

Beatitudes - Part 3

by Leonard Ravenhill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing spiritual poverty and living a life of sacrificial service in order to experience blessedness.

Duration: 1:05:37

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-6, Luke 6:20, Luke 15:17, Luke 15:24

Topics: "Beatitudes"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the incongruity of the gospel in the world. He uses the analogy of ducks hatching eggs with four legs and calves with three heads to illustrate how the church of Jesus Christ is seen as ludicrously incongruous in the modern world. He contrasts the teachings of Jesus, such as 'blessed are the meek' and 'blessed are the poor in spirit,' with the prevailing mindset of survival of the fittest and self-assertion. The preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing our unworthiness before God and the need for humility in approaching Him.

Transcript

...three, that's a long while ago in a, a lot of places, a Methodist, isn't that terrible, in a Methodist church. And we've been very good friends. Well, he's been a good friend to me, I may not have been as good to him, but he's a very precious friend and it's good to have him, have him with us tonight.

Okay, we've been dealing with a, uh, at least the introduction so far on this amazing sermon on the mount. And, uh, reading from chapter five of Matthew, verse one, and seeing the multitude, he went up into a mountain and when he was set, his disciples came unto him and he opened his mouth. Now, I'm, I'm going to deal with the next verse, don't worry, but you may ask the question, why did he open his mouth? He couldn't very well speak if he didn't open his mouth, could he? But, you know, Paul in writing, and, and, I've always kind of figured Paul was a man with no needs, you know.

He didn't need anybody to pray for him, and no man is greater than his prayer life, and Paul prays awesome prayers. I could wish myself a curse, literally in the Greek it's, I could wish myself damned if need be for my brethren. I'm willing to be poured out as a sacrifice.

And, and he prays such amazing prayer. And yet in Ephesians 6, 19, he says, pray for me that utterance may be given me. You know, the fellow that built this colossal, uh, theology higher than those mountains.

Uh, the, the epistle to the Romans and these other things, and yet he says, you pray for me. You know, and, and, I, to me that, that again is an amazing thing. But he says, pray for me that utterance may be given to me.

Now, he wasn't short of words for sure. But I think he means by utterance there, that the word I speak will be a word of authority. It won't just be empty words, it won't be terminology, it won't be juggling with words, you know, and drawing attention to myself.

Pray that utterance may be given. Do you remember this, uh, so, the temple guard as they're called, the soldiers of the temple went to arrest Jesus, and he arrested them. Well, he didn't lay his hands on them, he arrested them with his words.

When they got back to the temple, they said, well, didn't you bring him? No, no, no. Why, did he, did he hit you with a sword? Did somebody punch you? Oh, no, but nobody ever spoke like this man. Isn't that amazing? He, he almost knocked them flat with his words.

Oh, we've heard those mealy-mouthed Pharisees, they stand up at street corners, say their prayers, sign of the cross, north, south, east and west, you know, that some people still use. And, and they went through all the ritual, but when they heard Jesus, they said, this man is, oh, my, he's saying things that nobody else ever said. And I think that's what it means here, I, I don't know anybody else that agrees with me, but I agree with myself, which is good.

And, uh, I, I think that's what it means when he says, he opened his mouth. He's speaking with authority. He's saying something that's never been said in the history of the world.

And what did he say? He opened his mouth and he taught them, saying, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now, that's raised a lot of controversy over the years. You see, when, when you turn to Luke, chapter 6, it says that, that, uh, he, he said, blessed are the poor, not in spirit.

But wait a minute, there, there's a change there. If you look at the, uh, 6th chapter of, of, uh, Luke there, and, where is it, verse 20, he lifted up his eyes on his disciples. He's not talking to anybody else but the disciples.

A man says, boy, I read the Sermon on the Mount, it knocked me flat. I mean, I can't do anything about it. That's exactly why it's written, to show you can't do anything about it.

That it's a total impossibility to live that life apart from a miracle called regeneration. It, it's out of reach. You may as well say, look, I'm going to run down that hill and take off.

I'm not going to bother going to the airport. I'm going to fly there myself. And you start weaving your hands, and the next minute you're flat on your face.

You can't do it. It, it, it's put there to show us our bankruptcy, that this is an impossibility. And, uh, it says, he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and he said, now notice all the difference here.

Blessed, what? What does it say? Blessed be ye poor. Not blessed are the poor. He's not speaking about all the poor people through the ages.

He's talking to those disciples. He lifted his eyes onto his disciples, and he said to them, blessed be ye poor. I'm talking to you.

Now, some people have tried to ease that, you know, and say, well, sure it says, blessed are the poor in spirit. But, you know, actually what it means there is, uh, blessed is the spirit of the poor. They've juggled with the words.

It doesn't say that. Do you know any people living in a ghetto or a hell hole who are really blessed and happy? What are they to be blessed about? What are they to be happy about? He's talking about here recognizing, he's talking here about really living, coming to Jesus and recognizing, okay, in the language of the hymn, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. I have nothing that's going to give me a passport into the heart of God, except my nothingness.

You remember, when the prodigal came home, he came home, and he didn't come home and say, Dad, just a minute, I just want to tell you, I've had a marvelous time in Las Vegas. You should imagine, the first night I was there, I put \$100,000 on this machine, and then after that I went to another show in the silver slipper, and, Father, you should have traveled, you've no idea what it's like that. And then my trip to Egypt, I've got some films on it.

You know, he didn't excite his father like that. What did he do? He just came home, what did he say? He says, I'm not worthy to be called thy son, forget it, get some modern theology. Once a son, always a son, why didn't he say that? Huh? I mean, wasn't he his father's son just because he'd been living with hogs? Sure he was.

But he says, Father, I've so discredited you, I've so disgusted you, I've so despised you, I've so disappointed you, all I can come with is a load of wreckage. Notice his brother didn't say that, his stiff brother, who was an elder in a certain church, I won't tell you which, but his brother says, hey, you think I'm going to eat with a bunch there and dance and be happy? You don't know about my brother, I'd be keen to tabs on him. Do you know what? He's lived with prostitutes, he's been a drunkard, he's been in jail, he's dragged the family name in the gutter.

