

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
Sarasota, Florida

**SAKLC CONVERSATIONS – THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2016**

*A CONTINUING STUDY OF THE BEATITUDES*

**RESPONSIVE OPENING PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

Leader: Blessed Jesus, you offered us all your blessings when you announced  
Blessed are the poor in spirit

**People: but we have been rich in pride.**

Leader: Blessed are those who mourn

**People: but we have not known much sorrow for our sin.**

Leader: Blessed are the meek

**People: but we are a stiff-necked people.**

Leader: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

**People: but we are filled to the full with other things.**

Leader: Blessed are the merciful”

**People: but we are harsh and impatient.**

Leader: Blessed are the pure in heart

**People: but we have impure hearts.**

Leader: Blessed are the peacemakers

**People: but we have not sought reconciliation.**

Leader: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness

**People: but our lives do not challenge the world.**

Leader: Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all  
kinds of evil against you because of me

**People: but we have hardly made it known that we are yours.**

Leader: Your Law is holy and your benedictions are perfect, but they are both too  
great for us. You alone are blessed.

**People: We plead with you to forgive our sins and give us the blessing of your  
righteousness. AMEN**

**MUTUAL SHARING OF THE PEACE OF THE LORD**

## A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF YOUR WEALTH

Circle a single number in answer to each of the following questions:  
(#1 represents the **low** end and #10 the **high** end)

A) In terms of relative wealth, where do you rank in comparison with your friends and colleagues?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

B) In terms of relative wealth, where do you rank in comparison with your community?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

C) In terms of relative wealth, where do you rank in comparison with the population of the U.S.A.?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

D) In terms of relative wealth, where do you rank in comparison with the population of the world?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

## THE BLESSEDNESS OF BEING POOR IN SPIRIT

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:3)

A) **General Overview** - Some scholars take the position that this Beatitude has pre-Christian precedents:

- 1) **Socrates'** had a notion of *enkrateia*, which explained that the ancient Greek philosopher was one who had no interest in wealth.
- 2) This idea was subsequently adopted by the **Cynics**, who rejected wealth and saw poverty as the only route to freedom. While small in number, this group had a wide influence; some of their ideas were embraced by some Jewish communities (*Essenes*) at the time of Jesus.

- 3) The phrase "**poor in spirit**" has been found recorded in studies of the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, and seems to have been an important notion of the **Qumran community**.
- 4) The word "**poor**" translates more closely to beggar, than to one merely of few possessions. As used in Matthew 5:3, '**poor**' (πτωχός) means '**reduced to being a beggar**'.
- 5) Elsewhere in the New Testament, the term has reference to those who require the charity of others in order to survive. (see: Matt 11:5 "*the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and **the poor have good news brought to them.***")
- 6) Historically there have been three main interpretations of what is meant by "**the poor**" in this verse:
  - a) It can refer to the disadvantaged, those forced to the fringe of society.
  - b) It can refer to those who willingly surrender their belongings as a sign of piety.
  - c) It can refer to hardship in general, and not simply economic disadvantage.
- 7) Albert Schweitzer (physician, missionary, musician, biblical scholar), many years ago, asserted that being poor is not itself a ticket into heaven, but rather only those who understand the nature of real poverty are blessed. To this group blessing is promised without qualification. He also noted that nowhere in this section is there any mention of a need or obligation to help the poor.
- 8) Scholars agree that "**poor in spirit**" does not mean lacking in spirit, be it courage, the Holy Spirit, or religious awareness. Rather it is that poverty is not only a physical condition, but also a spiritual one.

