



Series: The Upside Down Kingdom

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EASTER WEEKEND!!!

Ok, Good Morning Mercy Family! It is the month of March which means it is EASTER MONTH. If you are new to Mercy, welcome so glad you are here. We've been praying for you, your friends & family have been praying for you. We are glad you are here and listen, we get pretty excited around here about Easter. We are big on Jesus. I'm not sure what else a church could be big on but we are big on Jesus and certainly, EASTER is a holy, joyful celebration for us because we celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection for our sins.

I'm gonna take 4 minutes right now and be an easter at Mercy Guide. Gonna call you to 3 things:

EASTER 2024: PRAY, INVITE, SERVE

First, I want to reinforce the call for us as a church to **pray**. Church, we don't save people, God does. And God seems to have a way of going where He's wanted. He goes where He pleases yes. But I've found also He goes where He's wanted. So, using your little blue, I want you to pray for the people you know who don't know Jesus yet. Let's pray God would save between now and Easter. I also want you to pray about being baptized. Several of you need to take that next step and what better time to follow Jesus in baptism than Easter? Lastly, one easter practice we have here at Mercy is we hold a Good Friday worship gathering. This will be on Friday Night and this year I want to ask you to FAST all day leading up to Good Friday. Praying for the lost and praying for our own dependence on the Lord. And then we will gather for prayer and worship and communion that night. It will be a powerful night together as we focus on the death of Christ.

INVITE - The Little Blue card will help you with this. Now is the time to start inviting lost friends and family to meals, and to join you for easter. Build a relationship, strengthen a relationship. Do you know that 82% of Americans say they are likely to attend church if invited BY a friend and 80% of people who come to faith, were invited by a friend to church? So,





INVITE. In that spirit of inviting, we are even going to equip you a little bit. We've put word out to our community groups and now I'm telling you. In years past we've done an easter egg hunt at our campuses as a way to connect with the community. This year we want to take the egg hunt TO your community. So, we are taking all the resources we would put into hosting one at Mercy and creating an "Easter Egg Hunt FUND" that you can request a grant from for you to throw an easter egg hunt in your community. Your HOA would love it if somebody else footed the bill. Young Adults...you are not too old for this, and your friends would probably love you for throwing an egg hunt they could come to. Just sayin'. Look there is no connection to Eggs OR a bunny for Christianity ok. I get that. It's a strange cultural practice but good missionaries look at where God has placed them and see all the opportunities for bridge-building. Easter Egg Hunts are just another one. Email

Lastly, **Serve**. We are going to have more people here, so we need some help making our church feel welcoming to first-timers. We need people in kids, greeting, parking, you name it. Also, man I need some of you to serve with your seat. So here is my ask. We will all invite SOMEBODY. But not everybody is going to say yes. So, my only ask is that if you wind up not bringing someone, would you serve by attending either the 11:15 OR the 8am? We did the hard work in September of adding seats when we went from 3 services to 7 across our campuses. And the Lord is blessing that. So, we aren't adding

any services this Easter. Instead, we are just saying - let's have a servant's mindset on Easter with our seat.

OK. Taking off my easter pastels and picking up my preaching book cause we got some work to do.

Series Review

Matthew Chapter 5. If you are new with us, we've started a series of sermons in a teaching of Jesus commonly called the Beatitudes. They are the very first words of the very first sermon on record from Jesus. And in this short passage...only 12 verses...Jesus lays out what life in his kingdom should look like. And we are calling it the upside-down kingdom because as you begin to really consider and even apply his teaching to your life what you will experience is he is calling you to almost the complete opposite of the life the world around you celebrates.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the humble, the persecuted...He's saying the rewards belong to what this world would label as losers. This world rewards winners. The strong, the secure, the upwardly mobile who laugh & have everything instead of those who cry, hunger, & thirst. The kingdom of this world belongs to them.

And the problem is, the kingdom of this world is hollow. It doesn't satisfy. You set financial goals, relationship goals, weight goals that you think will make you happy, and you hit those goals...and you find you aren't happy. You gotta set new goals. That's the kingdom of this world. Where happiness is



just out of your upward reach. Think about this - Have you ever chased your dreams and gotten them? Are you now a completely satisfied & happy person always? Of course not. The dreams you catch become dreams to maintain or to remember.

But the upside-down kingdom of Jesus is one where the way to joy, to the blessed life, is actually lowering yourself down, not up. It's in surrender & service, not achievement. It's gonna take a few weeks to get our heads around it so we are going verse by verse through it.