I'm not. My brother's the rottenest, vilest, wickedest man on the face of the earth. Isn't it amazing the father never said a sin against the boy? He didn't say my son is bad, he said my son is dead.

And that summed it all up. The other brother was peeling the tabs, and the father turned round and showed he got two prodigal sons because the other guy, he says you never killed a fatty cow for me and gave me a party, and his father said I couldn't do that. Why couldn't you do it? Because five years ago when your brother left home, I divided the whole estate, and he took the cash, and all that herd of Brangus down there, and Aberdeen Angus, and all the other things we've got, they're all yours.

What have you done with them? You see, he was a prodigal. He wasted everything he had without leaving the house. Like lots of churches, all they have is a stack of freeze-dried sermons and theology, and they know the world's going to hell fire, and all they say, have you read the latest statistics on pornography? Do you know how many girls got pregnant last night? Do you know this? Do you know? And that's all they do.

The boy doesn't come with anything except a pretty miserable record, and he's got a rotten memory, he hasn't slept for nights, and he comes home and he says, Father, I'm not worthy. That's where God begins, isn't it? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Not very long ago, somebody said to me, well, in fact, a guy loaned me a tape, he said, the greatest thing I ever heard.

I thought it was one of the worst tapes I'd ever heard. And this man said, you know what? All we have to do is get all the believers to really believe the Sermon on the Mount, and go out and live it, and we'll change the world. Well, I've said more than once, if every professing Christian in America lived the Sermon on the Mount for a day, we'd certainly change it to some degree.

What is the Sermon on the Mount? It's a full-length portrait of Jesus. That's what it is. He lived, totally, the Sermon on the Mount.

Well, did the world believe on him? Did the Pharisees all say, oh, this is the greatest teaching we've ever heard. This man's super. I'm resigning from the Board of Pharisees, and I'm resigning from the Sadducees, and I'm giving up this, and I'm not going to be the high priest anymore.

I'm through with Moses, and killing cattle, and all that junk. I'm going to embrace this man. He's got the most ideal philosophy in the world.

Did they say that? No, they didn't. What did he do with the portrait? The only thing the world did for the most holy man that ever lived was give him a crown of thorns. So why do you expect better treatment? If he couldn't put up with the holiest man that ever lived, why does he put up with us? Is it that our holiness doesn't irritate it enough? Just go out and live it, and everybody will admire you.

Well, ask the Apostle Paul, just two minutes before they chopped his head off, if they'd admired him. There's a lovely book. I think the Agape Force sell it now.

Oh, I forgot the title. It's by a lady doctor. Helen Rosevear.

Thank you, dear. Living Sacrifice. Well, I knew that young lady in England.

She used to come to our meetings. Her daddy, one of the most distinguished surgeons in the country. She's a brilliant young doctor.

What? You're going to where? The mission field? Don't be crazy. You've got a career. You're brilliant.

She's one of the best young surgeons in the country. And she went and lived before them, and lived sacrificially, and wouldn't live, you know, on the American standard, or the English standard out there. Let's live with the natives, and share everything they have.

And lived there for years, and she healed their diseases, and did magnificent surgery. Free! What did you get for it? Raped. It's nonsense to say that if you live a holy life, the whole world's going to fall at your feet.

They didn't fall at the feet of the Son of God, did they? Jesus is here. He's not saying here, look, if you do all these things, you'll be spiritual. You can be self-effacing, and very humble, and give all your money away, and do a lot of nice things.

But I won't make you spiritual. But if you're spiritual, you'll be meek and lowly. Doing the things doesn't make you spiritual, but being spiritual enables you to live that life that he's speaking of there.

And after all, this is, this is, this is, this is, well, it's just the road to blessedness, isn't it? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Well, that's the first rung on the ladder. Supposing he started by saying, blessed are the rich, we'd all back off and say, oh, well, I'm going to read the next chapter, nothing in this chapter for me.

But blessed are the poor in spirit. That's the first rung. If you're going up to the top, now, if he'd turned it the other way, and the first rung on the ladder was, blessed are the pure in heart, we'd all back off and say, oh, I wonder if there's anything in any other, there's nothing in Romanism, I just read the last newsletter, and there's nothing in these other things, so where am I going to go? But Jesus starts where we can all start, blessed are the poor.

That's the bottom rung of the ladder, and then you start climbing from there up into the heights, or you can say it's the gateway into the temple of God in one sense. There are many types of poverty, there's social poverty, there's intellectual poverty, physical poverty, spiritual poverty, and he's talking here about spiritual poverty, blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the poor, rather, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now, I guess one of the most embarrassing things in the world is to be poor. People do not like to think that they're poor, usually. At least they didn't used to, but now you can get, you know, you can still be drawing support from the government and ride up in a Cadillac to get it.

And we've abolished many of the old things that used to be considered a reproach to be poor, now people don't care a hill of beans, many of them, they say, well, I can get this social benefit and I can get food stamps and I can get anything and what's the good of working anyhow? But it used to be there was a reproach on poverty. Everybody likes to think they're a bit smarter than somebody else, so what we're really saying is that I'm intellectually richer than somebody else is. And of course, it's all relative, what poverty in this country would be considered quite comfortable in other countries, everything's so relative.

But when you come right down to this thing, it's blessed are the poor in spirit, that I have nothing that commends me to God, nothing in my hands I bring. It's an awful revelation when people say, as a man said to me recently, he came to see me the other week, a pastor, I asked him how old he was, he said, I'm 31, and I said, when were you saved? He said, when I was 14. I said, well, that's nice, nice age to get saved.

Well, let me say, I went up to the front and told the preacher I wanted to be saved, and he said, pray the sinner's prayer, and then they put me through the tank at night, and then he said I got saved 14 years after. I was 28 years of age when I got saved. Now, he'd lived a good life, he'd been, you know, very close to the church, he'd done all the church said, he'd tithed, he'd joined the youth club, youth baseball team, and I don't know what he had, all the other things in the kingdom of God, you know.

