</sup> *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

<sup>9</sup> *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>11</sup> *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

<sup>13</sup> *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.*

<sup>14</sup> *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

Let's pray. Father God, we come before You as we embark on this journey into the Sermon on the Mount that Your Son preached. Lord, glorify Yourself through the teaching of it. We pray that we would be a changed people because of how we encounter these words before us. Lord, You're going to turn us upside down through this series as we learn what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ, even when that means we have to live countercultural to the world. So God, lead us, guide us, be our Teacher we pray. In Christ's name. Amen.

## **1. The Syllabus – Jesus Gives Us a Theme**

As we begin this series on the Sermon on the Mount, we want to see a broad view of what is taking place. We're going to be following an outline—a syllabus—to guide the way. I remember hearing about a syllabus for the first time in college when the professor announced, "Here's the syllabus for the semester. Here are the textbooks and the materials that you are going to need. This is what you will know and understand in order to pass this class."

So when we look at the Sermon, we need to begin by understanding the whole of what Jesus was trying to accomplish in His teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. The theme is all about Jesus flipping our world upside down. What Jesus is going to do is say, "If you think that you can live life as a Christian and nobody takes notice in this world, you've got another think coming. I'm going to flip things upside down because I'm going to call you to live a countercultural life."

Throughout this series, Jesus is going to say, "Well, that may be the norm for the world but it's not the norm for My people." As a result of that, we are going to be called light. We're going to be called salt. We're going to be called those who are persecuted. Because we believe the way we do, because we act the way we do, people will revile us. People will judge us. Yet the Bible tells us very clearly in this Sermon that we will need to build our foundation on the rock of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is going to turn us upside down over and over again; at times we're going to feel uneasy. It's not fun to be upside down, especially spiritually, and Jesus is going to do that repeatedly. Now, He's a

master speaker. He's a master at homiletics. Notice that this theme of being upside down is going to be seen in some topics.

**John Stott** says of the Sermon on the Mount's theme, "The followers of Jesus are to be different—different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter-culture" (The Message of the Sermon on the Mount, InterVarsity Press).

So, how is He going to turn our world upside down? How's He going to show us what His Kingdom's all about? Notice in our text that we're going to see some upside-down things. In the first eight weeks of our series we're going to see an upside-down **attitude** toward life. We're going to deal with the Beatitudes: characteristics of the blessed life, ways that God has called us to live as followers of His. Those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful, the peacemakers—even those who are persecuted—we will be blessed when our attitudes are right side up.

Then, starting in Matthew 6:13, we're going to learn about upside-down **actions**: what it means to live according to Christ's Kingdom, what it means to live differently, what it means to be salt and light, what it means to submit our anger and our lusts to the rule of Jesus Christ. Through this rule of Christ's Lordship in our lives, we're going to look at our marriages differently; we're going to look at our thoughts differently; we're going to look at retaliation and judgment differently. We're going to see that revenge is no longer an option in the Christian life; that giving not getting is the goal for the Christian. These actions are so different from that of the world.

In Matthew 6:5-18, we're going to turn to what I call upside-down **affections**. This is where we're going to learn about our relationship with Jesus Christ and our calling to pray and fast. Here we're going to learn what it means to pray as the Lord teaches us how to pray.

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

We're going to learn what it means to pray and the affection we should have in our communication with the God Who loves us so very much. We're also going to learn about the lost art of fasting—the goal of the believer to show dependence on God, even in foregoing a meal or some other security.

Finally we'll be finishing this study by focusing on upside-down **aspirations**. It is here that we are going to learn what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We're going to learn what it means to not worry about the details of life and how to build our lives on the rock of Jesus Christ.

Throughout these topics, Jesus is going to get down below the surface to the crux of the matter. These four topics that Jesus addresses are going to the very core of who we are as followers of Christ. Casual Christianity is going to be rebuked. Sunday-only Christianity will be reprimanded and so will playing the game of Christian charades. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount absolutely means business and as a result of that you and I would do well to listen.

So with that as our guide, where we are headed? Let's get into God's Word!

## **2. The Setting**

Let's notice the setting of the Sermon on the Mount. What is going on? To do this we need to look at the context so let's turn in our Bibles to Matthew and look at a few verses prior to our passage. We have this young Man Who has been in relative obscurity in a backwoods place called Nazareth (**Matthew 2:23**). He's the son of a carpenter (**Matthew 13:55**) and He is not known as anything more than just the Nazarene, the Galilean.

