

Title: Happy are the Humble, Really?ⁱ
Text: Matthew 5.1-3
Theme: Humility
Prop Stmnt. Humility is a prerequisite for and a characteristic of life in the kingdom.
Aim: I aim to call my people to empty themselves before God, that He might fill them with his goodness.

Jeff Baumann was near the finish line of the Boston Marathon on Monday waiting for his girlfriend to complete the race when a young man placed a bag near his feet, looked at him in the eyes and walked away. Two and a half minutes later the bag exploded. Jeff lost both of his lower legs from the blast but after surgery was able to identify the suspect which proved to be a big help to the police. With the manhunt over, some of the more deeper issues begin to arise. How do you explain just unvarnished evil? How do you come to terms with someone who just deliberately maims and kills people? If your answer is, it is his religion, then, is our society willing to admit the utter absurdity and failure of post-modernism's notion that it does not matter what you believe. Truth is what works for you. Here is a fundamental distinction between what these two men believed and what we believe. They believed that killing, maiming and terrorizing others is how you advance your agenda. Jesus believed, taught and ultimately demonstrated that living for and if need be dying for others is how you advance his agenda. His kingdom, and therefore the foundational beliefs of his kingdom are different than this world. They are different than the religions of this world. In fact they are different than what much of Christianity represents them to be.

Read Text:

Christ offers a radical alternative to the thinking of this world. Ironically, the church, has historically struggled with embracing what Christ is saying. The church, instead of teaching this, has historically watered this down since it sounds so radical and so demanding. In its place the church has become a semi-religious version of Home Depot, telling people in regards to their lives, "You can do it. Jesus can help." that is not the message of Christ. If he really taught that, he would never have been rejected and crucified. Christ taught, you cannot do it. But I can and you have to come to terms with that. In this text, Christ is not suggesting how to get along a bit better in life. Christ is establishing what it means to be a citizen in his kingdom.

Remember the setting. Christ has started his public ministry (4.23-25). As a result, he is attracting large crowds, and he has identified the men who will be the closest to him. These men, known as the disciples have agreed to follow Christ, but now they need to know what they are getting into. It is sort of like this. If a guy has some interest in a girl, he will ask her if she would like to hang out with him sometime. If he survives that conversation, then the sometime becomes a time, and they hang out. This is not dating, mind you. This is just hanging out. The question is, if you are hanging out with one girl, are you allowed to hang out with another girl? The same question is posed for the girl. What is this? Are they "in a relationship"? Are they committed – what? No one knows

what to call this, until they have “the talk.” “The talk” is when they define the relationship. Here they establish what their expectations are, what their goals are, what the parameters are, etc. Up until the talk, everything is fuzzy, unclear and at times awkward. But, now we have definition.

That is what is going on here, only Jesus is defining the relationship. Now, don't miss some of the symbolism that is going on. Moses went upon a mountain and received the law from God that was the foundation for God's covenant with the nation of Israel. Now, Christ is on a mountain and instead of having 12 tribes, he has 12 disciples. And now, he delivers the Word of God. This sermon is basically the manifesto of the new people of God. He is saying that this is what the OT law was designed to lead us to. And because he is on a mountain, these three chapters are called the “Sermon on the Mount.” But notice this (5.1-2) there are two audiences in view. There are the disciples and there is the crowd. Matthew explains it in a way that makes it sound as if Christ is trying to put some distance between him and the crowd because he wants to speak directly to the disciples.

Luke's account of this event indicates that the crowd was there, but that it was the disciples too whom Christ spoke directly. The disciples were the inner circle, but the crowd was observing. They were hearing what it meant to be a follower of Christ. Christ had been preaching on the theme of repentance because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. As we looked at last week, repentance involves a change of mind, a change of affection and a change of direction. So, now it becomes clear that Christ is saying that not only do you need to repent of your sin, but your view of his kingdom also needs to change. You need to be informed about what it means to follow him. This is NOT what you would expect. This is different than the world of the Gentiles (notice 5.47; 6.7) and it is different than the Jews (notice 6.1-2). This is what life looks like as a citizen of Christ's kingdom and it is completely upside down and inside out. From day one Christ established that his kingdom and his message is counter-cultural. It is counter-intuitive. In other words, it makes no sense to the way that we naturally think. And yet, it has stood for 2,000 years as one of the most profound and influential sermons ever delivered. Even non-believers are staggered by these words. Jesus does not use pious, flowery speech, but instead he delivers a message that goes right after the heart. That is clear about Jesus. He always goes for the heart and this sermon is the classic example of that.

