



Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – August 29, 2023

The Lord be with you.

Do you ever feel like, well, maybe like you're a disappointment to God? I mean, try as you may you like you just can't get it together. You believe and you doubt...You hope and you get discouraged...You feel bad about feeling good...you feel guilty about not feeling guilty...You re-dedicate your life and you're still struggling. I mean, did you ever think that maybe that just maybe you would arrive spiritually and you haven't?

Well, if you've ever felt any of this I have good news for you. Good news straight from Jesus as it comes from Jesus' first words in his first recorded sermon in the Gospel of Matthew. It's what we call the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is setting forth the principles of kingdom life.

I begin reading in Matthew Chapter 5, verse 1, "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. And after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. Then Jesus began to speak and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Now, you might recognize this as the first of Jesus, the attitudes, his pronouncement of people who are truly blessed. And true to form Jesus, here he is upsetting the apple cart, as Jesus is turning right side up an upside down world, and it might sound strange to our ears that Jesus begins his description of the blessed life as, Blessed are the poor in spirit. The blessed life hardly sounds like the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

I wanna point out here that there are two Greek words in the New Testament, translated poor. One is a word that describes a person as poor with nothing to spare, this person has got zero in the bank, zero in savings, this person is poor but has not gone into debt, has not gone into bankruptcy. That's the first Greek word, translated poor. Now, the second Greek word in the word Jesus uses here for poor in spirit, this word describes a far greater poverty. This word describes someone who is seriously destitute and has run up a huge debt, a debt so big that there is no way to crawl out from under. Okay, that's the word here that Jesus uses when He says, Blessed are the poor, the bankrupt, the destitute in spirit. This is not being poor as far as money is concerned, this is poverty of spirit, and Jesus pronounces as blessed those who know, those who realize, those who have come to terms with the fact that we are spiritually destitute before God, that we are spiritually deficient beggars on the street. And for you and me to be blessed as poor in spirit means that we own our spiritual poverty, we know, we know that we have nothing to commend ourselves to God, nothing to ever earn, or when God's favor.



water from rock

And you know, this reminds me of the old hymn. I learned as a boy, Rock of Ages where it says, "Nothing in my hand I bring simply to Thy cross I cling." So Jesus says that this is a blessed state in life, this is a happy place to realize that I am one beggar getting to tell other beggars where I found bread. For us to be poor in spirit is to come to that deep subtle peace, an acceptance that yes, we are flawed. We do fall short and we can't get it together, and Jesus blesses us.

Please know Jesus is not saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, because they are poor in the spirit. No, it's Jesus. Who makes spiritual beggars blessed. It is Jesus who blesses us with unconditional love and grace for sinners. I like how Jesus begins the beatitudes, this description of the blessed life. This is in a sense, a summary of the entire Bible, and this is where the spiritual life begins. It begins with the realization of our spiritual poverty, and then we're okay with that in getting to live day-by day relying on God's unconditional love and grace. And that opens up for us the riches of God's kingdom.

I like how Brennan Manning puts a quote, "my deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ, and I have done nothing to earn or deserve it." So why not go ahead and decide to let God love you just as you are. And expect God to bless you just as you are, and don't let Satan discourage you with you, because Blessed are the poor in spirit. You and I, well, we're just like those people Jesus loved to hang out with the tax gatherers and sinners. And because it is God's will to bless. I speak those words of blessing from the Book of Numbers, Chapter Six, The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler on the pilgrim way. Thanks for listening, until next time.