

Poor In Spirit

Matthew 5:3

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Please turn to Leviticus 23.

Leviticus 23:27-32 "Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation to you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath."

We are here to be reminded of an event that will reshape this world. This event is one of the major reasons why the Feast of Tabernacles is so joyous, because this event prepares the way, removing impediments to the abundant life that God wants everyone to enjoy. Of all of God's holy days, Atonement is, along with the Last Great Day, the one the world is most in the darkness about—and with good reason. Satan does not want the world to become aware that it is estranged from God—nor does he want those who are somewhat aware that the world is estranged from God to fully understand the real cause of that estrangement from God and each other—nor does he want people to know of the estrangement's solution and his fate, all of which are contained in an understanding of this day.

We could allow Atonement to slip right by without much fanfare because of the excitement generated by Trumpets and the awesome import of the Feast of Tabernacles being just beyond. But God makes us think seriously about Atonement by commanding us to fast on it, and that seems to get our attention. But I hope that it does not get our attention simply because we feel it is a burdensome obligation that we have got to endure to satisfy the Old Man before the real fun can begin.

Atonement deals with reconciliation, as does Passover. With Passover, God shows reconciliation of the *individual* to Him through Christ, and unity of the individual within the church through Christ. With Atonement, He shows the reconciliation of the *world* through Christ. With Passover, He shows Satan defeated, but still around to do his dirty work. With Atonement, He shows Satan defeated and banished forever, no longer free to carry out his evil schemes.

The Jews call this day *Yom Kippur*, which literally means "Day of Covering," implying the covering—and therefore the hiding—of sin so that it is no longer seen. We call it the Day of Atonement because of what is accomplished in God's purpose by the events that this day pictures. My dictionary says that *atone* means "to make expiation, as for sin, or a sinner," and it is derived from an early adverbial phrase, "at one," or "to set at one." It means "to form by uniting." Atonement is a day of unity. The noun form, *atonement*, is "the offering of something to win forgiveness," and

suggests an equality. It also means "an action to make a ruling power more lenient." Atonement is a day of *at-one-ment* with God, or a day of unity with God, or the day of mankind's reconciliation with God.

Maintaining Reconciliation

In the course of the teaching about this day, God also shows the *cause* of our separation from Him, as well as its solutions. But my concern today is that, since reconciliation with God has been initiated by Christ, by what means do we keep it going? No one answer will be complete, because Christianity contains a collage of elements that must be blended to produce and maintain relationships with God and man that will enable the abundant life, the kind of life that Jesus Christ said He came to give to us. The particular element that I am thinking of is important enough that Jesus Himself listed it first among the qualities of those who are blessed and will be in His Kingdom. He listed it first because it virtually *guarantees* that all other necessary qualities will be added to it.

We need to consider the setting in which this quality appears to grasp how vitally important it is. It appears in Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. Almost all the commentators agree that the book of Matthew seems to have been written with Israelites in mind. It is the gospel that focuses most directly on the Kingdom of God—or the Kingdom of Heaven—and Jesus as King than any of the others. So it seems to be an exaltation of Him.

This element is stated at the very beginning of Christ's very first pastoral message, and is aimed directly at His disciples and potential disciples. Thus, when you pick up the New Testament and read the biographies of the Founder of Christianity, the first thing that you will read after His battle with Satan, after the beginning of His ministry in Galilee and the choosing of four of His disciples is:

Matthew 5:1-3 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

What does it mean to be "poor in spirit"? If I was a betting man, I would be willing to bet that the first thing that comes to your mind is "to become humble." Brethren, that is wrong! Being *poor in spirit* and *humble* are not the same thing! Humility is a composite of several qualities, one of which is being "poor in spirit." Poor in spirit is a precursor, and the most essential element, of humility.

Almost everyone with even the most basic familiarity with the Bible knows of the Beatitudes. They rank right up there in recognition with the 23rd Psalm, the Ten Commandments, and the Golden Rule. But what they are and what their importance is frequently escapes peoples' understanding.

The Beatitudes are eight mental states that are the keys to making things go right in life generally, most importantly and especially in our relationship with God. These mental states help us to look at life, to act and react properly so as to guarantee a successful, abundant life. They are so important that Jesus put them *first* of any of His teachings. That ought to tell us something.

