

TRUTH

“... Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

January 2025

“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT”

“Blessed” is a word that is used so frequently and in reference to so many things/situations that its true meaning is often obscured. As we study this word, we are considering the Koine Greek word *makarios*. This Greek word is difficult to define adequately. Some use “happy” to describe *makarios*, but such seems insufficient, for the word entails so much more. “Happiness” derives from one’s circumstances, while the state of being “blessed” is independent of circumstances. Yes, God wants all humans to be “happy” but, far more so, He desires humans to be “blessed.” And being blessed does not come from possessions or circumstances; it comes from being a faithful follower of God. For the faithful child of God, there is a much deeper state of joy and peace, even in less-than-ideal circumstances (which are “unhappy”), because he/she is “blessed.”

Jesus began His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7) with no less than eight categories of people who are pronounced, by God and His Son, as “blessed” (Matthew 5:1-12). “The Beatitudes,” as they are commonly called, might also be referred to as “kingdom attributes” (that is, attributes of citizens of Jesus’ kingdom). Those possessing/practicing the qualities described by Jesus are happy, but they have a deeper, abiding joy and peace within, whatever their outward circumstances may be. And, as Jesus told His apostles, no one can take that joy away (John 16:22).

In this article, the first Beatitude is our focus. Jesus’ first words of His Sermon on the Mount were, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3). Some have said that the phrasing of the original language tends more toward an exclamation, “*Oh, how blessed are the poor in spirit!*” In considering this first Beatitude, it is helpful to consider it part-by-part.

“*Blessed...*” Whether beginning matter-of-factly or with an exclamation, this one word from Jesus undoubtedly would have grabbed the attention of His audience, for who does not want to be happy in life? As already noted, the word “happy” does not fully convey the depth of the Greek word *makarios*, but such is certainly included in it. Jesus begins by telling His audience (and all who would hear/read His words

afterward) how to have the best life, and the “best” life is the “blessed” life. Thus, with a single word, Jesus surely had the crowd’s full attention instantly.

“*The poor in spirit...*” In short, Jesus is referring to those who humbly recognize their need for and full dependence upon God. The Greek word translated “poor” is the same root word used in Luke 16:20 to describe the “beggar” Lazarus. One who is “poor” like Lazarus is wholly dependent on the good deeds and kindness of others to survive. Likewise, those who are “poor in spirit” are those who look to and lean upon God for their “daily bread” (compare Matthew 6:11, as Jesus taught His followers to pray).

Because Luke 6:20 records Jesus’ statement simply as, “*Blessed are you poor,*” some believe “poor in spirit” in Matthew 5:3 refers to the poor in general. While it is true that God has “*chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom*” (James 2:5), considering Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20 collectively (versus ignoring their relationship, being spoken by the same Jesus in a very similar—if not the same—context), the more likely reference is to a poverty of spirit (not “full of self,” in other words). There is nothing inherently “blessed,” in and of itself, in being financially poor.

“*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” While “kingdom” is used in Scripture to describe both the church (Daniel 2:44; Colossians 1:13) and heaven (Matthew 25:34; 2 Peter 1:11), it is **always** used to denote the body of God’s people—the saved—whether the collective group or the eternal home for that collective group. When Jesus says, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,*” He means the kingdom of heaven is made up of those who recognize their need for and total dependence upon God (and who live accordingly.) He also means the kingdom of heaven is made up of humble servants of God who realize that without God and His grace, mercy, and forgiveness, they are truly lost.

Do you want to be **truly** happy—content, full of joy, and at peace? Live every day of your life humbly recognizing your need for God and utter dependence upon Him. That is the “blessed”—and “best”—life!

-- Chad Dollahite

TAKEAWAYS FROM 2 SAMUEL 1-2

The book of Second Samuel deals with David's reign as king over God's people. This book begins with David learning about the death of King Saul, and it closes with David numbering Israel's soldiers and the fallout from that decision.

