

## Matthew 5:1-3: Moses and the Poor in Spirit

Well, we are beginning our voyage through the SOTM. And I have to tell you that every little bit of this sermon is jam packed. Even the very first sentence is loaded with meaning. And I want to spend some time on **Vs. 1** because I think we have to understand it in order to understand the significance of Jesus's preaching. Verse 1 might not seem all that remarkable at first, but let me see if I can help you with an illustration.

In the midst of the 2016 presidential campaign, the Republican candidates for president were doing everything they could to paint themselves as the next Ronald Reagan. Reagan is sort of the high water mark of conservative politics in the 20th century. And the candidates were really tripping over themselves to show just how Reagan they were. There was even a point where Jeb Bush - whose father, George, was VP under Reagan - even brought out a old bright-red Bush-Reagan '84 T-Shirt. If they were to be elected, a new and greater era of Reaganism was going to be ushered in.

Just to be fair, Democrats do the same thing. They want to be the next Carter or Kennedy or FDR. The point is just that candidates often align themselves with great heroes of the past to show how great they will be.

This is what Matthew is doing with Jesus. Except it's not a political maneuver to get votes, it's to actually connect Jesus with someone from the past. But he's not outright saying it, he's painting a picture for us. What Matthew has done so far in his gospel is paint Jesus as the new Moses.

I'll connect those dots a little more in just a bit but for right now we have to understand that Moses was a huge deal to the Jews. On our side of the cross - this side of history - it's easy to mix Moses in to a hodgepodge bunch of Bible characters we hear stories about. But to the ancient Jews, Moses was **the** man.

He was really the founding monarch of Israel for their first 40 years - the formative years of Israel as a nation. He was the mouthpiece of God to the people. God even says "you will be as God to Aaron" (**Exo. 4:16**). Aaron was the Press Secretary, but Moses had all the power and authority.

And it was God working through Moses that Pharaoh was devastated over and over again. It was Moses who raised his hand and the Red Sea parted, it was Moses interceded for the people for manna and water and quail to eat. It was Moses who settled disputes between the people. It was Moses who went up on the mountain - Mt. Sinai - to give the Law to the people. That Law would guide the Israelites for the next 1,400 years.

To put that in perspective, the US Constitution has only been around about 250 years. The Law that guided Israel did so for almost 6 times longer than our own nation's constitution.

In the gospels people even referred to the OC Law simply as "Moses." "Moses commanded," "Moses allowed," "Moses wrote." Even Abraham when he's talking to the rich man in hell (**Luke 16:31**) refers to the whole OT as "Moses and the prophets" - Moses and those other guys. Which makes sense because Moses wrote at least 188 chapters of the Bible. When Stephen is about to be stoned in **Acts 6:11** he charged with blaspheming Moses and God. Just like we would say "Paul said" or "the apostle John said" and also mean "God said" - that was and is Moses.

And by Jesus's time it was ingrained into the people that if you obeyed the Law of Moses there was amazing blessing from God. If you disobeyed that Law, there was a whole litany of cursing that would be heaped upon Israel. And they had felt those curses, in exile and in judgment throughout their history. It was Moses who set the course for the entire history of the people of God.

But let me show you, though, that Moses - 1,400 years before Jesus - had promised a day when a greater leader than he would come. **Turn back to Deut. 18:15-22.** Deuteronomy was written by Moses just before the Jews entered into the Promised Land. Moses was getting old, about 120 years or so, and he wrote the book of Deuteronomy to the generation who was about to enter the Promised Land. Deuteronomy means second law: deutero - second, nomos - law. So this is the second time Moses has given the Law to the people of Israel in the wilderness just south of Israel on the Sinai peninsula. And at 120 years old, he knows he won't be around

much longer and so he tells them that a day is coming when God will raise up a prophet like Moses - and the people will follow that guy. **Read 15-16**

So this prophet will be like Moses - he will be Jewish. And he will have authority such that the people of God are commanded to listen to him. And just like the people wanted Moses to intercede for them on Horeb - Mt. Sinai - because the people were scared, so too this Prophet will lead and guide the people of God. So there's mountain imagery surrounding this coming Prophet. **Read 17-22**

So this coming Prophet will speak the pure words of God. Anyone who does not listen to this future prophet will give an account directly to God. And how do we know he is from God? Because all that he says comes to pass.

