

**Text: Matthew 5:1-3 (Pew Bible pg.958)**

**Title: “Blessed Bankruptcy”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Open your Bibles to Matthew 5:1. For the next several weeks we are going to camp in a portion of Matthew’s Gospel that is called the Beatitudes. Let’s all stand as I read these amazing verses. Read Matthew 5:1-12. Before being seated just let your mind dwell on this radical truth that Jesus sets out for us ... yes, for us! It may be hard for you to imagine someone being congratulated for being bankrupt or broken or hungry or meek or persecuted or insulted. But if you and I can understand these words of Jesus, and the radical life He calls us to live, we’ll find ourselves living at a higher level than ever in our lives. Be seated and keep your Bibles open to Matthew 5.

You’ll need a few background details in order to get the most out of our study of the Beatitudes. The word, by the way, comes from a Latin word that means “blessed” or “to be congratulated.” Of course, each statement Jesus makes in this section begins with the word “blessed.”

## **THE AUTHORITY OF THESE STATEMENTS**

These are the words of Jesus Himself to us ... yes, to the those who first heard Him 2000 years ago, but still, they are spoken to us.

**Matthew 5:1-2 - Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...**

It says that Jesus “sat down” and began to teach. The Gospel writers seem to go out of their way to add that detail in many places in Gospels where Jesus’ teaching ministry is detailed. Today a teacher or preacher typically stands to teach, but in Jesus’ culture, when a teacher had something really important to communicate they would often sit down and their students (disciples) would gather around them. It added a note of authority to what they were saying. Of course it doesn’t matter whether Jesus was sitting or standing, everything He says to us carries with it the highest authority. In fact, when Jesus finishes teaching the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), of which the Beatitudes are a part we’re told that people were amazed at His teaching because Jesus spoke as one who had authority, not as their religious leaders (Matt.7:28-29).

## **THE ARRANGEMENT THESE STATEMENTS**

Let’s zoom out from the Beatitudes, out from the Sermon on the Mount to the Gospel of Matthew. Turn back a page in your Bible:

**Matthew 4:17 - From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

**Matthew 4:23 - Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.**

So Jesus' ministry was to preach the coming of the Kingdom of God, to demonstrate the power of the Kingdom of God over suffering and sickness, and then to teach the way of the Kingdom of God to His followers.

And what is the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven? It is the reign and rule of God through Jesus Christ. Wherever Christ is enthroned as King, the Kingdom has come. That's what happened when Jesus first appeared. Though His reign was not visible, when Jesus came to this earth, the Kingdom of God had come. And it is still coming. As people surrender to the rule and reign of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God expands and continues to come. And the Kingdom of God is coming. It is *completely real* today, but there will be a day in the future when it will be *completely visible*. This happens when Christ returns.

And so we have the Sermon on the Mount in general, and the Beatitudes in particular, where Jesus teaches about Kingdom People who live by Kingdom Priorities.

## **THE AUDIENCE LISTENING TO JESUS**

**Matthew 5:1-2 - Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...**

This comes at a time when Jesus' ministry is gaining great popularity with the people. Crowds swelled everywhere He went. In the crowds were people who were curious, but not really committed ... people who were interested, but not fully invested in the life of following Jesus. So Jesus saw the crowds; He was aware of their growing presence around Him. But strangely Jesus doesn't speak to the crowds. Instead, He goes up on a mountainside, sat down, His disciples came to Him, and He "began to teach *them*." Who? His disciples, His apprentices, His learners.

If we don't get this, we will miss the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount in general, and the Beatitudes in particular. They are addressed to disciples, to followers of Jesus. They are spoken to the women and men who stepped out of the crowd of curious seekers and who became serious, committed followers of Christ.

When Jesus saves you the life He envisions for you is not the life of a church-goer or a casual religious person. The life God envisions for saved people is the life of a passionate follower of Jesus Christ. In our BLUEPRINT FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION we state that "We join God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ."

In the Sermon on the Mount and in the Beatitudes Jesus calls Kingdom people (His followers) to live by Kingdom priorities, not by the priorities of this world.