The history recorded in 2 Samuel is part of what we commonly call "The United Kingdom." As far as historical dates go, Saul began his forty-year reign as king over Israel in 1051 B.C., followed by David's forty-year monarchy from 1011-971 B.C.

1:1-16 – We read of Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31, but the record of David hearing about it is found here in 2 Samuel 1. A young man reported to David that Saul and his son, Jonathan, had been killed in battle. He also claimed that he had, at Saul's request, struck the final blow that took the injured king's life. Upon hearing the young man's story, David ordered his execution. Why did David take such action? David told the slayer of Saul, "*Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying 'I have killed the LORD's anointed'*" (1:16).

1:17-27 – David's great lamentation over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan is recorded in this section. It is a touching tribute to two men who had a strong influence on David's life. In speaking of their demise, three times David exclaimed, "*How the mighty have fallen*" (1:19,25,27). Though Saul's character was greatly flawed, he had been God's anointed. For the first time in its history, Israel lost a king and would have to make the transition to a new ruler. How would David and the nation handle it? Would it be a peaceful transition, or a time of bitterness and bloodshed?

When Jonathan died, David lost his best friend. David said this about the relationship they shared: "*I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, Surpassing the love of women*" (1:26). The Bible says, "*A friend loves at all times*" (Proverbs 17:17), and "*. . . there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother*" (Proverbs 18:24). Jonathan was such a friend to David. It is a tremendous blessing to have a friend like that; and, it is painful to lose one.

2:1-7 – David was anointed as king of Judah. The men of Judah, the tribe from which David's family came, anointed David in Hebron following Saul's death. David was thirty years old at the time, and he reigned in Hebron over Judah for seven years and six months (5:4,5). David actually was anointed three times: (1) by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13), (2) by Judah's leaders (2 Samuel 2:4), and (3) by the leaders of the whole nation of Israel (2 Samuel 5:3).

2:8-11 – During the time that David was king over

Judah in Hebron, a son of Saul, Ishbosheth, ruled over the rest of Israel for two years. Abner, former commander of Saul's army, helped make Ishbosheth king and originally supported him rather than David (2:8,9; 3:6). Though the Israelites, in general, were a united people for 120 years under the successive reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, it is clear that the nation was greatly divided for two years when Ishbosheth was acting as king. For those two years, "*Only the house of Judah followed David*" (2:10).

2:12-32 – There was extensive war between Saul's family and the house of David. In the end, David's family became the stronger of the two (3:1).

David had three nephews who were connected with his reign: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel (2:18). They were the sons of David's sister, Zeruiah (1 Chronicles 2:15,16). David later said that these three men were "too harsh" for him (3:39) and that God would deal with them in His own way.

Abner killed Joab's brother, Asahel, which caused bad blood between Abner and Joab, two men with strong personalities (2:19-25). An all-out war between David's troops and the followers of Ishbosheth was averted when Abner made this appeal: "*Shall the sword devour forever?*" (2:26). We all recognize the reality that Jesus verbalized: a kingdom divided itself cannot stand (Mark 3:24).

Others lessons from these two chapters:

- David asked the man who claimed that he took Saul's life, "*How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?*" (1:14). Jesus was the Lord's anointed one (Acts 4:26,27). At judgment, we would not want to be in the shoes of those who killed the Christ or who in their lives on earth opposed His Cause in any way!

- When Saul and his sons died, David said, "*How the mighty have fallen*" (1:19,25,27). Death shows no favoritism, as it comes to the mighty and the lowly alike (1 Kings 2:2; Hebrews 9:27). In God's sight, being mighty in *spiritual* matters is most important!