Matthew records 5 different discourses (teaching blocs) by Christ. This is the first one and it is the longest. This sermon is foundational to everything that Christ taught. In order to understand Jesus, in order to understand Christianity, in order to understand what life is intended to look like, you need to understand this sermon. This sermon begins with an introduction that, like the sermon, is foundational. This bulk of this introduction is called “The Beatitudes” (5.1-12) followed by the two statements, “You are the salt of the earth” and “You are the light of the world.” This introduction is foundational to the foundation. When you read this, what do you see? What stands out to you? What verb is repeated over and over? It is the verb “are.” “Blessed are”, “You are”. Which so clearly magnifies

the point that I was just making. Jesus starts with what you are. He recognizes that what you do is simply the fruit of what you are. What you are is the root. That is why Jesus does not build his kingdom on rules of behavior and rituals. In fact, he goes out of his way to say, “When you pray, DO NOT HEAP UP EMPTY PHRASES as the Gentiles do...” (6.7) This is NOT about your righteousness and what you do (5.20, 48). These are staggering statements!

All of which brings us to this conclusion (not of the sermon, just of the introduction). If you want a religion of rules and ceremonies, pithy sayings and pious rituals, then you do not want authentic Christianity. Every religion that settles for an hour or two in a weekend service and only tells you about the things that you can do to improve your life and get along a little better with your neighbor is in reality, an enemy of the kingdom of Christ. Christ offers a different way. Christ establishes a radical alternative and calls us to follow. Jesus does not build his kingdom on people who look nice. His kingdom is made up of people who have been changed from the inside out. Which is why we see, from the very first thing that Jesus says in this sermon is that *“humility is the prerequisite for and the foundational characteristic of his followers.”*

So, here it is. Christ has gathered his disciples around him. Hundreds of people, perhaps more are within earshot. This man who has done some amazing miracles and has been speaking about the kingdom of God that has come is now prepared to speak formally. He sits down. This is what the teachers did in that day. Rather than walking and announcing, he now is now prepared to do some explaining. And the very first thing he says is, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Did you get that?

1. **Happy are the Humble** (3a)

Whoa, hold the phone! Did he really mean to say that? If this was a political campaign, you can imagine the mad scramble that his handlers and media consultants would be doing right now. Oh no! This may play well to the poor people, but this is definitely going to anger some of our big donors. This is not how we think. In fact, when we look at people who are poor (Luke’s language) or poor in spirit, we do not normally think of happiness, do we? So, let’s start with some definitions, this will be helpful.

a. **What is blessed?**

There is a word that the Bible uses that is generally translated as blessed, and Jesus did not use that word. He did use the word that strictly speaking has the idea of happiness. The problem is, our view of happiness has more to do with our subjective feeling than our condition. We think of happiness in terms of how we are reacting to our immediate circumstances. In fact the very language that we use is a bit confusing. For example, we may say, “I am happy because the Tigers won.” But, seriously, am **I** really happy? Is my

being, the core essence of who I am, the very heart of my personhood constitutionally happy because the Tigers won? Do the Tigers have the capacity and power to fundamentally change my very nature? No. And we do not mean all of that, even though we are using the “being verb”. We mean, I feel pleasure at the news of the Tigers winning. This feeling of pleasure is in direct proportion to the performance of the bullpen, isn’t it? This feeling of pleasure is not what defines me as a person. It is simply an emotion. That is why it is generally not helpful to say, Happy are the humble without an explanation. When Jesus used this word, he was saying that the poor in spirit were happy because they were blessed. They experienced happiness because they were people who in the very core of their persons were given favor by God. This state of favor is from God. (chart)

Our happiness is a result of our condition of being blessed. Our being blessed is an act of God who pours out favor upon us. This person is happy because he recognizes that God has poured out favor upon him. This person is happy because he is the recipient of undeserved, unmerited, unearned, and infinitely free grace of God. This is why this statement is profound. In one sentence, Christ summarizes the gospel. (more on that later) But, what triggers this pouring out of favor upon us by God? God pours out favor on those who are “poor in spirit.”

b. What is “poor in spirit?”