We see that Jesus was about 30 years of age and in the early part of His earthly ministry. He has just been baptized in the Jordan River by His cousin, John the Baptist, and He has received the acclaim and affirmation of heaven that, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (**Matthew 3:13-17**). God has put His seal of approval on Jesus and straight from the waters of the Jordan, Jesus was thrust out into the wilderness where He endured 40 days and 40 nights of temptation by the devil. He found victory through the power of God's Word and He told the devil to flee from Him (**Matthew 4:1-11**). After that, He entered into His earthly ministry (**Matthew 4:12-17**) and hung around with some fishermen whom He called to be His disciples (**Matthew 4:18-22**). These four men left their fathers' businesses and followed Jesus. Then Scripture tells us that Jesus—this 30-year-old Nazarene—attracted a crowd to Himself (**Matthew 4:23-25**).

Now before we get too far, let's put this in perspective. I'm 37—seven years older than Jesus would have been at this time. We need to understand that this isn't some mature sage; this is a young guy who has just begun a ministry.

Now why would a crowd be so attracted to this Guy from a backwater town with relatively nominal parents who seem to have nothing great about them—His dad was a carpenter; Mary was just a stay-at-home mom, taking care of the house and the raising of kids. What would cause people to be so attracted to their Son? Notice what our text says in **Matthew 4:23-25**:

And [Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

When we look at the geography mentioned, we see this is not just a small local ministry. This is bigger than a ministry in the Fox Valley area. It's bigger than the Chicagoland area. This is the whole Midwest. To give you an idea, Jesus has become famous in a short amount of time over a multi-state area, and He's done so without TV, radio and print media. He's done it all with the speaking of His voice and the miraculous signs that He had done.

The term “great crowds” literally means in the thousands. Jesus had an absolute entourage following Him. And they followed Him because He had done some pretty amazing things in this setting. Notice what He’s done: He’s exorcised demons, healed paralytics (people unable to walk, many for their entire lives). He’s taken care of every disease and affliction. You name it, you bring it to Jesus; He’s able to heal it. He’s giving hope to the hopeless. Jesus was doing some amazing things and as a result, great crowds began to follow Him.

Now notice what the text tells us about these crowds. We need to ask the question, who’s in the crowd? Who are these people who are part of this crowd, hearing this Sermon? There are three types of people I want us to see in the crowd. And I’d like us to imagine ourselves in that first century setting, listening as they did.

### **The Desperate.**

These are people with afflictions. These are the ones who are demon-possessed. They are coming to Jesus totally hopeless. They’ve got nowhere else to turn and they’ve heard about this Jesus. They don’t know much about His theology. They don’t know much about His political stance. All they know is that, “My buddy came to Jesus and was healed. I’ve got this issue and it drives me absolutely crazy. I’m broken as a result of this struggle, this pain. Maybe Jesus can take care of it.”

Jesus loves that response. There’s nothing better for us as a people than to come to Jesus absolutely desperate. Jesus always had a heart for people. Another place in Scripture says, “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*” (**Matthew 9:36**). Jesus loves the broken. Even though we marginalize the broken, even though we push them off to the sides, Jesus absolutely loves to embrace broken and faulty and frail people. He also embraces people from all backgrounds; people who are young or old. People who are absolutely desperate.

Perhaps you too are desperate. Maybe you’ve received a bad medical report. Maybe you find yourself in financial turmoil. Maybe your marriage is all out of whack. Maybe your priorities have fallen all by the wayside and what you used to build your life on doesn’t work anymore. You’ve heard that Jesus fixes things like this and you’ve come to the One Who receives people who are desperate.

But understand this: just because you’re desperate in your circumstances does not guarantee you’ll be desperate for Christ. We don’t have to look very far in Scripture for an example of ten desperate lepers who were healed by Jesus (**Luke 17:11-19**). You would think that their lives would have been changed as a result of being healed. They’ve gone from being on the fringe of society, being rejected by the people around them, to being made whole and fully accepted again. You would think that these ten lepers would have come back to Jesus and said, “We give our lives to You. You’re the best. You’re the greatest.” But only one returned to thank Him. .

You see, some of us are desperate for an answer but not desperate for Jesus. We’re desperate for some hope, for some help, but not for the King of the universe. We need to recognize that our desperation must lead us to the cross. It must lead us to Christ because He is the answer to our desperation.