The Beatitudes should not be understood only as if each was an individual grain pearl of wisdom. Each Beatitude is linked to the others, as in a chain, but they also overlap in their characteristics. They begin with being poor in spirit and end with persecution, with six recognizable Christian qualities in between. They are very much like a chain, progressing from a beginning to an end. Each one of these characteristics enables a person to be truly blessed.

One commentator linked the first three as having very many overlapping qualities, and therefore being one link instead of eight. He grouped three into one. The next four, being a second link; and then the eighth being the final link of a three-link chain. There is some wisdom in that approach, but Jesus gave them separately, because each is also distinctive. They generally tend to follow the actual course of growth in the new life being developed by God's workmanship in us. I think it is very instructive which one He gave first.

Turn to Luke 12. This occurred when a man came to Jesus and asked Him to intervene, to divide the inheritance.

Luke 12:14-15 But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" And He said to them, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for a one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Is it not interesting that the world—that is, this system that we live in which is generated through man by Satan—says exactly the opposite of Jesus? Mr. Armstrong used to say frequently that if the Bible says something, you can almost be certain that man will say just the opposite. Jesus says, "*Blessed* are the poor in spirit." "*Blessed* are those who are mourning." "*Blessed* are those who are meek." But the world says, "*Blessed*—to be envied—are those who are rich, the jet-setters, the renowned, the assertive."

Luke 16:14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, "You are they those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Put the thoughts of those two verses together with being "poor in spirit," and you will come to the conclusion that this certainly expresses that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. All the kingdoms on earth cannot compare in value with a person who is poor in spirit, a person who is meek, a person who is hungering for righteousness. At the same time, we have to understand that God is not advocating poverty as a way of abundance in life, but He is asserting that life has a spiritual dimension to it. If life is going to be abundant, it requires right spiritual qualities to produce eternal life, which is the kind of life, the quality of life, that God lives and wants us to live.

Blessedness

Jesus' opening sermon lays the groundwork for all the teaching that will follow, and He expounds upon these states, these attitudes, in other places in His teaching. At the base of this is that God's major concern is what a person's character is. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount—and most specifically the Beatitudes—is teaching us what true happiness or "blessedness" consists of. That external luxuries, which appear to most to be indispensable to happiness and security, cannot produce it except for short periods.

When we get something that is nice physically, it lifts our spirits for a while, and we feel blessed and abundant. In my lifetime in the ministry, I received eighteen or nineteen brand new automobiles, one every couple of years, because I was putting so much mileage on them. Every time I would get one, I would think, "Boy! This is nice! This is the greatest automobile I've ever had!" But you know what? Maybe 4, 5, 6 months down the road, it was "old hat." The feeling of euphoria, of being blessed, went away because that automobile became my office; it became a place of work, a place of

boredom, driving long distances over virtually empty highways. It could not sustain the feeling of blessedness that I had.

I think you know that is the same way with every physical thing. No physical thing has the power to effect spiritual qualities in a person. These first 8 or 10 verses here in Matthew 5 also show indirectly that we should not expect external peace and prosperity from receiving and believing the gospel and having these qualities developed within us, because at the very end it says, "persecution." It is not what a person has or what a person does for a living that brings blessedness, but what he is in himself that counts—his *internal* characteristics.

What does it mean to be "poor in spirit"? It is of great practical use in interpreting the Bible to understand that it is written in an idiom that is peculiar to itself. It uses terms, expressions, and even single words that are sometimes different from the normal application used in daily life. An example of this is the word "bread." In normal, everyday conversation "bread" means that food made from grain from which we make sandwiches which we eat.

But biblically, "bread" can represent all physical things that a person might require, including clothing, shelter, money, education, companionship. Above all, it represents, it stands for *spiritual things*, such as spiritual knowledge, perception, and understanding—things from the spiritual realm that nourish man's spirit. Jesus tells us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Are we limited in understanding that bread there only means what we eat? Are we not supposed to trust and depend on God for other things as well, like a job or clothing? Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Unless you eat this bread. . ."

The same is true of the word "poor." It applies biblically to both the physical and the spiritual realms—physically, in terms of material prosperity, but even more so to spiritual well-being. When we study Scripture containing the word "poor," God wants us to give both aspects thought. If you think of the application of "poor" to material things, you will begin to have at least a pretty good handle on its spiritual application. It means "to be in want; to be lacking." It is indicative of poverty. It means "inferior, feeble, frail, mean, or low." Unsatisfactory [as in "poor quality"], needy, deficient, meager, scanty, wretched are some synonyms.

