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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at "Ebenezer", Clapham
on Wednesday evening 22.3.39

Text: Matthew 5.3

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ was such as man had never heard the like. "Never man spake like this Man." There was a total difference between the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that the people of His day had received from their Rabbis, their Scribes, Lawyers, Priests and so on. Many of the people had heard teaching from the lips of their religious leaders, but there was nothing at all like this:- "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Everything was so hard, so pitiless, so burdensome; there was a total lack of the savour of grace. There was nothing at all about the kindness, compassion and love of God to poor sinners. But when the Lord Jesus Christ opened His mouth to preach, as we read in His first recorded sermon, then He delivered a discourse on these words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives". Again, when He sent that gracious answer to John who was in prison, He said, "And the poor have the gospel preached to them." That has seemed to me the crowning sweetness of the whole message: "The poor have the gospel preached to them." "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now, you remember the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." By that of course He means the gate is so strait and the way is so narrow that before a man can enter that strait gate he must be stripped of everything. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." "Whosoever He be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." It was the Lord Jesus who said it, and He was not in the habit of indulging in extravagances, in mere hyperbolical expressions, but He spake words of soberness and truth and He meant exactly what He said. He told the people plainly that a man must leave houses and land, father and mother, wife and children, brother and sister, and hate his own life also, or he could not be a disciple of Christ's. And the Apostle Paul tells us that he suffered the loss of all things.

Now I wonder if you and I have ever been really face to face with these things, whether we have ever been made to consider them and been honest with ourselves about them. It is only poor people who can benefit by the Gospel; it is only poor people who have a case for the Gospel. "They that are whole

need not a physician but they that are sick."

"Sinners can say, and none but they,
How precious is the Saviour."

I noticed the other day some reference to that wonderful 55th. chapter of Isaiah:-
"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the water, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Rutherford calls it the poor man's market, and in the reference to it that I was reading there was this striking remark that very few people are to be found at this market because the entrance fee is so high. The good man went on to explain that the entrance fee was this, a man must part with everything he has, and when everything is gone and he is absolutely destitute the whole market is free to him. "He that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." All the blessings of the everlasting covenant, all the fulness and the fatness of the promises that are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus are for that poor man, the man who has no price to give. He has to say this, (have some of us said it?)

"Nothing but sin I Thee can give
Nothing but love shall I receive."

John Berridge puts it very beautifully in one of his quaint hymns,

"All my burdens for Thy rest,
All my death for Thy life given,
All my rags for Thy rich vest,
All my hell for Thy sweet heaven.

Now the sale I understand,
Know what Jesus' market is,
Much He asketh at my hand,
All my woe to buy His bliss."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." O, everything in the gospel, everything concerning Jesus Christ, all the things of the everlasting covenant, were designed by infinite wisdom and grace just to meet the cases of poor men and women, destitute men and women, poor men and women who know their poverty and who have to say as I just now repeated,

"Nothing but sin I Thee can give,
Nothing but love shall I receive."

The Lord Jesus pronounces them blessed; "Blessed are the poor in spirit", and it is none but these who are blessed. We read in the Scripture of a blessing and we read of a curse, and we inherit either one or the other. In Adam we inherit the curse as sinners by nature and practice, we deserve the curse, it is our just wages, but in Christ Jesus a poor believer inherits blessing. One of our poets very beautifully sings -

