

Sunday, September 27, 2020 | Kingdom Manifesto

### Matthew 5:1-3 | Spiritually Poor

What is a manifesto? Webster defines it as a public declaration of intentions, opinions, objectives, or motives, as one issued by a government, sovereign, or organization. Its closely related to the word “manifest”, which as you know, means that something is easy to perceive or recognize. Thus, a “*manifesto*” is a statement in which someone makes his or her intentions or views easy for people to establish. Famously, the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx outlined the ideals and objectives of the communist movement.

Now, while this whole series is called “Kingdom Manifesto” I do not want you to think that the things Jesus is going to talk about are akin to a political system. No earthly government can fulfill the Beatitudes. This is because every single principle that Jesus will talk about upsets the proverbial table. He literally turns our thinking upside down. He shows that we are thinking one way but God thinks in another way. In fact, by the time we come to the end of this series, we’ll discover that Jesus and His “Kingdom Manifesto” are far too liberal for liberals, far too conservative for conservatives, and far too moderate for the moderates. I want you to understand that if Jesus were running for political office today, He wouldn’t have been placed anywhere on the political spectrum. Rather, He would’ve been placed far above our political ideologies.

Furthermore, these principles we’ll discuss are not a set of moral ethics which give one admittance into the Kingdom of God. It is not a list of requirements one can work through to then earn approval for entry. No. These beatitudes are a messianic manifesto which sets forth the characteristics already inherent in members of the kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Just as a rose does not choose to be a rose but simply is one so too is the disciple a member of the kingdom of God simply because God has made him that way. The principles outlined are set up as “blessed are those because...” not “blessed will be those if...” These are not “how to”s but rather, “now that” s.

**READ:** Matthew 4:23-25 (NKJV)

<sup>23</sup> And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. <sup>24</sup> Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. <sup>25</sup> Great multitudes

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<sup>1</sup> France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2007), p. 156.

followed Him—from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Here's something that we have to bear in mind whenever we read the Gospels: *Jesus was a pretty big deal*. Mathew tells us great multitudes followed him. Jesus was from a small town in Galilee and yet people from every corner of Israel flocked to see and hear him. That would be like today if Jesus were to be in Lincoln, Nebraska and people from LA, DC, and NYC came to simply hear him speak. Jesus was a big deal.

Now, if a revolutionary is going to amass quite a following as this, you'd think that he'd take this opportunity to get something for himself. Like, you know if you're going to get a free weekend because of some timeshare, you know there's going to be some meeting where the people try to get you to buy something more. There's always a catch, right? In fact, historically, when cult leaders have begun to amass a large following, they always want something: sex, money, power. But Jesus asks for none of these things. Instead, he lays out principles for what it means to become a follower of his Kingdom. He asks for nothing. He simply tells them a better way to live.

**READ:** Matthew 5:1-12 (NKJV)

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His **disciples** came to Him. [The Disciples, with an audience.] <sup>2</sup> Then 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 filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed *are* the **merciful**,  
For they shall obtain 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 they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Two things we need to notice about the Beatitudes before we break down the first one.

- i. Jesus taught on a mountain to his disciples.

Jesus does this to parallel Moses on mount Sinai when he gave the people the law. Basically, Matthew is coloring Jesus' actions with Moses' to show how much better Jesus is. Now, as you know, the ten commandments were a code of ethics for the budding nation of Israel to maintain good standing with God. Similarly, the Beatitudes are principles for this new kingdom of Heaven. However, where Moses simply relayed the law for God to the people, Jesus was both the fulfillment of the Law and He was God himself. The best Moses could say was, "God hath said..." Whereas Jesus would say, "I say unto you..." Interestingly, when Jesus finishes his sermon on the mount two chapters later, Matthew says, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (Mt. 7:28-29).<sup>2</sup>

- ii. The beatitudes are divided into two groups of four. The first four deal with our relationship with God. The next four deal with our relationship with people.

What is the manner in which I engage with God and those around me? The beatitudes answer that questions.

Furthermore, this structure makes it easy to understand and therefore easy to memorize these foundational principles. They're supposed to punch and shock the audience. It is a breath of fresh air that their and our s world desperately needs. Jesus reverses the conventional values of a society. As such, those who abide by these set principles will be thought of as the outcast, the unwise, and the poor but, in the end, they will be recognized by God.

Now, as you no doubt noticed, throughout the beatitudes Jesus uses the word "blessed". Interestingly, the Beatitudes gets its name from the Latin word "beatus" which, itself, means blessed.<sup>3</sup> However, the Greek word used here is **μακάριος** (ma-kar'-ee-os) which would be

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<sup>2</sup> France (2007), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 149.

better translated as “fortunate” or “it will be well with” instead of using the word “blessed” since, by today’s standards, “blessed” carries more of the idea that someone is happy.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in a sense, one could say that we ought to pity the rich and envy the poor. For the rich, in God’s eyes, are not in a better state than the poor. If anything, the poor are in a better state because they’re not deluded into thinking that life is easy. They know it to be an unfair struggle. They know that the only way to survive is get help from someone.