In many cases, people who are poor can do nothing—they have nothing, and they can do nothing. They may be deeply in debt for a variety of factors, and others usually consider a poor person to be a sorry and pitiful person, ill-clothed, ill-fed—generally an ill-natured, miserable wretch worthy of no regard, and who has no future.

Now how can Jesus possibly say that such a person is "blessed"? Well, it is in understanding the mind-set of a poor person; that is, nobody wants to be poor. It is degrading, disgraceful, and to some it destroys hope. When such a person realizes or recognizes that he lacks all of the good things in life, what kind of an approach to life does that person have? A person may not desire to be fabulously rich. A person may truly desire to only have enough to meet his daily necessities, but nobody *desires* to be poor.

So what does a person who recognizes his poverty do? He takes the necessary steps so that he will no longer be poor! He seeks advice on how to get out of his dilemma, or he gets a job or changes jobs. He curtails spending on luxury items, or he gets rid of something that is a financial drain. In other words, he *does* something to change his circumstances.

What we discover is that this word "poor" is a play on words. Jesus is using a word normally associated with material circumstances to express an extremely important spiritual condition—a state that every child of God must come to in order to be in the Kingdom of God. If you do not have this quality, you will not be there! That is why it is listed first. It is the trigger that sets off every good thing in our relationship to God.

Do not be deceived, though. There is a vast difference between this poor and being hard up in our circumstances. There is no virtue in financial poverty as such, nor does it of and by itself produce humility. I can find nowhere that God desires that any of His children be poor financially. Do you know, are you aware, that there is just as much pride in the indigent as there is in the rich? In fact, the Bible indicates that the poor are *more* proud than the rich.

This poverty of spirit is not the fruit of the natural man. It is a product of God's workmanship in those that He is creating in Christ Jesus. By nature we are usually well-pleased with ourselves, and just mad enough to think that we deserve something good from God. We feel that, if we just conduct ourselves in a decent, civil way and keep ourselves from gross sins, we are alright with God. But brethren, let me inform you that is a heart *rich* in spirit, filled with *pride* and self-righteousness.

Let us look at verse 10 of Luke 17. Here is our Savior saying,

Luke 17:10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do."

Now with a statement like that, when we have done everything that is commanded, we are still unprofitable in the eyes of God, how can we think that we deserve something good from God? The emphasis here is on the attitude behind the word "deserve," because we do not even come close to doing all that God commands us. We fall short—far short—and yet Jesus says if we do everything that is commanded, we are still unprofitable. How can we possibly think that we deserve anything from God when we fall short all the time—frequently? Brethren, God owes us *nothing*! A person who thinks God owes him something has made a very poor evaluation of God's holiness. He knows neither God nor himself. If he knew God *well*, he would never make a statement like that.

Listen to this invitation from God:

Isaiah 55:1-3 Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread? [Notice these words:] and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—even the sure mercies of David.

God is saying there that His great salvation is free, without money and without price. This is a most *merciful* provision on God's part, because based on our record, no sinner has anything by which he could possibly purchase it. But the vast majority of people are insensitive to this, especially in regard to themselves, and they feel that they might be worthy recipients of God's attention and blessings.

Attitude Is the Key

Let us go back to Matthew 19 as we continue to pursue this. We come in the midst of Jesus' encounter with the rich young man who asked, "What must I do to have life?"

Matthew 19:23-26 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When his disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them, and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Here is a play on words, as we saw earlier. It is God's intention that we understand this first of all in its spiritual sense. Wealth is a problem, not intrinsically, but because of human nature; but still it is not *the* problem. The Bible tells me in Genesis 13:2 that Abraham was *exceedingly* rich. God does not exaggerate. But Abraham, the father of the faithful, was exceedingly rich. Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David were rich. Undoubtedly, others were too, and it teaches us that a person can be both wealthy and godly.

