



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 5:1–3

Gospel of Matthew

“The Beatitudes I: From Poverty to Royalty”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading this morning very short. I’m only going to read three verses. They are from the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. You’ll recognize them as an introduction to the Beatitudes and an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, as well as the first of the Beatitudes. I would like to spend a little more time in the Beatitudes over the next few weeks in which we study Matthew together, because they are so important, and I think are sometimes misunderstood, these very familiar texts from the Gospel of Matthew. If you have found the passage now, I’m going to read beginning at verse 1.

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was seated, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’”

May God bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the text of the Beatitudes, and the great truths that are so beautifully enshrined within them. Surely, as we ponder then and reflect upon them, there comes over us again anew the sense that they could have only come from God.

And how beautifully appropriate is this first of them: blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. And we pray, O God, that in the experience of everyone in this auditorium and the next, there may be this sense of poverty of spirit in Thy presence.

We rejoice in the gospel of the Lord Jesus, which comes to those who have recognized they have nothing with which to commend themselves to thee. We recognize, Lord, that all sufficiency rests with our great triune God in heaven, Father, Son and Spirit, and that we have no sufficiency within ourselves to recommend ourselves to Thee.

We thank Thee that Thou art not satisfied with human righteousness, but only with the righteousness of God; with that righteousness which Thou dost supply, which Thou dost bestow on those who come and receive it in free grace. And we thank Thee for all of the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing these great truths to us.

Enable us, O God, to live in the light of them, and may they not only penetrate our minds, our hearts, our wills, for the obtaining of eternal salvation, but also be part and parcel of the principles by which our daily lives are lived.

We know from the study of the Holy Scriptures that though we have come to know him and have a righteousness acceptable to Thee, we still need the daily enablement of the Holy Spirit's ministry which comes to us in grace. So teach us, Lord, to be reliant, not only upon the finished Word of the Lord Jesus, but upon which that which flows out of it: the daily ministry of the great High Priest in the Spirit for the perfecting of the saints.

And Father, we pray that this perfecting of the saints may be useful to Thee in the accomplishment of the purposes which Thou art accomplishing, not only here in Dallas, but to the four corners of the earth. We praise Thee for the little part which Thou hast given this assembly in the dissemination of the Word of God. And O Father, if it should please Thee, give us a greater share in the making of Christ known.

Bless the whole church of Jesus Christ, and in these days in which we live, in which there are so many multitudes of people who are wandering about with no shepherd, may they, through the

preaching of the Word and the testimony of the individuals here, come to know him who to know is life eternal.

O God, we pray that Thou would give us the compassion for the lost in measure at least that our great Savior had when he saw the multitudes without shepherds, and was moved to compassion over them.

We thank Thee for this country in which we live. We pray for its leadership and particularly in the light of the decisions that the citizens make this year. We pray for the ministry of other churches, not only outside of Dallas but right here in our own community, and in this part of Dallas, may Thy blessing rest upon each one of them in which the Lord Jesus is lifted up and exalted. We commit to Thee the meetings that have been, that have already taken place already this morning, and for the meetings of the remainder of the day. May Thy blessing rest upon us. And we pray that it may be good for each one of us to have been here to hear the Scriptures.

For Christ's sake. Amen.

[Message] This is the first of our series of studies in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. And the subject is “From Poverty to Royalty.” The world is enthralled with riches, and it knows of what they consist, and who the rich are. In fact, the world is so enthralled with riches that it feels that it can attract almost any individual by the appeal to riches. All one has to do is open up one of the contemporary magazines or papers that we receive in our home, and it's not long before we see a full page ad, how to get rich.

I must confess I read every one of them. [Laughter] They all are very much the same. And after the conclusion of the appeal—which really does not tell us ever anything about exactly what is to be done to obtain riches—they exhort me to act now. They tell me that no salesman will call if I send in my name, and they also tell me that the thrill of receiving money in the mail is one that I will never tire of. [Laughter] And that may be, well, the only forthright, truthful statement in the whole ad [sustained laughter].