## The Detractors.

Notice the second group. There were detractors in the crowd who didn't need to be healed. They were there to observe. They were there to listen. They were open to what Jesus was saying but as soon as Jesus talked about His way, they came up with all kinds of excuses and all kinds of different ways they could do it. Let me name some of these detractors.

The first is a well-known group called **Pharisees**. The whole Sermon on the Mount is how you can be happy, not in a worldly sense but what it means to live the blessed life. The Pharisees said happiness was found in living by the rules. If you live by the rules and show yourself to be a holy person on the outside—even though on the inside you may not believe it—you will find happiness. By following all the rules and doing everything the way man dictates you might get to God.

So these detractors listened to Jesus' message. What would cause them a problem? Jesus said, "Even if you were to obey with greater righteousness than all the Pharisees, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God." The Pharisees said, "Hey, hey, hey. Jesus. We love that You're bringing people back to the Kingdom. We love that You're getting people to talk about morality. This is a good thing, Jesus. We believe we can be good enough to get to heaven. Just do everything the right way and we'll get there and everything will be fine."

But Jesus said, "Even if you exceed the righteousness of all the Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of God." "Wait a minute, Jesus! That ain't right. We've got a different way." The Pharisees created an uproar.

Notice the second group of detractors was the **Sadducees**, a group that didn't like the Pharisees at all. They were a group of people known for their youthful exuberance. They were more mellow than the stodgy and curmudgeonly Pharisees who were basically your Type A personalities. Everything's got to fit in the box; you can't do anything outside the box. The Sadducees actually threw out the box and the Pharisees with the box. The Sadducees said, "All right. You find blessing by just doing your own thing. Tolerance is great. Bring on more tolerance. Let everybody do their own thing and we'll all just kind of hang out."

It's kind of like that logo you see on the bumper sticker—"Just co-exist"—with all the different symbols of the different religions. Let's just co-exist. The Sadducees would say, "Why can't we all just get along? You say you love God—who cares if we're worshipping the same god. It really doesn't matter because at the end of the day we just die. There's no resurrection."

You see, they didn't believe in the resurrection. As a little kid, I was taught that's why they were "sad, you see." So these guys were an affront. They said, "Hey, let's get rid of all the rules and regulations. Let's just hang out. Let's say we love God but really, do we have to be held to anything? It really doesn't matter. Just try to stay out of everybody else's business and you'll be just fine."

Here's the problem: Jesus says to the Sadducees, "Hey, you've heard it said adultery is wrong but I tell you if you lust after a woman with your eyes, you've lusted in your heart."

"Wait a minute," the Sadducees say. "I can't have lustful thoughts? Even if I'm living okay and she's just existing and I'm not bothering her?"

Jesus says, "Hey, Sadducees. You need to understand that you can't do anything on the inside that doesn't affect the outside." The Sadducees are going to struggle with this Sermon!

Then we have the **Essenes**. The Essenes were a group of people who said, 'Pharisees, you're wrong. Sadducees, you're wrong. It isn't about the box and what's supposed to be in it or what's supposed to come out of it. What you're supposed to do is to build a box around yourself.' You see, the Essenes were the type of people who would say, "Don't be around any unbelieving people, any people who are not God-fearing Jews. How can we be pure when we're living in the world? Stay away from them!"

So if you weren't a God-fearing Jew, the Essenes wouldn't associate with you. Here's what Jesus says to that: "You are the salt and light of the world."

But the Essenes would say, "Wait a minute. Aren't we supposed to build a colony somewhere else where everybody believes the same way and our moral code is the same and everything's going to be fine?"

Jesus says, "No. While you're not to be of the world, you are to be in the world. You are to permeate the world and you are to shine light in that world and not cover it up, not holster yourself into some sort of cloister but you are to let your light shine among men." The Essenes aren't going to like what Jesus has to say either.

Then there are the **Zealots**. The Zealots said happiness is found in revolting against the government authority. They've got nothing nice to say about the Caesars; they've got nothing nice to say about the Roman Empire. They see Jesus coming, talking about the Kingdom. It's exciting. They're all fired up and they're asking the questions, "Jesus, when does the revolt take place? When do we go after Rome? When do we establish once again that God is our King, God is our Leader? Where is the moral code that comes with it? When do we become a godly nation again?"