This statement is shocking because people then, just like people now believed that outward prosperity was THE indicator of the favor of God. And Jesus is blowing that up! People assume that you are happy if you have stuff, or if you have esteem, if you have respect, if you have accomplishments. Jesus is saying happiness is not based on having those things. In fact, you can only be happy if you are blessed. And God blesses people who admit that they are poor, empty and bankrupt. A person who is poor as a person (and who admits it) is poor in spirit. One who is empty as a person, that is, has nothing to hold up to God as a trophy or accomplishment (and does not pretend to be fine) is poor in spirit. One who is bankrupt of righteousness (and does not pretend to have goodness that earns favor, which it cannot), but who admits the true condition of his soul is poor in spirit. One who is poor in spirit, agrees with God about the true, natural condition of his very being. I am a sinner. I am a rebel against God, in my natural condition. I am incapable of rescuing myself. I sin and cannot stop sinning. I make promises to myself and to God and break them. I deserve the wrath of God because I think evil things and do sinful things that break his law. I cannot, in my own efforts please God. I am admitting the true condition of my soul, apart from the grace of God. I am empty!!

How do you know if you are poor in spirit?

- When you stop defending yourself.
- When you stop feeling the need to defend to yourself
- When you are amazed that you are not in hell

- When you do not feel sorry for yourself
- When you do not think of yourself as being better than others
- When you do not make excuses for your sin
- When you are grateful that you are convicted by your sin, or caught in your sin
- When you do not try to impress others with your accomplishments
- When you do not try to impress others with how humble you are
- When you do not feel cheated by God or wronged by your world
- When you give up your right to be vindicated
- When you stop thinking that everyone needs to hear your opinion
- When you stop feeling slighted or unappreciated
- When you do not get an invitation and you are not hurt
- When you get an invitation and you are surprised
- When you are more concerned about others than you are your rights
- When you are more concerned about listening than you are talking
- When you are more concerned about understanding than being understood
- When you stop tattling on your brother and sister
- When you encourage others instead of belittling them
- When someone disagrees with you and you do not get angry
- When you do not try to intimidate others
- When you do what is right and do not care who gets the credit
- When you ask forgiveness without waiting for the other person to admit their fault
- When you pray
- When you want to pray
- When you want to bow before God
- When you want to tell others about God's goodness and gospel
- When you do not take credit for any success
- When you do not change based upon the home you live in, the car you drive, the clothes you wear, the school you attend, or the title that you have
- When you do not make value judgments about others based on the home they live in, the car they drive, the clothes they wear, the school they attend, or the title they have
- When you care more about people than you care about stuff
- When you enjoy someone else getting picked for the lead part, the solo, the recognition or affirmation
- When you are more concerned about the reputation of Christ than you are about your rights
- When you can't wait to forgive someone who has sinned against you

As we will see, you will be poor in spirit

- When you mourn over your sin
- When you are meek
- When you hunger and thirst for righteousness
- When you are merciful
- When you are pure in heart
- When you are a peacemaker

- When you rejoice because you are persecuted for righteousness sake

This is convicting isn't it? This is devastatingly convicting. In fact, it is impossible for us to make ourselves poor in spirit. Here is the tension with what Christ taught. On the one hand he is rightfully disgusted with image, pretension and all attempts to perform for God and others in order to be well thought of. There is something that is wondrously refreshing about that. But, on the other hand, he not only goes after the hearts of the pretenders and performers, he goes after our hearts. And what he exposes in us just wipes us out. How can I ever be poor in spirit? How can I ever be freed from my self-righteousness, self-centeredness, and critical, demanding, self-promoting self? Are you ready? Listen carefully. There are two things that you need to understand. Two things that are absolutely essential for you to understand:

- 1) You will only be poor in spirit when you freely and fully acknowledge that you are NOT poor in spirit and that it is absolutely impossible for you to will yourself to be poor in spirit and yet God still demands that you be poor in spirit.
- 2) You will only truly be accepted by God as being poor in spirit when you realize and trust completely in Christ who was poor in spirit for you.