**B) According to Jesus, true happiness is related to some sort of poverty:**

- 1) Jesus is **not** talking about some sort of **material poverty**....yet some Christian religious groups are fond of this interpretation!
  - Material poverty does not guarantee heaven...
  - If Jesus was teaching the innate blessedness of material poverty, then the overriding task of Christians would be to help make everyone, including themselves, penniless! ....
  - The Apostle Paul knew both poverty and riches: **Philippians 4:11-13** (NRSV)  
*"<sup>11</sup> **Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be***

*content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*

2) Being poor in spirit does not mean being “**poor-spirited**”

- Poor-spirited people lack drive; have no enthusiasm for life
- Poor-spirited people have no real motivation to accomplish anything!

3) **Jesus’ is concerned with poverty of spirit** – a frame of mind

- Jesus’ Beatitudes were given in a very definite order...
- They picture a person turning to God.
- This first Beatitude begins with the emptying of one’s self; the rest speak of a filling!

### **C) What Attitude Should We Have About Ourselves?**

1) It is a fact that the world (*past & present*) places a great emphasis on self-reliance, self-confidence:

- Humble politicians are rarely elected because most people would say that they “lack sufficient personality” (CAN YOU IDENTIFY ANY TRULY HUMBLE CANDIDATES IN THE UPCOMING USA PRESIDENTIAL RACE?)
- Humble persons in the business world are often “*passed over*” for managerial promotions because they lack the personality and “*the drive*” necessary for our fast-paced world of commerce.
- *Contrary to the above assertions:* The Apostle Paul placed no confidence in himself; he made Christ the focus of his life and work. See: 2 Cor. 4:5 - ***For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.***
- Paul might not be readily accepted today as a pastoral candidate by many modern churches! Imagine being a member of the “*Parish Call Committee*” and receiving the following message: “***When I (come) to you, brothers and sisters, I (will) not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words***

*or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> For I (have) decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I (will come) to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> My speech and my proclamation (will) not (be) with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)*

2) Jesus taught that being poor in spirit is not a suppression of your own personality

- You don't need to be ashamed of your personal abilities, the money you've earned, the car you drive, the school you attended, or the house in which you live.
- While we are not to flaunt our wealth and material possession, there is nothing wrong with being rich!

**FOR PERSONAL THOUGHT and GROUP DISCUSSION:**

1. What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase "*poor in spirit*"?
2. Can you identify examples of the "*spiritual poverty*" we all experience?
3. What might be some connections or disconnects between spiritual poverty and physical poverty?
4. How might monetary wealth be hazardous to our spiritual health?
5. How might our well-developed spirituality jeopardize our relationship with God?

D) Great characters of the O. T. who are examples of being poor in spirit:

- 1) Gideon: Judges 6:15 "*He responded, "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."*
- 2) Moses: Exodus 4:10 "*But Moses said to the LORD, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.'*"

- 3) **Solomon**: 1 Kings 3:5-9 *“At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.”<sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today.<sup>7</sup> And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.<sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted.<sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”*

E) **Great N. T. examples of being poor in spirit:**

1) **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector** (Luke 18:9-14)

- **Pharisee** (*was deluded*) he left the Temple, dreaming that he had earned his eternal salvation; but:
  - He totally forgot the tithes he prided himself on giving were merely tithes on what God had already blessed him with...
  - He seems to think that God was lucky to have him on His side!
  - Here is a man who was proud in spirit, yet had no sense of his utter worthlessness before God.
- **Tax Collector** (*humble; contrite; heartbroken*)
  - His only hope was to throw himself on the mercy of God
  - The Pharisee thought he needed nothing and that is what he received; Tax Collector saw his need for mercy and received it!

