

**SERMON BY REV W HUIZINGA  
ON MATTHEW 5:3**

LITURGY

Votum and Salutation

Psalm 72:1,2

The Ten Words of the Covenant or Confession of Faith

Psalm 72:3,4

Hymn 1A

Prayer for the Opening of God's Word

Thankoffering

Psalm 1:1,2

Read - Matthew 4:12-5:12 and Luke 6:17-26

Text - Matthew 5:3

Sermon

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT**

- 1. The poor in spirit are blessed.***
- 2. You must be poor in spirit.***
- 3. Thus the kingdom of heaven is yours.***

Hymn 11:2,3

Pastoral Prayer

Psalm 72:7,10

Benediction

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hope runs eternal in the human heart. People keep looking ahead for that elusive success. They keep hoping that they will win the Lotto or find their heart's desire.

Yet at the same time change and decay occur in all around. As a result things change; dreams lie unfulfilled. People grow bitter and aggressive. Often in their middle years a bitter disillusionment sets in. What happened to their dreams? It seems they were pipe-dreams.

Jesus surprisingly begins his instruction with terms about being blessed. They may enjoy the kingdom of heaven. What a prospect to look forward to! Jesus knows the longing of men's heart. Jesus knows that this life does not fulfil people.

So Jesus holds out the true blessing each sinner here on earth wants and needs. I preach to you the Word of our chief Prophet under this THEME:

## **BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT**

- 1. The poor in spirit are blessed.***
- 2. You must be poor in spirit.***
- 3. Thus the kingdom of heaven is yours.***

### ***1. The poor in spirit are blessed.***

Jesus' ministry has started. When Jesus heard that Herod Antipas, the fox, had placed John the Baptist in prison, the signal came for Jesus to embark on his ministry. During the wilderness ordeal Jesus proved true to God and to his task. Now the time has come to start his public ministry.

We read how Jesus preaches as John did: *repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Jesus teaches in the synagogues about the good news of the kingdom. He heals all manner of disease

We read how multitudes gathered from all over Galilee, from the area of the ten cities, from Jerusalem, from Judea and from the area on the other side of the Jordan.

In Luke's gospel we read how just beforehand Jesus appoints his twelve disciples. Instead of finding them at the temple among the leaders – the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus appoints them from the common tradesmen, the fishermen. So a council of twelve men surrounds Jesus.

You start to see how Jesus has a plan, a blueprint, for his ministry.

Where does He take them? To the mountain! Not to the temple area in Jerusalem, where priests lead the people. As John the Baptist, Jesus has his own agenda. Here in Galilee by the Sea of Galilee lies a mountain. Probably on the northeast side of the sea, facing Capernaum, He takes them. I am told this high place has wonderful acoustics. Sitting at the bottom of the mount, Jesus could reach the multitudes with his authoritative teachings.

Here at the mountain, where we often find Jesus with his disciples, Jesus also prepares himself for a very important meeting. All night long He prays with his Father. All night! Jesus has an important preaching engagement. He must prepare.

Then He takes the followers towards the mount.

Here He opens his mouth to teach them. He does it solemnly.

Jesus is the great Lawgiver. His preaching consists not in quoting texts and the comments of other rabbis. Jesus has his own authoritative style – *truly, truly I say to you*. Jesus speaks with his own authority as the Son of God who has come in the flesh.

Do these words apply to you? Maybe that question surprises you. Yet many think these words are specifically directed toward his Jewish disciples. Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, that is wrong. Jesus speaks to you as well. Do you remember how, after Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus met his apostles at this same mountain where He had given them his teachings and commandments (Mt 28:16-20). There at the same mount Jesus then tells his apostles to go out to the whole world to preach the good news of the kingdom and *to teach them to observe all that I have commanded you*. So take all these teachings to the whole world! It certainly does apply to you and to me.

Jesus opens his remarkable teachings with these declarations of blessing. We call them beatitudes, after the Latin term, *beatus*. Note whom Jesus calls blessed. The scribes and Pharisees would point to those who strictly keep all the rules and regulations of the elders. All the legal casuistry! A different teaching echoes up the mount here in Galilee.

***Blessed*** are the poor in spirit. Some think this means ***happy*** are the poor in spirit. Yet many are happy even though they reject our Lord Jesus Christ. From the pacific isles we get that mesmerising song, *don't worry, be happy; don't worry, be happy*. Many happily pursue their own dreams or pipe-dreams. Is Jesus the only Teacher who can make us happy?

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, *blessed* refers to the status you have before God. God declares you *blessed*. Jesus approves you as one who has God's blessing. God declared Job *blessed* even though Job suffered. God declared his own Son *blessed* even though He died on the accursed cross. Jesus *blessed* Paul even though men stoned him, shipwrecked him or threw him out. To be *blessed* is a state and a status before God. No matter in what situation you find yourself, God approves you. God looks down from heaven and is on your side to help you.

