

A Sermon on Poverty of spirit
Preached in Elizabeth-City
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Matthew V. 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The circumstances around when our Lord exercised his ministry were calculated to excite great astonishment among the people for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes – He professed the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, who had come from heaven to teach mankind true religion. These high pretensions were accompanied by the most stupendous miracles which he wrought in confirmation of his divine authority. The miracles which he wrought, drew out vast crowd both to hear him speak and to witness his performances. The Savior seeing the vast crowd which had gathered around him for all parts of the country, felt inclined to embrace the opportunity to open his commission more fully in unfolding the truths of that religion which he came into the world to establish. And that he might do so with more convenience to himself and advantage to his hearers, he went up into a neighboring mountain; and after he had obtained a commanding spot from which he could be seen and heard at a considerable distance, he sat down, after the manner of the Jewish doctors (?), who to show their superiority were accustomed to sit when they taught. After the Savior had thus seated himself, he opened his mouth and taught them saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. This is the commandment of our Lord’s memorable discourse on the mount. In the prosecution of his sermon he sums up the whole of experimental & practical religion in a few general particulars, which he afterwards guards and defends against the false glosses of men.

Some have supposed, that he designed by these particulars to point out the several grades in Christian experience – the successive steps which the good man takes in the divine life – Others are of opinion, that all the graces here mentioned are found at all times in a greater or less degree in every sincere Christian. We are persuaded however that these two opinions are not contradictory, but equally correct For it is understandably true, that both poverty spirit, and every other temper here mentioned, are forms at all times in a greater or less degree in every Christian believer; and it is equally true, that Christianity begins with poverty of spirit, and proceeds in the order laid down in this Chapter until the individual is made perfect in love.

The doctrine contained in our text seems to be this, -- Those who are truly poor in spirit, shall be happy in the present world, and in the world to come obtain the rewards of heaven – In the treatment of this subject we shall notice,

- I. What is meant by poverty of Spirit
- II. The happiness of those who possess it.

I. We are to enquire what is meant by poverty of spirit – we should certainly endeavor to obtain a correct view of this subject; for if we make a mistake here, we blunder at the very foundation of experimental godliness, and at once counterfeit our hope in salvation.

Some have supposed, that poverty of spirit was a disposition of soul peculiar to those who xxx
^are destitute of riches – who are poor and indigent in their temporal circumstances This opinion they have endeavored to support by the literal meaning of the term used in our text, without any regard to the manner in which our hearts are affected by it – And in farther confirmation of this opinion, they invariably quote the weighty expression of St. Paul “The love of money is the root of all evil”. From these premises many have drawn the conclusion, that to be poor in spirit, we should impose upon ourselves, absolute and voluntary poverty. Hence many have divested themselves not only of riches,

but of the comfort and blessing of life. And from this view of the subject, the vows of voluntary poverty seem to have arisen in The Romish Church.

But such persons ought to consider that the expression of Saint Paul must be understood with some degree of qualification; otherwise it will prove to be false; for the love of money is not the source of all evil. There are ten thousand evils, as daily observation will testify with which money has no connection whatever. When St. Paul used this expression, he had just innumeraled a number of evils which abounded in the world, -- and perhaps the reading should be, the love of money is the root of all these evils he has just mentioned -- moreover if poverty of Spirit signify only freedom from covetousness -- from the love of money, or the desire of riches it would make our Lord guilty of tautology, for with this view of the subject it wd. coincide with another particular which he lays down, & would only be a branch of purity of heart ____

From what we have said then, it is obvious that poverty of spirit, does not depend upon our condition in life -- upon our temporal circumstances -- it is not restricted to the rich or to the poor. The man may live in object poverty all his days, and yet never know what it is to be poor in spirit. The Savior no doubt intended to convince his hearers of this fact when he used the words of our text. For it must be recollected that the most of his hearers were the poor of this world; and to show them that their condition in life wd. not prepare them for the kingdom of heaven (?), he declares to them that this Poverty of Spirit, must extend to the inward man -- that it must affect the heart; for blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ____

A man may live in object poverty all his days -- he may be poor & destitute in his temporal circumstances, and yet have his heart fixed upon the wealth of the world; and where this is the case he will find just as much difficulty in the exercise of this gracious disposition of soul. as though he possessed the whole world; for they that will be rich fall into temptation &c

On the other hand, a man may have his thousands at command, & yet so deman himself -- so live in the exercise of charity and benevolences, as to live in the exercise of poverty of spirit, and finally get safely home to heaven ____

But we would observe however, that the poor of this world, whose possessions are small, whose support depends upon their daily labor are placed in much more favorable circumstances to become poor in spirit ____ If then providence has not favored you with a large estate, recollect with a grateful heart, that God has removed many impediments out of your way to the kingdom of heaven ____ If you should murmur at your allotment, you may frustrate the designs of Providence, and the love of the world, may yet prove more ~~thy~~ your final and eternal ruin ____

But if Providence has favored you with great prosperity in temporal pursuits, God has committed to you an important trust -- Recollect that the silver and the gold are his, and you are his steward ____ If riches increase set not your affections upon them, lest the displeasure of God, fall upon as delinquent stewards.

