

Happy Are The Poor

The first recorded words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount are blessed are those who mourn. This is a strange statement. The surprising word He used was “blessed.” It is a Greek word, *markarios*, which has the sense of being happy or satisfied. So Jesus’ words could be restated as “Happy are the poor in spirit.” I do not know about you, but this is not my normal idea of happiness. The ancients had their concept of happiness and it is not very different from our view.

ANCIENTS WERE HAPPY WHEN . . . Homer said a man is *markarios* when he has wealth, a good wife and children.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matt 5:3 (NASB)

Others in the ancient world said, one was *markarios* when they had power, fame, a life of pleasure, when they could live in joy without suffering, or have constant nonstop satisfaction. Aristotle believed a person who was virtuous was *markarios*. I have discovered that I can have a sense of being happy when I am with people who respect me, when I am busy accomplishing my goals or being entertained. If we are honest with ourselves, we are always pursuing happiness. But Jesus says we are really satisfied when we are “poor in spirit.” What does He mean by that?

THE “POOR IN SPIRIT?” Of the two Greek words for poor, *ptochos* and *penas*, that Jesus could have used, He used *ptochos*. This word, *ptochos*, means more than just being poor. To give you a sense of the rich meaning of the word, look up Luke 16:19-25. What we see is a poor man named Lazarus. He is so poor that he is diseased and longing for crumbs that fall to the floor, not loaves or slices of bread - he is just hoping for crumbs. That is poor. He has absolutely nothing. In fact, the correct meaning of *ptochos* is “beggar.” The second word for poor, the word Jesus did not use, refers to a person who at least has something. In our culture a *penas* person would have a place to live, a home, but *ptochos* implies one who is living in the streets. Where are you living? Do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying that we are really happy when we are beggars in spirit. Real happi-

ness is realizing that you are a spiritual beggar - out in the streets and spiritually having nothing. Do you see yourself as having nothing - spiritually speaking? When we honestly believe we are spiritually poor, we will come begging to God for help - for even His crumbs.

HAPPY IS THE BEGGAR. That afternoon on the hillside, Jesus was talking to a lot of people. Some were spiritual beggars and others were not. We are not spiritual beggars when we speak against God and ask why He did this or did that to me or someone else. We are not beggars when we want honor and want others to serve us. That is not Jesus’ idea of a beggar. A street beggar knows he has nothing and rejoices in whatever he receives. A spiritual street beggar knows he sins and displeases God. A spiritual beggar comes to God to receive a spiritual handout. Did you know that God is giving away free stuff? He offers forgiveness for our sins and He is offering the kingdom of God to you if you believe in Jesus, when you truly believe, you become a disciple or follower of Jesus. This is Jesus idea of happiness. Happiness is dependence on God for everything in your life. A spiritual beggar knows that he/she has nothing to offer God. His handout is free - just receive His forgiveness of your sins and He will take you off the streets and bring you into His mansion (John 14:2), the kingdom of heaven.

DISCIPLE, ARE YOU STILL BEGGING? As His disciples,

we are no longer living in the streets of sin. Our sins are forgiven. Yet, what is interesting is that we often feel as though we have no needs. We forget that we are still dependent on Jesus. If you are a disciple, are you like me and often in self-denial about your neediness? The Bible tells us that we should never be confident about our plans and that we should always say “Lord willing” (James 4:13-17). We are told to not “worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything [we] need, always giving thanks” (Phil. 4:6 (NCV). “Do not worry then saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ . . . your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt. 6:31-32, NIV). “So through Jesus let us always offer

to God our sacrifice of praise” (Heb. 13:15, NCV). “If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves . . .” but if we are constantly admitting our sins, “He will forgive our sins” (1 John 1:8-9, NCV). You see, Jesus offers help and ongoing forgiveness to His needy disciples. But self-sufficient disciples do not ask nor do they constantly admit or confess their sins because they do not sense they have needs. Are you a needy disciple, a beggar in spirit - thankful and yet sorry for your sins. Or, have you forgotten you are a forgiven beggar? Remember only God is perfect and self-sufficient. Everything we have has come from Him. Are you poor in spirit? Then the Kingdom of Heaven is your future home!