And then suddenly woke up one night, I'm not saved, I, I, no, no, no, no, I don't know anything about this that you're talking about. Isn't it horrible the way, you know, when I read this, I feel when I get up, if you haven't read Macefield, you should read His Everlasting Mercy, I think it's the greatest poem maybe ever written outside of the Bible, that's apart from hymns that are so beautiful. And Macefield says at one point, he makes Saul Cain, who is the hero in the story, a man who'd live for the devil, the poem starts off from 41 to 51, I was my folk's contrary son, I, I bit my father's hand right through and broke my mother's heart in two, sometimes I go without my dinner, now when I think of times I've ginner.

From 51 to 61 I lived in, I cut my teeth and took to fun, I learned what women's lips are made of, I learned what not to be afraid of, I cursed, would make a man look pale, and 19 times I went to jail. And then he goes on from 61 to 67, I lived in disbelief of heaven, I fought, I lied, I poached, I whored, I did despite to the Lord, and then wham, he has a revelation from God, he sees what a leper he is. And when the great turnaround comes, he says in one of his phrases, he says, you know, sometimes I get up, and he said, this day I felt I'd like to hit the world a belt.

You know what he means? I'd like to punch it. Sometimes I feel like that about the church. But he says, I felt I'd like to hit the world a belt.

And when I read the Sermon on the Mount, all our problems are answered in this sermon. It's rather like a man with a check for a million dollars, or say a thousand dollar bill. They showed one on TV the other day, I've never seen one.

Maybe you have a few, but this thousand dollar bill. And here he is, he's shaking, and I say, what's wrong? Oh, I see your soles. Yeah, I'm walking on my bare feet, just got covers on the top, you know.

And I haven't had a meal for three days. And I slept out in... Well, isn't that a genuine bill? Yeah, but you see, I'm trying to find out where it was printed. And I've been looking for the printer of this bill for the last two years.

And then I want to find where, you know, what closet's in the government where it's legal to have it. I think it was in 1867. And until I get all these facts straight, well, I could die in the process, isn't it terrible? You know, the world's like that, a stupid world's got all the answers to its problems, and yet it refuses to believe that Jesus Christ is the answer.

It's a stubborn, rebellious, stupid, ignorant, blind world with all its cleverness. Buddha died saying, I'm seeking for truth. Jesus started by saying, I am the truth.

He didn't say, I'm looking for it. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. The Holy Ghost, when he has come, he is the spirit of truth who takes the word of truth.

And the psalmist says, doesn't he? Thy word is truth. We don't have to fear. People say, do you think everybody's wrong but you? I say, yes.

Well, you're arrogant. No, I'm a Christian. You're the only people that's right.

Exactly, exactly. That means we've an awful responsibility. There is no other word of truth in the whole world except this word of truth.

There is no God of truth except the God of truth, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I say again, when I read this, and I think of the, now what they're trying to do, they're trying to get another, oh, I don't know, some stupid number, another hundred million dollars for armaments. We need this, we need that, we need the other.

Isn't it crazy? I think Brother mentioned yesterday that we gave the lives of 50,000 men in that terrible war there in Vietnam. What good has it done? It was to stop communism. Why are we trying to get married to them? We're trying to get married to the communists in China right now.

We're trying to get married to a diabolical system. When it suits us, 50,000 homes were wrecked, 50,000 mothers had broken hearts. So what? Plenty more to go at, aren't there? We can rape this generation too.

And here are all the answers given so beautifully to us in this Blessed Sermon on the Mount. Now, I don't care whether you say this is the heavenly octave, I think it was Boerum that called it the heavenly octave, but mostly people say there are eight Beatitudes, well, there may be eight Beatitudes, but nine times he says, Blessed, Blessed, Blessed, Blessed. And as we said last week, happiness depends on its external, it depends on what's happening round about you.

Blessedness does not. Blessedness is the anointing of God, it's the fullness of God. It's awesome when I read that, what, the 14th chapter of John's Gospel, just before Jesus is going to get seminary, he says, well now, don't get nervous about it, he says, you know what, that joy you have, no man taketh it from you.

He's talking about joy, my joy. He's going to the cross. Are you suggesting there's a lot of happiness in having a great big copper spike ripped through your hands and through your feet and your side torn, and hanging there in misery? I don't think Jesus had a stitch on him, I think part of the humiliation was to hang there naked, plus the fact that God is going to forsake him, just for a matter of split seconds.

There were two great men in history by the name of Diogenes. Diogenes, the Egyptian said, at noon day in Egypt it became as black as night. And heathen that he was, he said, either deity is suffering or somebody is suffering with him.

One of the awful things in eternity will be to discover what it meant when God walked away from his Son and nobody saw the crucifixion really. Why not? Because God put a blind over the Son, the earth went into mourning, the whole earth shook, the whole earth went into darkness. And that's what it cost to redeem us, you see.

Just the other day, these three guys came, I don't know if I've quoted this before, but anyhow it comes back to me right here, I'll quote it again, Repetitions of the Law of Learning, anyhow. And one of them said, yeah, you recommended this book and that book, and that book by David Brainerd. You know, those Puritans, you know, like John Owen and some of those great big characters, Richard Baxter and others, they had fits of melancholia, didn't they? I said, yes, they did, pretty regularly.

Well, why did they have fits of melancholia? I mean, why did they get a kind of depression in their spirit? I said, I've never found an answer in a book, but I've got an answer for you. Well, what's the answer? I said, I think it's a double-headed answer. I think, number one, their soberness was due to the fact they lived in the light of the judgment seat all the time, and the other was, they saw the awful abyss into which lost men and women are going to go.

We've lost sight of that. It's an easy thing now. You just come up and say, oh, I'm sorry, and you go out, and people go out unchanged.

There's no miracle in the world like the miracle of regeneration. Isn't it a blessing? Every baby that comes in the world is a new one. What if they were second-hand ones? Huh? Every baby is a miracle.

Every time I see a miracle, every time I see a baby, I see a miracle. I gaze at it. Childbirth is one of the greatest gambles in the whole world.

