

Poor in Spirit

by Joseph Carroll

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being 'poor in spirit' and having a sense of total inadequacy, drawing strength from the Holy Spirit, and being willing to renounce one's own plan and joyously accept God's plan.

Duration: 35:19

Scripture: Matthew 5:3

Topics: "Beatitudes", "Obedience to God", "Spiritual Poverty"

Description

Joseph Carroll emphasizes the concept of being 'poor in spirit' as a vital Christian attitude, contrasting it with worldly views of success and blessedness. He reflects on the story of Achan from Joshua 7, illustrating the necessity of obedience and the consequences of sin for the greater good of the community. Carroll explains that true blessedness comes from recognizing our spiritual inadequacy and relying on God's strength, rather than our own self-sufficiency. He encourages believers to embrace God's plans over their own, highlighting that true meekness and mourning for spiritual poverty lead to a deeper relationship with God. Ultimately, he calls for a transformation in attitudes that aligns with the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Transcript

But let's turn to Joshua, chapter 7. We all know the story of Achan, it's a sad story. Verse 22, So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent. And behold, it was hidden, his tent, and the silver under it.

And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had. And they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire. After they had stoned them with stones.

Quite a verse, isn't it? And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called the valley of Achor unto this day.

Perhaps we have a very wrong conception of what God is like. Now why? His sons, his daughters, everything that he owned, his cattle, his oxen, his asses, his sheep, everything stoned, everything burned. Why? For the sake of the nation.

They all saw it. They all saw it. You say it's harsh.

It's necessary. God is never harsh. He always does that which is necessary.

It was necessary. They were to be in the midst of very fierce enemies. And they had to learn one thing.

Obedience. And it was an example for the sake of the nation. One man, his family, had to perish for the sake of the nation.

Sad incident, but a necessary one. Do we use harsh measures at times? Yes, we do. But sadly, and hesitatingly, and only as the very last resort, for the sake of the body, or for the sake of the human family, or as far as an evangelical Christian is concerned, for the sake of the continued proclamation of the gospel.

Now shall we turn again to Matthew chapter 5? Matthew chapter 5. Last Tuesday morning we had quite an exceptional prayer meeting. Many had been spoken to the evening before concerning the matter of right attitudes. And one of our dear sisters, toward the end of the meeting, gave a testimony.

I seldom ask a person would they like to testify, but I was led to ask her for a word of testimony. Did you have a word of testimony? She said, yes, I do. The Lord spoke to me last night concerning my attitude and my reaction to other people, that I so very often react to their condition and not to their need.

And so I returned home and I prayed a prayer similar to that prayed by Solomon. You remember Solomon prayed, give me an understanding heart that I may discern, that I may discern. And so she prayed a similar prayer.

Solomon prayed that he might discern between good and bad. But she prayed, give me an understanding heart that I may discern between condition and need, and respond to the need in others. I do not believe we have shared a more important message than that message last Monday evening in this building.

And we must be very careful not to let the devil snatch away the seed. Because unless there is a response to light, there will be a relapse into darkness. Light demands obedience in order that there might be more light.

But if we do not walk in the light and obey the light, that light will be removed. If we do not heed the voice of the Spirit, the next time the voice of the Spirit is not as easily heard. Until finally it is possible for you not to hear it at all.

And after a meeting when people say, well that was a tremendous word, you begin to wonder, well what are they talking about? What do they mean, tremendous word? What do they mean? They mean that you are a backslider. They mean that you are not in the position where you can hear the voice of the Lord. Of course they are not saying that and they don't realize that that is what they are saying.

But that is what is a fact. When the Spirit of God speaks, if we obey promptly with all our hearts, the next time He speaks His voice is clearer. And if we obey again, His voice is even clearer.

But if we resist the Spirit of God and we lightly regard His word, the next time He speaks we don't hear quite as easily. And if we don't obey this time, the next time it's the barest and faintest of whispers until finally we don't hear it at all. We listen to truth but we just don't hear it.

And so we must be careful when the Lord speaks to us to incorporate into our lives that principle and no more vital principle than this, this matter of attitudes. Now I want you to notice here, and we will come again to this first part of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, because you must consider it from various angles. It's basically the same truth that we are coming back to but it's a different facet of the same truth.

