

## Upside Down Kingdom: Poor In Spirit Matthew 5:1-3<sup>i</sup>

### INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you this morning. For those of you that are guests, my name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. Whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are certainly glad you are with us today. And on behalf of our church family, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to get to connect with you. If you would, simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to 94-000. You will then be prompted to click on a link that will provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. And here's our promise to you... we promise not to bombard your inbox. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with you and to pray for you.

### SERIES OVERVIEW:

Today we begin a new teaching series that we have called, "The Upside Down Kingdom." Over the next several weeks, we are going to be looking at the Beatitudes that are listed in the opening of Matthew chapter 5. Let me invite you to take your bibles and turn there with me this morning as we look at verses 1-3.

And let me begin today by sharing with you the vision behind this teaching series. In August, I asked our church to consider how we might be intentional in our spiritual growth and development this church calendar year. We just completed a series called "Rhythms" where we looked at 7 spiritual disciplines that help us position ourselves to grow.

As we kickoff our new series this morning, we are doing so in the same vein of spiritual growth. As we close out 2021 and look to the beginning of 2022, I want us to consider what spiritual growth looks like, what spiritual thriving looks like, in a world that seems upside down. We are going to look at Jesus' upside-down Kingdom.

### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Oxymorons and Paradoxes**

You know, we use oxymorons all the time. You know what I'm talking about? An oxymoron is a statement in which the words seem contradictory. For example, Jumbo Shrimp, plastic silverware, and veggie burger. Zero sense. We also know these as paradoxes. Socrates once said, "I know one thing, that I know nothing." I've heard people say, "Nobody goes to that restaurant, it's too crowded." Or we tell our kids to not go near the water until you learn to swim. Well, how's that supposed to happen? Right?!

Jesus often makes use of paradoxical statements to teach about His Kingdom. For example, He said, "The first shall be last," and "if you want to be great, you must be a servant." Other New Testament writers said to be exalted requires to be humble. The reason for this is that Jesus' Kingdom is completely different from other kingdoms.

And it is important for us to center ourselves as believers of Jesus Christ on His Kingdom. The author of Hebrews said in 13:14, "*For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.*" In other words, this world is not our home, but rather the Kingdom of Heaven is our permanent residence. And so, Jesus, in Matthew chapter 5, teaches how-to live-in accordance to His Kingdom and therefore live in a way that, though it seems upside down to the world, it is actually right side up.

### BACKGROUND:

Read along with me in your copy of God's Word in Matthew 5:1-3. *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: <sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

To set this passage in context, there are a couple of things that I want us to know. These verses are the opening lines in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It is called that because Jesus preaches this message on a rolling hill by the Sea of Galilee. It is the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher to ever preach.

And what Jesus is doing in this sermon is teaching about the Kingdom of God. A Pastor friend of mine once said about the Sermon on the Mount, "This is Jesus, the King of the Kingdom, teaching citizens of the Kingdom how to live as people of the Kingdom."<sup>ii</sup> I like that. Jesus talking about His Kingdom, how to enter His Kingdom, and what life is like in His Kingdom. And when we live as

citizens of our true Kingdom, we will appear to live lives that are upside down in comparison to the earthly kingdom.

So, with that background, let's look at the components to life in the upside down Kingdom.

### **MESSAGE:**

#### **1) The Upside Down Kingdom has... Upside Down Vision**

What do I mean by this? A couple of things here. Notice again in verse 1 that Jesus saw the crowds. Matthew lets us know that Jesus saw the crowd and He took advantage of the opportunity to meet the crowd where they were. Both Matthew and Luke, by the way, record the Beatitudes. And they both talk about Jesus noticing the crowd, seeing the crowd. And when Jesus sees the crowd, I believe, in His omniscience, sees much more than faces. He sees much more than a multitude of people. I think He, being God, sees individuals, peers into souls, and sees the lost and hurting and the desperate. So, He meets them where they need Him the most.

This is important for us to realize because if we are to be true citizens of Jesus' Kingdom, we must see people as our Lord sees people. We must operate our daily lives in a way that we see souls, we see the lost, we see the hurting, we see the desperate, and be a people that offers hope and help and redemption. And this stands in contrast to the world in which we live, doesn't it?!

The world's kingdom vision is self-centered. God's Kingdom vision is others centered. The world's kingdom says to look at for number 1. God's Kingdom says to love your neighbor as yourself. The world's kingdom says to seek greatness. God's Kingdom says greatness is achieved by serving others. The Upside down Kingdom has upside down vision. Jesus saw the crowds and He served the crowds.

The second way that we see how the Upside Down Kingdom has Upside Down Vision is its definition of happiness.

