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The Beatitudes

BY THE LATE: C. D. COLE

The sermon on the mount is one of the longest sermons recorded in the Scriptures. It takes in the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of Matthew. When our Lord began, there were only His disciples present; when He had finished it, the multitudes were astonished at His teaching. The crowd increased as He taught. The beatitudes make up the first section of the sermon. There are 8 of these beatitudes, and they tell us who are the "blessed" people of this world. They are in direct contrast with the world's judgment or opinion of who are the blessed people. In these beatitudes, our Lord makes known wherein true blessedness consists. He describes those who are truly blessed or fortunate. The word "blessed" does not mean a happy feeling, but a happy condition. A man may have a happy feeling, and yet, not be in a happy condition. On the other hand, one may feel sorrowful and be in a happy condition. The second beatitude pronounces a blessing upon mourners, but mourning is not a happy feeling.

The sermon on the mount is not telling people how to be saved, but describing those who belong to the kingdom of heaven—describing people who are already saved. There is no gospel in the sermon on the mount. How could there be when there is nothing at all about the death and resurrection of Christ? Can there be any saving Gospel without Christ and Him crucified?

In the beatitudes we have spiritual photography. Photography is an entrancing hobby with a lot of people, and many follow it for a

livelihood. In looking through Kodak albums you will see the same person in many postures, and from different angles or positions. Now, the beatitudes is a sort of moral album, giving word pictures of the saint in many postures and from various angles. The first beatitude is a portrait of the saved man as he is in his own eyes. He is poor in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now, what does it mean to be poor in spirit? The man who is poor in spirit belongs to the kingdom of heaven. To be poor in spirit is not the same as spiritual poverty. There is no blessedness in spiritual poverty. It is not so much what we are as to what we think we are. To be poor in spirit means to be consciously poor in personal worthiness. There is no blessedness in being poor in personal worthiness, but there is a blessedness in being conscious of it. Many are poor in personal worthiness, who do not know it—they think well of themselves—they are self-righteous and self-important. It is one thing to be poor in personal righteousness and another thing to realize. To be poor in spirit is the realization that in ourselves, we are nothing, and have nothing, and can do nothing, and have need of all things. To be poor in spirit is an attitude towards self. True saints are more sensitive to sin than are the lost. It does not take much sin to fill the saved man; yea, a very little sin makes him sick at heart and causes him, like Job, to abhor himself. To be poor in spirit is the very antithesis of that proud, haughty,

self-righteous disposition manifested by the world in general, and by one Simon Magus in particular, who furnished the information that he, himself, was some great one. The spirit of those in the kingdom was strikingly exemplified by Isaiah who cried out, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips;" and by Paul who exclaimed, "When I would do good, evil is present with me."

You have heard it said of certain boastful fellows that if they could be bought for what they are actually worth, and then sold for what they think they are worth, there would be an immense profit. Now the saint—the man who is in the kingdom of God—is not selling himself for more than he is worth. During the late war, on the wall of a tailor shop, catering exclusively to men of our armed forces, was a sign which read: "Hats altered to fit any promotion." This was a smart sign slyly aimed at those who do not grow with an important position, but merely swell-aimed at those who let a little success go to their heads.

Many new words have come to us out of this late war. We have read and heard much about the black market. Some men are so avaricious, so crazy for money, that they take advantage of every opportunity afforded by the war and other catastrophes to make money. And they have no scruples about how they make it. Now, this thing of getting things unlawfully and selling above ceiling prices is popularly called a "black market". This obnoxious evil has poisoned our commercial life. It permeates almost every kind of business, and has given rise to hitherto unheard of business. All through the scarcity of things, it has been possible to buy most anything on the black market. We read of a black market in babies. We are told there are baby brokers who get unfortunate mothers to sign away their rights to their prospective babies, even before they enter the hospital, and then these brokers sell these infants to eager foster parents for huge sums. We hear of black market in Bibles in Japan, where a Bible—a copy of the Word of God—sells for six or seven times its legitimate price.

Now, there are people who are self-righteous. Like the Pharisees of old, they trust in themselves, that they are righteous and despise others. They blow the trumpet of self-praise and hope to hear others sing of their praises. They sell themselves for more than they are worth. But those in the kingdom of heaven are not running any black market. They are poor in spirit. In their conversion, their self-righteousness was slain, and they became mean in their own eyes. They lost hope in self and found the good hope that is in Christ. They became poor in their own eyes and became rich in Christ. They became nothing

and Christ became everything. They gave self a vote of "no confidence" and gave Christ a vote of "full confidence". They sing in all sincerity; "I am only a sinner and nothing at all; Christ is my all and in all."

To be poor in spirit is not the same as an inferiority complex. It is not what we are in comparison with others, but what we are in comparison with Christ—what we are in comparison with what we ought to be. Spurgeon says: "In the kingdom of heaven, the question is not, Are you a peer, but are you poor in spirit? It is those who are of no account in their own eyes who are of the blood royal of the universe."

No man possesses this spirit naturally, nor is it self-acquired. It belongs to those who have been born into the kingdom of God. It is not a natural trait of some men, but an instinct of the new man in Christ. We have heard it said that certain people are born musicians or born mathematicians, etc. This means that they have certain inherent qualities which enables them to develop in these arts.

Now, in regeneration or birth from above, we get a new pair of eyes. Our vision by nature is distorted when it comes to spiritual things. When looking at self, the natural man sees a lot of good, but when looking at his neighbor, he sees much that is bad. When looking at self, he feels proud; when looking at others, he thinks how bad they are. I looked at my brother with the microscope of criticism and said, "How coarse my brother is." I looked at him through the telescope of scorn and remarked, "How small my brother is." Then, I looked in the mirror of truth and exclaimed, "How much like me my brother is."

A well-balanced ministry will promote humility as well as hope; it will turn our eyes upon our failures, as well as upon Christ and His finished work. It will cure the Laodicean spirit which says, "We have need of nothing." It will cause poor prodigals in the far country to come to themselves and be in want and say, "We will arise and go to our father." A ministry that only makes people feel good will never promote a spirit of humility. A ministry that fills people with high spirits will never make them poor in spirit. We are not saying that the Christian is without joy. But his joy is not in himself. He rejoices in the Lord and has no confidence in himself.

The believer feels happy when he is occupied with Christ and His saving grace. He feels poor in spirit when he is occupied with himself—when he faces up to his own sinful condition.

A well-balanced ministry will promote humility as well as happiness. It will turn the eyes of the believer upon himself and his failures, as well as upon Christ and His finished work. We need to be occupied with self just

enough to keep us humble, and we must be occupied with Christ to make us happy.

On the tombstone of William Carey at Serampore are the words he instructed to be engraved on it. There is his name with no honors or degrees, the dates 1761-1834, and then a quotation from a hymn by Isaac Watts:

A wretched, poor and helpless worm
On thy kind arms I fall.

That is strange language to most of us moderns, but it is like the language of great saints of God, both in and out of the Bible.




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