

ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

BIBLE STUDY, 16/01/2008

STUDY 1

THE BROKEN SPIRIT

Matthew 5:3

Christ begins his sermon with blessings, for *he came into the world to bless us* (Acts 3:26), as *the great High Priest of our profession*; as *the blessed Melchizedec*; as *He in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed*, Genesis 12:3. He came not only to purchase blessings for us, but to pour out and pronounce blessings on us; and here he does it *as one having authority*, as one that can *command the blessing, even life for evermore*, and that is the blessing here again and again promised to the good; his pronouncing them happy makes them so; for those whom he blesses, are blessed indeed. The Old Testament ended with a curse (Malachi 4:6), the gospel begins with a blessing; for *hereunto are we called, that we should inherit the blessing*. Each of the blessings Christ here pronounces has a double intention: to show who they are that are to be accounted truly happy, and what their characters are; and secondly to show wherein true happiness consists, in the promises made to persons of certain characters, the performance of which will make them happy.

Blessed means "happy." This is a basic description of the believer's inner condition as a result of the work of God. These Beatitudes, like Psalm 1, do not show a man how to be saved, but rather describe the characteristics of one who has been saved. The **poor in spirit** are the opposite of the proud or haughty in spirit. These are those who have been humbled by the grace of God and have acknowledged their sin and therefore their dependence upon God to save them. They are the ones who will inherit the **kingdom of heaven**.

According to Matthew, these beatitudes are nine in number and seven in character, for the last two, which concern persecution, do not relate to traits of character, but to certain external circumstances which lead to blessings. Luke gives us beatitudes not recorded in Matthew, Luke 6:20–23. Most of the beatitudes are paradoxical, being the very reverse of the world's view, but Christians who have put them to the test have learned to realise their unquestionable truth.

1. The description of poor in spirit

Matthew 5:3; II Samuel 22:18; Revelation 3:14–19; Job 21:14–15; Matthew 11:5; Luke 15:17–24

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." Poverty of spirit is the opposite of that haughty, self-assertive 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?" To be "poor in spirit" is to realise that I have nothing, am nothing, and can do nothing, and have need of all things. Poverty of spirit is a consciousness of my emptiness, the result of the Spirit's work within. It issues from the painful discovery that all my righteousnesses are as filthy rags. It follows the

awakening that my best performances are unacceptable, yea, an abomination to the thrice Holy One. Poverty of spirit evidences itself by its bringing the individual into the dust before God, acknowledging his utter helplessness and deservingness of hell. It corresponds to the initial awakening of the prodigal in the far country, when he "began to be *in want*." How to cultivate this God-honouring spirit is revealed in Matthew 11:29.

To be *poor in spirit* is: to be contentedly poor, willing to be emptied of worldly wealth, if God orders that to be our lot; to bring our mind to our condition, when it is a low condition. Many are poor in the world, but high in spirit, poor and proud, murmuring and complaining, and blaming their lot, but we must accommodate ourselves to our poverty, must *know how to be abased*, Philippians 4:12; it is to be humble and lowly in our own eyes; to think meanly of ourselves, of what we are, and have, and do; the poor are often taken in the Old Testament for the humble and self-denying, as opposed to those that are at ease, and the proud; it is to be as little children in our opinion of ourselves, weak, foolish, and insignificant, Matthew 18:4; 19:14; and it is to come off from all confidence in our own righteousness and strength, that we may depend only upon the merit of Christ for our justification, and the spirit and grace of Christ for our sanctification. That *broken and contrite spirit* with which the publican cried for mercy to a poor sinner, is that poverty of spirit. We must call ourselves poor, because always in want of God's grace, always begging at God's door, always hanging on in his house.

2. The picture of those characters upon whom divine benediction rests

Matthew 5:3; Ephesians 1:18; 3:8, 16; II Corinthians 6:10; I Corinthians 3:21–23; Luke 55:17; 66:2; Psalm 37:11; 51:17

Poverty of spirit may be termed the negative side of faith. It is that realisation of our utter worthlessness which precedes the laying hold of Christ, the eating of His flesh and drinking His blood. It is the Spirit emptying the heart of self that Christ may fill it: it is a sense of need and destitution. This first beatitude, then, is foundational, describing a fundamental trait which is found in every regenerated soul. Many books are telling us how to be "filled with the Spirit," but where can we find one setting forth what it means to be spiritually emptied: emptied of self-confidence, self-importance, and self-righteousness? Alas, if it be true that, "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15), it is equally true that what is of great price in His sight is despised by men—by none more so than by modern Pharisees, who now hold nearly all the positions of prominence in Christendom. Almost all of the so-called "ministry" of this generation feeds pride, instead of starving the flesh; puffs up, rather than abases.

3. The gracious promises addressed to the poor in spirit

Matthew 5:3; Psalm 40:17; 69:33; 40:17; 72:13; 107:41; 132:15; Isaiah 66:2; Psalm 74:19

He who is in possession of this poverty of spirit is pronounced "blessed." He is so because he now has a disposition the very opposite of what was his by nature, because he has in himself the first sure evidence that a Divine work of grace has been wrought in his heart, because he is an heir of the "kingdom of heaven"—the kingdom of grace here, the kingdom of glory hereafter. Many are the gracious promises addressed to the

poor in spirit. "I am poor and needy: yet the Lord thinketh upon me: Thou art my help and my deliverer", "The Lord heareth the poor", "He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy", "Yet setteth He the poor on high from affliction", "I will satisfy her poor with bread", "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word". Let such favours as these stir us up to pray earnestly for more of this poverty of spirit.