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Matthew 5:3 The Poor in the Spirit

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Let's pray: "Father in Heaven, here we've come to the point in the worship service when we are about to open Your Word. And Lord we are longing for a word from You. We want to hear Your voice speaking directly to our hearts, to our needs, to our circumstances and situations. And so we pray for a miracle. We ask for Your Holy Spirit to speak to us. And we pray this in Jesus Name, Amen."

While researching for this presentation, I ran across a story in a book about a man named, Ike. And he wrote about his friend. Now he didn't give his friend's name. But in order to tell this story in a meaningful way, I am going to give him a name. I am going to give him the name, John. And Ike was telling the author of this book about his experiences with John. John had a severe alcohol addiction, and unfortunately had a cycle of overcoming it and then being overcome by it. And Ike would hear from John from time to time, and he would always hear from John when he was at the end of his rope. No hope anywhere, no resources, anything, he would call Ike. Well, Ike would feed him, find clothes for him, help him get another job, and help him to start over. And unfortunately, the cycle would be repeated.

One day Ike received a phone call from a funeral home. And they identified that John had been found dead, frozen to death under a bridge. And so Ike went to the funeral home. It doesn't say why he did this, but he went to the funeral home and he wanted John's clothes; he wanted to check his clothes. They said, "Oh, those old rags we threw out in the dumpster in the back." So Ike went out and rummaged through the dumpster, found John's clothes, and in the pockets found several one dollar bills. And then this is what was recorded in the book: "Those few dollars killed my friend. As long as he had a little money, he would never ask for help. Only at rock bottom would he seek assistance. This time he was sick and near death, but thought he could make it on his own because he had a few dollars in his pocket. John perished because he didn't realize his poverty and his need. And that's what I'd like to study with you to today.

Please turn to Matthew chapter 5 verse 3. We continue our series in the Sermon on the Mount and we come to the first of the beatitudes. Matthew 5 verse 3, Jesus says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now if we are going to study this carefully, we are going to begin by identifying what it does not say. It is not saying, "Blessed are the poor." There had been people down through time, who have read this passage, and they have thought that there was some special spiritual grace associated with poverty. And people would take vows of poverty. The monastery system that was setup throughout the Middle Ages that was part of it.

That's not what Jesus is talking about. But I do not want to discourage you if you want to take a vow of poverty. In fact, I hope some of you will, and you will talk to me after the service because I know what to do with your money. You see, I've been wanting to start this 'speedboat ministry.' I believe God would really bless me. So if you want to take a vow of poverty, you just come right on down because I've got lots of room, right in here, for anything that you would like to contribute to the 'speedboat ministry.'

Well, Jesus isn't talking about being poor here in the world or worldly goods. He is talking about being poor in the spirit. Let's take the verse apart word by word and see what we can learn. We begin with the word "Blessed." In the Greek it's 'makarios.' Now remember that word, it's the only Greek word you are getting today. We can give you more, but this will be good enough. You can impress people by saying, 'makarios.' 'Makarios', it was used back in Jesus' day by the Greeks to describe the joy that the gods had. You know, the Greeks had a god for everything. And those gods apparently had more joy than mankind. And so 'makarios' is associated with joy.

There is an island in the Mediterranean called, Cyprus. And it's a "happy isle." In fact, it was called "The Happy Isle" "Hey Makaria." And it was so rich, fertile, lovely; the climate was great, beautiful flowers, minerals, fruit trees. It had all the natural resources contained within itself, all the materials for perfect happiness. And it was called by the Greeks, 'Hey Makaria," "The Happy Isle." Jesus in using this word, is talking about being supremely blessed, being fortunate.

In Psalm 1 verse 1, and you might you might want to mark here in your Bible where Matthew 5 is because we are going to come back to it. But let's go to Psalm 1 verse 1. The idea of "Makarios" is used. It's found in Psalm 1, verse 1, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly." In the Amplified Version it says: "Blessed, happy, fortunate, prosperous and enviable" and that's kind of what the word means. It's fortunate, prosperous, and enviable. Some of your Bibles will refer to the word as being 'happy.' "Happy is the man who is poor in spirit."