**Turn back to Matt. 5.** Fast forward to the time of Jesus. People are looking for the Prophet. When John the Baptist was baptizing people in the wilderness people would come up to him and ask him "Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah? Are you the Prophet? Who are you? (**John 1:19-23**). So there's this expectation of the Prophet like Moses to come.

And we know that Jesus is that Prophet. Peter makes that connection in **Acts 3:22**. But here Matthew isn't making that connection explicit so much as he's painting a picture of Jesus as the new Moses.

Just think about the connection between Moses and Jesus in the first few chapters of Matthew's gospel. Jesus and Moses were both almost killed at birth. Jesus and Moses both fled to a different country to save their lives. Jesus and Moses were both in the wilderness - Moses for 40 years, Jesus for 40 days. Jesus, like Moses, performed signs and wonders and miracles for the good of the people of God. And Jesus who, like Moses, goes up on a mountain and sits down to give people God's Law. By the way, the small phrases "went up" and "the mountain" and "sitting down" are the exact same words used of Moses on Mt. Sinai.

So part of understanding the significance of this sermon is what Matthew is sketching for us: Jesus - just like Moses - is creating a new people of God that is based on following him. It starts with the Israel, and is preached initially to Israel, but this Kingdom will also include Jews and Gentiles who follow Jesus by faith.

Jesus is the true and better Moses. The God-Man who is creating a new people, a new and better Law, based on true heart-felt devotion to God that is brought about by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. So everything about this sermon - and even these beatitudes we're going to read - we have to understand through the lens of Jesus as the new and better Moses who has come to deliver his people.

And so as the new Moses, the Law-giver, the new leader of the people of God - what is it that Jesus teaches and preaches? What's the foundation of his sermon?

Any time someone is giving a public speech - whether a sermon, or a class presentation, a sales pitch, whatever - usually the first thing they have to say is crucial. What does Jesus lead out with? What is it to be part of the new people of God he is creating through his life, death and resurrection?

I want to submit to you that the defining characteristic of following Jesus and being part of the new people of God that Jesus is creating is that it is a life of blessing. What Jesus is saying to us here, is that following him is the good life. Following him, as one scholar put it, is the way to human flourishing (Jonathan Pennington). If you want the best that God has to offer - here it is! Nine times in the opening of the sermon Jesus identifies those who follow him as blessed.

The Greek word for blessed is μακάριος and it means to be favored or happy or to have divine blessing poured out on you. The world says if you are the child of a billionaire you are μακάριος. If you land a scholarship at a great college, if you land a sweet job, or are the next Michael Jordan you are μακάριος. You are blessed - get this - **because** of your situation. Blessings because of your situation. That is the word Jesus is using: that the people of God are blessed because of our situation.

See, a lot of times we think that we are blessed in spite of our situation. “Well, life is tough - I have sickness/illness/financial problems - but God is good anyway. He’s blessing me in spite of my situation.” But that’s not what Jesus is saying here. He’s saying you are blessed - μακάριος - because of your situation.

Now if we had never read this section before and we heard that God the Son was calling us into a life of blessing because our situation would be so sweet we couldn’t help but overflow with joy, we’d probably say “Sign me up!!”

But what situations does Jesus have in mind that are the life of blessing? **Read 2-12**

Well, that’s strange. Jesus is saying all of these situations we probably don’t care to be in are actually the very situations God says is the good life, they are the path to human flourishing and eternal life.

There’s another aspect of the good life that Jesus is making front and center: the good life now only comes if you’re focused on the life to come. The only way to follow Jesus rightly in this life is to keep your eye on the next life.

Another way to say this is that the beatitudes are thoroughly eschatological. When we hear eschatology we think of different end times views. But that’s a pretty narrow definition. Eschatology is everything that we are promised will happen in the future, leading up to - and culminating in the New Heavens and New Earth. We often talk about how those who have faith in Jesus will die and go to heaven. That’s true; it’s just not complete. Christians will die and go to heaven, but ultimately God will make a New Heavens and New Earth where we will live and work and worship in the presence of the Triune God forever.