The Lord’s answer to the question, who are the spiritually rich, is rather startling: the spiritually empty. His attitude in that sphere seems exactly contrary to the attitude of the world. Modern society does not teach, blessed are the poor in spirit. In fact, the modern ideas are quite different. Its ideas of blessedness are something like this: blessed is the man who is always right; blessed is the man who is satisfied with himself; blessed is the man who is strong; blessed is the man who rules; blessed is the man who is popular; blessed is the man who enjoys life; blessed is the man who is rightly adjusted.

It comes as a shock, and it opens a whole new realm of thought to realize that not one of these men entered our Lord’s mind when he spoke on the subject of blessedness. Blessed are the poor in the spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. And this first of the Beatitudes makes our Lord’s position absolutely clear. The eight others contribute to the crystal clear position of Jesus Christ with reference to the standard of life, expected of those who are to enter the kingdom. What we see really could be called a portrait of the life of Jesus Christ himself, because he is the one great illustration of all of these Beatitudes.

When we approach the Sermon on the Mount, we have to immediately ask ourselves the question: Of whom does the Lord Jesus speak? Now this is a question that is necessary simply because there is a great deal of confusion about the application of this sermon. There are some of us who tell us, for example, that this is for the world. This is the view of theological liberalism. It takes two tacks. Some of these who are liberal in their theology say it is given us for the liberation of society.

The great Russian author Tolstoy, who influenced Gandhi of India, put the viewpoint that the Sermon on the Mount was for the salvation of society. He said, for example, that when the Lord Jesus said we are not to swear, swear not, that we should do away with all oaths in our society, and even those oaths that we’re required to take in law courts. He said that the statement of the Lord, “resist not evil,” was to be carried out literally, and if we really carried it out literally we would do

away with our police forces and then we should have the kind of society that the Lord Jesus was speaking about.

Mr. Tolstoy and Mr. Gandhi did not understand the true nature of humanity. And I must say, I would not like to live in a society in which we did not have oaths and in which we did not have the police force. That is, I would not like to live in a society with you [laughter] if we did not have these things.

Now you understand, of course, that when I say you, I don't mean just you in this auditorium. I mean you as representative of society of which I'm a part. We need the police force, we need government, for the simple reason that we are not perfect individuals. If this is the plan for the salvation of society, it is a woefully inadequate plan.

Others have taken a slightly different tact among theological liberals and have said that the Sermon on the Mount is for the world, but it is not the whole society of the world. It is the plan of salvation for individuals in the world. In other words, if we are to become Christians, then we read the Sermon on the Mount and we use it as the pattern of life by which we may obtain a right standing before God.

To my mind, the greatest illustration of this was not a theologian at all, but one of the past presidents that we have had, a man who is not noted for spirituality. I refer to Harry Truman. Someone asked Harry Truman once—he was a Baptist; I'm sure the Baptists were quite glad when his term of office ended, because he was a constant embarrassment to them [laughter]. His theology did not match the theology of most of the Baptists I know, and certainly did not match their theology in the sense of what they were historically standing for. For Mr. Truman said that “If you were to distill all of my theology into an easy compass, I would suggest that it's contained in the Sermon on the Mount, and salvation consists in living by the Sermon on the Mount.” I do hope that Mr. Truman is with the Lord. But if he is, he's not there because of that philosophy.

For if you search through the Sermon on the Mount, you discover that the terminology of salvation is not in the Sermon on the Mount at all. Not once do we read how we may come to know

Christ through faith in his finished work, for example. Never once do we have the term salvation through faith referred to, or anything close to it. Never do we read of justification by faith, nor do we read of anything that may be compared with it. There are no evidences in this sermon whatsoever that it was intended to be the means of conversion for anyone.

As a matter of fact, if we had read the opening introduction, where his disciples gathered round him, we would have realized immediately that that was highly unlikely in the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, because it was given to those who have already received the message of the Lord Jesus concerning salvation. So it is not for the world.