**ILLUSTRATION** – A recent Gallup poll reveals something that is shocking, yet probably not all that surprising to us. Over three-quarters of Americans (77%) say religion is losing its influence on American life. It's been over 40 years since Americans were that pessimistic about the influence of religion on the heart of our nation. Add to that the recent surveys that reveal that the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously

unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever. They are called the “nones” ... those who, when asked what their religious affiliation is, mark “none.”

Some would say that what the church needs to do is to lower the standards and move closer to the world to attract them. Jesus sees it just the opposite. He saw the crowds, was aware of the crowds, but then He sat with His disciples and called them to such a radical life. The radical life that is produced in us is what makes Christ attractive to non-believers, not the opposite. When people see the radical difference produced in us they will be drawn to the One who made that difference.

## **THE AIM OF JESUS' TEACHING**

I've already said that the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount fall in the middle of Jesus' ministry to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, to teach the way of the Kingdom of Heaven, and to demonstrate the power of the Kingdom of Heaven over sin and suffering.

Notice that the first and the last beatitude end with the fact that “theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

**Matthew 5:3 - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

You and I belong to a different kingdom. O if I could help you in the next few weeks to understand that, and to understand how different the two kingdoms are. In the Beatitudes Jesus calls us into His Kingdom where what we believe and how we behave are radical ... a sharp contrast to the world's system and way. Jesus is about making Kingdom People with Kingdom Priorities.

**1 John 2:15 - Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

**1 John 2:16 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.**

**1 John 2:17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**

And to believers who love the world (not the people of the world, but the values and priorities of the world) Jesus would remind us that we are to be different because we are citizens of another kingdom. The Beatitudes take us beyond the worldly view of life ... and they take us beyond mere religion. They call out Kingdom People to live with Kingdom Priorities. That is the aim of Jesus in His teaching here.

Now there's something else you need to understand about the Beatitudes. Since the Kingdom of God has already come, these qualities displayed in the Beatitudes are “birth marks of Kingdom People.” These are not merits that we have to attain before we receive the blessings of the Kingdom. The Beatitudes are not a NT set of commandments ... like we have the OT Ten Commandments and

the NT Eight Commandments in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount teach us not, “Live like this *so that* you will be a Christian.” They teach us, “Live like this *because* you are a Christian.” The Beatitudes do not tell us how Christians *ought* to live in order to be right with God, but how Christians are *meant* to live because we are right with God.

Now let’s get to the first beatitude.

**Matthew 5:3 - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

As a Kingdom person who lives by Kingdom priorities I realize two things:

### **1. MY REAL POVERTY IN SIN**

**Matthew 5:3 - “Blessed are the poor in spirit...”**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Dave Ramsey is well-known today for his talk show and ministry called Financial Peace. When Dave was a young man in his twenties he had a real knack for making money. He and his wife did the exotic vacations, drove luxury cars and wore only the most expensive clothing. One day an economic downturn caused their world to come crashing down around them. He was living on the edge and when things began to crumble it looked like was going to fall hard. He tells of the day when he was standing at a gasoline pump putting fuel in his sleek Jaguar luxury car, checking to see how much change he had in his pocket to buy enough gas to get him where he was going. He was totally broke, but still trying to maintain the image that he was rich.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the bankrupt.” But He’s not talking about financial bankruptcy but spiritual bankruptcy.” Blessed are the poor in *spirit*. The Lord is concerned here with a person’s “spirit” ... their attitude towards themselves as they face God. When you face God if you feel anything but utter poverty and bankruptcy of spirit, you have not really faced God.

It is the awareness that we are nothing in God’s presence. It is the awareness that we have absolutely nothing to bring to this relationship ... nothing ... no righteousness of our own, no strength of our own, no talent of our own. It’s all God.

The word “poor” Jesus uses here doesn’t just mean to be a little short of cash. It was the word that was used for abject poverty ... one who is totally dependent on the mercy of someone else. One word means I have a little hope of paying my bills. The other means I have no hope of paying the debt I owe.

**ILLUSTRATION** – One of the new discipleship classes that will begin tonight at 6pm is a class called “Life’s Healing Choices.” It’s about how to recover from the hurts, habits and hang-ups in life. And the first principle is to realize you are powerless to change without God’s help.