But Jesus throws them for a loop when He says, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

"Wait a minute, Jesus. We're here to fight!" There were even Zealots among His disciples, remember? They took up their swords time and time again. "It's time to take over. We're ready to die with You, Jesus."

But Jesus says, "No, brothers. We're going to be persecuted and we're going to be peacemakers."

This is a motley group of people following and listening to Jesus. Who are you in that crowd? There are Essenes in our group. There are Zealots in our group. There are Pharisees in our group. And there are Sadducees in our group.

One final group is the **disciples**. Not only the twelve but those who followed Jesus. Now, what is a disciple? Very clearly, a disciple is a learner and Jesus is going to teach them. Are they going to figure it out? Nope. There are going to be numerous times in Jesus' teaching that the people are going to say, "This is hard teaching. Who can understand it?" Many are going to leave and the disciples are going to stay there. Even though they don't get it and they haven't figured it all out yet, Jesus is going to say, "Are you going to go too? Is this too hard for you?"

Their response, "Well, yeah, it's hard. I don't get it. It seems impossible. What You're talking about goes totally against what we know, Jesus." But here's what the disciples are going to say over and over again:

"You have the words of life. You have the words that are going to change me, make me new, make me who God wants me to be."

As disciples today, we're going to be turned upside down as well. We're going to be challenged. As disciples, we aren't required to have it all figured out. If we've got it all figured out, then we've ceased to be disciples and have become the teacher. But as disciples, we are called to wrestle with the things of the Lord and at the end of the day say, "You've got the words of life. Who else are we going to turn to? Change us and make us who You want us to be."

Now notice very quickly the location of the Sermon on the Mount. Where's the place? It says a mountain. We don't know why He chose a mountain. Some say it was for better acoustics. Perhaps He picked the side of a mountain so that He could be heard better. He did this next to the Sea of Galilee and many believed it helped His public speaking to be able to be heard without amplification.

Others say that Jesus picked a mountain because God does His best work on mountains. You see, God is not an Illinois-cornfield kind of God. Very little happens in the corn and soybean fields in these stories. God does a ton of stuff on mountains. Abraham just about sacrificed his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah and but then the sacrifice was provided—a picture of Jesus Who would come on Mt. Moriah (**Genesis 22**). The law of Moses—the Ten Commandments—came down from Mt. Sinai (**Exodus 19**). We think of Mt. Carmel where the prophets of Baal were destroyed by Elijah (**1 Kings 18:20-46**). We think about this mountain where this message was delivered. Jesus took some disciples up to the Mount of Transfiguration where He revealed His glory (**Matthew 17:1-13**). We know that He was crucified on Mt. Calvary (**Luke 23:33** KJV). He also ascended from the Mount of Olives and we know at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, He'll descend on this same mountain (**Acts 1:6-11**). I don't know why Jesus spoke on the mountain but He sure does seem to like mountains and they seem to work well for Him.

Notice also His posture: He sat down. Why in the world would He sit down? We need to understand He's not a ranting preacher; He's not yelling and screaming. It's really hard to yell and scream from a seated position. It sure doesn't look like He's shaking His fist but rather He is speaking in a very composed way, allowing His hearer to clearly understand what He's trying to communicate. Also in rabbinical times, a rabbi would share his heart from a seated position.

So, here's what we know from first century history: Jesus shared His heart with His followers. Oh, how important it is for us to hear this. Now, the disciples had come, the people had followed Him because of all the miracles and healings that had taken place. And then He taught them with truths from His heart.

While healings and signs and wonders may have their place within the Christian faith, they always, always, always in Jesus' ministry were secondary to the preaching and teaching of the Word. The "show" will always be built on signs and wonders but disciples are created, grown and maintained by the steady diet of the Word of God. The reason we here at Village Bible Church put such a focus on the teaching of God's Word is because Jesus did. He taught people what it meant to be a follower of His.

So now we move from the setting to four key points in Jesus' sermon



### 3. The Summary

The first point of His sermon is the attitudes that you and I are called to have. Jesus began this sermon with the Beatitudes—characteristics that you and I as believers ought to have. They're going to convict us because a lot of us aren't living this way right now. Many of us are choosing to go the way of the world instead of the way of Christ.

I want you to notice a couple things about these Beatitudes. These are characteristics that only Christians can live out. You cannot be an unbeliever and live out the Beatitudes because you can't be poor in spirit and not be a believer. You cannot hunger and thirst for righteousness and say, "Well, I hunger and thirst for righteousness but I don't want Jesus." You see, these are things that are for us as believers to practice. While they may be a nice pattern of morality, they go deeper than just the skin surface of morality. They go to the very crux and the very heart of who we are. It is for us today just as it was for the listeners who were hearing it for the first time. With each of these Beatitudes, we are called to be followers of Christ.