This young man's value system—the young man in Matthew 19—was like almost everybody else's: completely out of whack. He was more fearful about lacking material wealth than he was about his need for something spiritual that Jesus could give him, something that he could receive from no other source. Attitude is the problem, a person's state of mind. If a person's state of mind is correct, if he is poor in spirit, he can handle wealth like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David did. Attitude is the problem. This young man in Matthew 19 could not handle wealth because of his attitude, his state of his mind. What we are concerned about here is what a man thinks about himself spiritually, morally, and ethically, first of all in relation to God, and then also in relation to fellowman and things.

John sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He was the Messiah. Jesus replies:

Matthew 11:4-5 "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Jesus is quoting Isaiah 61:1, where it specifically says that He was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. Each one of these classes of people mentioned here—the lame, the lepers, the deaf—has a dual sense, a spiritual as well as a material sense. Each of them represents a class of people who need help, considering their circumstances, physically and spiritually.

Now let us look at Revelation 2:9, right in the midst of the letters to the seven churches. Jesus says to the Smyrna group:

Revelation 2:9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich)."

Were they really rich? Their wealth was in spiritual qualities, spiritual virtues. The gospel is preached to the poor. Those who are "poor in spirit" are primed to believe the gospel and apply its instructions. That is why it is the *beginning* of all that follows. If one is "poor in spirit," it does something to the mind.

We are going to look at a scripture that everybody knows.

Isaiah 66:1-2 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."

Considering these last three or four scriptures, does God pay no attention to the rich? Is He, who judges without respect to persons, somehow prejudiced against the wealthy—that He makes sure that only the poor hear the gospel? Not on your life! "Rich" and "poor" in these verses have nothing at all to do with a person's economic circumstances.

In Isaiah 66:2, "poor" and "contrite" are not the same thing. They are related but not specifically the same attitude. To be sorry is to be contrite, to be remorseful, because of guilt. It relates to the "blessed are the those who mourn" in Matthew 5. To be poor is to be destitute, indigent, needy, and so a person can be wealthy economically, and be both poor and contrite spiritually. A person can be poor economically and be neither poor nor contrite spiritually. But God looks upon, focuses His attention upon, or blesses anyone who is poor and contrite spiritually. The poverty God is concerned with *precedes* remorse, humility, and meekness because of what *poverty of spirit* does in a person.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15 contains the Parable of the Prodigal Son:

Luke 15:11-13 Then He said, "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living."

He really lived it up. He was *rich*.

Luke 15:14-19 "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." [He went and got a job.] And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine did ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." '

Notice in verse 14 that "he began to be in want." He began to be fully aware of his poverty, and he was so poverty-stricken that he was feeding swine, which was very degrading for an Israelite. Then it says that "he came to himself." We see a progression. He began to be in want; he began to recognize his poverty. He began to *do* something about it, but he was further degraded by that time. Then in the process, he came to himself, which is an Aramaic idiom that means *he repented*. And then he sought forgiveness, willing to be merely a servant, showing that he knew that he did not deserve anything from his father. It also shows that his repentance was real.

Remember Psalm 51, David's psalm of repentance. At the very beginning of that psalm, David says to God, "You are justified in anything that You decide to do with me. I am not asking anything from

You at this point. I am a sinner." He was willing to take any judgment that God would give him, and if it was death, so be it because that is what he deserved.

Now this young man felt that he deserved nothing and was open to whatever his father chose to provide for him. Brethren, it is the *recognition* of the poverty of spirit, the want, the lacking that God is concerned about in Matthew 5:3. Recognition of spiritual poverty drives one, makes one acutely aware of spiritual need, and motivates one to do something about changing his circumstances.

Where did the prodigal son turn to supply his need? He first turned to the world, and that did not work. Then he turned to his father, and the instruction is exceedingly clear. This beatitude is foundational to all the other beatitudes. Indeed, it is foundational to Christian life itself. The "poor in spirit" are those who are poor in respect of spirit. They have become convinced of their *spiritual poverty*. They have been made conscious of their misery and lack. Their pride has been thoroughly broken, and they, in full awareness of their need, cry out to *God* to supply their needs—not to this world, their friends, material things, fame, fortune, entertainment, or good health. None of these things is intrinsically evil, but none of them can supply what only a vibrant relationship with God can.