Then others have said, well, it's for the church. It's the pattern of living for the believers in this age, the age in which we live, the age after the Day of Pentecost, which shall conclude with the coming of the Lord. James Montgomery Boice, who has a relatively recent work on the Sermon on the Mount, has explained that this is the way of blessing for Christians. Now I do not think that satisfies the context of this passage.

For example, it does not take into account the fact that the Lord Jesus, when he gave this sermon, gave it under law. In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law that he might redeem those what were under the law. And as the Apostle Paul expresses it, he was the minister of the circumcision to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. The Lord Jesus lived his life under law. That is why, when he healed the lepers, he told them to go and offer the offerings that Moses had commanded. And consequently, this, if it is a pattern of life, if it is a way of blessing—and I do think it is a way of blessing—it is not for the church of Jesus Christ, for the church of Jesus Christ does not dwell under law. And furthermore, the term “church” as you well know is not found once in the Sermon on the Mount. Now I think that Mr. Boice has made it very plain that this sermon applies to us, and with that I wholeheartedly concur. But then that does not really tell us anything, because we know that the whole of the Bible applies to us.

The Apostle Paul has stated in Romans chapter 15 and verse 4 that the whole of Scriptures are the mind of God for us, but there is a great deal of difference between that which is for us, the

whole of the Bible, and that which is directed to us who are in the church of Jesus Christ. It's the same difference that exists when we go out to our mailbox and bring in our mail. I bring in my mail and take a look at it, and some of it says “Mr. and Mrs. S. Lewis Johnson.” I feel free to open that. And that which is addressed to S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., I open that. But when I see a letter that is addressed “Mrs. S. Lewis Johnson,” or “Mary Sibley McCormick Johnson,” [laughter] I don't open that because that's her mail that's addressed to her.

Now there are parts of the Word of God that are addressed to the church of Jesus Christ, and they are God's mind for us and to us. But there are also parts of the Word of God that are addressed to the nation Israel. They are not my mail directly, but it is for me. I should learn from it. In fact, the Apostle Paul gives us spiritual justification for this, because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine. Incidentally, it's profitable, first of all for doctrine. So all of it is profitable for me, though it may not all be addressed to me.

Now this becomes very evident when we read, for example, that the Lord Jesus told the disciples, the apostles, that they were not to go to the Gentiles, but they were to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now we would not take that command to ourselves and say to our friends, now that you've become a Christian, be sure and do not explain the gospel to any Gentile, but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That was an historical statement of the Lord Jesus for a particular time. This is not for the church.

There are dispensational teachers who say this is for the kingdom. There are laws concerning the coming messianic kingdom, and they are enforced only when the kingdom has come upon the earth. And therefore, we should think of the Sermon on the Mount as something that is to be, is directed to those who will live in the kingdom of the future, after Jesus Christ comes to the earth and establishes his kingdom. This is the way of blessing for the inhabitants of the kingdom.

Now, I respect the brethren who hold all of these interpretations with the exception of the first. They're not brethren. But I genuinely respect all of the brethren who hold these interpretations which I think are erroneous, and I hope they at least will respect my viewpoint, too. And I have some

very good friends who take this interpretation that it is for the kingdom, but I ask you, if this is for the kingdom, why did the Lord Jesus ask the disciples to pray in this manner, in his great Lord's Prayer, so called? Thy kingdom come? Now why would a person standing in the midst of the kingdom pray, Thy kingdom come, if he had his wits about him? [Laughter]

Not only that, we read of persecution. Do we have persecution in the Kingdom of God when the Lord Jesus rules and reigns in person? We have words concerning war. Are we going to lack while the king is here ruling, and we, his citizens, are there in his kingdom? We are warned against false prophets. We are also given instruction concerning divorce. There are many statements in the Sermon on the Mount which make it necessary for me to say that if what is pictured here is the kingdom, then the kingdom is not much different from the society in which we are living now. I do not think that this can be sustained as the interpretation of this passage.