The Beatitudes also have to be a package deal. They can't be picked out a la carte style. I love a la carte things. "I'll have a little of this and a little of that. No, I don't want this. Keep that off my plate." Some of us want to choose these characteristics a la carte. "Sure, I can be poor in spirit but I can't be merciful. Sure, I'm happy to hunger and thirst for righteousness but a peacemaker? I'm unwilling to give up the fight." Just like the Ten Commandments, you can't pick commandments one, five and nine, then scrap the rest of them. They come together as a package deal. In fact, we're going to learn they build one onto another. So we've got to accept all these Beatitudes as a whole, not as individual options.

Thirdly, these are behaviors that flow from the right beliefs. You have to believe the right thing which is that you will not live them out unless you've fully recognized King Jesus as the One Who told us to do these things. These cannot be pithy thoughts from a nice teacher. That won't work. It's either, "King Jesus says I must live and have an attitude like this," or it's not. If you don't think much of King Jesus, you're not going to think much of the Beatitudes. If you want to do what King Jesus says, then the Beatitudes are going to come a whole lot easier in your life. They need to flow from a right belief that Jesus is in charge and you're not.

Finally, these Beatitudes are going to glorify God and grant blessings to us. When we are living out these Beatitudes, we will become salt and light in the world of darkness and depravity around us. We will glorify God as we live out these Beatitudes. God is saying, "You're approved by Me because of your life and because of what you're doing. You long to serve Me as your King. You long to do what I've called you to do and because of that, I can't be prouder of what you are doing." We glorify God when we follow the Beatitudes.

But notice, they bring blessing to us. That word 'blessing' can mean happiness but it goes much deeper in that it speaks about a joy that's not based on circumstances but based on Christ. **William Barclay** said, "The world can win and lose its joy. A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition—even the change in the weather—can take away the fickle joy that the world gives. But the Christian has the serene and untouchable joy which comes from walking forever in the company and in the presence of God. The greatness of the Beatitudes is that they are not wistful glimpses of some future beauty, nor are they even golden promises of some future glory. But they are triumphant shouts of bliss for a permanent joy that nothing in this world can take away."

#### 4. The Spirit

You see, God desires that you have an abundant life in Christ. In order to do that you have to buy into the prescription of a Beatitude-kind-of-life which begins with the “spirit” that is required for the journey. We’ve unveiled just the surface of this sermon where Jesus opens His mouth and says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

First, we need to look at the “poor in spirit” and see some sad examples in this world. You see, the world says, “Yeah, we’re poor.” But Jesus is not talking about material poverty. Jesus does not say, “Blessed are the poor.” He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Whether you’re rich or poor, it doesn’t matter. We’re all on equal ground before the cross. God isn’t concerned so much about how much money you have as He is concerned about where and how you spend your money. But that’s not even the case here. This has nothing to do with material poverty or material wealth.

Secondly, it has nothing to do with false humility. Some of us right now think we’re humble. We’re so humble we’re proud of it. We go around humbly saying, “No, I don’t deserve that acclaim. I don’t deserve that affirmation. I don’t deserve that award.” We see this in Hollywood all the time. The most prideful people up there on stage—the very essence of a humble speech—“I’d like to thank all the little people...” Wait a minute! That means you’re a big person and you’re thanking all the little people. We do as well with false humility, where we pretend to be humble and all the while we’re thinking, “I’m better than them. I’m more important than them.” We look at people in dire straits and say, “Well, I’m not in that place because they’re lazy and I pull myself up by my own bootstraps.” Jesus is going to say, “It has nothing to do with you—it has to do with Me.”

Notice finally, it is not an inferiority complex. Some of you think little of yourselves, either because of abuse in the past or rejection. You think you have little to offer the world. “Tim, you’re rolling the ball right up my alley. This is perfect. I don’t think very much of myself, so I must be poor in spirit.” No, you just have a self-esteem problem. Okay? I don’t mean that to be a joke; I’m just saying that’s not being poor in spirit.