Have you ever heard someone say that Christians are just weak people who need a crutch to lean on? Atheistic and agnostic philosophers have criticized Christianity in this way for a long time. Maybe you’ve had a friend who argued this. And that is because our culture values self-reliance, self-

esteem and self-confidence. If you have to depend on something or someone else for that you are weak. They say that Christianity only works for cripples. But guess what? They're right. In fact, Christians aren't just people who need a crutch. A crutch won't do, because with a crutch you can still lean a little on your own strength.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I think it's more like a wheelchair. For a person confined to a wheelchair it is impossible for you to go some places. The only way you can get there is for someone else to push you. On one occasion Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). That means that the only people who will ever come to get what Jesus has to give are sick people, that is, people who know that they are spiritually and morally and very often physically crippled.

People who have come to trust in Christ believe that their own righteousness, morality, strength, ingenuity, wisdom and reason are not enough to give them meaning in this life and assurance for the future life. So they lean on Christ for these things. And we don't just start the Christian life with this attitude; we live everyday of our lives with this attitude.

Isaiah 57:15 tells us that the Lord has two particular dwelling places:

**Isaiah 57:15 - For this is what the high and lofty One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.**

And that leads me to the next thing I have to realize...

## **2. MY TRUE RICHES IN CHRIST**

**Matthew 5:3 - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

So as a follower of Christ I live every day in the realization that I am totally bankrupt without Christ. It's the way I come to Christ as a sinner to be saved, and it's the way I live before Christ every day. But I struggled with this as I prepared this week. I thought, “If I am poor in spirit won't that leave me feeling guilty, worthless and useless all the time? (Some of us are prone to this anyway.) Surely that's not the way I'm supposed to feel all the time. Can Christ be honored in that?

One solution is for someone to say to us, “Stop putting yourself down. You are special; you are somebody.” But that's not the way of the Kingdom of Heaven. Rather, what Christ in the Gospel teaches us is this: Stop looking at your own unworthiness and uselessness and look to Me. God's way of freeing and mobilizing people who see themselves as worms is not to tell them that they are beautiful butterflies but rather to say, “Look to Me. See the riches and strength and righteousness that are found in Me. Turn to Me. I will help you.”

It's one thing for Paul to say...

**1 Timothy 1:15b - Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.**

It's another thing for Paul to go on to say...

**1 Timothy 1:16 - But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.**

I look away from my own unworthiness and uselessness to the One who displays His unlimited patience by saving those who look to Him.

## **CONCLUSION**

**ILLUSTRATION** – One of my heroes in church history is William Carey, the father of the modern missions movement. He accomplished amazing things in his long career in India. Carey endured 40 years of one obstacle after another. Some described Carey as a homely man. He suffered from a recurring fever. He walked with a limp because of an injury he sustained. In spite of all those things William Carey translated the entire Bible into six languages and parts of it into 29 other languages. He laid the foundation for work in winning India to Christ that endures to this day. But what was the secret of William Carey’s usefulness and productivity for the kingdom of God? He was a man of incredible humility. When he had outlived four of his fellow missionaries in India, he wrote back to England to his dear friend Andrew Fuller, “I know not why so fruitless a tree is preserved; but the Lord is too wise to err.” When he died in 1834 in Serampore, a simple tablet was placed on his grave, a tablet that displayed the words he had previously requested ... words that may explain the secret to Carey’s effectiveness as a servant of God. The tablet on his grave reads...

### **WILLIAM CAREY**

**Born August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1761**

**Died June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1834**

**A wretched, poor, and helpless worm,**

**On Thy kind arms I fall.**

The secret for William Carey was not self-esteem and self-confidence. He was poor in spirit to the very end. He called himself “A wretched, poor, and helpless worm.” He knew too well his own weaknesses, sin and failings. He was aware of his real poverty in his sin. But more importantly he was aware of his true riches in Christ. He says, “On Thy kind arms I fall.” Carey knew the promise of Jesus: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven ... and theirs is the Kingdom of the Kingdom, our merciful Savior Jesusx.

You see, Christ comes to fill our lives with eternal blessings, but if our lives are already full of our own righteousness and our own self-esteem and our own strength, then there is no room for what He wants to give us.