

"Impoverished in Spirit"

I know something inherently true about every person. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Well what is that truth? You desperately need the Lord Jesus in your life. Stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. How we think of God makes all the difference in the world. If we love Him and humble ourselves before God, God will bless us richly; but if we fail to give Him our respect and our obedience, we'll find the blessed life disappear. The more we get away from God, the more the blessings of God get away from us. That's why we continually go to the Word of God, the Bible, to find the truth of God and the blessing of God. You won't find it anywhere else. God's way is the right way, the blessed way, and the true way. Thanks for taking time to search God's word with us. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world in his day. God allowed him to have this power in order to punish Israel for her sins. Three times Nebuchadnezzar's army entered Jerusalem, and the third time completely destroyed the city, including the temple. Nebuchadnezzar's home was the great city of Babylon, whose hanging gardens were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Chapter four of the book of Daniel tells how Nebuchadnezzar became proud and said, "Is not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?"

Because he forgot God was the true ruler of the world, God humbled him by making him like a beast of the field for seven periods of time. He ate grass like cattle, and his hair and nails grew long. Afterwards Nebuchadnezzar praised and honored the Most High God. He learned his need for God the hard way.

Now we offer this study free on the need for God. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or you can send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Matthew 5:1 to 6, and then we'll explore what it means to be "poor in spirit."

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to Matthew and contains the words of Jesus Himself as He begins His sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5: 1 through 6. "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.'" That's the words of Jesus our Lord.

Let's pray. "Father, we're thankful that You have given us Your word, to know the things that we can do to be a blessing, to be blessed by You, and to bless other people. And Father, we pray that You will help us always to do Your will. In Jesus name we pray, Amen."

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to hear Jesus speak in person? In 2006 sweet Jackie and I visited the site near the Sea of Galilee where Jesus supposedly delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The crowds gathered to the mountain to hear Him speak. They hung on every word. The

people knew about Jesus' power to heal, His godly teaching and kind ways. Matthew 4:23 to 25 says, "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, paralytics, and he healed them all. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan." They wanted to hear what the Master had to say—I hope you have that kind of hunger for the word of God.

How would you begin your signature sermon? The beginning statement of a sermon is usually what catches people's attention. Jesus made a surprising and captivating comment about being poor in spirit. He said in Matthew 5 and verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He started His sermon talking about people who are "poor in spirit." He started there, because He knew how vital being "poor in spirit" was to our relationship with Him and with the Father. Now if we're not "poor in spirit," we may never have room for God in our hearts. The blessed person not only has room for God; the blessed person cannot live without God!

What does it mean to be blessed? Well, the word "blessed" means more than merely being "happy." Happiness is merely an emotion, often dependent upon outward circumstances. To be blessed here refers to the ultimate well-being of a person who has lasting spiritual joy arising from his relationship with God. The beatitudes are not simple statements, they are exclamations! They are saying these are the kinds of people that God sees as having the ultimate in well-being.

I'm reminded of Habakkuk, a prophet in the Old Testament, who lived at a very difficult time. Habakkuk 3:17 to 19 says, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail, And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places." A relationship with God is a wonderful and fulfilling blessing, because it assures us of an eternal home, even when our world here falls apart.

The Lord Jesus before His death gave some assurance to the apostles. Jesus knew that He would be crucified and they of course sorrowed over that, but the Lord said in John 16:22, "Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you." In Christ, no one can take away our joy or our hope. In Christ we have forgiveness, the right to pray, eternal life, and an inheritance in heaven. And no one can take this away! We may have all kinds of change in this world, but nothing can take all the joys that Christ gives. If you're counting on this world to bless you, remember this world is fickle and temporal, but Christ is eternal.

We don't see things the way that God sees them. The people we think are blessed aren't necessarily the ones God says are blessed. God said in Isaiah 55, verses 8 to 9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

The world values riches, honors, fame, intelligence, appearance, and strength. Now these beatitudes emphasize an inward disposition, that is the attitudes of God, not the outward circumstances, but the inward. God has different values than we do. Jeremiah 10:23 to 24 says: Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight

in these things," declares the LORD. Men shouldn't boast over their human wisdom, power, or wealth. These things don't make a man blessed in God's eyes. If you wish to boast about something, boast that you know and understand the Lord God of heaven, who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth. Those things are truly valuable.