And listen I give that intro because many of you who are not Christians are concerned about whether or not Christianity is GOOD. Is it good for you and is it good for the world? That is your measuring stick. And the beatitudes are beautiful. They lay out a good, hope-filled way of life. But they are different than the ways of this world. And so, what I need you to do if you are investigating this faith is ask the same question of the worldview you've been living with. Is the way of this world actually good for you and for the world? I think what you'll find is its exhausting and the message of Jesus you'll encounter in this series is deeply soul refreshing.

Today's verse is verse 3. It's the first beatitude. So today is a pretty big deal. The first words of the first sermon of Jesus on record.

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

Jesus opens his teaching ministry by announcing that the greatest reward possible...the kingdom of heaven...belongs to those who are poor in spirit. He's instantly, right here at the opening, sets the focus for his ministry. The Kingdom of Heaven. That's what he's about. And he says it belongs to those who are poor in spirit. The greatest blessing possible - the kingdom of heaven. Belongs to the poor in spirit. Right here at the start of his ministry, you see Jesus revealing a foundational truth about the people of God. So, our outline is this simple.

1. **What does this mean?**
2. **An example to follow**
3. **How to live out "poor in spirit"**

Why does Jesus start here?

I believe Jesus starts here because it is the fundamental characteristic of being a follower of Jesus. It is the lowest level foundation upon which the Christian life is built. For my trekkies out there this is the prime directive. You cannot progress in the Christian life...you cannot even begin in the Christian life...until you become poor in spirit. Everything begins here.

So, what does it mean to be poor in spirit?



To be poor in spirit means you are aware you have nothing in yourself to bring to God that will make you worthy of him or his kingdom.

The word poor here. Let's make sure we understand what we are saying. There's a different word for someone who lives paycheck to paycheck & barely able to make ends meet. Who doesn't really have anything but is scraping by. That word for poor in 2 Corinthians 9.9 is the word "penes." That's not the word here though. The word here is ptochos. And it is describing the person who is an absolute beggar with no way to escape their poverty and is forced into a life of cowering & with a sense of shame, forced to beg for help from others. Inescapable, abject poverty. Nothing to offer, just in desperate need. Now take that word POOR and apply it to the spirit.

To be poor in spirit means you are at the mercy of the help of another. You have nothing to bring. It is awareness of your spiritual emptiness. You are aware of your spiritual bankruptcy. It is awareness of your moral uncleanness before God. It is awareness of your personal unworthiness before God. It is the awareness that any joy or useful contribution in your life will have to come from God, not as a wage you earn but as a complete act of Grace.¹

¹ John Piper, "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit Who Mourn." (Sermon, February 2, 1986). Accessed 27 February, 2024. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/blessed-are-the-poor-in-spirit-who-mourn>

You keep hearing me say awareness. This is important because nobody actually IS sufficient on their own. The tough truth of scripture is that everyone is spiritually impoverished. But those who are aware of their condition are the ones who are blessed. Blessed are the ones who are aware they need God!

Why is this the whole starting point for Jesus' ministry? **Because you cannot enter God's kingdom until you surrender yours.** REPEAT. But here's the great news - When it comes to what is going to give you the blessed life - His kingdom is way better than yours. So, to the skeptic and seeker listen...you gotta evaluate: just how good is your kingdom? Is it eternal? Is it forgiving? Does it offer deep honor and compassion to the outcast? Is it always just? That's not the world I experience. The world I experience is broken and grasping for something good and true. THAT is what the kingdom of heaven is. And the reason even our own little kingdoms we build don't satisfy...

Because you weren't made for your kingdom. You were made for his. Can I do a quick review for you from last week to help this sink in?



Remember last week we said blessing has both a fact component and a feeling component? Walked you guys through the fact, faith, feeling train? There's the fact of the gospel. And its promises. And we put our faith in those facts. And Jesus is saying you have the fact of blessing as a follower of Christ:

Blessedness is the promised favor of God on the people of God

The beatitudes talk about this favor in terms of present and future promises. And they are factual. That said, there is also the feeling of your faith. It's the experience that follows you putting your faith in the facts. And this word "blessed" also has a feeling perspective. We said

Blessedness is the deep abiding joy that comes from knowing God and living out the ways of God.

Old hymn we used to sing growing up was called Blessed Assurance. And like a good song does, it weaves FACT & FEELING TOGETHER really well. Look at these lyrics.

**Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! ²**

² Psalm 34.14 - Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

**Heir of salvation, purchase of God
Born of his Spirit, washed in His blood**

**This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Savior all the day long**

Praising my savior. Not praising myself. And the FACT of my salvation allows me to experience deep abiding joy even when my circumstances are not great. The author of Blessed Assurance was Fanny Crosby. A blind woman writing in 1873. Not a lot going for her and yet she has an AWARENESS of her poor spirit and foretaste of glory divine here on this earth. Her faith was in the facts & that directed her feelings.

It is the POOR IN SPIRIT - who have nothing to bring to God - who can direct their hands & hearts upward off of themselves and onto God. And are therefore able to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

This is why Jesus starts here. HEAR ME. You cannot enter the kingdom of God, you cannot receive anything from God...until you admit you have nothing to offer God. And THAT is a fundamental rejection of our deepest problem - our pride.

I don't know how to say this any more clearly than this - your pride is your biggest enemy to knowing God. The gospel says



you are a sinner. Isaiah 64.3 says even your righteous deeds are like filthy rags before God. Until you are willing to say...not my will but yours be done. Not my kingdom come but THY kingdom come...you will never enter the kingdom of God. None of these blessings - Comfort, Mercy, inheritance, filling, seeing God....they all start with PTOCHOS. Those who are Poor in spirit.

This is a relief to those who've become aware of their insufficiency But it is offensive to those still convinced they **are good without God**. Or convinced...see if this rings a little closer to home...convinced they are good enough at BEING GODLY to where they don't practice an actual need for God anymore. **Let me give you an example. That's part two of our sermon.**

And actually when I say let me give you an example, what I really mean is I'm going to let Jesus give us an example. Look with me at Luke 18.9-14. This is a passage I think depicts really well what Jesus is getting after when it comes to being poor in spirit.

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else:
10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other people — greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or

even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.'

Look at what the Pharisee did. The pharisee is the one who knows the bible. One who is practicing his religion with a great deal of effort. And look at the betrayal his pride has brought on himself. Even his WORSHIP of God is not for God...it's for himself. God thank you that I am BETTER. Look at me, I'm generous, righteous, faithful. This is incredible - look Jesus says both went up to pray. But the pharisee DOESN'T EVEN PRAY. HE USES PRAYER AS A TIME TO CELEBRATE HIMSELF! No Ptochos. And Jesus then says watch how the tax collector prays. Tax Collector at this time would have been viewed as a traitor. These were Jewish people who, for a job, worked for Caesar and took money from their fellow Jews to give to the Romans. Often times skimming for themselves in the process.

And look what Jesus says

13 "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner!'

Look at that prayer. It's so simple. God have mercy on me, a sinner. Jesus says

14 I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be



humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." -- Luke 18:9-14

This is the one who is poor in spirit. The one who is able to receive forgiveness is the one who knows he needs forgiveness. I am preaching this message hoping someone will finally lay down their pride. Lay down your excuses, lay down your self-justification. God has seen your whole life. You don't need to explain yourself to God. The gospel is not...COME ALL WHO CAN EXPLAIN AND JUSTIFY THEMSELVES. NO, IT SAYS COME ALL WHO ARE SINNERS IN NEED OF FORGIVENESS. Those who beat their chest and say God have mercy on me a sinner. This is the posture of those who inherit and inhabit the kingdom of heaven.

This was Abraham in Genesis 18:27 who said "I have ventured to speak to my lord — even though I am dust and ashes —" -- Genesis 18: 27

This was Jacob who said I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. -- Genesis 32:10

This was David who said 17 The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God -- Psalms 51:17

This was Isaiah who said Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Armies. -- Isaiah 6:5

This is John the Baptist who said 26 "I baptize with water," John answered them. "Someone stands among you, but you don't know him. 27 He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie." -- John 1:26-27

This is the Canaanite woman whom Jesus rejected at first because she wasn't a Jew. Implied she was a dog. And she embraced her lowly status saying 27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." -- Matthew 15:27

This is Peter after Jesus miraculously filled his nets with fish 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus's knees and said, "Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord!" -- Luke 5:8

This is the GREAT EVANGELIST & CHURCH PLANTER PAUL 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. -- 1 Corinthians 3:6-7



The posture of the people of God is ptochos! Empty vessels.
Ready to pray the sinner's prayer
The sinner's prayer: God have mercy on me, a sinner.