So if those are bad or sad examples of the real deal, let’s see what that real deal is. Poor in spirit is simply this: an acknowledgement that we are bankrupt when it comes to our relationship with God. We are sinners in need of grace. It will change the way we look at this world when we recognize we are sinners and we are broken. It’s by God’s grace that we have what we have. We will look at our brothers and sisters, not only here in our area but across the world, with greater hearts when we look at them through the lens of being poor in spirit, when we recognize that we bring nothing to the table when it comes to God and our relationship with Him.

The only requirement for being poor in spirit is **repentance**. You and I need to stop thinking that the world revolves around us. It doesn’t. It’s not what people are going to do for you in this kingdom. God says, “You’re going to be part of My Kingdom. It’s about what you’re going to do for others and what you’re going to do for Me.” It’s not about us, it’s about Christ. It’s about getting on our knees and saying, “God, I can’t do it without You. I’m a failure without You. I’ve got nothing without You.” It’s repenting of trying to live our lives dependent on ourselves instead of our Savior, knowing we have nothing to offer.

The language of this kind of heart is heard in this hymn:

Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling;  
Naked I come to Thee for dress;

Helpless I look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I'll die.

(Rock of Ages, Augustus M. Toplady; circa 1776)

If you have not come to a place where you have said this to Jesus, let me tell you something: You are not experiencing the Kingdom of heaven. Repentance is we get on our knees and say, "It's all about You; it's not about me. I've got nothing to give You except my sin and my baggage and all my issues and all my struggles. Jesus, I've got nothing to give You but my garbage and You're going to give me grace."

If you have never experienced that, today is the day you can. Today is the day, being poor in spirit, you can bow the knee and trust Christ as your Savior. And when you do that, God says you will inherit the Kingdom of heaven—not only in the life to come but in the life now. You'll experience His joy, His peace, His contentment. You'll experience the abundance of knowing you are part of the family of God. I would implore you, if you never bowed the knee to Jesus, today is the day of salvation.

But what's the road map? There are two things that you and I need to do, whether we are sinners experiencing grace for the first time or have been Christians for a long time. What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Number one, it is time to acknowledge your impoverished position. You've got nothing; God has got everything. When was the last time you got on your knees as a follower of Jesus Christ and just thanked God for all that He's given you? Do you recognize—do I recognize—that every good and perfect gift comes from above?

As a father, do I recognize, "God, You've given me three beautiful boys—gifts to show me Your love. Gifts that teach me how You love and care for me; how You provide for me."

Do I see the relationship that I have with my wife as a gift that God has given? You know, when we start looking at our marriages that way, we're going to not fight as much because we're going to see our wives and our husbands as gracious gifts to us from God. They show us what it is to live in community and intimacy with one another.

Do you see the money in your pocket, not as something that you get to decide what to do with but as a way to say, "God, You have provided everything I need. Now, how can I provide for others in need?" When we understand that we are in need, it will change the way we do business and manage our money.

Finally, we need to depend on God's plentiful provision. Have you basked in the greatness of God's grace? Oh, I would pray this week that you would get away just by yourself and thank God that He meets every one of your needs. He ministers to you—while you were still a sinner He demonstrated His love for you by dying on the cross, taking care of your need (**Romans 5:6-11**). And now what Jesus is saying is, "I want you to act like Me. I want you to live like Me. I want you to talk like Me. I want you to relate to people like I do." When we understand how bad we were without Jesus and how great we have it now, it will compel us to live like Him.

So this is the journey we're going to be a part of throughout this new series. I pray this introduction has been of help to you. Let's close in prayer.

Father God, much has been talked about as is the nature of introductions, but I pray that there would just be a couple things to walk away with today. Lord, I pray that we would remember that it is by Your grace that we have the ability to hear Your Words being spoken. Thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your example. Thank You for Your deliverance for us out of sin. Lord, I pray that as followers of Jesus Christ, we would begin, even in our first acknowledgements and conversations today, that we would be poor in spirit. We would be humble. We would recognize we are here because of You. We are here in spite of ourselves and we have a great opportunity to look at people and respond to people differently because of what You've done in our lives.

Oh Lord, change us. Let us be a church that is poor in spirit so that we may continue to inherit the Kingdom of God. We want it because You're offering it and You offer only good things. So Lord, we're going to bask in Your grace so that we can receive this inheritance and live for You. Now Lord, receive all the glory and honor for this. Allow us to go out in fellowship and enjoy the rest of Your day, for Your glory and for Your name's sake. In Christ's name we pray all these things. Amen.

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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