When God calls someone blessed, he is blessed indeed! God never lies but calls things as they truly are! And if anyone else blesses you, the blessing lasts for a time, but God's blessings last for a lifetime and beyond. God's blessings are both physical and spiritual. He meets our physical needs for food, and water, and clothing, and shelter; but He also meets our spiritual needs. Ephesians 1 and verse 3 says that "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places [and it's] in Christ."

In Christ we have every spiritual blessing that we could ever hope for. We have access to the Father, peace, joy, assurance, and love. In Christ we have forgiveness. Romans 4:7 to 8 says, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." Forgiveness through the blood of Christ opens the door to an eternal fellowship with God on earth and in heaven. And that is a truly blessed state, a truly blessed condition!

The Lord said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." There are two words for poor in the New Testament. First, there are the poor who are needy and must work from day to day to earn a living. They have food and clothes enough to survive but very little if anything else. Second, there are the destitute beggars, living in absolute poverty—the person who has nothing at all and is desperate. And it's this second word that is used here in the poor in spirit; and that's what makes this so surprising! The blessed person is the one who "in spirit" has nothing at all. He has nothing and is utterly dependent upon God.

The poor in spirit are not the same as the "poor-spirited," who are dejected or self-pitying creatures who go about in fear or in indifference. No, this is speaking of people who realize their spiritual poverty without God. They realize they have a great need and dependence upon God. Since they know their condition, they are humble and yearn for God's help. They put their whole trust in God. They realize that they owe their existence and their salvation to God. They realize that on their own without God they're lost in sin and have no hope. They know that they cannot earn their salvation.

Ephesians 2:8 to 10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." A person poor in spirit will become wholly dependent upon God— and God means everything to him! We must realize that we need God's help and strength; and only God can give us eternal life. We must put our trust in Him.

A person that's poor in spirit doesn't invent his own religion and doesn't invent his own way to be saved. A person poor in spirit is willing to listen and do what God says and do it God's way. He doesn't try to correct God or change God's laws or God's morals. He doesn't propose his own solutions to the problems of sin or question God's wisdom and justice. He loves God and is willing to follow the Lord and learn from Him.

Because a person "poor in spirit" realizes His need for Jesus to be His Savior, he also regards Jesus as His Lord! He belongs to the Lord and takes what God says seriously. God said in Isaiah 66, verse 2, "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."

Does the word of God make you tremble? It should. God's word will one day determine your eternal destiny. God is the eternal authority, and one day you'll have to give an account for your life to Him.

False religions think they can make their own rules and decide their own morals, but God is the only One who can make moral laws. The Pharisees lived by their own human traditions and judged others for not keeping their rules. They would even judge Jesus for not keeping their traditions! They were really just deceiving themselves. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 15:13 to 14, that "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them [that is the Pharisees] alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Now a proud person doesn't think he needs God's wisdom but imagines God should be honored just to have him around. You remember the Lord Jesus in Luke 18:9 to 14 "told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus [some versions say prayed to himself, and he said]: "God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but he beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.'" God cannot use a man who's so full of himself, because such a man has no room for God!

The Bible also tells of an arrogant church that didn't know that it needed the Lord. The Lord Jesus sent this message to the church in Laodicea in Revelation. 3:15 to 20: "I know your works: that you're neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I've prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love [Jesus says], I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

These things matter because we all stand in need for God. Are you poor in spirit? Do you need God? Do you wish to enter the kingdom of God?

Let's pray together. "Of Father, help us to love You and to praise You, and to give You the glory in our lives, knowing that we have a great need for You every day. And Father we pray that our love and our service will show how much we regard You, and know what You have done for us. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

Blessed is the person who knows he needs God and puts his trust in God, for only by lovingly denying himself can he take up a cross to follow the Lord. Obeying God is a demonstration of our faith and love. James said a man shows his faith by his works. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 9:23 to 24, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Humble yourself before God to enter the kingdom of heaven.

To become a Christian, we must die to ourselves, so we may live for Christ! Trust in the Lord with all your heart, remove the sin in repentance, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ by being immersed in water. Now baptism is when our old man of sin dies and we're born

again to walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3 to 4 says, "Do you not know that all of us who've been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Start a new life in Christ today by trusting in Christ and obeying the Lord.

And get involved in the church. When you're baptized, the Lord saves you and adds you to His church (Acts 2:41 and 47). Now keep your connection with God and with His people by regularly worshipping at church. You need the Lord and His people to help you stay faithful and to reach heaven. You can do nothing more important today than getting right and staying right with the Lord Jesus.

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So focus your heart on God by worshipping at church. Because everybody needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.