

Matthew 5:3

- Blessed are the poor in spirit -

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Introduction

- ❖ The first blessing of the Sermon on the Mount is very insightful.
 - The belief in Jesus Christ is a blessing for everyone who listens to the words of Jesus and puts them into practice (Mt 7:24-27). This blessing is the kingdom of Heaven, the presence of God the Father, in this time and in the future, the new heavens and earth.
 - The poor in spirit is anyone who receives the gospel as a child, sitting at the feet of the Lord, listening to him.
 - The poor in spirit show a mental attitude: “Teach us; guide us; show us the words of God, the kingdom of heaven; give us your holy Spirit.” “Give us rest for our souls” (Mt 11:20).
 - The church of Jesus Christ should invest a lot of time and effort in teaching and proclaiming the gospel and be aware that the gospel is meant for the poor in spirit.
 - The kingdom of heaven is the realm where God reigns. It is the realm of the Spirit. It is the kingdom of grace and peace, love and hope, righteousness and mercy, knowledge and wisdom.
- ❖ The first with all other blessings reveal the character of Christ and the work of the Spirit.
 - A few examples:
 - Jesus hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He was (and is) pure in heart. He was persecuted because of righteousness. He was merciful and meek.
- ❖ The church should become poor in spirit and call the world to repentance.
- ❖ The context, form and structure as well as the theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlaps somewhat with other sermon outlines taken from the

Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). This makes it possible to use this outline as a “stand alone” or as part of a series.

Context

- ❖ To understand the teachings of Jesus, a brief summary of the background is necessary.
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13-17):
 - Before Jesus was baptised by John, he said: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfill all righteousness.**”
 - And afterwards: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”
 - The Sermon on the Mount teaches this **fulfilment of all righteousness.** <> “For I tell you that unless **your righteousness surpasses** that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law...” (Mt 5:20).
- ❖ The preaching of Jesus:
 - Jesus had already been preaching in the synagogues in Galilee for some time before he delivered his sermon on the mount. Matthew summarized these sermons as follows:
 - “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt 4:17).
 - Jesus continued and took over the ministry of John the Baptist:
 - “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt 3:1–2).
 - And later on, when Jesus sent out his twelve disciples:
 - “As you go, preach this message: ‘**The kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt 10:7).
 - These two aspects, repentance and the kingdom, are prominent in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ The life of Jesus Christ:
 - Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets, and he lived according to the Law and the Prophets. The Sermon on the Mount reflects his life. He lived according to his own teachings and by doing so set an example for his followers, the disciples. A clear example is found in Matthew 5:39: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” When Jesus was arrested, he didn’t strike back.

❖ The future of the kingdom:

- After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his eleven disciples to go back to the mount: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (...) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”** (Mt 28:18-20).
 - This authority is reflected in expressions like: **“But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Mt 5:22).
 - And in: “Not everyone who says to me, **‘Lord, Lord,’** will enter the kingdom of heaven, but...” (Mt 7:20).

Form and structure

❖ The Sermon on the Mount consists of five main parts:

- 1. General calling to repentance and the promise of the kingdom: Matthew 5:3-10, characterized by: “Blessed are...”
 - 2. Then Jesus turns to his disciples and all who want to learn from him: “Blessed are **you...**” The main theme is **“the prophets”** (Mt 5:11-16).
 - 3. The central part is an exposition of the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17-7:12):
 - “Do not think that I have come to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfil** them” (Mt 5:17)...
 - The Lord’s Prayer is found at the very centre of the sermon!
 - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the **Law and the Prophets”** (Mt 7:12).
 - 4. After his exposition of the Law and the Prophets, he returns to the theme of the Prophets and warns against **“the false prophets”** (Mt 7:13-23). This contrasts with the second part of the sermon.
 - 5. He concludes his sermon again with a general call to choose: **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine...”**(Mt 7:24-27).

❖ The structure of Matthew 5:3-10:

- These are the so-called blessings. They reflect the preaching of Jesus. Each blessing consists of two parts:
 - The first part is the result of repentance.
 - The second part describes God’s gift, “blessing”.

