

## Devotional Matthew 5:1-3: Poor in Spirit September 19, 2021

### Monday

Read Matthew 5:1-3

How are the poor in spirit blessed?

The blessing that Jesus gives to the poor in spirit who have open hands is his very presence. Jesus is the kingdom of God in the flesh present in the Holy Spirit, whose work was finished on the cross, and celebrated in its fullness in his resurrection. The spiritually destitute have hope because on the cross Jesus made the sufferings of the world his own and in his resurrection is victorious over the powers of sin, death, despair. The blessing is that Jesus walks besides the poor in spirit to give them hope because God's plan is to deliver them from their poverty and welcome them into the fullness of the kingdom of heaven.

*Will you believe in the one whose open hands were nailed to the cross so that in your spiritual poverty you could receive the riches of the Kingdom of God?*

### Tuesday

Read Philippians 2:1-11

It can be difficult to think of Jesus as spiritually poor, because, well, how can the Son of God be spiritually poor of all things? Yet, I think the Apostle Paul explains quite concisely in this passage, especially verses 6-8, but with words that we know but don't necessarily use in the same way all the time. So, let's take a look at these verses to get their full meaning.

When we might use a phrase like "form of God" we would usually mean or understand that this person or thing is *like* God but not actually God, he/she/it is merely in the form of God. However, Paul uses "form" to mean the true and exact nature of God. This means that having the "form of God" is basically the same as having

equality with God. This equality with God is contrasted with Jesus taking the form of a servant (in v. 7). Just as Jesus is truly God, he is truly a servant. The astonishing thing is, Paul says, that Jesus did not imagine having equality with God (which he already had) should lead him to hold onto all his privileges at all costs – it wasn't something to be held (grasped) for his own benefit, but instead he had a mindset to serve and save fallen humanity. This, then, could be Jesus' first step into becoming poor in spirit for our sakes.

On the cross, Jesus becomes the fullness of personal and spiritual poverty. He takes his place amongst the lowest of the low, the neediest of the needy, and is humiliated and shamed. How far Jesus fell; from the right hand of God the Father to naked and dying on the side of the road, rejected and an object of public shame and ridicule. In his crucifixion, Jesus becomes one who has nothing, could do nothing, is nothing, and has need of all things. He enters into nothingness and total and utter poverty such that he cries from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" On the cross, the one who is the Son of God is abandoned and totally alone – his impoverishment is complete and no one will ever experience being poor in spirit like Jesus.

### Wednesday

Read Matthew 5:3

What have you been trying to grab onto so tightly the past 18 months? For many of us, we have been holding on tightly to expectations. We attach ourselves to our expectations and in times of trouble, we hold on tight. And then tighter. We have had a whole host of expectations altered, dashed, or just turned upside down during the pandemic. Expectations about school, work, church, business, politics, medicine, media, family, vacations, other people, etc. And you've probably been disappointed a lot along the way. And so you gripped tighter to what was left. Maybe you gripped tighter and tighter and thrashed around to recreate some semblance of what you value as "normal" and you keep fighting the "new normal" and you've torn your world apart to reconstruct

some façade of the “old normal” and you grip tighter and tighter with more anxiety and rage trying to control more and more. And now you find you’ve squeezed everything away. Nothing can fit in that exhausted, white-knuckle reality you’ve created. Your expectations, fear, and anxiety have led you into a spiritual poverty that perhaps you can’t even recognize.

What if instead of making a tighter and tighter fist, you opened up your hands? Open up your hands now. You can simply rest your open hands, palms up, on your lap if you want. It is quite easy and relaxing. It’s so dangerous to base your well-being on your expectations. If you don’t get what you want, your whole world can collapse on itself. If you do get what you want, you might find that you still aren’t satisfied and so try again. You can’t control the world or your own life with your expectations, or anxiety, or rage, or with that white-knuckled fist.

What if you opened your hands? With open hands you can receive the blessings of Jesus Christ. White-knuckled fists beat the blessing away. Open hands let go of all those expectations and can, as Paul says, “<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> [and] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:17–18). *Open hands can trust and receive Jesus.*

### **Thursday**

Read Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:14-20

This prophecy is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus inaugurated the day of salvation in which the gospel is preached all over the world and those who were impoverished in spirit can find peace in him. For good news is indeed proclaimed to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty given to the oppressed.

*How will you join Jesus in his ministry with open hands?*

### **Friday**

Please read and reflect on Matthew 5:4 and Matthew 23:37-39 in preparation for Sunday worship.