The child can be born with what? Blindness? Lameness? Retarded? Ooh, there's a thousand deficiencies that could come to a newborn baby. And every time you see a baby, and maybe it doesn't look so good. A friend of mine, his wife just bore the first baby, and the little thing, you know, was all crumpled up and red and had its fists up.

Well, it's the only way to come into a world like this, with your fists up. I mean, it's going to have to fight its way through life. But he lifted it up and said to his mother, looking through the window, oh, it's ugly.

It's ugly. Sure it was ugly. It's all, you know, like the little boy that saw, went to see his cousin, and there's the little baby, and on it's, ah, ah, ah, and it's red and fighting and no teeth and bald and yelling at the top

of its voice as though it's furious and angry.

Oh. He says, now, mummy, I understand. Understand what? He said, why she kept it under a coat so long.

It's so ugly. But what a miracle in regeneration. Ah? Isn't it amazing that nobody that's ever truly born again is born with a deformity.

Nobody's ever born again blind. Nobody's ever born again lame. Nobody's ever born again retarded.

Yes, some people are poor by choice. Not many. Usually we're poor because we have to be poor.

We're born in that strata of society, if you like. But you know what? We're all poor spiritually because we want to be. We don't have to be.

We want to be. Why? Because this book is open to every one of us. What, what, oh, OK, let's say there are eight Beatitudes.

What did Jesus say? Well, now, ah, OK, I'm going to give you a gift of meekness. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the pure in heart.

Did he dish them out one at a time? He gave gifts out like that, didn't he? And did he say, this is, this is just a little elite group of mine, just my disciples. They were born at the right time. As we say, they were in the right place at the right time.

And so they're going to start off with poverty, but they're going to climb up the ladder and they're going to end up with a holy life, a pure life, and a relationship with God, but it's not for everybody. Oh, yes it is. Oh, yes it is.

This again is the, is the manifesto of the kingdom. It's not for an elitist set. After all, what does Jesus say? Is the church, what can I call it? Ah, is the church a secret society? Is it to hide in buildings? You know, I was thinking today, I don't know why, about a statement I read years ago by a fellow called Stringfellow.

I think actually he's a Presbyterian. And he's seen this modern architecture, you know. I went to preach at a church up north some years ago.

And when I went in, I guess putting my hands up, I could just about touch the ceiling as I went in the church. And then it rose like that, up like a jet taking off, you know. And it was about 10 feet at the entrance and about 50 feet at the end.

And the church expanded like that and it went way, way up like that. Oh, that's to give you a sense of grandeur and majesty and opening out into eternity. I couldn't see eternity.

I could see a cheap stained glass window. That's all I could see. But you know, outside it looked as though it was like a ship that was sinking at the back.

It's down in the ground, you know. And it's what Stringfellow calls bastard architecture. And I was reading a book just this week where the woman says, well, supposing 500 years from now somebody comes and excavates one of our cities that's been covered in dust or it's sunk in the desert.

Will they be able to tell the difference between the church and the, what did she call it, the security and lawn building at the end of the street? Where's the distinction? She says supposing there are two records found, what she calls these imperishable plastic records and we play one and it's jazz music, rock music and the other's gospel rock. Will they know the difference if they can't hear the lyrics? Supposing they come and find some other traces of the church as it is today. Will they think it's a supernatural operation? Is there anything to identify it? After all, you talk about miracles.

My, this is surely the greatest miracle in the whole world. It's totally, oh, what was it? I wrote something here that I read this week. I can't memorize it enough.

It's written by a woman called Virginia Stem Owens and she says the gospel is ludicrously incongruous. Boy, that takes a bit of saying. It's ludicrously incongruous.

It doesn't fit in this world. It's like you going down there in the morning and you find the ducks and they've hatched some eggs and all the ducks have four legs. All your calves have three heads.

Boy, you'd get press photographers, everybody would be coming round to see it and say, oh, this is marvelous, this is marvelous. You say, no, no, it's embarrassing. I mean, how in the world have we got this brood round here? You see, the church of Jesus Christ is, as she says, it's incongruously ridiculous in the world in which we live.

It's the very opposite of modern life. Blessed are the meek. Forget it.

Blessed are the armament folk. They're going to conquer the world. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

No, they'll tread you down. This is a day of the survival of the fittest. Come on, assert your personality.

Take some lessons on how to develop and, you know, show your stuff. I taught myself at least some things years ago. One is I can't impress God.

Did you ever try? I can't impress God. He knows me better than I know myself. The only thing that impresses God, again, is obedience.

The church is not a private group that has to be sheltered and protected. Now, don't laugh at us. I mean, we've given up a lot for Jesus, I know.

And, you know, we're not sure when the Lord's coming and it gets a bit harder every day. Now, don't laugh. We've enough to bear without you laughing.

Is that the way we go through the world? What did Jesus say about this group? What did He say about the church? It's a city set on what? In a valley with trees around it so nobody can see you? It's a city set on a hill that cannot be hid. It's a light that you put it in a nice suburban area, you know, and surround it with trees and dim the lights and let the lights shine through, you know, stained glass windows so people admire it going past on the bus. And all they do is say, what do they get impressed with that kind of junk with? What He says, it should be the most conspicuous thing that there is.

The church should be the light of the world. The church is a city set on a hill. The church is salt.

No, no, that's wrong. You listen to, I was going to say, a certain group in the morning on TV. It's sugar.

The church is sugar now. But we're so sweet and we're so inoffensive, you know. And our old fathers used to stand up and say, you're lost.

Now we say, you're loved. We're going to love people into hell if we're not careful. Well, you see, God loves people.

How many times does it say that in the Bible? You'll find ten times as much of the wrath of God in the Bible than you do the love of God. As I've said, if you have a bumper sticker at one end that says, that says, smile, God loves you, balance it at the other end with God is angry with the wicked every day. If you've got a sticker that says, in case of a rapture, this church, no, this thing's going to go on its own, you know, you can have it kind of thing.

Why not put a bumper at the other side that says when he comes, he's coming in flaming judgment on sinners. You better not put that on before you go have your lunch over in the shopping mall because they may have burned your car by the time you come out. But aren't we trying to be so passive and aren't we trying to make the gospel so presentable and so nice and so gracious? Jesus didn't.