Our brothers and sisters in the Great Reformation gave their bodies to be killed. Yet Jesus declares them *blessed*. They inherit much more than they surrendered here on earth. God approves them.

Think of Psalm 1, the psalm of the two ways. The righteous man delights in the covenant teachings of God. He meditates on them. God blesses this person. He is a green tree besides the streams of water. In all he does, God blesses him. Surely you envy and congratulate such a person.

Yes, if God blesses you, you can be happy, truly happy, but it is much more than that. For who is *blessed*?

## ***2. You must be poor in spirit.***

Jesus here announces the character of the citizens who may enter the kingdom of heaven. All these characteristics in the beatitudes should be seen together. Together they form your character as a christian, a follower of Jesus, the Christ.

Please do not mistake these beatitudes as though it reads, *blessed are those who inherit the kingdom of heaven*, or *blessed are those who shall see God*.

Jesus does not pronounce a blessing on all people. Jesus instead prescribes certain characteristics for those who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven. The promise of blessing is tied to the virtue Jesus expects you to exhibit as his follower.

Why? We as rebels turned coat against God in favour of the Tempter. At one point, the garden of Eden, the blessing of God enriched us. But then God expelled us from the garden. We look forward to re-entering that beautiful garden with the rich fruit trees. But we may not enter just like that. First of all, our relation with God must be restored. We need Jesus for that. We need our Saviour.

Yes, many pursue happiness. Some seek it by becoming wealthy so that they can enjoy tropical holidays. But please, do not try to locate paradise in some unspoiled Pacific island, where only the rich can afford to go. The kingdom of heaven is not a tropical paradise where the rich enjoy ease and luxury.

Others try fame. Yet the glitter of Hollywood deceives people, leaving them morally empty. The merry-go-round marriages testify to that restless and dissatisfied emptiness.

Still others pursue much knowledge. Be tops in your field. It brings satisfaction, happiness. The same applies to athletes. Why do so many opt out for some years, get married and then go back? Because there is more to life than sport! Too often the pursuit of happiness is chasing after the elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The pursuit of wealth means a man neglects wife and family. Once he has earned his bundle, he finds that his house is empty, often literally!

Here on earth the various pursuits for happiness end in disappointment.

So let's listen to our chief Teacher about true blessedness.

Jesus teaches that this paradise requires repentance. Did Jesus not preach, ***repent***, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*? Show this repentance as well, in a godly life. You would think that the church leaders stand out as examples of godly ones. Yet this paradise does not belong to the spiritual elite, who religiously adhere to every little rule of scribe and Pharisee. Jesus does not consider their righteousness sufficient. *Unless your righteousness exceeds that of these leaders, you by no means will enter the kingdom of heaven.* More is asked than these leaders teach! So Jesus is not afraid to insist on a holy way of life.

You must be ***poor in spirit***. Notice contrast – *blessed, the poor in spirit!* Or I could say, *prosperous are the poor!*? What a contradiction we say. Yet it is true. Our Lord teaches it. If you stand in God's favour, you are truly rich and blessed. But you must exhibit this quality of *poor in spirit*.

When we think of the poor, visions of masses in Africa who have only the very basics come to mind. These people have very little. Yet they, especially their children, can be very happy. Their streets resound with laughter and games.

Jesus uses a slightly different term. You must think of a poor beggar, someone who has no daily food, no daily basics. They sit or kneel with open hands and begging eyes. They have nothing! They cannot do anything for themselves. You see them everywhere in third world countries. Poor beggars! In the gospels we hear of the poor widow who gave her all into the box for the poor. Mark tells us of scribes who devour widow's houses. Scribes cursed poverty because it was a sign of God's curse. Rich and arrogant, they looked

down at the poor. No wonder Jesus proclaimed *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*. Jesus proclaims blessing to the needy ones. He is the messianic King of whom we sing:

*The helpless poor he will deliver  
And hear them when they call,  
For he, the great and gracious giver,  
Has pity on them all.  
He saves them from oppressors greedy  
And hears their anguished cries;  
The blood of all the poor and needy  
Is precious in his eyes (BOP, Ps 72, stanza 7).*

Why do I speak of the poor, since the text says, *poor in spirit*, you will say? Well, remember that Luke records the first beatitude as, *blessed are you poor* along with the corresponding woe, *woe to you rich*, for have received your reward. Luke does not add *in spirit*. Why?