Simply stated, when Jesus says over and over again that such and such a person is blessed, he means that they are commended for their good life.<sup>5</sup> He literally means that they have divine favor. And, without exception, each person he calls blessed in these beatitudes, we would call cursed. It seems we need to reevaluate our standards.

The first beatitude we’ll be focusing in on is “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God.”

Now, here’s what Jesus is NOT saying: “Poverty is a blessing.” Poverty, powerlessness, or being destitute of life’s essentials is not something to admire nor aspire to. Understand that, “...to canonize a state of life in which people find themselves against their will (real poverty does not mean voluntarily choosing to live simply) and from which they would escape if they could is scarcely Christian.”<sup>6</sup> Even though there are numerous passages in Scripture which speak about the deceitfulness of riches (cf. Prov. 11:28; Ec. 5:10; Mat. 6:24; 13:22; 16:26; Heb. 13:5-6; 1 Tim. 6:10, 17). Jesus, in this passage, is not calling us to be materialistically poor nor is he romanticizing poverty.

Instead, Jesus is drawing our attention to the reality that all of humanity, no matter their financial standing, are spiritually poor. And true, while those who are wealthy in this life have a far more difficult time realizing this (cf. Mr.10:25), the materialistically poor must also realize this too. In fact, those who lack the basic necessities can not only be poor in this life yet also “rich in spirit” in that they fixate on acquiring wealth. The prize materialistic gain above all else. In this way, the tragedy of this is that they are doubly poor and just as lost just as those who have wealth but do not see their spiritual poverty.

Jesus says that those who are poor in spirit are blessed. Meaning, despite our richly station, if we have recognized our spiritual poverty and so gladly accept God’s rule through Jesus Christ, we are, in fact, rich. And not just a little rich, as we have possession of an entire Kingdom. We

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<sup>4</sup> Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1999), p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> France (2007), p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1992), p. 96.

must humbly accept our low station in order to rise to a greater one. Or, as Charles Spurgeon put it, "The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves."<sup>7</sup>

This is something the rich western world needs to hear more than anything else. If we're not careful, our prosperity will leave us blind to our true poverty (cf. Ja. 2:5; 5:1-6). "To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge one's total dependence on God for everything, for righteousness as well as sustenance."<sup>8</sup>

**EXAMPLE:** Every makes one law. It would be chaos. It wouldn't work. In this same way, we must come to God without demands or expectations. We must come as beggars not entitled bureaucrats.

Say this with me: "Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. And I am poor. I have nothing. I am nothing. And I need help."

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

Acknowledgement of our spiritual poverty is a prerequisite for entry into the Kingdom of God.

We must become poor before we can become rich in God.

This principle is firmly cemented throughout the scriptures:

**READ:** Isaiah 57:15 (NKJV)

For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

**READ:** Isaiah 66:1-2 (NKJV)

Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.

After David confessed to the murder of an innocence man, he prayed:

**READ:** Psalm 51:14-17 (NKJV)

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Spurgeon, quoted by John Stott in *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Turner (2008), p. 149.

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, *And* my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise. <sup>16</sup> For You **do not desire** sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You **do not delight** in burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God *are* a **broken** spirit, A **broken** and a **contrite** heart—These, O God, You will not despise.

When Jesus wanted to illustrate the kind of spirit with which we should approach God he told them the following:

**READ:** Luke 18:9-14 (NKJV)

<sup>9</sup> Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ <sup>13</sup> And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

A spirit of entitlement and comparison is a spirit of wickedness. Look hard enough and you’ll eventually find someone that pales in comparison to you. But do not think you are better by contrast. Some septic tanks aren’t nearly as big as others, but they are all full of crap.

Sin is not a measure of how bad you are, it’s a measure of good you are not. We do not commit sins and then become sinful. We are sinful and so commit sins. It is in our natures to wrong. We are, all of us, unclean.

We are nothing when we are compared to Jesus. We are poor and wretched sinners in need of God’s grace. Some of us, undoubtedly, need it more than others. But we are, all of us, in need.

**EXAMPLE:** When the great reformer Martin Luther died in 1946, there was a small piece of paper found in his pocket and on it were written these words, “We are beggars; this is true.”<sup>9</sup>

All of us are beggars, caught outside at night, hoping for some charity. We must know this. We must feel this. We must not forget this. We are destitute. We have nothing of value to God. We

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<sup>9</sup> Veith, Gene, “We Are Beggars; This is True,” *Cranach* [blog], *Patheos*, October 29, 2013, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2013/10/we-are-beggars-this-is-true/>

come to him on his terms: poor, contrite, and trembling. Beggars can't be choosers. They must be content with whatever scraps they find which fall from the wealthy's table. However, a beggar who comes to God's table will not only be given a place at His table but will be given a place in His kingdom. True, beggars can't be choosers; but with God, beggars can become princes.

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