The ultimate One who was poor in spirit was Christ. He who had it all, gave it all up. He who was rich became poor, so that we who are truly poor could become rich. He who was pure because sinless so that we who are sinful could be counted as pure. He who was all-powerful became weak, so that we who are weak could become strong. He who truly had rights, gave them up for us all. You and I cannot be poor in spirit in a manner that satisfies the standard of God, so Jesus became poor in spirit for us. And what happened when he did? What happened, when he, though in the form of God did not consider his equality with God something to be grasped but came to this earth in the form of a baby and made himself nothing and took on human nature and was found in the likeness of a man and humbled himself, and submitted himself to hunger, thirst, scorn, temptation, rejection, abuse hatred, accusations, humiliating torture and even to death? What happened to the God-man who submitted himself and surrendered himself to a death on a cross in order to pay in full the debt of my sin and to satisfy in full the wrath of God against my rebellion? He was raised again from the dead and was given a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father! He, who lost it all, got it all!

He knew he was headed for the cross. He knew that the cross was the means of glory and the means of rescue. So, now, he is defining the relationship. He is laying it out what it means to follow him. He says, if you are going to follow me, you have to lose it all. You have to admit what I already know that is true about you. You have to admit that you are empty. You have to empty your pockets of self-righteousness and religion, and rebellion and self-centeredness. You have to admit that you are empty and that you cannot fix it. And when you do, then you will be blessed.

It is sort of like this. You cannot teach someone who already knows everything. You cannot give answers when people are not asking questions. But, to the one who admits that he is empty, that one can be filled up. And what is he filled up with? He is filled up with God! That is why there is a relationship throughout these beatitudes between happiness and holiness. This is not a poor in spirit holiness that comes from self-loathing, self-pity, and self-abuse. No, this is a humility that recognizes that I cannot trust myself or fix myself. I am empty and I turn to Christ and trust Him and receive him as Redeemer, Savior and King. And God, who is infinitely holy, and is therefore infinitely happy, now fills me up. When I, recognize my true condition and confess it to God and trust in Christ, I am credited with the righteousness of Christ. I get credit for his life and I get credit for his death. Then, I am not only “poor in spirit” but now I am able to pursue humility because truly I have been given something that I do not deserve. I am simultaneously humbled by my natural condition and joyfully amazed by his grace. It is not only pardon that I get, I get it all!

We are happy primarily (literally in the state of being blessed by God) because we acknowledged our need of Him, we trust Him and we get Him and when we get Him, we get the Kingdom. We don't trust him to get the kingdom. We trust him and become citizens of his kingdom. Only broken, confessing, humble sinners can apply for citizenship in his kingdom.

2. **They have it all!** – (3b) *“theirs is the kingdom of heaven”*

The poor in spirit are happy and blessed because they have the kingdom of heaven right now. This is a present reality that awaits a future consummation.

a. Now

Right now, the poor in spirit have the kingdom because they have the King! You cannot separate the king from the kingdom. Those who are under the reign of the king are in the kingdom of the king. Those who are under the reign of the King are in the realm of the king. Jesus was the kingdom in person. He was the dwelling of God on earth. He was the temple of God on earth. He was the manifestation of God on earth. He was the Word of God on earth. He was at once the Creator and creation. He was the King and the Servant. He was perfect Ruler and perfect Subject. He was the One who commanded and the One who obeyed. He not only brought the kingdom, he was the kingdom.

Because he is the Sovereign Ruler of all, who inherits all, who was guaranteed it all by His Father, all of his followers get it all. Right now, we have the king and we enjoy many of the blessings of his reign. But, one day, we will enjoy the ultimate manifestation of his kingdom.

b. Later

The entire story line of the Bible culminates when God lives among his people in a perfect place, where He enjoys them, and where they enjoy Him. There is no evil there. There is no death there. There are no acts of terror, no acts of rebellion and no sin that will ever, ever, ever tarnish that place or those people. That is guaranteed for every follower of Christ. You cannot lose. If you lose your life, you gain the one to come. If you are rejected by this world, you are accepted by the one to come. If you are hated by this world, you are loved by the King. If you have no home to live in, no money to buy food, no clothes to wear, if you are in Christ, you have a home that can never be foreclosed, food that will never run out and clothes that will never wear out. But those aren't the treasures, those are just the benefits. The treasure is Christ. If you have Christ, you get it all. Because if you have Christ, he shares the kingdom with you.

ⁱ Research assistant: Matt Klein