

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Starter: Who are some of the people you most admire and why?

Read Matthew 4.12-5.2

Jesus has just begun his public ministry. In chapter 4 he hinted that God's long promised kingdom is coming. This is revolutionary teaching – the Jews thought of the kingdom as geographical, of liberation from the Romans, an independent Jewish nation, of God restoring the Promised Land and His presence. Jesus was teaching and healing in the most densely populated region of the Middle East, the word was spreading – he was a major celebrity, the prophets had been quiet for 300 years, such miracles had not been seen for centuries. But Jesus isn't interested in an emotional following, the disciples and crowds gather around and Jesus begins to outline the sort of kingdom he is talking about. It's not what they were expecting – in fact what he says is completely upside down.

Read Matthew 5.3-16

When you hear the phrase 'poor in spirit' what do you think? (What images or people come into your head?)

In the Old Testament 'poor' meant materially poor, but as the poor had no-one to turn to except God it began to take on a sense of those whose only hope and help was God. Poor in Spirit means a sense of spiritual bankruptcy before God. Jesus was not proclaiming a kingdom of power, but one where the entry requirement was acknowledging our unworthiness before and need of God.

What are some of the occasions you have been aware of being poor in spirit, and how have you experienced blessing as a result? (Discuss in twos and threes)

What might it look like to practice being poor in spirit as you interact as a group?

The Kingdom of heaven (or God) is a term often used in the gospels. It is what life looks like with God at the centre, with him as King of our lives and the whole creation. God's kingdom arrived with Jesus and will be consummated (completed) with the return of Jesus. Currently we live in-between; the kingdom is here but not fully, is now and not yet.

In what ways do we miss God's kingdom if we don't acknowledge our spiritual poverty?

Reflect

God's kingdom is upside-down, entry requires desperation for God and acknowledgement of our unworthiness, and as such those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty possess the kingdom.
How is your poverty of spirit?

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The letter from Jesus to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3 is an example of a group of people who have ceased to be poor in spirit.

Read Revelation 3. 14-22

Jesus' purpose is to save the church from lukewarmness and possible destruction. It contains solemn words of advice and love to a church that is content with itself, proud of its wealth and feels need of nothing. It's a damning indictment of apathy, and the rejection from God that will result. In God's eyes they are blind and naked beggars, self satisfied and superficial – not living lives that reflect his kingdom. It's as if Jesus puts a cup to his lips, hoping to taste a pleasing drink, but is disgusted and spits it out.

Read Revelation 3.14-22 again, slowly.

What are some of the things that we use to replace our need for God? (In our own lives, in the church and in society)

[Which of these are most applicable to you?]

In this passage how does Jesus call on the Laodiceans to respond?

Practically what does that mean for us, and how can we help each other to be poor in spirit/maintain our intimacy with God?

(Admitting our need of God involves allowing Jesus in to all of our lives, and enjoying intimate relationship, enjoying a long leisurely meal with him not a quick take-away)

Being people who are poor in spirit, who acknowledge our need for God, and inability to make it on our own, flies in the face of so much of what our culture says. We need to remind ourselves that 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven' is not just a poetic add-on but a promise to hold on to, and believe. So too are the words of Jesus in Revelation 3.20-22.

Reflect

In what areas of your life and in what circumstances is it easy to be poor in spirit?

In what areas and circumstances do you lack a poverty of spirit?

Are there things you need to repent of? Or do you need to remind yourself of the promises?