One of my favorite mountains is in Switzerland, and the Matterhorn, and I always look for different snapshots of the Matterhorn, I have a favorite, but you can get a shot of the Matterhorn from different angles. And no matter which angle you shoot that magnificent mountain from, it's always so awe-inspiring. It's the same mountain, it looks a little different but it's the same mountain.

So we're going to take another shot at these first verses in this tremendous sermon on the Mount this evening. Now I want you to notice one thing, that He speaks about the blessed man. And the keynote to the beginning of this sermon is blessedness.

And Jesus goes on to outline the ideal life. And in outlining the ideal life, He speaks of poverty, of mourning, of hunger, of thirst, of reviling, of persecution. This is the blessed life.

Now it is the exact opposite of the attitude of the man in the world or his conception of what the blessed life is. For example, what does the man in the world consider the blessed life to be? Well firstly, wealth. Wealth is the blessed life.

Is it? There is such a thing as the poor rich. Oh no, that's not the way to blessedness. But you see this is what the man in the world says, well the blessed life, well it's wealth, it's social prominence, it's having other people speak well of you, it's having a good reputation, it's having a good table on which is laid the finest of food, the finest of clothes in the closet and so on.

This is his idea of blessedness. Our Lord's idea of blessedness has revealed His exact opposite. We have touched very briefly on how the devil keeps his subjects in ignorance through pleasure, through possessions and through position.

And you see it's all the opposite of what our Lord reveals to us here. What is the life of blessedness when it's one of poverty, it's one of mourning, hunger, thirst, reviling, persecution? It has nothing to do with social prominence or wealth or being well spoken of, good food, good clothing, etc., etc. Now, can we get hold of that tonight? Once you see that you will never seek for these things.

Forget about the wealth, forget about public opinion, forget about reputation, forget about it all and concentrate on these things that the Lord says if they are incorporated into your life and you live by these principles you'll know what it is to be blessed. And it's not without significance that the first one is blessed are the poor in spirit. The poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now I want you to notice that these first four are personal qualities and the last four are what we might call active social qualities. Or the first four have to do with our relations to God and the last four are relations to others. And there is no more important teaching in all the word of God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Now, what does he mean by the poor in spirit? Well, blessed are they who have a sense of total inadequacy. A sense of total inadequacy.

Without me ye can do nothing. Now, this is the exact opposite of the world's concept. Blessed is the man who can project his personality and put himself across.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed is that man who has a sense of total inadequacy. Now, he's not saying poor spirited.

The man who has a sense of total inadequacy has a strong spirit because he draws from the Holy Spirit for his adequacy. That's the difference. He has a different source.

The world's source is rooted in self. The true Christian source is rooted in the spirit of God. You see, the Lord gives power to the faint.

If you are strong, you don't need his power. You don't get it because you don't need it. To them that have no might, he increaseth strength.

If you have personal strength, you don't need his strength. What a difference. Poor in spirit.

The man who is poor in spirit is absolutely emptied of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. And not only that, but he considers himself to be very insignificant. Now, you can tell as soon as a man walks into a room, usually what he thinks of himself.

Here am I. I have a very favorite illustration. You've heard it before, but you must suffer it again tonight. Of the man, the southerner who went to see, and this is a true story, who went to see his senator in Washington.

And he was ushered into the room of the senator's office, and the senator said, Take a chair. And he looked at the senator and he said, Now, senator, before I take a chair, just let me tell you who I am. So for the next five or ten minutes, he just told him who he was.

And the senator said, Take two chairs. Take two. This is the world.

Take two chairs. There was a great Scottish theologian, Principal Cairns, great man of God, who always had the habit of saying to others, You go first and I'll follow. And yet in his day, he was probably the greatest biblical scholar in Scotland.

And on one occasion, he was making his way to the platform, and he happened to be leading another brother. They were walking to the platform together. And just as he reached the platform, there was a great burst of applause.

And he looked round in surprise and said to the other friend, It must be for you. And he sent him up to the platform and he followed him. It must be for you.

He never thought for a moment it could be for him. You see, he was poor in spirit. Bishop Westcott, the greatest evangelical biblical scholar in the world of his day.

Bishop of Durham, the seat of the great Anglican scholar of the Anglican church. He was always the Bishop of Durham. Whenever he went down into the town of Durham in his carriage, drawn by horses, he

would never sit facing the people.