The question now arises, what is poverty of spirit? Seeing that a man may be poor, and yet without it, and seeing a man may be rich, and yet capable of becoming poor in spirit ____ The best definition that we can give of this subject in so many words, is this; -- It is a gracious disposition of soul, by which

We are emptied of Self and self-sufficiency in order to our being filled with Christ and the fruits of the Holy Spirit-

It is produced by a proper sense of inward and outward sins. The individual, Who is convinced of sin, discover, that instead of being rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing, he is wretched, and from and miserable and (thin?) & naked in the anguish of his soul he cries out, in me dwelleth no good thing, but whatsoever is evil and abominable. He has a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin which he brought with him into the world, & which overspreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof. He feels and deeply feels the corruptions of his heart, from which proceed pride and vanity, and malice, and envy, and hatred, and every evil and unholy temper-

His guilt also presses him down like an incubus- he feels that he deserves everlasting banishment from the presence of God and he is ready to cry out, "how shall I escape, who have neglected so great salvation?" But how can he find relief from his dreadful condition? How shall he atone for the sins that are past? Were he to lead a spotless life to the day of his death, this wd. make no amends for a single act of past disobedience- This wd. only be what God requires of him at every moment of his life- this could never atone for a single act of past disobedience. But if God were to forgive all that is past on condition that he should sin no more- that he should thereafter entirely and constantly obey all his commands, he is confident that this to profit him nothing, being a condition which he could never perform- from the corruptness of his heart he is confident he could never exhibit in his life the fruits of the Holy Spirit- In such a condition, he is utterly at a loss. how to begin to walk in the path of God's commandments – He knows not how to take one step towards heaven – Encompassed with sin and sorrow, and finding no way of escape, he only cry out, "Lord save or I perish" – when he is then emptied of his own sufficiency, and finds that he has not one rag of righteousness to recommend him to the notice of God, he throws himself upon the Lord Jesus Christ in all the poverty of his soul – he is then made rich in the blessings of salvation. He can the witness from that experience, "blessed are the poor in Spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven"-

consider we,

II. The happiness of those who possess this poverty of Spirit – theirs is the Kingdom of heaven – This phrase has a two-fold signification – it refers to the present and the future – In its present signification, it is not meat and drink, but "righteousness and peace & joy in the Holy Ghost." This Kingdom is set up in the heart of the Christian believer which constitutes his happiness in the present world.

1. He is righteous before God – pardoned and justified – the image of God is stamped upon the soul, whereby it is created in the image of God. He now loves God ~~Go~~ because he first love him, And he loves all mankind for his sake
2. He is also the subject of peace – Previous to his reception of this kingdom, he had no peace – All was trouble and anguish of soul; but now that he has received this inward kingdom, his peace flows as a river, and his righteousness as the waves of the sea. He has a heavenly calm, a sweet repose in the blood of Jesus Christ.
3. In this Kingdom he ~~enjoys~~ is enabled to rejoice, with joy in the Holy Ghost, which arises from a sense of the forgiveness of our sins, from a lively hope of the glory of God, from the testimony of a good conscience, from Communion with God, and from a earnest of his future inheritance – In the possession of such an inheritance – of such an experience, the indivisible can break out in the language of the Prophet, O Lord I will praise thee, tho thou wast angry with me; thine anger turned away – he feels that those givers of pleasure, which flow at God's right hand are springing up within him – This is heaven on earth begun meat that endureth to everlasting life.

But this Poverty of Spirit must be perpetuated after we receive this Kingdom, but upon different principles – It arises from a continual sense of our total dependence upon God for every good thought and word and work – of our utter inability to do good, unless he water us every moment by his grace – With this is joined a loving shame, a tender humiliation before God, even for the sins which he know he hath forgiven us, although they are not imputed to our condemnation – And the more he grow in grace, the more shall he discover of the corruption of our hearts; and the more shall he become humbled in the sight of God –

And the great reason why many grow cold and languished in religion, is attributable to the fact, that they have lost their poverty of spirit and have become proud and highminded, & forgotten the depths of his misery from which they have been raised. O let me exhort you, to cultivate religion in his valley of humility, if you hope to be exalted to the kingdom of heaven hereafter –

2 At the end of their pilgrimage, those who possess this gracious disposition of soul, shall be put in possession of the rich rewards of heaven By the kingdom of heaven in its fortune signification, we mean the place of the more immediate presence of God, where his glory is more fully displayed – This kingdom is sometimes called a house in which there are many mansions – a city hath foundations whose maker and builder is God. There we are told, shall be no night, no sorrow, nor crying, nor pain nor death – But a tide of increasing delight- happiness without alloy – pleasure undisturbed – joy without mixture – New beauties shall increasing like the flowers of an ever blooming spring forever putting forth to charm the eyes – All this, and more than this, will be the future inheritance of that man as of that woman, who cultivates this gracious disposition of soul – this poverty of spirit.

Religion stands opposed to pride. for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble – Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

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The humble man is the happy man -