I learned a long time ago, and I know you know this, but I have to keep repeating it because you and I both so often fail to apply this rule in the study of Scripture. If we are to understand Holy Scripture, we are to read it in the light of its context.

Now the Lord Jesus has been baptized. He's been tested. He's been seen to be thoroughly qualified to be the messianic king. He has begun his ministry. He has traveled over the north of Galilee. He has gathered disciples unto himself. He has been teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God, and he has been healing in authentication of his position as king. And having gathered a group of citizens of this coming kingdom to him as his disciples, would it not be natural for us to expect him to now instruct them in the principles of life which are to guide them during the time that they are on the earth before the kingdom comes while the king is here?

Would we not expect, in the light of the salvation of these citizens—in the salvation that is to be and in the light of the salvation of the disciples and the apostles—would we not expect him now to instruct them in the principles of life they are to live now that they belong to him? I think that's imminently reasonable and to be expected. And it seems to me that we can only conclude that the Sermon on the Mount is designed for citizens of the kingdom, who have received the message

“repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand”—not present, but near—and it is for them to guide them during that interim between the time of the king’s ministry and the time when the age changes.

And consequently, then, this Sermon on the Mount was directed to the men who were living in the time of our Lord. It has its application for us. For all Scripture is profitable for us, but it is not written directly to us. As we go through, I will try to point out the things that are unique and concern the citizens of the kingdom, the disciples of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, and of course the application that does pertain to us.

Now let’s look at the introduction to this sermon. “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was seated, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying...” If the disciples are to work well, they must have instruction.

Luke, when he gives the account of the Sermon on the Mount, he gives it right after the choosing of the Twelve. He states the Lord Jesus went up into a mountain, and he prayed all night, and then he chose the Twelve. That will have significance for us later on when we consider the case of Judas. But having prayed all night, he chose the twelve apostles. And then having gathered them together, he gives what one scholar calls the ordination address to the Twelve. Someone has said it is the “manifesto of the king,” but it is addressed particularly to his disciples at that time.

Isn’t it interesting that the Lord Jesus taught sitting down? Why did he do that? Why it was the custom for Rabbis to sit when they taught. They did stand and stroll about, but when they stood and strolled about, their teaching was not official. When they sat down, they taught officially. That’s why we still have expressions in our theological and also our educational institutions, such as our colleges and universities, we speak of professor so-and-so who occupies the chair of philosophy, or the chair of theology or the chair of New Testament Greek exegesis. We are recognizing the fact that this is customary for the man who has been appointed to office, when he teaches as an official teacher, he sits.

I’m not suggesting, incidentally, that that’s the way we should teach. I don’t see any objection to it. In the Roman Catholic Church, it’s recognized by the fact that when the Pope makes his pronouncements that really count—now he talks all the time, of course [laughter]. He comments on all the affairs of life, but if we were good Roman Catholics, we would know we would not have to believe him if he tells us, for example, that there is injustice in Africa, we don’t have to believe that; that is, as official church doctrine. But when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that means, literally, in Latin, “[from] his chair,” then, of course, as good Roman Catholics, we have to believe that he speaks infallibly as the voice of the apostles in the application of truth.

So when we read here that he sat down, he’s taking the position of a Jewish Rabbi, for the Lord was recognized as that by virtue of his functioning. He wasn’t appointed such. They just recognized him as such when they taught. And after all, that’s the best way to be recognized as a teacher, if you can teach.

Dr. Chafer used to tell us many years ago that, when he discussed the question of degrees, he would say that there are some men who are not helped by a degree. He said they already have ability to teach, and it’s manifest to all. And then he said there are some men who are helped by a degree, they not having the ability of the first category, need the addition of the degree, which gives them a little standing before certain people. And then he liked to say there are some people who cannot get along without them.