- David offered high praise for Saul and Jonathan after their passing: "*Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions*" (2:23). After a person's death, it is appropriate for us to show respect for the deceased and surviving family members. Let us be careful, however, that we do not speak of dead people who obviously did not submit to the Lord's will as if they were in a saved relationship with Him. We are not really helping anyone by offering false comfort.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Practical Suggestions about How to Study the Bible

Bible study is an undertaking that is demanding. It will take dedicated time and a level of work that daily Bible reading does not require. Get ready mentally to devote yourself to digging in and learning. Here are some practical suggestions that will help.

Find a quiet place to study. Someone may say that they can focus better in a loud or busy environment. However, for the focus needed to bring out the truth of God's message, it is best done with the least number of distractions.

Pray about your studies. Pray for God's wisdom in your approach to His word. Pray as you agonize through understanding the message. Pray as you search yourself in application and how your life is going to be changed as you are brought closer to God.

Choose a study method: such as topical study (focus on specific themes), chronological study (putting the books/passages in historical order), or expository study (bringing out of the text what it says and means).

Gather the proper tools for the type of study you want to do. In any type of study, you need good resources that will be helpful, and not harmful, to your goal. There are many reliable books (or online sources) that can be of great assistance: Bible dictionary, Hebrew and Greek lexicons that help with the original languages of the Old and New Testaments (such as Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon), Strong's Concordance (which has Hebrew and Greek definitions), and trusted commentaries. First, go through your study and draw your own conclusions. Then, if you are going to consult a commentary, make sure it is written by someone who is known for holding to the truth of God's word. Examine and compare their thoughts to the Scriptures and to your own conclusions. Do not fall into the trap of simply reading what someone else thinks about the Bible and making that the basis for your faith!

Dig into the text. Remember, communication is done through language. Dig out and dust off your old grammar book and refresh yourself. Books are broken into paragraphs, paragraphs are made up of sentences, and sentences are comprised of words. Start by reading through an entire book of the Bible. As you study smaller portions of the text, even down to individual words, do not leave the big picture. Every text is in a context, and we do not want to "miss the forest for the trees!"

-- Dave Leonard

Why don't we keep the Sabbath today?

"Jesus kept the Sabbath, and we are supposed to imitate Him, correct? So, we should keep the Sabbath, too." Let us consider why that conclusion is faulty.

The day of the week – The Lord told Israel, ". . . *the seventh day is the Sabbath*" (Exodus 20:10). The seventh day/Sabbath was Saturday (not Sunday).

The restriction – God's Sabbath decree for Israel was, "*In it you shall do not work,*" a charge that applied to all Israelites, their animals, and their servants. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest, a twenty-four cycle of no labor (Deuteronomy 5:14).

The covenant – The command to keep the Sabbath was part of the covenant which Jehovah made with Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). In God's words, the Sabbath was "*a sign between Me and the children of Israel*" (Exodus 31:17). The Sabbath command was not given to all nations, but only to Israel.

The significance – In addition to being a day of rest, what special meaning did the Sabbath have to the children of Israel? Moses reminded them, "*And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day*" (Deuteronomy 5:15). It is clear: keeping the Sabbath was to be a memorial, a reminder each seventh day that Jehovah had delivered them (Israelites) from Egypt. Who was charged to keep the Sabbath? Those who had been slaves in Egypt.

The penalty for violation – What if an Israelite chose to disregard the Lord's command to abstain from work on the Sabbath? Hear God's answer: "*Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death*" (Exodus 31:15). There is a historical incident when an Israelite man worked on the Sabbath. God commanded Israel to kill him, which they did (Numbers 15:32-35).

The abolition – When Jesus died on the cross, He "*abolished . . . the law of commandments contained in ordinances*" (Ephesians 2:15). That is, He abolished the old law (law of Moses), including the command to keep the Sabbath. Thus, the Sabbath command no longer is in force.

The absence in the new covenant – Today, all people everywhere are under Jesus' authority, and He wants us to keep all that He has commanded (Matthew 28:18,20). Jesus is the Mediator of a new and better covenant (Hebrews 9:15; 8:6), and that covenant does not include the instruction to keep the Sabbath. *That*, friend, is why Christians do not keep the Sabbath today: it is not a requirement under the new covenant.