A man says, well, look, I've listened to your preaching and I'll tell you what, it's really marvelous and I'm prepared to give you a million dollars a year. I'll support you. And he says, is that all right? Jesus says, yes, if you give the other ten million, sell all that thou hast.

Sell all that thou hast. Why? Because it'll become his idol. The scripture warns against those who trust in uncertain riches because many people who have been trusted with riches now trust in their uncertain riches.

Jesus says the church is to them the most conspicuous thing that there is. It's a light. It's a city set on a hill and you can't hide it.

Can't hide it. Man alive today, you can't find it. You go into a city and ask for a certain church.

I don't know. If you ask for a tavern, they know where it is and a disco, they know where it is. Lauren Cunningham tells about the time he drove into a city and he was late, Saturday night and he pulled up, there's a guy mowing the lawn outside the church.

He says, excuse me, would you happen to know where the first Pentecostal church is? He said, yes, sir. You go down this road about a mile and a half, you'll see a steeple. That's the Episcopal church and you turn right and you'll go about three blocks and on the left hand corner, you'll see, there's a big Baptist church and then you go a bit further down and let me see, you go about two blocks and you'll turn right and then there's a big Methodist church and you turn left there and go down the street and he named them about six churches.

Well, the guy was late. Poor, poor brother was late so he set off down the street and he thought, now, wait a minute, now, here's a Methodist church. Now, what did he say? Do I go two blocks past here? Do I, two blocks, two blocks? I think it's two blocks right.

Oh, well, there's a garage here. He pulled in and says, hey, how are you? He said, fine. He said, do you happen to know where the Pentecostal church is? First Pentecostal, yeah, I've been there sometimes.

Where is it? He said, well, go down this road about a mile and you'll see a gold station and then turn left and when you get down there about 200 yards, you'll see a Texaco station and if you turn right there and you go a bit further and you'll see a finer station and I think it's just a bit, let me see, you go a bit further down there, there's a Standard Oil, oh yes, it's just past Standard Oil. What's he doing? Well, where his treasure is, where his thought is, he got it all mapped out. One guy knows all the churches, the other guy knows all the gas stations.

But by and large, the church is not the most influential thing and I'm not thinking of a steeple. You know, I'm playing on words here, but now we identify churches by a steeple, not by the people. Oh, yes, there are three spires, it's the biggest one, you know, it's a bit nearer heaven than the others, that's it.

And yet Jesus says the church, not by some fancy building, he says the church of the living God in every city should be the most vibrant, radiant thing that there is in the world. It should be light in the city. It should be salt in the city.

Oh boy, not sugar. I remember the first time as a little boy, I cut my finger and mother had been working and I put my hand down like this and got some salt. Oh, did I jump.

I never realized salt was so painful. We kind of think that we have to work as mediators and say, well now, you know, I know the old preachers used to preach 50 years ago, they were very severe, they preached a lot on hell fire and this, that and the other. But, you know, nowadays we've got a new concept of God.

We're talking about his love, you know the old argument, you catch a lot more flies with honey than with vinegar. Great theology. But that's the thing now, isn't it? You see, Jesus says, look, I have got one standard.

If you're coming into the kingdom, you sell all that you have. You've got to come in and it's totally stripped. You want to be clothed? I'm going to strip you.

You want to be filled? You're going to be emptied. You want to save your life? Lose it. You want to lose your life? Save it.

You want to go up? Go down. He that exalted himself shall be amazed. He that humbled himself shall be exalted.

Poverty surely is tied again into humility. You get again the word of the psalmist and well, he wasn't socially poor for sure he was a king. But he says, this poor man cried and the Lord heard him.

True, Jesus didn't despise the poor. He fed the poor. He healed the poor.

When John was in prison, he said, run and tell John that yes, I'm really the son of God and people are being healed. And to the poor, the gospel is preached. It's not for an elite group of Pharisees.

It's not for a distinguished bunch of Sadducees. The gospel is for the man that's prepared to come in and he gets into the kingdom like that big fat camel that can't get in the gate at night. And there is still a side gate there if you go to Jerusalem and you have to try and get the camel through there and in order to do that boy, you've got to get the pack off and carry the pack through yourself then drag the old thing like a stubborn mule that doesn't want to go through.

And it's a tight squeeze to get through the earth and evil. And he says, don't trust in uncertain riches. Often we get arrogant in them.

They become the bed on which we lie. They become our satisfaction. Again, it's an awesome thing really to be able to sing Thou O Christ art all I want and more than all in Thee I find.

You think of the words of Paul. I was thinking of his word when he writes in 2 Corinthians there. You remember he says, what did he say? He doesn't say I'm the greatest preacher that ever lived.

I've written more epistles than any other man. My track record is the best. My back has more stripes on it than any man.

I've been in weariness and fastings and painfulness and distress and perils of the deep and perils of my own kind. He doesn't run through his track record which is an amazing track record. What does he say? He says, we're as poor yet making many rich.

Having nothing and yet possessing all things. Phillips puts it this way and I like it there. He says, our sole defense our only weapon is a life of integrity.

Whether we meet with honor or dishonor meet with praise or with blame whether we're called impostors we must be true and be called nobodies. And we must be nobodies in the public eye. We're never far from death and yet here we are alive.

We're always going through it but never going under. We know sorrow yet our joy is inextinguishable. We've nothing to bless ourselves with yet we bless many others with true riches.

We're penniless and yet in reality we have everything that's worth having. Now what do you want? Do you want riches and trimmings on the outside or do we want to be able to say with the apostle Paul well I don't have anything but you know I have everything I require in this life. Everything.

Because you see what do you mean by poverty? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Oh I see. So then when they die the Lord's going to say well give my child here a special robe and a special crown No that's not what it says.

It is true that later it says they shall see the kingdom of God but here it says blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What is the kingdom of heaven? It's everything that's left in the chapter. It's meekness and holiness and purity and joy unspeakable.

I get them now on the way to heaven. Heaven is the bonus at the end of the trip. Again if any man be in Christ.