But happy does not quite get the real meaning in the Greek. In fact, happiness comes from the root word, 'hap.' Hap means chance. And so happiness in this world is by chance. Something happens to us, we feel happy. Something happens to us, we feel sad. It is more of the ups and downs; it is more controlled by circumstance. And that is not what Jesus is talking about. He is talking about a joy that is a serene, untouchable, self-contained, independent of all changes and chances of life. It is a constant.

Now after the second service somebody talked to me and they said, "What do you mean by joy?" And what I mean by it, this is what I think is the Biblical definition of joy. Joy is not just being in this ecstatic, 'Oh, everything is wonderful' state. Joy is constant and it's associated with a hope that 'This will be okay. God is going to get me through.' And it is like wearing a life preserver when the boat has sunk. That's your joy, it keeps you up. It keeps you buoyant. That joy is not affected by life, by the changes and the chances of life. In fact, Jesus talks about it being a gift from Him. Let's look at John chapter 16.

In John chapter 16 verse 22, the night of the Last Supper, Jesus says this to His apostles: "Therefore you now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice and your joy no one will take from you." It is a joy given by God, and no one can take this joy from you. Galatians 5 verse 22, joy is identified as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5 verse 22 it says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace..." and then it will mention six more. So Jesus is saying, "There is a joy. There is a heaven born joy in the heart of a person who is poor in spirit."

Well, let's go back to Matthew 5 and see what He means by "poor"? There is a joy for those who are poor in spirit. There are two words in the Greek that describe "poor." One is a word that describes a hard working man. He is not rich, but he is not destitute. He has nothing extra though, nothing superfluous, nothing extra at all. He is just making it. He is considered poor by the Greeks. That's a picture of one word of poor.

Another picture, another word, is an individual that is in absolute and abject poverty. They are absolutely and totally destitute. They have nothing and no hope forever having anything unless it comes from an outside source. That is the word that Jesus uses. He says, so there is a joy for the people who have a sense of poverty, who are absolutely destitute. Now the Bible takes that idea and it applies it to the word "poor" in the Psalms. I'd like for you to turn there to several Psalms.

Psalms 34 is where we'll begin. Many Psalms refer to the poor. And I know that I have been in my life where I have been poor. And when I've read these Psalms, they encouraged me. God was going to take care of me. And some of you may be there right now, and God will help you. He will take care of you. But that's really not what it's been written about many times in the Psalms. The concept of poor is not about worldly wealth but about a humble man who realizes he is helpless and is trusting in God.

Look at Psalm 34 verses 4-6. "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." That's the expression of the author, and I believe it's David that is the author saying, "Look, this humble and helpless man called out to God, and God helped him." Look at Psalm 35 verses 9 and 10, it says: "And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord, it shall rejoice in His salvation. All my bones shall say, 'Lord, who is like You, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him. Yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him'" poor, in the context of salvation, poor, in the context of calling out to God to be delivered.

So we see that Jesus says, "Blessed" He is talking about joy. When he talks about "Poor" he is talking about an absolute and abject poverty and it is applied spiritually to a humble and helpless person, to a poor man who realizes his total need on God. Now let's go back to Matthew 5 verse 3. "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." "Spirit," the temper or disposition of the mind, the prevailing tone or tendency, the attitude within a person, that's what's being spoken of here. It's what's going on deep inside of the individual. So Jesus is saying that this poverty must be inside of the person.

Well, we see a reflection of what it means to have this poverty of spirit or excuse me, I should say this. We are going to see the use of the word "spirit" in the way that demonstrates attitude within a person. Let's go to First Kings chapter 21 verses 4 and 5. It's the story of Ahab. King Ahab is king of the ten tribes, and the Northern Kingdom as it's called. And he has just asked Naboth if he could purchase his vineyard, and Naboth said, "No." Well, I am going to try to read it off the screen. I am going to have to look backward; it's pretty small back there. It says, "So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.'" And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. But Jezebel his

wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?" Talking about what's going on inside of him?