Is this you? Christian, I wonder how long it's been since you've brought such a simple and honest prayer to God. No excuses, no explanations, no promises to God about how you will change this time. Just an honest confession and a need for help from the one who can save you. God have mercy on me a sinner.

Now here's the great news. When you get there. Poor in spirit...the promise of this beatitude is that the kingdom of heaven is yours. And one of my favorite parables Jesus teaches pulls this together.

Luke 15 Jesus tells the story of a young man who has come to the end of himself. He rebelled against his father. Asked for his inheritance while his father was still LIVING. What an entitled brat. And he went and squandered it. And Jesus says eventually this guy winds up sleeping in the slop with the pigs when Jesus says he came to his senses. It's this beautiful mental image of a starving man covered in mud surrounded by pigs who has a revelation. He remembers his father was a good employer. He's squandered his sonship but maybe he could be a hired hand. So, Jesus lets us in on a little conversation he has with himself

18 I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. 19 I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers." -- Luke 15:18-19

In other words - Ptochos. I am nothing. Not worthy. I'm just here. And Jesus says this is how the father responds...

20 So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. 21 The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate. -- Luke 15:19-24

This is the good news to us when we come to the end of ourselves. I read a comment from Billy Graham this week that so perfectly summarized the beautiful relationship between the poor in spirit and admittance into the kingdom of heaven. "When we come to the end of ourselves, we come to the beginning of God."



And that is where some of you are today. You've come to the end of yourself, welcome to the beginning of God. This leads me to our final point today and it's brief.

How to live out the call to be "poor in spirit"

What would it look like if we were poor in spirit in a way that also led us into the experience of deep abiding joy?

First, **receive the mercy of God**

Some of you are not Christians. You've never received what Jesus did for you. He was the sacrifice slaughtered as a payment for your sin so you could be reconciled to God. He refuses to let you pay him. You must receive it. You pray "God have mercy on me a sinner" and God says...ok son, ok daughter. I've made a way for that mercy to come to you. It's through believing Jesus paid for your sins. TODAY is the day for you to say yes to God.

Secondly, **Abide in Jesus**

Jesus says I am the vine and you are the branches. Apart from me, you can do nothing. Do you believe this? That you are powerless? But when you abide in Christ...when you stay close to the source of life...you can bear great fruit. Jesus WANTS to bear fruit in your life. You gotta get this! He wants to! But you gotta stay close to him because he is the one getting credit for it.

One of the reasons I'm so determined to read my bible & pray every morning. To have a daily time of devotion. Is to keep my mind off of myself & lift it up to heaven. That's what Keller called the freedom of self-forgetfulness. And this is important because I'm not here to beat you up. It's not woe to the poor in spirit. Jesus says BLESSED are they. So I'm Not here to make you feel terrible about yourself. Today is meant to make you aware of yourself so you can shift your attention off of yourself. And focus your attention instead on God and his kingdom.

Tim Keller called this the freedom of self-forgetfulness. That is, we find great joy...we experience the blessedness of God not in thinking less of ourselves. But in thinking of ourselves less. Redirecting our attention, our focus, our hearts onto our glorious God.

To abide is to stay real close to Jesus. Functionally this should look like a really active prayer life. I told you at the beginning of our message that between now and easter I want us to First PRAY. this is why man. We can do nothing on our own. EVEN JESUS...who was God...went away to pray to God the Father. Why? To show us the way the kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. Through prayerfully surrendering to God & his power.

Focus your life on heaven



Ian Duguid in this wonderful little book I'm reading as we go through this series called "Hero of Heroes" said *One of our basic problems in life is that we don't think about heaven nearly enough. That's the reason why our daily dreams are filled with the wrong kind of heroes. Our longings and aspirations turn out to be full of this world and empty of the next.*³

Here's why I know this is the right perspective - Ya'll none of us are going to arrive at heavenushered into the presence of God Almighty...to the banquet table as a son or daughter of the king of glory...none of us are going to wonder if the

investment we made in living as KINGDOM citizens here on earth...if the sacrifices and sufferings we went through because we directed our lives on eternity...NONE OF US WILL WONDER IF IT IS WORTH IT. We will be so in AWE of GOD we'll say oh man he was worthy of more. THIS was more worth it than I ever knew. In fact, Paul says NOTHING in this world is worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

INVITATION INTO COMMUNION

³ Iain M. Duguid, *Hero of Heroes: Seeing Christ in the Beatitudes* (P&R Publishing, 2001), pp. 8-14.