I like that. I'm almost sure that Paul jumped up from his desk and put his shoulders back poor old beaten up shoulders he had and swaggered and said hallelujah if any man anywhere at any time be in Christ. You know like that sign I remember the first time coming to America in 1950 and like everybody else I get up early in the morning we're going to pass that big old lady that stands there with a lamp in her hand you know and you should see it when the sun rises and we were all on deck all us first time sea travelers you know and there was a great old lady standing and somebody said it says on that pillar at the bottom bring me your wretched and this and that and the other and everything that's great.

Well isn't that exactly what Jesus says? He says now wait a minute wait a minute if you're sufficient in yourself if your lifestyle is what you like if you're intellectually comfortable and if you've got all it takes to live this life I'm sorry there's no way get out of here. That's what he says doesn't he? He says I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. You see what is it in about Luke 15 they turned their noses up and said this man receiveth sinners I say hallelujah that's the greatest thing ever said about it.

Do you know this woman this man let a leprous woman touch him a woman with a rotten reputation in the city came and he calls himself the son of God. Oh you should hear the Irish sing that old song Christ receiveth sinful men you know the chorus says Christ receiveth sinful men that's how it starts and the chorus says sing it o'er and o'er again Christ receiveth sinful men and then there's a pause and the women always mess it up there and then they sing and women as well they sing Christ receiveth sinful men and women as well they want to get in and right in there.

There's neither Jew nor Greek bond nor free male nor female no class distinction no social distinction no sex distinction all you have to get in is to be as rotten and helpless it doesn't mean you dive into corruption you know somebody said well it does young people good to go and live in a hell hole oh I see I say did you ever have surgery oh you don't know the benefits of modern surgery and antibiotics now there's a bus coming down the street throw yourself in front of it and I'll call the police I'll call the ambulance and I'll get you the best doctor and he may put your spine together but anyhow he'll do all the repairs and oh you've got to prove what modern science can do forget it somebody asked me the other day if I'd read a book on Dixie Smith I think did you get one Keith I think

you got one the other week didn't you and so yeah I had lunch with Dixie Smith many times and I remember him saying he'd just come back from America and he was in a big conference and they said the final night instead of preaching we're going to have three outstanding testimonies one by so and so you remember him he's a kind of Al Capone and so and so oh he oh oh oh oh his life has been purple patches ever since he fell out of his cradle nearly and then Dixie Smith the famous Dixie Smith oh he said the first man he used about every adjective he could to describe his he went to hell and back he remembered every incident till people were almost throwing up with his insurance and where he'd been he took them through the gutters they wanted it and they got it the other guy came up with his

lifestyle had been different he'd been a con man and he'd lived in society and he'd done this and done that but oh then he ended up with lives he'd polluted and everything else and Dixie thought oh the atmosphere's electric what in the world am I going to do oh he said I suddenly got an idea I stood there very solemnly and said you'll have heard two most dramatic testimonies that I've ever heard in my life I've been going to conferences for 40, 50 years whatever it was and he said these are the most dramatic stories I've ever heard but mine is more dramatic than that oh boy we're going to hear something now he said you know these men they fell over a cliff they got into a horrible pit they were covered they'd sinned enough to damn a hundred men but he said I've a far greater experience

than that he said Jesus saved me before I ever consciously sinned and he's kept me from sin all the days of my life and he said that's the biggest miracle not to get all blasted and twisted but to have to come the same way and that's why I brought it in and he said and as self-righteous as I was I had to come and say same old thing nothing in my hands I bring simply to my cross thy cross I cling you know there's a lot of mystery I guess you've found there is a lot of mystery in life anyhow you know there but you know one of the mysteries is a mystery of personality I know people who are not saved who are far nicer than lots of people who are saved gentle, gracious, loving a sense of honor always being taught to never lie never do

anything dishonorable never cheat never anything else and

there's something again I say mysterious about personality I think disposition is something you're born with I believe character is something that we make as I said before people say about a certain man well you know he has a reputation what is reputation? reputation is human character reputation is what they think they have a certain standard of judgment and you get a reputation a man gets a reputation for being generous another man gets a reputation for being a fraud a woman gets a reputation she doesn't quite tell the truth again reputation is what people think I am character is what God knows I am now a lady came to me one day and she said I really would like a pure heart I'd like to be a really sanctified person a victorious person well you know like I felt good this week in these

meetings oh I felt real good this week but she said I know next week I'll be the same old bad tempered person I was she said I don't think it's serious I think it's I'm temperamental I said hold it a minute you're what? she said I'm temperamental I said what? do you mean it's your temper or your mental? well she didn't like it she didn't kiss me for saying that she looked at me with a query and I said well temperamental well you can overcome that because that's something in my judgment it has to do with your with your emotions I believe character is something that we build but then I need something more than character again the most revolutionary thing in the whole wide world is when a man a woman comes to Christ and they confess their sin and you can't even bring faith because you don't

have any faith I believe faith is the gift of God and our repentance you know the old story a fellow comes to the altar and they pray with him 25 minutes he can't get through and somebody comes and slaps him on the back and says let go brother but she's very good but listen the sermon on the mount is not morality on its tip toes it's a miracle of regeneration it's again I don't even ask people if they're saved now because everybody's saved butcher, the baker the candlestick maker from the white house to the ale house everybody's saved but you go to somebody and look at them and say I want to ask you a question a real question now does Christ live in you? oh yeah I got saved so and so I got the baptism I heard a man you all know and I won't tell you his name say recently I didn't think

Keith was there too where this brother said I got saved when I was 9 I walked down the aisle when I was 14 I was filled with the spirit and I spoke in tongues and he said I really became aware of God about I don't know 7 or 8 years ago he's an outstanding person in the Christian world in one sense at least in America and yet he'd gone through a process he confessed his sin and then he went and went through something else and said he spoke in tongues but there was never any living relationship with God if anyone in Christ he is a new creation to get there I've got to have no sufficiency of myself and even when I get saved I have no sufficiency of myself it's all of grace as I heard somebody I don't know where say this week isn't it wonderful that God loved us before we loved him and he

loves us now when we don't love him very much that's a bit awesome to think isn't it as a brother said we know what we shouldn't be but we're not quite sure what we should be now we get there but you see even when you get saved there's no confidence you don't build an ego and say well it's a sanctified ego you know I strut but my strutting is very pure now I mean I don't take it all to myself I give the Lord some I was telling Keith there we should change that him we sing sometimes Friday night all to Jesus I surrender you know we should sing what do you say 10% I should surrender 10% I freely give all the rest is needed now because I surely want to live ok but that's what it's come to you see we want to give God a measly part God says no I want all of you that awesome word of in 1