"'Tis mine the covenant of His grace,
And every blessing mine,
All flowing from eternal love,
And sealed by blood divine."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." Yes, there is a blessedness in his very poverty; and he will find this, that it is indeed a blessed thing to be so emptied, to be filled out of the fulness that is in Jesus Christ, to be filled from that most sweet fountain of grace. Rutherford said he was "half content to have sores for his Lord Jesus' plaisters, sickness hath this advantage that it draws forth the holy and soft fingers of our good Physician to touch our withered and leper skins." O, there is a blessedness in that poverty that draws out the compassion of the Christ of God and of the Father. O, there is a blessedness in that poverty by which the soul is through grace fitted to receive the blessings of the gospel. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Now what is it makes a person poor in this spiritual sense? It is not being in circumstances of literal poverty that will do it; it is not living in a two-roomed cottage that will do it, or occupying a workhouse bed. A person may live in a two-roomed cottage and yet be as full of pride and pharisaical riches as he can be. They are not always the humblest people that live in the poorest dwellings. A poor man, a spiritually poor man, is a man who has been brought to some true knowledge of God and himself. If the Spirit of God brings you to such a knowledge of God as Isaiah was brought to, and such a knowledge of your own heart and your own self as he was brought to, it will make a very poor person of you, it will make a bankrupt of you, make you absolutely destitute, to realise in some sufficient degree what a God He is you have to do with, how infinitely holy, how just, how great in His majesty, how glorious, how perfect in all the attributes of His being. "I fell at His feet as one dead"; that is what it brought Daniel to. "Woe is me, for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips;" that is what it brought Isaiah to. "Behold, I am vile, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes;" that is what it brought Job to. And what did it do for the Apostle Paul? Why, it brought him to this, "O wretched man that I am." "Sold under sin." It was just the awful sense that he had of the majesty and holiness of God that brought him to that, because in the light of revelation he was made to see himself as a poor, vile sinner, deformed in every part, and incapable of bringing forth good fruit in any way or degree whatever. "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing". This makes a person very poor; and a wonderful mercy it is to be made thus poor. When a man is made to believe this there is nothing will meet his case but a revelation of Jesus Christ as the Mediator; and it must be a revelation of Christ, not a mere letter-Christ, if I may so speak, not a Christ read of in the Bible, Christ heard of through the lips of another man; but a revealed Christ. That alone will meet the case of a man who has had by the Spirit a revelation of what God is, and in the light of that revelation an awful sense of his unspeakable sinnership. O, he is poor

indeed. One says,

"Deeds of righteousness I've none,
No, not one good work to plead."

O, says one of these poor men, with his sinful poverty before him, with his sinful helplessness before him, with all the ruin of his nature before him, 'If ever my poor soul is saved it must be entirely the work of almighty grace; nothing else can do it, I cannot lift a finger towards it, I can make no contribution whatever towards my own salvation, not so much as a good thought, not so much as a good motive or a good desire. Salvation is and must be of the Lord if such a sinner as I am is to be saved.' That is the conclusion this man is brought to. The Lord Jesus says he is a blessed man, and His words agree with the testimony we have in the Old Testament; "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word." There he is. I think it was Bunyan who said in one of his wonderful treatises that if a child seven years old were convinced by the Holy Ghost of its sin, that child would take its place among the biggest sinners, and he said if such a man could be found as having only committed one sin and that one sin of thought only, and that man were convinced of the Holy Ghost of the sinfulness of that sin, it would make him take his place amongst the biggest sinners. It makes a man a very poor man when he is convinced of his sin, and convinced of the sinfulness of his sin by the Holy Ghost.

Then he is poor in this respect, that he is not only destitute of righteousness, not only destitute of any self-power to remedy his condition, but he is destitute of wisdom. Says Bunyan, "I was an ignorant sot, tossed continually between the devil and my own ignorance." O, he was a poor man was Bunyan. Some of us have been cheered to read that; it has cheered us wonderfully to read that Bunyan felt that and had to confess that I have felt destitute of wisdom. "Surely I am more foolish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man": "So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee": "What I know not teach Thou me": "I know not how to go out or how to come in, for I am but a child." Says the Apostle James, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." "In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The poor in spirit feel their poverty in respect of wisdom and understanding, and they are blessed, because all wisdom is in Christ, and as James says, He gives wisdom to all men, to all that ask it of Him, and upbraideth not. He is kind, He is most mercifully patient towards dull scholars; there is no teacher so patient with His dull scholars as the Holy Spirit. O, the pains the Lord Jesus took with His disciples; He bore with their ignorance and folly, so kind He was to them all the time. We read in Luke 24 how effectually He dealt with them and how He did open their understanding so that they understood the

Scriptures. It was the communication of light, life, grace and wisdom from Him that made them the preachers of the gospel they were in their day.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." These poor people feel their poverty in this that they are so destitute of the grace of the Spirit, so lacking here. Some of us have found our hearts in that beautiful hymn in our hymnbook,

"Lord, my heart a desert vast,
Thy reviving hand requires",

and you know how the hymnwriter pleads for more humility and love. Then he says,

"Greatest sinners, greatly spared,
Love much and themselves debase;
Mine's a paradox too hard
Rich of mercy, poor of grace;
Me Thou hast forgiven much;
This my sins too plainly prove;
Give me what Thou givest such,
Much humility and love."

