

January 31

Scriptures: Read Matthew 5

Key Verse: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”(Matthew 5:3)

Overview

This beatitude not only sets the tone for Jesus’ “sermon on the mount”, but it’s also the bedrock of Jesus’ ministry. He came to bring men and women into the kingdom. It wasn’t just a case of coming and announcing the kingdom; the hearers of that announcement had to willingly embrace the kingdom. It wasn’t just a case of coming and announcing the kingdom. There were requirements, repentances, commitments and obedience which were part and parcel of the meaning of embracing the kingdom. So, when Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” He’s telling us that spiritual poverty is the general qualification for entry into the kingdom of heaven.

I think you and I might put it differently. We might say, “Blessed are the successful, the victorious, the pious, the religious and the spiritual giants, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” We’d say this because all of us are guilty, to a greater or lesser degree, of the sin of pride. Pride is the antithesis of what Jesus is talking about here. Proud people tend to compare themselves with others and put down either the other person, or themselves. Putting yourself down, by the way, is not virtuous. Sometimes an inferiority complex is an inverted form of pride. We compare ourselves with others positively or negatively and then we compete with others. This can happen in fairly subtle ways. We attempt to rise above the other guy – to put him down if we can’t rise above him – but in some way, to push ourselves ahead.

We also have this longing for unrestrained independence. We don’t want to be dependent on anyone, God included. We try as much as possible to be self-sufficient. Well, poverty of spirit is antithetical to pride. To admit that one is poor in spirit is a humiliating and painful experience. We’re not talking here about putting oneself down, rather we’re talking about seeing oneself in the light of the kingdom of heaven totally undeserving, totally incapable of entry because our garments are so unworthy. Jesus looks on those who acknowledge their poverty of spirit and says, “You are the ones I am looking for. I didn’t come to call the healthy, I came to call the sick.”

Perhaps the most important lesson of all for us to learn is that, even though we’re made for the kingdom, the kingdom will never be ours until the day we honestly confess to God our unworthiness.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for your boundless grace which gives us entrance into Your kingdom, though we are undeserving and unworthy servants.