In Hebrews 4 verse 12, kind of the same idea is presented regarding the Word of God. Let's go there. In Hebrews 4 verse 12 it says: "That the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" talking about something deep inside of a person. So Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Blessed is the person who feels their poverty in themselves, deep inside themselves that they are actually bankrupt in their spirit.

We read one author's account of how the verse in Matthew 5 verse 3 could be rewritten. "Blessed is the man who has realized his own utter helplessness and who has put his whole trust in God." Arthur Pink wrote this in a book I was reading. "By nature, we are well pleased with ourselves and mad enough to think that we deserve something good at the hands of God." Let me repeat that for you: "By nature, we are well pleased with ourselves and mad enough to think that we deserve something good at the hands of God." This poverty of spirit that Jesus is speaking about is the complete absence of self assurance, pride and self reliance. It is a consciousness that we have nothing to offer God.

Now right now some of you are thinking, "Boy, I don't get it because the Bible teaches us that we are to be individuals of dignity that God loves us and we have worth. And now, all of a sudden we are supposed to set all that aside." Please, be careful here. This is not talking about setting your personality aside. It is not telling you to be a doormat. It is not telling you to walk around saying, "I am sorry for the oxygen that I am breathing because I know there are other people more worthy than I." It is not to have that type of spirit or attitude. We are talking about salvation here. This is Christianity 101. This is Jesus' message to humanity how to be saved. And he is saying, "It starts with the understanding that you have nothing to offer God when it comes to salvation." We have no righteousness of our own to give God. We never will have anything to offer God. And we cannot have any sense of self-assurance, pride and self-reliance when it comes to the area of righteousness before God.

Now I'll tell you something. This is a problem for us. And when I say us, I mean me and everyone here because as human beings, born into the world with sinful natures, we are so sinful we don't even know how sinful that we are. We just don't even know how sinful that we are. But we embrace Christ, we embrace His teachings, we are baptized, we join the church, and we begin hanging out with other sinful people. And overtime we realize some of them are more sinful than us. In fact, become friends with anybody and you'll discover they have weaknesses you don't have and consequently, you know, you are better than them.

And in the realm of religion, the saddest thing that I've read in a long time, I read this week. Every author that I read in preparation for this sermon, every author that I read said, "In all of Christendom, there are very, very few people that are actually poor in the spirit." We get enough doctrine, we get enough temptations that we resist, we avoid the major public sins, we conduct ourselves and our affairs in a way that are better than the world, and we begin to think that we are okay. But the problem is, brothers and sisters, Jesus said that the kingdom of

heaven is for people who have spiritual poverty. Poverty of spirit, I should say. He could just as easily have said; if you don't have that you don't have the kingdom of heaven.

So we must reach a point even as we journey along with the Lord where we recognize over and over again that God is supreme and we can never ever relax. We have enough few good works, few good deeds, enough few promises kept, a few sins resisted, and a few sacrifices made. We have enough of those to feel like we've got all that we need. And we are just like John in the story. We are dying, but we are not asking for help. How can we get to the point where we ask for help? How could we get to the point where we realize our need?

Well, we are going to look at three men really quickly. It won't take long. First, the prophet Isaiah; Isaiah chapter 6 verses 1-7; Isaiah is a prophet of God. He is a man that the Bible records no ill against. There is no sin of Isaiah recorded anywhere. He apparently is a good, fine man. It says that in Isaiah 6 verse 1: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke."

"So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in this hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged"" demonstrating the gift of eternal life. Isaiah, this good man, a prophet, among a bunch of sinful people, when he came into the presence of God, cried out: "I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among people of unclean lips."