O, if you find a truly humbled man, you will not find him talking about his humility; you will find him lamenting his want of it. You find a person in whose heart the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost, and who really loves the Lord, complaining of his want of love. Rutherford is an outstanding instance of a man, as we see him in many of his letters, with a soul all aflame with his love to Jesus Christ, and yet his complaint was that he had so little love for Christ, so little love. If you find a really spiritually-minded man, you will find that man mourning over his want of spirituality of mind. A truly spiritually-minded man does not go about telling people how spiritually-minded he is; Moses did not go about calling the attention of the people to the brightness of his countenance. The most spiritual of men and women are those who are the greatest beggars in this respect, that they have to beg at the Throne of Grace for more spirituality of mind, that they might be more under the influence of the Holy Ghost, that they might have more of the unction of the truth in their poor hearts. Dr. Owen says of the true believer that his highest attainment in this life is hunger for Christ. I know some people would be inclined to disagree with Dr. Owen on that point, but I believe it is perfectly true. The highest attainment of a believer in this life is hunger for Christ, because there are none so hungry for Christ as those whom He most favours with His presence. The more a poor sinner knows of Christ and the more he knows of the visits of His grace and the tokens of His love, the more hungry his soul is after Him. That man will never cease to be a hungry man until he is right up in heaven, and is seated at the marriage-supper of the Lamb; there his hungry soul will find its full and eternal satisfaction.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It is to these poor people that the kingdom of heaven with all the blessedness of it, with all the riches of it, with all the glory of it, belongs. "For theirs

is the kingdom of heaven." Why, Christ is theirs! Christ is theirs, and therefore the kingdom of heaven with all its glory and blessedness is theirs. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." O, what riches this does include. For instance, those that are poor in spirit, as they inherit the kingdom of heaven, they inherit a free, complete, eternal justification. Sinners they are in themselves, guilty; they have sinned and come short of the glory of God and have been justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; a justification that is complete. He died for their sins and He rose again for their justification. They are justified by His blood, by His matchless atoning sacrifice, and His justification is perfect. The justification of the dying thief is every whit as perfect as that of the Apostle John, or Mary the mother of our Lord, or the Apostle Paul. No justified sinner has contributed one iota to his justification, being justified freely without any cost, without any contribution of merit. "Justified freely by His grace", by the free, unmerited favour of Jehovah, flowing from His eternal love.

These poor in spirit inherit all the riches of grace. "It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell", and we have received out of His fulness grace for grace. So there is grace and everlasting strength; grace to help in time of need, grace sufficient and grace made perfect in weakness. These are the poor in spirit; they have in Christ everlasting victory. O, the victory is certain. They are hemmed in by foes and receive a good many wounds and bruises; they have many terrors and fears, are sometimes beaten down, and it seems as though the life would be crushed out of them and they would never rise again. But eternal victory is theirs, for their Captain stood the fiery test and they shall stand through Him. Then another thing, sanctification is theirs. Mr. Hart puts it well,

"Perfect holiness of spirit
Saints above, full of love,
With the Lamb inherit."

Poor believers here below have to enter into this.

"Though thou here receive but little;
Scarce enough for the proof
Of thy proper title."

But the fulness of it is in Him. His people inherit complete sanctification and eternal sanctification in Him. Justification is perfect now; sanctification in the soul is not perfect: it is very imperfect as the Apostle Paul found to his sorrow and cost; but it is the perfection of it in glory which is certain. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I must sum it all up and come to a conclusion, but it does mean this, that all a helpless soul can need and that a faithful God can give, all grace here and all glory hereafter is theirs, because Christ is theirs and they are His.

"We two are so joined,

He'll not be in glory and leave me behind."

May the Lord command His blessing. Amen

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