What we see in these beatitudes is that following Jesus in the blessed life is to be focused on the end game of NHNE. Look at some of these:

**Vs. 3:** Theirs is the Kingdom of heaven - there’s a sense in which we are part of the KOH the moment we are saved. But when do we get the fullness of the KOH? In the New Heavens and New Earth.

**1 Cor 15:50:** I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

**Vs. 4:** They shall be - that’s future tense - comforted. When is that? To some extent the Holy Spirit is our comforter now, but don’t we long for a day when every tear is wiped away and all our sorrows are gone? That’s the NHNE (**Rev. 21:4**).

**Vs. 5:** When do we inherit the earth? It’s not now. And I would say even if you are a premillennialist looking forward to a future millennial reign of Christ the answer is still has to be NHNE. Because the future millennium - at best - is only a temporary thing. The earth we look forward to is the NHNE.

When are we finally satisfied with righteousness? When do we receive final mercy? When do we see God? When do we receive rewards? This all points to a future reality, doesn’t it? Some of this is now - sort of the already/not yet tension we see in the NT. But the ultimate fulfillment of all of this is in the NHNE after judgment when all is set back to right.

The good life, the blessed life, a life of flourishing and happiness that Jesus says happens right now is the life that is continually reminded of the age to come.

Again, Jesus is not talking about joy in spite of our situations. That’s how we often think about joy: yes I have to clean the toilet now, but there’s pie and ice cream after dinner so it’ll be worth it in the end.

Jesus isn’t saying that. Jesus is not saying we are blessed in spite of these situations. He’s saying we are blessed **because** of them!

The group that follows Jesus and is poor in spirit is defined as blessed. Blessed are those that mourn. Not in spite of their mourning. You are living the good life right here, right now if you are meek and hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It doesn't get any better than being a peace maker - trying trying to get 2 parties that hate each other to love each other. It doesn't get any better than being reviled and insulted for Jesus! That's the good life. That is the blessed life that Jesus has called us into.

These are not the things we should wish to go away, these are the signs that we are living the blessed life of following Jesus on the road to the eternal Kingdom.

So how does Jesus say we live the good life?

1) You are living the good life if you are poor in spirit. Read 3

So you've probably noticed that there are 2 parts of every beatitude: the description of the blessed person, and what they will receive.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? In a simple word, it is someone who is humble. It is the polar opposite of someone who is proud and arrogant.

**Psa. 131:1:** O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high.

In the Bible, someone whose heart or spirit is lifted up is someone who is proud, they are arrogant. And often times we think of arrogance only in its worst forms. Like Muhammed Ali whose mantra was "I am the greatest!" When we think of pride we think of athletes who think they are the best of the best, we think of lawyers who come off as untouchable, politicians who enjoy a corrupted life.

But biblically speaking, pride is having an inaccurate picture of ourselves in light of who God is. Pride could be the generous unbeliever - nice guy - who thinks there's a God out there somewhere, but he's just not really into organized religion like Christianity. Really? Because Jesus - God the Son - has organized Christianity.

Pride could be the person who thinks "Well, I'm not perfect - nobody's perfect. But am I a wretched sinner who is constant need of God's forgiveness? Nah." That's pride. And pride creeps in in small ways more often than in big ways.

What does Jesus mean to be poor in spirit? In our culture, to be poor is when you make a certain amount per year, adjusted for your family size. So you could be below the poverty line and have 2 cars, a flatscreen TV, air-conditioning, and a pantry full of food. In Jesus's time that would have been opulent luxury.

When Jesus says poor here what he's talking about is poor in ancient times. To be poor was to be a beggar. And even that we have to redefine because these guys who stand along Division in Spokane are not beggar's like in Jesus's time. It's amazing they can stand in the hot sun for 8 hours a day walking up and down asking for tax-free money but they can't go in to the store right next to them that has a help-wanted sign and get a job. In the Bible, people who are able to work, are told to work. If anyone is not willing to work, let them not eat. They're not poor.

In Jesus's time someone who was poor was someone who was absolutely destitute. Someone who had absolutely zero resources, not by choice but by circumstance. Usually they were blind: they couldn't see to go work. Or they were lame: they literally couldn't walk and had to have someone carry them to the place where they would sit and beg for scraps. Or they had a leprosy of some kind which removed them from society and removed them from the possibility of securing employment. Or they had some other physical malady that kept them from working.