Now the Lord Jesus was one of the first category. He was recognized as a teacher, and they puzzled. They said, how does this man know letters when he has never been taught by our authenticated teachers? But they did recognize him as a teacher. There are three great discourses in the Gospel of Matthew, and the Sermon on the Mount is the first of them. It has been separated from the other two and called “a discourse of precept.” And the second great discourse is the one in the 13th chapter. I can hardly wait to get to it. It has to do with the parables. And that is its character: parabolic teaching. And finally, the great Olivet Discourse in which we have the prophecies with regard to the future.

The thing which characterizes all of the discourses—and we could include a couple of more in the Gospel of Matthew, for this is the great teaching Gospel—the thing that characterizes all of them is that they are biblical doctrine. From beginning to end, it is biblical doctrine. And Professor Warfield used to say, he didn’t like at all those men who liked to separate doctrine from practice and suggest practice is more important than doctrine. And after he had discussed this for some time, he usually like to add, “As a matter of fact, everything in the Bible from Genesis 1:1 on through to the conclusion is biblical doctrine; one statement after another that is the teaching of God through appointed men.”

So here, he sat down and he began to teach them. It is authoritative teaching, for he is the king, and so we are not surprised when he finished—I appointed you to this text already, in chapter 7 and verse 28 and 29—that when he ended these things, the people were astonished at his doctrine. And they were astonished at his teaching or his doctrine, because he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. When you listened to him, you knew that what he was saying was true.

Now we look at the initial Beatitude. May I begin it with an old statement that is reported to have been made by Sophie Tucker. There are only two people in this auditorium who are old enough to remember this [laughter]. Sophie Tucker was an outstanding stage personality of a couple of generations ago when I was young [more laughter]. And she had had a life of outstanding success, but she had come from abject poverty, and someone asked her, “Mrs. Tucker, do you not think that you have received some outstanding lessons in life from your poverty?” And she replied something like this, “I was once poor. I have been poor, and I have been rich. But believe me, rich is better.”

Now if I could say that, I think she’s right in the material sphere. I have been poor. I have not been rich, yet. But I know there must something better than that, that poverty. Let’s look at what our Lord does in the spiritual sphere.

He doesn’t say, “Blessed are the rich”—now he could have. If he said, blessed are the rich in faith, for the New Testament does contain that expression. But he says, blessed are the poor—

incidentally, he does not say blessed are poor, period. Now Luke says that in his account: blessed are the poor. But it's evident from this account that it is to be understood in the sense that Matthew has put it. Perhaps he added these words in order to make plain what the Lord meant; we don't know, exactly what was said. But the sense of the two is the same: blessed are the poor in spirit. So he is not speaking about material things.

I am sure that we all learn many things by being poor, materially. But that is not what Jesus Christ is speaking about. The first thing that he states is that the consequences of spiritual poverty are blessedness. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heaven.

This word blessed is very interesting. It was used of God-like blessedness in the isles of the blessed. In other words, it was used of the life of the gods. When a man used the adjective *macharios*, it had inevitably about it the associations of the life of the gods. Incidentally, the Island of Cyprus is called Macharia—the “blessed island.” And the bishop of Cyprus is, as you know, Bishop Macharios; Bishop Happy or Bishop Blessed. The reason that Cyprus was called the blessed isle is because the inhabitants of Cyprus, Cypriots, have believed that on that island is everything necessary to sustain life. And so they've called it Macharia.

That's the word our Lord uses. *macharios* are the poor in spirit, or *machariori*, are the poor in spirit. So the reference then is to the blessedness of complete satisfaction. It has nothing to do with the idea of happiness. Sometimes we think that the true value in life is happiness. Why the English word should tell us that is not true. The English word, “happiness” comes from an old English word hap, which means “chance.” And it's found in “perhaps.” And, his hap were to light upon—that's King James English. But that's the meaning of it. It's a word that refers to chance.

Happiness is something that depends upon our circumstances, and so if we receive a windfall financially, we're happy. But when it goes, so goes our happiness. Our Lord is speaking about something far deeper than the happiness that depends upon circumstances. He is saying blessed—that is, the man who is poor in spirit is the man who has the kind of life that characterizes the gods, or in the Christian sense, the life that characterizes the one who has a relationship with the

trine God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That’s the consequences of spiritual poverty. The man who is poor in spirit is blessed.