Think of what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

*Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise.*

Often God's people belong to the poor, to the oppressed, to the despised among society. Yet Jesus exalts them and blesses them, because these poor people have learned to rely on God, to depend on the Lord for all they need. Think of the poor man, Lazarus, in Jesus' story. He was rich toward God. The rich man banqueted every day in luxury. Yet he entered the torments of Hades. You see, the rich do not need God. They can take care of themselves. That often applies. Thus we make a point of it.

At the same time we must insist that Jesus nowhere declares poverty of itself blessed. For then the whole church needs to join one of the begging orders of monks and nuns. Then only the poor classes of society, and only the poor nations enjoy the blessing of God. Again, Jesus picks the term for a beggar, who has nothing of himself.

Matthew records the first beatitude as *blessed are the poor in spirit*.

These spiritual beggars open their hands toward heaven; their eyes plead with God in heaven. *We cannot do it ourselves. Be merciful to me, a sinner!* In ourselves we are blind, naked, poor and pitiful. That is our state before the holy God. Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, you and I confess that in the Heidelberg Catechism. We learn to know our sins and misery more and more. We cannot earn our own righteousness. Instead we flee to Jesus to claim his perfect righteousness, which He earned in our place.

How many really flee to God in this manner. As the angels look down from the window frames of heaven how many penitent persons do they see? How many truly abhor themselves; flee to Jesus and trust wholly in what Jesus has done for them? How many seek spiritual virtues, spiritual gifts?!

Jesus had many poor, sick people come to Him. *Help us!*, pleaded those possessed by demons. *Heal us!*, implored the blind and lame. Jesus did heal, did help. But now He takes those same people along toward the mount where they may sit and listen to his commandments for their life of thanks.

Now you need to become *beggars in spirit*. You are not going to be lucky and happy just because I restore your bodies, says Jesus. Be *poor in spirit* and then you become blessed in a full sense.

Think of persons such as Gideon. Does Gideon have the means to free his people from the hand of Midian? Absolutely not! Gideon thus turns to God – how can I and these lowly farmers conquer such a huge host of experienced fighters? Impossible! Gideon begs for help. God tells him to send more of his soldiers away!! It seems even more helpless for Gideon and his small band. Yes, when all seems hopeless, then God provides the victory. How often has that not happened.

Here too we must rely on God and on what Jesus supply us. We must acknowledge we are bankrupt, unable to do any good to save us.

*Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Christ's cross I cling;  
Naked, come to You for dress;  
Helpless, look to You for grace.  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

To see what Jesus means by *poor in spirit*, look at the opposite. In Jesus' days the Pharisee thought himself to be rich in good works, blessed with God's many rewards. Yet they did not enter the kingdom of heaven. Nor did the Zealots who dreamed of establishing the kingdom of heaven by the sword and blood. Jesus undoubtedly met many of these zealots in Galilee, the hot-bed of the resistance movement. Instead, tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners – the rejects of society - entered the kingdom of heaven. These knew they could bring nothing with them, could achieve nothing to earn God's favour.

Calvin writes, *only he who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God, is poor in spirit.*

Consider with me one of the seven churches to whom Jesus sent a letter. I think of the Laodiceans. What does Jesus say to them? Listen (Rev 3:17):

*You say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing –  
and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and  
naked!*

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, learn to see yourself as God looks at you. In yourself you are a beggar, blind, dead and lost. Seek all you need to be saved and blessed from Jesus. Be *poor in spirit*.

### **3. Thus the kingdom of heaven is yours.**

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The first and last beatitude end with this blessing - *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. That stylistic feature means everything else in between form details of this overall blessing - *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

John the Baptist spoke already of the kingdom of heaven. John demanded repentance and fruits worthy of it. Then they would be ready for the kingdom. Jesus here pledges the kingdom of heaven to all who are *poor in spirit*.

If you want a passport to paradise, to the kingdom of heaven, then Jesus has prescribed it – be *poor in spirit*. God acknowledges that. You will receive the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom is the realm of God. This kingdom originates in heaven, is ruled from heaven, has the norms of heaven, and enjoys the treasures of heaven. In its climax heaven comes down to earth. God will dwell with men.

There in the kingdom of heaven you will find untold wealth and glory. You find endless fruit. You rejoice in your God. You have an endless task in God's presence.

If you want to know about the value of the kingdom of heaven, read the parables of Jesus about the pearl of pearls or the hidden treasure in the field. In both parables people sell everything they have in order to obtain that pearl of that hidden treasure. That is how valuable the kingdom is.

Jesus offers it to you, freely! All you grownups who bow before God with a broken heart, holding out the empty hands of a beggar, for the grace and gifts of God, you receive it freely. So do your children. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them, says Jesus.

Follow Jesus, who *though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich* (2 Cor 8:9).

Amen.