Rich Man and Lazarus

JESUS SAID, “There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed and who lived each day in luxury. At his door lay a diseased beggar named Lazarus. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come a lock his open sores. Finally, the beggar died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Larazus in the far distance with Abraham.

THE RICH MAN SHOUTED, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity and send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in these flames.’

BUT ABRAHAM SAID to him, ‘Son remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted and Larazus had nothing . . . (Luke 16:19-25), NLT).’ “

¹Trench, Richard Chenevix, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973, p. 238.

Kingdom of Heaven

JESUS' KINGDOM: Just before Jesus was hung on a cross, the Roman governor, Pilate, who had control over all Judea asked Jesus if he was the King of the Jews (John 18:33). After awhile Jesus responded saying "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I would not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm (John 18:36, NASB)."

A SPIRITUAL KINGDOM: This kingdom that Jesus refers to is called the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God in the gospels. It is a spiritual kingdom (Heb. 1:8). The phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" occurs 16 times in the Gospel of Matthew. The phrase King of God occurs 3 times in Matthew, 4 times in Mark, 16 times in Luke and once in John. What is interesting is that the phrase Kingdom of Heaven occurs only in Matthew.

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN/KINGDOM OF GOD: The phrases do not describe different kingdoms but the same kingdom. The Jewish rabbis used the two terms interchangeably (see the Targum on Micah 4:7). The word heaven was frequently substituted for God to minimize using the sacred name "God."

Kingdom and Kingdom: The "Kingdom of God" is a

reminder of who sits on the throne of this kingdom and the "Kingdom of Heaven" reminds us where the throne is located. According to Matthew, Mark and Luke the kingdom exists now (Matt. 12:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 17:21) and in the future (Luke 13:29). And even though the kingdom is not of this world (John 18:33-37) it is within us (Luke 17:21).

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM: The kingdom population is growing (Matt. 13:31-32) since all have the opportunity to live in the kingdom if they trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Mat. 18:3; John 3:5). For Jesus came saying, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Matt. 4:17). You see it was offered to everyone. Yet, ONLY Jesus' disciples will ultimately enter this spiritual kingdom (Matt. 19:23-24; Mark 10:25-26; Luke 18:24-25).

WHO IS WHO: We will know and see Abraham, Issac and Jacob in the kingdom (Matt. 8:11). There are those who will be great in the kingdom and those there will be least (Matt. 5:19; 18:1-4).

WHAT A KINGDOM! IT'S KING IS GOD. It exists everywhere. It will someday be on earth for a short period of time (Acts 1:3-7; Rev. 20:1-6). Those who are His disciples will live in it forever. But best of all we will live with God.

Kingdom of Heaven = Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are synonyms terms in the New Testament. The Jewish rabbis used them interchangeably. The table below presents identical statements of Jesus with the only change being the replacement of heaven for God. They were used interchangeably.

Passage	Matt	Mark	Luke
"Blessed are the poor in spirit for . . ."	5:3	-	6:20
"Recline with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob . . ."	8:11	-	13:29
"Who is the greatest in the . . ."	11:11	-	7:28
". . . is like a mustard seed . . ."	13:31	4:30-31	13:18-19
". . . is like yeast . . ."	13:33	-	13:21
"Hard for a rich man to enter . . ."	19:23-24	10:25	18:24-25

A thorough search of all relevant gospel references to the Kingdom of God (Mt 6:33; 21:31; 21:43; Mr 1:15; 9:47; 10:14; 15:43; Lu 8:1; 8:10; 9:2; 9:1; 9:60; 9:62; 10:9; 12:3; 13:18; 13:20; 13:28; 13:29; 16:16; 17:21; 18:24; 19:11; 23:51; Joh 3:5) and the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 5:19; 5:20; 8:11; 10:7; 11:12; 13:31; 13:33; 13:44; 13:52; 16:19; 18:1; 18:3; 19:12; 19:14; 23:13; 25:1; 25:14) will reveal that the Jews considered the phrases to refer to the same concept.