Who are these people? The monied, the privileged? No. Experience doesn’t support that. One of our Texas millionaires once said, “I thought that money would satisfy all of my needs, but I was terribly disillusioned.” Incidentally, it’s no reference to me. Voltaire, who charmed so many people with his attacks on the faith, when it finally came down to the real test of life, and he was on his death bed, he cried out to doctor, “I am abandoned by God and man! I’ll give you half of what I have if you can give me six months more life.”

Poor in spirit. There are two words in Greek for poverty or poor. There is one word, *penes*, which means a person has nothing superfluous. When your bank account reaches zero, but you’re not in debt, then you are *penes*. My wife reaches that with her bank account every month. [Laughter] She has the record for diminishing her bank account to \$2.41, for the whole State of Texas I’m sure. And if not the record for quickness, then at least the record for consecutive months of doing this. *Penes* is to have nothing superfluous but to have nothing in addition.

There is another word in Greek which means abject poverty: *tokos*. That adjective means that we have nothing at all. That’s the word for abject poverty. That’s the word for the person who does not have anything but who has nothing but needs. That’s the word that’s used here. Blessed are the poor in spirit—blessed are those who are abjectly poor in spirit, who have absolutely nothing at all in spirit, who have come to realize that, doctrinally, they are deprived. They are spiritually unable to save themselves, that they do not have anything with which they commend themselves to God. Such men are fit for the reception of justification by faith.

For it’s only when a person comes to this place in his life that he senses his great need of the Lord Jesus. Luther said, “We are all beggars,” and he was scriptural in that statement.

There was a beautiful parable told by the Lord Jesus in the 18th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. It’s the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the publican. You’ll remember that two of them went to the Temple, and the publican was beating upon his breast and saying, “God be

merciful to me, a sinner!” while the Pharisee was praying with himself, the Lord Jesus says, “O God, I thank Thee that I am not like this publican over here;” unjust, extortionist and various other types of things. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess. I thank Thee that I am not like the publican.

Now we don’t pray that in the 20th century. Those of us who are associated with the general Protestant testimony in the Western world, we pray, O God, I thank Thee that I am not like this Pharisee. And in our pride we express ourselves in that way. Mr. Spurgeon liked to say that in the days in which the faith was being abandoned in England, that that publican who cried out, God be merciful to me, a sinner, had the soundest theology of any Englishman. Blessed are the poor in spirit, and he was poor—abjectly poverty-stricken in spirit.

The philosophers have sought to understand the secret of happiness. There are 80 different ways in which the philosophers have sought to introduce us to happiness, and probably a few have been invented in the last decade or so since men stopped counting.

It’s very striking that Mr. Gladstone was one of the first to point this out, that in the Greek language, and also in the Latin language, there was no form for true humility. Those languages, with the richness of vocabulary, had no word that could adequately describe true humility. All of the words that are related to humility in both Greek and Latin were words that have about them a sense of meanness or contempt. The humble was the contemptible man. And it was not until the Lord Jesus came, or the biblical revelation came with the idea, blessed are the poor in spirit, that we have true humility set forth in the light of the presence of God.

Diogenes was a friend of Plato, and there is an old story that the ancients used to laugh over quite a bit. Diogenes came to see Plato, and he walked in—Plato has some very luxurious rugs upon his floors—and he came and stamped upon them and said, “Thus I stamp upon the pride of Plato.” And Plato was not only a better philosopher and a better intellectual than Diogenes, but he also had a better disposition. He said nothing about it until he returned his visit sometime later. And he

walked into Diogenes’ place which was ostentatious in its poverty, and he looked and he said, “Why, I can see the pride of Diogenes peeping out from the holes in his rug.” [Laughter]

It’s very possible, you know, for us to be proud of our humility. Blessedness of the poor in the spirit is the blessedness of the man who recognizes nothing in himself. A fit subject for justification by faith. The cause of the blessedness is described as the kingdom of the heavens shall be theirs.