He'd always sit with his back to the people. He didn't want to look at them. He said he wasn't worthy.

And yet I have his books in my library today, and there's nothing to equal them today. And always it is the custom of the English to place a plaque in that cathedral to commemorate and to honor the man who has been a bishop. But he said you must not put anything in the cathedral about me.

I'm not worthy of that. That's why he was a great Christian. His son said in his latter years, My father obviously lived in two worlds at once.

Whilst his feet were set in the world, his spirit was obviously in the presence of God. Everything that came to him was met in that presence. Nothing could ever surprise him from that attitude.

I memorized that as a young preacher because I realized I needed to. His feet were set in the world. His spirit was in the presence of God.

Nothing could surprise him from that attitude. What an indictment to us. We're so busy running here and there, we hardly know what it is to live in the presence of God.

In unbroken fellowship. Why? Because Westcott knew he had to live in the presence of God. And he did.

And everybody knew it. Poor in spirit. I wonder if there's any self-sufficiency, self-reliance in us tonight.

This attitude is the complete opposite or the antithesis to the Laodiceans. Do you remember their opinion of themselves? I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. That's Laodicea.

And you know what the Lord said concerning Laodicea. I'll spew the out of my mouth. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

And I want to say this and say it carefully. I believe if this characteristic is not manifest in the life, none of the others will be. None of the others will be.

Let's be honest tonight. Do you seek for a reputation amongst men? Do you? Do you want to be well thought of? Do you seek for security and satisfaction and blessing in possessions and in wealth? Do you? If you want that, you cannot have this. You make your choice.

You make your choice. And there's no middle ground. It's either or.

If you do not have this characteristic manifest in your life, I dare to say that nothing else here will be. It can't be. Because you're drawing from the wrong source.

You're drawing from the source of self instead of from the source of the Spirit of God. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Now, to be sorrowful, to mourn, is not a blessed thing. But the comfort which God ministers to the sorrowing soul, that's the blessed thing, you see. That's the blessed thing.

And here the thought of sorrowing has to do primarily with a sense of spiritual poverty and spiritual lukewarmness. And it's this poorness of spirit that leads to a sense of poverty. Have you ever heard a godly man pray and he's pouring out his heart to God for forgiveness of sin for himself and for those

around him and for their lukewarmness? And people think, what is he praying that prayer for? He's mourning.

He's mourning. He's mourning his own lukewarmness, but he might have more fire than anybody else in the city. The nearer he gets to the Lord, the more he mourns.

But the apostle could say, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. With the mourning comes the blessedness. What is it? The joy of the Spirit.

The joy of the Spirit. Is there a sense of failure? A sense of lukewarmness? It's painful. You ask the Lord to continually show you yourself.

He will. You see, this shatters all our self-sufficiency and self-planning and self-deception. We don't want to mourn.

Because we have a superficial idea of God and a superficial concept of sin. Spurgeon says there is one fatal flaw in Pharaoh's prayer. There is no confession of sin.

No confession of sin. I listen very carefully when people pray. You can tell where a man is and what he is by his prayer.

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Now, meekness is not weakness.

Let's underline that. Moses was a meek man, but he was certainly not a weak man. And meekness is not mildness of disposition.

Meekness is an attitude of mind that does not insist on its own rights. An attitude of mind that does not insist on its own rights. Now, I want you to notice that all of this ties in with being poor in spirit.

You see how if you are not poor in spirit, you are never going to be meek. You can't be. Your attitude or your poorness of spirit leads you to mourn your spiritual unworthiness and your lukewarmness.

Which leads you to true meekness. You don't insist on your own rights. Why? You have no worthiness of your own to insist.

It's that attitude of mind that always is ready to waive its privileges for the interest of others. How important these words are. That you have a certain privilege, you see.

And the interest of others collides with what your privilege is. Do you waive your own privilege for the interest of others? Or do you hang on to that which you want for your sake? That's what meekness is. It has nothing to do with weakness or a mild disposition.

It's meekness. Our Lord Jesus, of course, is the great example. Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself out of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant.

His privilege, what was it? The expression of his deity in heaven. He thought it not a thing to be grasped after. But he gave it up to come down to this earth for your sake and for mine.

He did not grasp after that which was his by right. He was willing to become a man and to become sin for you and for me. That's what it's all about.