<i>repentance</i> ¹	<i>promise</i>
5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit,	for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
5:4 Blessed are those who mourn,	for they will be comforted.
5:5 Blessed are the meek,	for they will inherit the earth.
5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,	for they will be filled.
5:7 Blessed are the merciful,	for they will be shown mercy.
5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart,	for they will see God.
5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers,	for they will be called sons of God.
5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,	for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

○ Remarks:

- Jesus didn't call / bless different people with different character traits. He showed us the character of the one who repents.² All promises are part of the same big promise: the kingdom of heaven, where God rules.
- The blessings are paired:
 - The first (5:3) and the last (5:10) and:

5:4 Blessed are those who mourn,	for they will be comforted.
5:5 Blessed are the meek,	for they will inherit the earth.

- Those who mourn become meek, because they know about a real loss:
 - The loss of a beloved one;
The loss of innocence;
The loss of righteousness.
 - This experience will make them meek towards others.
 - This experience will make them hunger and thirst for righteousness and mercy.

¹ For more information on repentance: Lunde, L. (1992, p.669-673)

² Garland, D. (1992, p.77-81)

5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,	for they will be filled.
5:7 Blessed are the merciful,	for they will be shown mercy.

- Righteousness and mercy are the two sides of the same coin. A righteous person is merciful, and a merciful person is righteous. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, who were striving after righteousness, that they forgot the most important aspect of the Law: “If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent” (Mt 12:7; Hos 6:6).

5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart,	for they will see God.
5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers,	for they will be called sons of God.

- Only the pure in heart can become peacemakers. They don’t have a hidden agenda.
- Only the pure in heart can see God, for they will be called sons of God (by God himself).
- The blessings are in ascending order:
 - The mourning and the meek hunger and thirst for righteousness and mercy, and because they long for God’s righteousness and mercy, they are pure in heart and will make peace.

Technical and hermeneutical notes

- ❖ It is important to realise that Jesus preached this sermon around 30 AD in Galilee:
 - to Jews living in a country
 - which was part of the Roman Empire;
 - who had contact with the Hellenistic (Greek) and Roman culture; this culture was prominent in a city like Tiberias (Lake of Tiberias = Sea of Galilee) and the Decapolis, nowadays Jordan;
 - to Jews
 - who frequented the synagogues and were used to listening to the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes, their spiritual leaders at that time;

- who were expecting the promised One (according to Dt 18:15-18; Mal 4:4-5; Mt 11:3);
 - who were longing for the restoration of the kingdom of God (Mt 11:12), which was the main theme of the teaching of Jesus.
- ❖ This background is needed to understand some passages of the sermon, especially those that speak of persecution (Mt 5:10-12), pagans (Mt 6:7, 32) and of hypocrites.
 - The selection of topics found in the Sermon on the Mount reflects some debated issues among first century Jews such as divorce (Mt 5:31-32; Mt 19:3-9). Jesus didn't cover all aspects of the Law, for instance, the fourth commandment (Sabbath Day) is not found here, although it was hotly debated between the Pharisees and Jesus (Mt 12:1-8). Neither did he refer to the greatest commandment (Mt 22:37-40).
 - He especially confronted the teaching of the Pharisees and Scribes. Some of the topics found in the sermon are also found in Matthew 23, where he condemned them for their hypocritical stance.
 - Jesus didn't give a new set of rules or applications but showed a different mindset. This mindset is governed by (see application):
 - the blessings of the kingdom (Mt 5:3-10);
 - the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:9-13), the central part of the sermon.
- ❖ The Old Testament background is especially important. Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets.
 - The blessings are found in the Book of Psalms. Especially Psalm 1 is important: "**Blessed** is the man his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1,2; Ps 32:1-2; Ps 106:3; Ps 119:1-2).
 - The parallels between Isaiah 61:1-4 and the first blessings are striking:
 - "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me (*The baptism of the Lord*)

to preach good news to the poor. (*Mt 5:3*)
 He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, (*Mt 5:4*)
 to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,
 to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (*Mt 5:4*)

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor” (Mt 5:6).