Extended Definitions

Now let me give you some extended definitions from a couple of resources. First of all from Emmett Fox, in his book titled *The Sermon on the Mount*. He said that "poor in spirit" means

. . . to have been emptied of all desire; to exercise personal self-will; and what is just as important, to have renounced all preconceived opinions in a whole-hearted search for God. It means to be willing to set aside your present habits of thought, your present views and prejudices, your present way of life, if necessary, to jettison in fact anything and everything that stands in your way of finding God.

A second definition from Arthur Pink, in his book, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*:

It is the opposite of that haughty, self-asserted and self-sufficient disposition which the world so much admires and praises. It is the very reverse of that independent and defiant attitude which refuses to bow to God, which determines to brave things out, which says with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" It is to realize that I have nothing, I am nothing, I can do nothing, and have need of all things. It is a consciousness of my emptiness. It issues from the painful discovery that all my righteousnesses are as filthy rags. It follows the awakening that my best performances are unacceptable. Poverty of spirit evidences itself by its bringing the individual into the dust before God, acknowledging his utter helplessness, and deservingness of hell.

That is *way* below humility. That is *way* below meekness and mourning.

Another approach to understanding this is to know the Greek words translated as "poor." One indicates a person who has a job and is just getting by. He has just enough for the bare necessities. That describes most of us. Another word depicts one who has no job at all, and is utterly destitute, in abject poverty and cowering. This latter word is the one that Jesus uses in Matthew 5:3.

The Hebrew word adds another part to this picture, because its etymology begins with the word simply meaning "poor," just like the first Greek word. But through its usage through the centuries, it

came to describe the helpless person who, because he had no earthly resources whatsoever, puts his trust in God. Jesus applied this thought to a spiritual state.

To be poor in spirit might be termed as the flip side, or the negative side, of faith, and the world generally looks upon it as being *weak*. But it is the utter realization, the recognition, of our utter worthlessness and lack of qualities that make God what *He* is. This must precede laying hold of Christ, eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and taking advantage of His office as High Priest. It is being *emptied of self*, that Christ may fill us, because we see that our place is face down, groveling in the dust like Isaiah did when he saw God on His throne. To the casual observer from this world, it looks weak and debasing, but it is the way to blessing from God.

The Blessings of Being Poor in Spirit

Let us see, taking a hop, skip, and a jump through the book of Psalms, how important it is to be poor in spirit.

Psalm 40:17 But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.

Do you want God to think about you? Boy! I want Him to think about me, whether it is for good or bad. Even if He thinks about me in terms of bad, He is going to do something to make it good. But those who are poor God thinks about! They are in His mind. They are in His thoughts. And as we find from other places, they are the *apple of His eye*. They are what He focuses on. We want God to pay attention to us.

Psalm 69:33 For the LORD hears the poor, and does not despise His prisoners.

Do you want God to hear your prayers? Do you want your prayers to go up and not just disappear into a great void? Do you want your prayers to be answered? Of course you do!

Psalm 72:12-13 For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy.

Do you want to go to a place of safety, where God is going to spare His jewels, and hide them while all the trouble is going on? It will be awfully good to be poor of spirit when that time comes.

Psalm 107:41 Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes their families like a flock.

Now there is a blessing for you. He will lift the poor from his affliction, and make that person families like a flock. Big families gathered around a shepherd. Do you know the way it is today? Families are scattered all over creation, and we have all suffered that. For the poor, God says He will bring the families together. What a promise!

This is a Feast of Tabernacles psalm:

Psalm 113:7-8 He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may set him with princes—with the princes of His people.

Usually princes are pretty rich. God is not promising to make us rich, but He promises that He will lift us up so that we can have a good life, if we are poor in spirit.

Let us look at another one, and we will stop here. Actually, there are quite a number of them that I have not read. In fact, the gist of Psalm 40:17 alone appears four or five times in the psalms in slightly different context. This one in Psalm 132 is especially interesting because the psalmist is talking about Zion, a type of the church:

Psalm 132:13 For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place.

Is He living in us? He is.

Psalm 132:14-15 This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread.

Here are both of the words that I mentioned at the beginning: "poor" and "bread." Bread stands for everything that is considered to be needful and good for an abundant life, if we are poor in spirit.

Psalm 132:16-17 I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.

The Other Side of Poor in Spirit

Let us look at a very obvious contrast to this, using the word "rich," and maybe it will help us to understand "poor in spirit" better. Let us go to the letter to the Laodiceans.