That kingdom is the kingdom they have heard the message about. They have heard the Lord Jesus say, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” They have responded in repentance, and they have come to faith in the Son of God and because of their recognition of their abject poverty, spiritually, the disciples have entered the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus, and they are blessed for having become citizens of that kingdom that is to come in the future.

May I close with just a comment or two. This Beatitude is, in a sense, a commentary on the whole Bible. All of the saints of the Word of God, from the beginning in the book of Genesis, from Adam on through Abraham and Moses and David and the great prophets, on into the New Testament times with John the Baptist, who in the presence of the Lord Jesus said, “I shouldn’t be baptizing you, you should be baptizing me;” on into the time of the apostles. And finally, even to the end of the testimony of the apostles that we have in the New Testament, and down through the years with men such as Augustine and Luther and Calvin, into the present time, this great truth has its application to all of us: blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of the heavens is theirs.

Mr. Spurgeon has said in one of his comments on this text, “He that is poor in spirit is a Christ-admirer, as an old Puritan has said. He has high thoughts of Jesus Christ. He sets a high value and appreciation on Christ. He hides himself on Christ’s wounds. He bathes himself in his blood. He wraps himself in his robe. He sees a spiritual dearth and famine at home, but he looks out to Christ and cries, ‘Lord, show me Thyself!’ and it sufficeth.”

For you see, the man who is truly poor in spirit, recognizing that he has nothing within himself that is acceptable to God, is read to look off to the cross of Christ, where God has, in this

most beautiful way signified to us: here are the riches that are available for all who will turn from themselves to him who has offered the once and for all sacrifice for the sins of sinners.

The answer to the question, what is the secret of happiness—and there is an answer to the question—is found right here. And it involves the conviction of sin, first of all. Then, the conviction that the Lord Jesus has offered a sacrifice in his blood that is availed for all who come to him. And that through this there comes the gift of new life in Christ. That’s the secret of happiness.

But it’s more than happiness. It’s not something that depends upon circumstances. It satisfies us in all the circumstances of life, even the tragic circumstances of life. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for in the midst of the great trials of life, they shall find true blessedness and satisfaction.

Thomas Hooker was a Puritan preacher and theologian, considered by some to be the father of constitutional liberty in this country. In his deathbed, a number of the members of his church gathered round him in order to console him. And as he was on his deathbed some of them spoke out and said, suggested to him that because he had lived such a pious life, a life of such great accomplishment, that it was not the time for him to go into the presence of the Lord and claim his reward. And Mr. Hooker, who knew his theology said, “I go to claim mercy.” That’s true poverty of spirit, and true poverty of spirit is that which characterizes true royalty.

If you are here today, and you have never yet believed in the Lord Jesus, you will never believe in him until the Lord Jesus has come to your heart in a convincing way and has shown you that you are poverty-stricken spiritually, that you have nothing with which to commend yourself to God. Your church membership, your baptism, your sitting at the Lord’s table, your attendance in meetings such as this, your education, your culture—all of the things that we are inclined to trust in cannot avail in the presence of a holy God.

Only one thing can: the finished work of the Lord Jesus. May God help us to see how poor we are, and may he lead us to look outside of ourselves to one great objective fact of divine revelation, the center of all of the Bible: the suffering Savior who cried, “My God, my God, why hast

“The Beatitudes I: From Poverty to Royalty” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Thou forsaken me?!” as he bore our judgment, and then cried, “It is finished!” May God the Holy Spirit bring you to trust in him is my prayer. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be and abide with all who know him in sincerity.

And again, O Father, if there are some here who think of themselves as rich in spirit but poor in faith, by the Holy Spirit, so bring conviction that there may come conversion to our Lord Jesus Christ. Go with us as we part.

For Christ’s sake. Amen.