These weren't even the people who, we'd say, were down on their luck. Remember in the OT Law there were provisions for people who were incredibly poor but could work. People like Ruth in the OT who would go harvest the edges of the fields that were left by those who could work.

What Jesus is saying is that the the only people who can be followers of Jesus are beggars, completely impoverished in spirit and recognize they are unable to do anything spiritually on their own. People who have absolutely no hope at all in themselves. They can't claim any works or any goodness at all, because they know they have none. People who don't care if anyone else - or everyone else - knows they are a beggar in spirit because they have nothing left to lose, and only Jesus to gain.

If you think you have something to offer God, you're not a beggar. You're an employee. Employees don't inherit the Kingdom, beggars do.

If you think "Well, I'll come to Jesus but I don't want everyone to know how impoverished I really am. I don't want everyone to know how messed up I really am," you're not a beggar. You're a poser. You want to come to Jesus middle-class in spirit, not poor in spirit. You want to come to Jesus so that he'll provide you a little help to get back on your feet, make life a little easier. You don't want to come to Jesus as the sovereign for absolutely everything.

To be poor in spirit is to be the one who has absolutely nothing to offer God except the sinful mess they're in. To beg God for mercy and grace like a blind man crying out to passerby for bread. It is to live life like the lame man asking his friend for the millionth time to carry him to the city gate so he he can beg.

That's why I think Luke's version of this beatitude says "blessed are the poor," because in Jesus's day the poor were by definition poor in spirit. The poor in Jesus's day had no pride, had no rights, they had nothing but shame. So blessed are the poor or blessed are the poor in spirit - in Jesus' day those were the same group.

Isn't that interesting? Jesus is creating a new people of God and the only way to be part of that people of God is to be a beggar. To have absolutely nothing to offer him. Not just to come to him as a beggar at first, but to remain a beggar all our lives. Does anybody who is a follower of Jesus really think they need less grace now than they did when they were first saved? No, the longer I follow Jesus the more sure I am that I need even more grace day by day.

When I was first saved I know I needed grace, I knew I had nothing to offer God. But looking back now, I realize I had no idea how much grace I really needed and how much grace God poured out on me. I still don't.

Listen, Jesus says the only way to live the good life, a super-blessed life of flourishing is to follow him like a beggar. Why? **Read 3**

Why are you living the good life? Because beggars have the Kingdom. It's something of a Kingdom irony: If you come to Jesus as a blind, lame, mute, wretched beggar in spirit, you're super-blessed because you have the whole Kingdom. People who beg Jesus for grace, already own the whole Kingdom.

And notice what Jesus says. I mentioned before that the beatitudes are eschatological: they look forward to a future reality. What does Jesus say on this one? Blessed are the poor in spirit, their one day they will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven? No. For theirs *is* the KOH. Right now.

**Rom. 8:17:** We are - right now - co-heirs with Christ.

**Eph. 2:6:** We are - right now - seated in the heavenly places.

This is that already/not yet tension. We have it right now, but we won't experience it's fullness until the age to come.

When I was a sophomore in high school my grandmother died on the other side of the country. So four of us packed our bags and drove across the country in this small little Nissan Altima. It was small and packed with stuff and uncomfortable. It was quite the miserable trip topped off by the fact that on the way back we all got sick in Wyoming with an intestinal virus. Two of us felt good enough to walk across the parking lot and we ate a bowl of soup Denny's for Thanksgiving dinner because that's all we could keep down. But I knew I had a home. I knew I had a bed waiting. I had a shower waiting. I had good food waiting. I had those things - I owned

those things as a child of my parents - I possessed those things, even though I wasn't there. I already had them, but I was not yet experiencing.

That's the life we live following Jesus. As beggars in spirit, ours is the Kingdom - right here, right now. Maybe you know this, maybe you don't, but if you've come to Jesus you have the Kingdom. Everything Jesus has you have. What does Jesus have? What does Jesus rule over? Absolutely everything. If you are a child of God, that's yours. It does not belong to those who are high in spirit or even middle class in spirit. It only belongs to those who are beggars of God's grace.

Are you a beggar of God's grace? You should be.

Have you forgotten how little we have to offer God? Be reminded.

And then rejoice because he has given us everything.

**Pray**