Revelation 3:17 Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing . . .

The poor have need of everything! The rich have need of nothing. The poor in spirit need everything. They recognize their need of everything that they can possibly get from God, and so they grovel in the dust before Him in terms of their attitude, but even physically, if it is necessary and needful for them to do it. Their self-will is broken, and they will cast themselves at the feet of God.

But the rich—those who say they are rich—they do not need God. They are already alright the way they are! Whom are they worshipping? Laodiceanism, saying that "I am rich and increased with goods," is one of the most base idolatries in all of the Bible! These people are worshipping themselves. There is such self-righteousness there they do not need God!

The poor in spirit are at the other end of the scale completely. They need God for everything! They recognize it, and they cry out to Him, developing and working on that relationship, because someday they are going to marry Him, and they know it. But the rich cannot see that as far as true righteousness goes, they stand naked before God and destitute of anything of spiritual value that might cause God to allow them in His Kingdom. They are so focused on the world and its values and on the self that they do not recognize their spiritual poverty. They look good to themselves. Such vanity! God's focus in this context is to try to remove their blindness through trial, bringing them low enough to see their need.

The book of Proverbs has a couple of supporting scriptures to show the same basic principle.

Proverbs 28:11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding searches him out.

He sees right through him spiritually. The rich man is wise in his own conceit.

Proverbs 18:11 The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own esteem.

A wall is a symbol of protection. The rich man's safety, his spiritual safety, his spiritual security, is in what he already is. He is not in need, he feels, except for more wealth and power. He is not at all like Christ. This is how Christ describes Himself, in His own words:

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke [My burden] upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Incidentally, right in this context He alludes to another blessing of being poor in spirit: Such a person does not have the worries that the rich do. In other words, he is not burdened, not yoked, to the wrong things. The rich must always be seeking more security, more approbation in the eyes of others, and so there is a kind of restlessness for more. Do you think Bill Gates is satisfied with \$38 or 39 billion? He will do all in his power to keep increasing that. What in the world can you do with \$39 billion? Buy the world? Maybe. But, you see, the poor in spirit are taken care of by God, and therefore their security, safety, and wealth is in Him.

Fasting and Poor in Spirit

Today, we are fasting by the command of God. People exercise because they expect to receive a physical benefit of better health from their efforts. They expect to live longer because they jog, or because they walk. There is nothing wrong with that. Fasting is a spiritual exercise, whose main benefit is to make us feel our need, because we are lacking those things necessary to life, dynamic vitality, and good health—things that God so abundantly supplies us out of His vast stores. But in this case it is *spiritual life*, *spiritual vitality*, and *spiritual health* that we lack, and which God can so abundantly supply from His vast spiritual stores.

God expects us to get the point from our fasting, to make the transference from the lack in the physical realm—"I'm hungry, I need"—to the lack in the spiritual realm. Being poor in spirit is not a product of human nature. It is a product of God's workmanship in us, produced to make us aware of our spiritual lack and to motivate us to seek Him with all of our being. It is given to enhance our relationship with Him, to drive us to the only source that will enable us to be in His image and to be fully at one with Him. When we are poor in spirit and one with Him, He hears us and responds.

Being poor in spirit is foundational—a major key to all that is truly good in this universe. Matthew 5:3 is an exclamation of joy. "Oh! The blessedness of the poor in spirit" is actually the way that Jesus said it. "Oh! The blessedness of the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

This, brethren, is a quality that all of us need to be asking God for. It is not easy for us to do this, because when we ask God to make us poor in spirit, we are asking Him to reveal what we are in relation to Him—and it ain't pretty, and it might not be easy to take. Perhaps there is no more poignant example than what happened to Isaiah when he was given a vision of God's holiness (Isaiah 6:1-5). He threw himself into the dust, with his face down on the ground, and said, "Woe is me! I am undone!" The comparison between God and himself was more than he could stand.

Brethren, the next time you fast, remember this: The idea behind a fast is to make us aware of our need by making us feel a little bit of discomfort because we lack something that God so abundantly supplies. The point is that if He can supply the physical, He can also supply the spiritual. He will not supply it *until* we begin to feel and recognize the lack, and *cry* out to Him, asking Him to reveal it so that we can seek it and seek Him, and be like Him.