What about Job? Job chapter 42, we'll be reading that passage. Job 42 verses 5 and 6. You start out in the Book of Job and God is bragging about him. "He is a man of righteousness." So much so that he dares Satan, "Go ahead, tempt him. He will not deny me. Go ahead!" Well, during the course of the Book, Job does get angry at God. He never does turn away from serving Him, but he certainly misunderstands Him. And you come to 42 verses 5 and 6, these are the words of Job: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job says of God, "I heard about You, and I was serving You. But when I saw You, wow, I abhor myself. I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

The Apostle Paul would write in Romans chapter 7: "Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of sin and death?" And he goes on to praise God for Jesus who will do that. These men, all three of them were men serving God. All three of them saw the Lord. And when they saw the Lord, they realized, that's where holiness is, and they were bankrupt spiritually when it came in comparison to God. Brothers and sisters, when we read the Word of God; I know it's a temptation to look for things to prove other people wrong or to prove us right or whatever, we have got to find God. We have got to get the vision of God. We've got to sense how holy He is, and when we do that we will see Him. We can find Him. He promises us

that. When we search for Him, when we seek for Him with all our heart, we indeed will find Him.

Now, you may be wondering whether or not you have poverty of spirit like Jesus is talking about. Well, I ask you this question: How many of you this week lost your joy? Now I am talking about that constant, abiding trust and hope in the Lord. Did you lose that and did you lose your temper? Did you lose your faith? Did you lose your courage, did you lose those things? You brothers and sisters then lost that poverty of spirit. I know because I did this last week. It made me think in studying about it here. Have I that poverty of spirit? And I realized; if Jesus is saying the person who has that has this abiding joy, then I realized I'd lost it. And then, I began to analyze, well what was it that made me upset? What was it that distressed me along the way?

And I will tell you what it was. At the core of everything that upset me this last week was my own self pride. Something cut across me, and it took my joy away. And I began to think, "Lord, if I really had this poverty of spirit, I would trust in You more than I do, and I would let You take care of these things that I think I have to take care of myself." And I realized that I, with a few good deeds, a few promises kept, a few sins resisted, a few sacrifices made, had positioned myself to think, I had all I needed. And the truth is brothers and sisters, I am bankrupt spiritually. But that's a good place to be in the cause of God. 'Cause Jesus says the person who has that, who acknowledges that, will have the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now, I want to turn to the screen, one more text, Luke chapter 2 verse 34. Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple. And when they did, Simeon, the old prophet met them there. And he said to Mary: "Behold this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel..." "...the fall and rising of many in Israel!" There is a principle of the Gospel that before Jesus can lift us up we must realize we are fallen. Before there is conversion, there must be conviction. We must fall. We must realize how low we are, and then He lifts us to a higher place than we've ever thought possible. And it's all because of Him.

When we are in Heaven some day, and we look back, and those individuals whom we'll call John, who aren't with us, we will be able to say this: "Those few things killed my friend. As long as he had the attitude that he was not helpless before God, he would never be truly humble. He would not seek assistance from God, and a few good deeds, a few promises kept, a few sins resisted, and a few sacrifices made, ultimately resulted in his death and loss of eternal life."

Today, I want you to know that we have poverty and we have need. And God wants to provide for our need. And if we will be humble before Him and acknowledge, we have absolutely nothing that we can offer Him. Tell me, if salvation could be purchased, what would you purchase it with? If it could be earned by good deeds, what would you do? In fact, I want you to know, not one of you has ever had a pure motive in your life. So even the best things you've ever done are tainted with sinful motives way back there at the beginning of it. There is nothing we can do except acknowledge, we are in poverty – abject, total poverty when it comes to this thing called righteousness. But the good news is - Jesus died for us.

I read about the Pharisees this week how they would do everything they can to keep somebody from being a sinner and then avoid that person. And Jesus did everything He could to find sinners and to be with them. And He is here today, and He wants to find you. And He wants to

give you a joy and a hope that can only come when we are humble and helpless before Him, trusting only and completely in Him for eternal life.

If you would like to say that you want that experience, I am going to ask you to stand. "Father in Heaven, we can't do anything on our own. We praise You today for Jesus. We ask for Him to come into our lives and into our hearts and to save us. We thank you in Jesus name, Amen."