Thessalonians 5 23 the very God of peace sanctify you wholly which is not H-O-L-Y but W-H-O-L-L-Y wholly and then in case you miss it he says your spirit and your soul and your body that's what you are man is a Trinity spirit soul and body and yet he can sanctify you spirit and soul and body and the whole personality can be sanctified cleansed and indwelt by the spirit of God and yet again I don't have no assurance of myself my confidence is in God it's not of ourselves now people say sometimes you're trying to say by the Sermon on the Mount you know that if we do these things we merit salvation we're not talking about works at all we're talking about the grace of God you cannot live the Sermon on the Mount as an unsafe person you get people who shame us as regards tossing the world

away Albert Schweitzer lived as poorly as any man at Lambrin there in Africa he wouldn't even use shaving soap he said just wet your face and put some soap on which I often do you know they tell us men you need to get some electric stuff and put it on your face and it makes the hair stand up that's true because the hairs will lie down in the little holes in your face you can't see so you get this electric stuff and boy it stands up as though it had a shot well if you do the same with soap it makes it stand up you get the smoothest without using shaving soap he wouldn't use shaving soap I can save that money give it to mission he slept on a rusty bed he despised material things and yet his first book he denied the deity of Jesus Christ who was more sacrificial than Mahatma Gandhi was it

last year when they gave the Nobel Peace Prize to somebody kind and loving they didn't happen to give it to one of our top radio preachers or TV preachers they gave it to a little woman that spends all the time in the gutters of India and I've been through those gutters and round that city you watch people die there you can see babies lying in the gutter you can see a woman there with her breast exposed she's trying to feed her baby and the breast is all shriveled she can't feed it it's the most miserable value of the shadow of death in the world and this woman finds pleasure in going and comforting and she says every day maybe 8 or 9 or 10 people die in her arms every day and the world is impressed and says well that's what Jesus would do but the stuffy people go to church Sunday morning

and say what a fashion parade and they have to go in the ladies room to see their hats on straight and their noses powdered up properly in case it shines too much and they don't want to let the light shine too much so they have to get it all trimmed up and they go and sit there all prim and proper and the world says what's that?

You see Jesus again is not advancing a creed here he's advancing a life and it's the life of God maybe the best definition of Christianity was given by Henry Scougal a little Scotsman he lived before John Wesley and it was the book that actually stirred the heart of one of the greatest evangelists that ever lived that was Whitfield and he said it seemed gracious of God that he should hand to me a little book called The Life of God in the Soul of Man which is published to this very day it was never intended to be a book it was just his own thoughts there's been I don't know how many times somebody said it's one of the most published books in the whole world that's what he wanted he wanted The Life of God in the Soul of Man this is not disciplining yourself and say well I'm going to be poor

in spirit you can't do that if you're saved by yourself you say well how do I know when I'm poor in spirit well one way is when somebody really treads on your toes and offends you and there's no retaliation you're not self-defending you take the spoiling of your goods cheerfully they cast your name out as an evil thing and it's not a case of I guess I told you about a friend of mine that got saved a strong Catholic in Ireland and he went home and he shut the door and his brother was there with some beer and smoking and he had a book in his hand and he knew what his brother would do so Peter said I'll put my hands in my trousers like

this and I grabbed the flesh on my legs and said I've been saved tonight you've been what you've been to a protestant meeting I got saved tonight brother came

up did you really get saved yes and he just slammed him in the burst his nose and he said I had to keep hold of my legs cos he'd never hit me before he knew I could lick him but he knew now as a Christian I wouldn't hit him back and he said when I went to bed I had all my fingernail marks in my blue when I gripped the flesh and he said I knew that wasn't right and I went back to the same group and they told me not only could I be saved but I could be cleansed and filled with the spirit and he said I have a sanctified heart and he said I trusted God to do that and he said I went back and said to my brother I went back to that meeting tonight and got sanctified I said you got what well he said I got my sins forgiven before but now he took the thing out of me that made me do the sins and

I've got peace and I've got joy and I've got love and I've got meekness and he said I had my hands out like this when I talked to him he said you did? yes and he said you know God had taken the want to out of me too I didn't even want to do it I didn't have to fight and say I've got to hold this down because you know I could knock his head off never mind well isn't that what it's all about ah boy you talk about playing with fire when those guys mock Jesus and said come down from the cross well if he turned water into wine he could have turned those men into stone he said he could have called 12 legions of angels and again that second of kings 19 where one angel destroyed 185,000 people in one night well 12 legions of angels would be 60,000 angels 60,000 times 185,000 would have been he

could have wiped the earth's population out in one night you know he taught me a secret years ago that when you are in a place of authority you need power not to use power Jesus didn't use his power for fun sure he could do how many times did he cross the lake of Galilee on foot once well I didn't need to borrow anybody's boat why didn't he say well boys you swim for it I'm walking across the lake no he didn't do miracles for fun he did it in the time of necessity and that's how God does it for us but you see if I come in this way of poverty and say Lord I really am poor in spirit I mean it and he knows you can't fool God we fool each other we don't fool God and I come and say Lord I have no confidence in my church membership sure my family is a family rich in pedigree spirituality your

father was a bishop a preacher your grandfather a bishop you know it doesn't add one cent to your privileges only to your responsibilities and we've all become the same way isn't that great let me say this when I was at Cliff College a brother and I were to go to London and we had no money so we decided to hike and it was roughly 200 miles well we'd walked already we'd walked the length of England and the breadth which is pretty long way 300 miles one way and 120 the other with no horses with no automobiles for sure and with no bicycles so we walked so okay we set off for London and we wore the heels off our shoes for sure and well we had some rough nights rough days but you know we made it in good time we had a spare day and we went to St.