I am meek and lowly in heart. When we are willing to put aside that which is ours by right for the sake of others. That's what the word of God is speaking about here.

And that man is blessed. He's blessed. This is the blessed man.

Always ready to renounce his own plan. And joyously to embrace God's plan. Do you have some plan? Forget it.

You've got a great plan for yourself, for your future, for your children. Forget it. People ask me, what plans do you have for your children? I say, the will of God for their lives.

Nothing more. Oh, but don't you want to be this or that? No. Whatever the will of God is, that's it.

And it's a day at a time proposition. That's his responsibility, not mine. But have you planned for your children? Why don't you let the Lord plan for them? Why don't you let the Lord plan? Have you got a nice little plan for your retirement? I don't read here ever where a child of God retires.

The Apostle Paul, when he could have retired, said, I press toward the mark for the prize. I'm running harder than ever. What do you mean retirement? We were chatting in our home recently about a dear man of God who went to be with the Lord quite recently in Germany, Uncle Ewald.

He lived in a city which was 90% Roman Catholic, rabid Roman Catholic in Germany. And quite often he had been stoned for giving out tracks in certain parts of that city. But the last time I saw Uncle Ewald, he had a little black bag, a special little suitcase that he had made, leather, to put his tracks in.

And every day he'd take about 500 tracks. He'd just take that little bag, and away he went into the city. And I can still see his form as he disappeared out of sight, with his little black bag and his tracks.

Great man. His wife didn't know if he would come home with a bloodied face or a bloodied body. But even if he did the next day, he was out with a little black bag, you see, like his master.

Plans for retirement? No, he didn't have any plans. I want to tell you, my friend, that when you have a plan for retirement, you are inevitably right in the middle of it. Jesus Christ, isn't it? Isn't that right? It is right.

When you have a plan for retirement, you are right in the middle of it. Something is going to give you self-satisfaction. I don't read a thing about that in the Word of God.

Uncle Ewald never retired, he died with his boots on, in his eighties. Still giving out his tracks. Hallelujah.

Willingness to renounce your own plan and joyously accept God's plan. This is the test. There was a very dear, sweet sister, Ann Fortosis, who you will remember we prayed for when she was dying of cancer.

And right to the end, she believed God for healing, if it was His will, right to the end. And I went once and sometimes two times a week to visit her. She was a very brave woman.

Till finally she had to be taken to the hospital, and the cancer was devouring her body. In her spine, almost reached her brain. But she still believed.

And then one afternoon, I entered her room and she said to me, Am I going to die? I said yes. She didn't say why. She said tell me about heaven.

Right on the spot. One word, am I going to die? Yes, you're going to die. Tell me about heaven.

You see, she had a plan, she wanted to recover, she loved her husband, she loved her children. They needed her, you see. From her viewpoint, she was needed.

She wanted to live for them. But the Lord had other plans. And so when it was revealed to her that her plan had been scrapped by the Lord, she immediately embraced His plan.

She said tell me about heaven. And in three days she was with the Lord. You see, this is what our Lord is speaking about here.

When He scraps your plan, and gives you a plan you don't want, what is your reaction to it? That's the test, isn't it? What is your reaction? Is it like amphotersis? I think that must have been the greatest moment in a great life. To me it was. She never asked why, why couldn't it be, why didn't God answer prayer, why, why, why.

No questions. All right? If this is God's will, what's heaven like? And so we spoke to her about heaven. A few days she was in heaven.

This is the blessed life. This is the blessed life. Perhaps we should finish there.

Shall we pray? Dear Lord, these attitudes speak deeply to us. We don't like to scrap our own plans when we are in the center. But Lord, your ways are perfect, and they lead to blessedness.

When to us they would seem to lead to disaster. How different your ways are to ours. Give us grace, Lord, not merely to hear thy word, and then to lightly, superficially, foolishly forget it.

And go our own way, dominated by the currents of our time, by the world in which we live, and the devil's children who dominate it, living their way and seeking their goals. Give us grace to seek thee. Oh Lord, may we know what it is to be totally inadequate, no sense of self-sufficiency of any kind, totally cast upon the indwelling Spirit of God for everything.

Give us grace, we pray thee, to accept your ways and not ours for the sake of others, that we might be like our Master which is in heaven. Lord, write these words upon our hearts, and so fill us with thy Spirit that their truth shall be manifested in our lives. And this we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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