Exposition

Verse 3

❖ “Blessed are the poor in spirit”

- “Blessed” = μακάριος. **2.** pertaining to being especially favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged, from a transcendent perspective, a. **of humans privileged recipient of divine favour.**³
- “poor” = πτωχός. **2.** pertaining to being thrust on divine resources, poor. At times the reference is not only to the unfavorable circumstances of these people from an economic point of view; the thought is also that since they are oppressed and disillusioned they are in special need of God’s help, and may be expected to receive it shortly. **3.** lacking in spiritual worth, οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι = “the poor in spirit”.⁴
 - Compare Matthew 11:5: “the good news is preached to the poor.”
 - This doesn’t mean that “the rich” don’t hear the “good news.” But, when Jesus explained the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-9), he said: “The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, **but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it**, making it unfruitful.” Compare Mt 6:24: “No one can serve two masters. (...) **You cannot serve both God and Money.**” In Luke 6:20 the Lord contrasted the poor with the rich very sharply: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.” (See also the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Lk 16:19-31.)⁵
 - Matthew 11:25-27: “At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because **you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.** (...) No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
 - Jesus contrasted the “**little children**” with “**the wise**” and “**the learned.**” That doesn’t mean that the educated can’t receive the good news. But the educated face the same problem as the rich: “You say, ‘I am rich,

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 611)

⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 896)

⁵ Davids, P. (1992, p. 701-710)

learned, wise; I have acquired wealth, knowledge, wisdom and do not need a thing” (Rev 3:17).

- These **little children** are called to learn (Mt 11:29).
- Being “**poor in spirit**” is the first result of repentance. He acknowledges his spiritual poverty.
- Because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, these words are full of Spirit, knowledge and wisdom.
- ❖ “**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**”
 - The “**kingdom of heaven**” is the realm where God reigns. It is the realm of the Spirit of Christ. It is the kingdom of grace and peace, love and hope, righteousness and mercy, knowledge and wisdom.
 - The revelation of the kingdom of heaven is at the same time the revelation of Jesus Christ and of God the Father (Mt 11:27) and their power and glory.
 - This means salvation, (eternal) life (Jn 17:3), walking in his light (Jn 8:12), the inheritance of God’s new world, God’s treasures.
 - The “kingdom of heaven” will reveal the sons/children of God.

Application

- ❖ Becoming poor in spirit is the first result of repentance, the acknowledgement of our spiritual bankruptcy.⁶
 - It is the mental attitude of the tax collector, the sinner, the prostitute, sitting at the feet of Jesus (Lk 15:1-2) and of the revolutionary who wants to establish a better world even by violence.
 - It is the mental attitude of a believer, a disciple, a child of God, a listener.
 - The poor in spirit show a mental attitude: “teach us; guide us; show us the words of God, the kingdom of Heaven; give us your holy Spirit.” “Give us rest for our souls” (Mt 11:20).
 - He/she will have an openness of mind towards the words of God.
 - The poor in spirit are not longing for wealth (Mt 6:19-24, 25-34), but for righteousness and mercy, for pureness in heart and peace.
 - There can be several obstacles such as Jesus describes in the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-9, 18-23).

⁶ Stott, J. (1992, p. 39)

- But previous teachings, religious traditions, other beliefs, previous life experiences (disappointments, painful memories) can also make it difficult for someone to become poor in spirit.
 - The poor in spirit will pray the Lord's prayer(!),
 - The poor in spirit will be transformed into the likeness of Jesus, the son of God (Mt 5:8-9).
- ❖ The preacher should be poor in spirit himself.
 - This means that he is asking the right questions in the search for the answers. He will not just give the answers, but guide the believers to ask the right questions themselves.
 - While teaching and preaching, he should aim at relationships and a learning environment.
- ❖ The kingdom of heaven is the realm where God the Father reigns. It is the realm of the Spirit. It is the kingdom of grace and peace, love and hope, righteousness and mercy, knowledge and wisdom.
 - The kingdom of heaven is the revelation of God the Father and of Jesus Christ the son.
 - The "**kingdom of heaven**" can be contrasted with aspects of the kingdoms of this world:
 - The growing gap between the rich and the poor.
 - Corruption, unrighteousness, mercilessness, broken families and relationships.
 - The violence and the refugee problem in this world.
 - Persecution of Christians (and other people).
 - "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.'" (Isa 57:15; Isa 66:1,2).

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