Paul's Cathedral there's no elevator St. Christopher Wren designed it and you can go up and I don't know say 100 steps and then you come and there's an inner rim in the gallery it's called the whispering gallery and as you go in there's a man standing and he just says would you kindly go right round the gallery to the right opposite where you are now and there actually is a hole in the wall with his breath isn't that amazing that his breath has worn a hole in the wall that doesn't mean possible that it is and you know when you get right round the gallery there it looks about a football field away you're just walking around quietly and he says please sit down and that's why it's called the whispering gallery for some reason the acoustics are just as those right behind your ear well we saw that then we said can we go higher they said well yes

there's another you know 150 steps okay let's go and so my friend and I went and when we got there there was a man on guard at the top and he says now this you see this square here if you kneel down you can see you can see the base of the church which is the main I don't know 400 feet below and the chairs looked about this size you know so we got down and looked and there were little things and I think there were people looked about this size there they were and then we looked here and said oh the ladder can we go up that yes it's it's about the best view you'll get of London and we both reached for it together and got a foot no no no I said well we've just about done everything together for the last few days we went walked together slept together got wet through together eaten together done everything together yes but gentlemen he said when you get on that ladder and you go to the top put your hand there did you notice St.

Paul's Cathedral has a dome and then it has a huge golden cross well he said the cross is fixed into that floor there which is or the ceiling the cross is wedged in that's how St.

Christopher designed it and he just said it without any meaning any significance he said if you're going up to the cross you've got to go by yourself and I thought boy that's that's a nice way to finish our long tiring journey to London well isn't that what it's all about if any man will be his how do I acknowledge my poverty I deny myself I deny myself all my rights and say Lord I never want to take them up anymore I'm never going to defend myself Romans 8 gives you the answer it is God that justifies my who is he that condemneth as I've told you before if you think I'm the greatest preacher in the world I know you do but supposing you did think I was the greatest preacher in the world or the greatest saint in the world and then next year you say no Radnil did this I don't you know you

you can't you can't change God's opinion of me you can change anybody else you can't change I'm the only person can change God's opinion of me by my obedience or my disobedience you know you can take the front page of the New York Times if you do surely send me a copy and say Radnil's a rogue and he cheats and he does this and that and the other send me a copy because I need to laugh too I'm not going to sit in the corner and say oh what do you think of those Christians and what they said about me so what you could lose thousands of friends well if they're friends that kind I'm glad to lose every one of them and I'm just saying what a friend we have in Jesus because you see you can't change God's opinion about me I can I'm the only person you can about me by my obedience by my

disobedience you can't and character is something I built you can't build my character I built my character by obedience I built my character by by working out I've got to do oh he's done a wonderful work in my life sure he has and then you know he says you go and work out your own salvation sure with the responsibility of the poor and needy you read the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew boy that's a score I don't know when I heard a sermon on it and it's a final judgment and Jesus says well now this is you know we talk about I'm going to talk about rewards I'm not preaching this Sunday so breathe easy I preach the Sunday after so you can go visit your aunt so last time I tried to preach on the race I'm going to preach on the rewards oh we're going to get oh we're laying up treasure in

heaven oh all the things God's we're all going to have a crown what about the demerits we're going to get what about the I was hungry and you didn't feed me Lord you've got it all mixed up I mean I wasn't even living on earth when you were around I'm sorry you're two thousand years somebody's Gabriel you've put the wrong record down or something no no no no but Lord I mean I was naked and you didn't you weren't naked and you weren't hungry and you weren't poor but Jesus says as you've done it to the least of my brethren or you haven't done it you did it unto me and I've said if you if you were sitting in church Jesus

sitting in church and he had his foot up like this you saw a hole in his sandals you'd be saying hey Mary Jane as soon as the meeting's over go home and say Jesus come to our

house to lunch we're going to buy new shoes tomorrow but when some old bum comes in you say I bet he has a record of crime bet he broke his father's heart left his wife deserted and his kids or something oh boy how smart we get don't we we're smarter than 50 lawyers Jesus says you've got to work it out how did you come to Jesus well you may have come rich you may have come in a Cadillac you may have come to the cross in a private plane but when you got there you were morally and spiritually bankrupt you had nothing that commended you to God except a lot of rotten wounds and putrefying sores and in infinite mercy he took you in and I was going to hell down the middle isle of a Methodist church brought up in a strict home where prayer was had each day where we read the word of God I'd never

been in a movie in my life I feared sin I can remember fearing God from being five years of age and this year I start my 75th year so for 70 years I've had the fear of God on my life even before I was saved but oh I remember one night seeing after all the greatest sin in the world is not adultery and lying and thieving the greatest sin in the world is to say I'm going to run my life not God that's the central sin of all total selfishness it's my life I'm going to run it and do what I like with it and then God comes in infinite mercy and says well you're a sinner like the rest of them and when you come in poverty and in need all the blessedness is laid up but you've got to come through this little eye of a needle and when repentant again nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy

cross I cling naked come to thee for dress helpless look to thee for grace foul I to that fountain fly wash me saviour or I die and again I believe that more than ever we need to have a new view of the lostness of men they're not just dead in trespassing they're lost and they're not just lost for time they're lost for eternity and maybe who knows some of us might have some days of real total darkness not because we're in sin not because we're disobedient but we see the enormity of the task of the church of Jesus Christ today she's hiding like a coward as though she's nothing to say she should be a city ablaze on a hill a light that lights the world salt that arrests the corruption but there is round about God's desire is that we move up from the first rung of the ladder and then bless

it at the peak and gradually we go up into the place where again he talks to us about a heart purity that's only possible through cleansing and only maintained by the indwelling of the spirit father we thank you tonight again for your holy word it quickens our hearts it has a marvellous effect on us it lifts us up and it casts us down it lifts us up to realize that we're heirs of God that the riches are ours in Jesus Christ over and over to appropriate these things and shed them abroad in this poor lost bewildered world in which we live and we give you praise in Jesus name amen.

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