2) **The Apostle Peter** (an aggressive, assertive, confident man) see Matt. 26:33-35 *“Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”<sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.”*

- However, when he saw Jesus, he cried out, *“Depart from me; for I am a sinful man.”* (Luke 5:8)

- He never ceased to be bold and assertive; but, he was always aware of his nothingness before God. see 1 Peter 1:18-19 ***“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold,<sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.”***

**3) The Apostle Paul** (a man of power & education) see Phil. 3:3-6 ***“For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God<sup>[a]</sup> and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh—<sup>4</sup> even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more:<sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;<sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.***

- He could have taken pride in his pedigree, his education under Gamaliel, or his Roman citizenship.
- However, after seeing the Lord, all that he once valued became “loss for Christ” and counted as “rubbish.” See Phil. 3:7-8 ***“Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.<sup>8</sup> More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”***
- He considered himself to be the “chief of sinners” see 1 Tim. 1:15 ***“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost.”***

#### **F) So, what is meant by being “Poor in Spirit?”**

1) Complete absence of pride and self-reliance

- Jer. 10:23 – ***“I know, O LORD, that the way of human beings is not in their control, that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.”***
- 1 Cor. 3:18 – ***“Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise.”***

a) A consciousness of the fact that we are nothing before God. see Psalm 8:3-4 –

***“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals<sup>[a]</sup> that you care for them?”***

- b) We will not rely on our ancestry, our financial resources and reserves, nor our education, for these things are meaningless before God.
  - c) Consider this quote from the Expositor’s Bible Commentary: *“To be poor in spirit is not to lack courage, but to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It confesses one’s unworthiness before God and utter dependence on him.”*
- 2) There must be an emptying of our lives before there can be a divine filling – we must become poor in spirit before we can become rich in God’s blessings:
- a) We must have a recognition of our unworthiness before God before we can truly accept His Salvation.
  - b) In the absence of human pride and self-assurance, we bow before our God and humbly submit to God’s Will.

#### **G) Ours is The Kingdom of Heaven**

- 1) The Kingdom of Heaven is the consequence of being poor in spirit; it is not a reward for it; it is not something that we earn.
- 2) The Poor in Spirit are those who feel a deep sense of spiritual destitution and understand their nothingness before God. That kingdom is theirs because they seek it, and therefore find and abide in it. There must be an emptiness before there can be a fullness.
- 3) It is a blessed thing to belong to that invisible kingdom which is already in our world; ever-expanding; composed of all people who name Jesus, as Lord.

#### **H) Final Conclusions:**

- 1) Humility really is the first step toward entering the Kingdom; until we submit our wills to the Will of God we cannot enter it.
  - a) We come to Christ hopeless and helpless; naked and vile. See Eph. 2:12 ***“remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”***
  - b) In Jesus’ day it was not the Pharisees who entered the kingdom, who thought they were rich, so rich in merit that they thanked God for their attainments; nor the

Zealots who dreamed of establishing the kingdom by the sword and shedding of blood; but, the publicans and prostitutes, the rejects of society, who knew they were so poor they could offer nothing and achieve nothing. All they could do was to cry to God for mercy; God heard their cry!

- c) Remember the hymn: "Rock of Ages." In one verse we sing "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling!"
  - d) We become humble when we take our eyes off ourselves and fix them on the cross of Christ – see Gal 2:20 "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,<sup>[a]</sup> who loved me and gave himself for me.
  - e) Only then can we declare, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21)
- 2) Becoming poor in spirit allows God to turn us into His own special people. (1 Peter 2:9-10) ***"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."***
- 3) We come to God empty and helpless, but with a contrite heart and humble spirit we are then allowed to dwell with Him. (Isa. 57:15; 66:2)
- "For thus says the high and lofty one  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the humble,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite."  
"All these things my hand has made,  
and so all these things are mine,  
says the LORD.  
But this is the one to whom I will look,  
to the humble and contrite in spirit,  
who trembles at my word."***
- 4) The Kingdom of God/Heaven can be yours when you realize our own utter helplessness without God and learn to trust and obey!

**FINAL QUESTIONS for PERSONAL THOUGHT and/or GROUP DISCUSSION:**

- 1. How would you describe the “Kingdom of Heaven”?**
- 2. In what sense is the “Kingdom” a future reality?**
- 3. In what sense is the “Kingdom” a present reality?**
- 4. Why do you think the “poor in spirit” get to inherit the “Kingdom of Heaven”?**

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