-- Roger D. Campbell

JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH NATHANAEL (John 1:47-51)

In the Bible, the only place where we read about Nathanael is in the Book of John. He is mentioned in two chapters of that book: the first and the last.

John declared his purpose in writing this book, saying it was written to cause those who read it to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in Jesus' name (John 20:30,31). A conversation between our Lord and Nathanael is directly connected to that overall theme of the book.

Before Nathanael was acquainted with Jesus, a man by the name of Philip informed Nathanael, "*We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*" (1:45). Nathanael's response to Philip's claim was, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" Philip's brief answer was, "*Come and see*" (1:41).

That was the background of the conversation between Jesus and Nathanael, found in John 1:47-51:

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' Nathanael said to Him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Jesus identified Nathanael as "an Israelite." Israel was the other name of Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. The offspring of Jacob were known as Israelites or the children of Israel. When Jesus was on the earth, Israelites were also called Jews, and vice versa. By the time this conversation between Nathanael and Jesus concluded, Nathanael, who formerly doubted that anything good could come out of Nazareth, would be a convert of the Nazarene.

Jesus said there was "no deceit" in Nathanael (1:47). The Greek word for "deceit" ("δόλος/dolos") means "craft, deceit, guile" [Thayer, word no. 1388 via e-Sword]. Jesus described deceit as "evil" (Mark 7:22,23). The fact that there was no deceit in Nathanael demonstrated his character and integrity. Do you know who else was void of deceit? Jesus Himself (1 Peter 2:22). Being deceitful or not being that kind of person is a choice, and Jesus wants all of His followers to lay aside all deceit (1 Peter 2:1).

"*How do you know me?*" (1:48). Those were the first words which Nathanael spoke to our Lord. It is

clear that prior to this occasion, Nathanael had never encountered Jesus. He was amazed that Jesus had such intimate personal knowledge of him.

In response to Nathanael's question, Jesus affirmed, "*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you*" (1:48). Three facts are included in that statement: (1) Philip called you, (2) before Philip called you, you were under a fig tree, and (3) when you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you. During His ministry, over and over the Messiah demonstrated His perfect knowledge of people's thoughts, speech, and actions. It is written, "*He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man*" (John 2:24,25). Jesus knew every single thing about Nathanael, and He knows each detail about you and me, too!

Nathanael confessed Jesus as "Rabbi," "the Son of God," and "the King of Israel" (1:49). "Rabbi" was a title which Jews used when addressing their teachers. The term meant "my great one, my honorable sir" [Thayer, word no. 4461 via e-Sword]. From what Jesus said, Nathanael had heard enough . . . enough evidence to convince him to believe in Jesus (1:50). To call Jesus "*the Son of God*" shows His divine nature: He really was God in the flesh (John 1:1,14).

What about "*the King of Israel?*" Old Testament prophecies pointed to the Messiah/Branch being "*Ruler in Israel*" (Micah 5:2) and One who would "*sit and rule on His throne*" (Zechariah 6:12,13). The angel Gabriel predicted that Jesus would "*reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be on end*" (Luke 1:33). The spiritual kingdom over which God's Son rules is His church.

Jesus told Nathanael that he would see "*greater things than these*" (1:50). When Jesus spoke of "*the Son of man,*" He was talking about Himself (Matthew 16:13). The reference to seeing heaven open and angels ascending and descending on Him is symbolic language that seems to point to the fact that the door to heaven will be open through the Christ and His sacrifice. The one way to the Father and the joy of heaven is via Jesus and no other (John 14:6).

Like Philip did with Nathanael, we encourage folks to "*come and see*" the truth about Jesus. If a person is truly converted to the Christ as his Teacher, the Son of God, and King, he will show that by loving Him and submitting to Him in all matters.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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