Jesus opens the sermon with a series of paradoxical statements. In this, the first Beatitude, Jesus says, "***Blessed are the poor in spirit...***" The word translated as blessed literally means, "happy." So, happy are the poor in spirit. This paradox doesn't seem to make sense to us because of the way we

envision happiness. The Upside Down Kingdom has upside down vision when it comes to defining happiness.

### **ILLUSTRATION: Reuters' News Study<sup>iii</sup>**

An article published by Reuters' News said that Americans today claim to be less happy than they were 30 years ago. Perhaps that's because we have the wrong view of happiness. The world defines happiness in a different way from those that belong to God's Kingdom. Again, it's upside down.

If we were to take a poll and ask, "What would it take to make you happy," we would probably hear earthly definitions of happiness. Things like, "If I could get this promotion, or make this salary, or buy this item, or live in this location" etc. But that runs contrary to the Bible's definition of true happiness.

It appears the Bible's definition of happiness has nothing to do with circumstance or situation or possession, but rather has everything to do with the pursuit of holiness. True happiness can be found in our pursuit of becoming more like Christ. This is why wealthy people can be so unhappy and impoverished people can be so joyful. Not saying that wealth leads to unhappiness, you see, but to simply say that happiness isn't found in wealth. Again, living upside down to the kingdom of this world.

Think about Jesus for a moment. I would think that we would say that Jesus was a person that exemplified happiness. Sure, Jesus demonstrated times of anger and frustration and pain, but those instances were not all the time, and they were applied in a non-sinful way. Jesus was filled with happiness because of the fulfillment of His mission; to make a way for the redemption of sinners to a Holy God.

Jesus' happiness certainly was not rooted in earthly things. He didn't have a home. Matthew 8:20, "***20 And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'***" Jesus' happiness was obviously not rooted in his address. Again, I think the point is, happiness is not gained in circumstance, position, or possession. Happiness is gained by the pursuit of holiness.

The Upside Down Kingdom has Upside Down vision. Secondly, ...

#### **2) The Upside Down Kingdom has... Upside down thinking.**

When Jesus teaches the Beatitudes, it is important to realize that they are not isolated sayings but rather are a logical progression. In other words, they build upon one another. Not random but purposeful. And they demonstrate that God's Upside Down Kingdom has upside down thinking.

Let me show you what I mean by the logical progression of the Beatitudes. Being poor in spirit reveals an attitude, a thought, we ought to have toward our own sin and selfishness. That way of thinking leads us to mourn, to be meek and then to hunger for righteousness. And by doing that, we become people that are merciful, pure in heart, and seek peace. And that kind of person stands in such stark contrast to the world that we are then persecuted because of our faith. See, the Beatitudes build upon one another.

And because they are logical in nature, we can conclude that they are not to be separated. In other words, we can't choose which qualities we would like to possess at the expense of the others. This is not a buffet where we can pick and choose based upon our own preferences. No, following Jesus, living in the Upside Down Kingdom, requires that we exemplify all of the character traits listed in the Beatitudes.

And the first one is to be poor in spirit. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? The words translated as poor in spirit means, destitute, poverty stricken, spiritually bankrupt. **In classical Greek, it described a person who had one hand over his face and the other hand out for a handout.** The picture is of covering one's face so as to say, "Don't look at me." I'm so poor, so bankrupt, completely dependent on another. I'm in such need and I can't help myself. And this is the person that gains entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus is saying that the person that is spiritually bankrupt is one that realizes that they are broken and in need of rescue. They can't make it on their own. I am a sinner and incapable of saving myself. I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And in that realization, turn to Jesus as Lord and Savior. What Jesus is saying is that this is how you gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. You cannot gain entrance into Heaven apart from the recognition that you are a sinner and turn to Him as Lord and Savior.

Furthermore, Paul says in Ephesians 2:1, "*And you were **dead** in the **trespasses and sins.***"

Beloved, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we have to adjust our thinking regarding sin. Prior to faith in Jesus as Lord, we were dead in our sin. There is nothing we can do to get us out of that situation. We weren't drowning, you see, we were already dead. Romans 6:23 says that, "*The wages of sin [what we earn because of our sin] is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" We are a sinful people and our only hope rests in trusting in Jesus, by faith, as Lord and Savior.

I think we have a tendency to rank sin and place it in different categories and by so doing we try to ease the conviction associated with our sin. For example, we tend to think that "white lies" are not as bad as murder. We also justify our sin by believing that it's okay, it's just human nature. And by so doing, what do we do? We tolerate sin.

But what we need to realize is that our sin, regardless of how we rank it, all of it is an offense to Almighty God. And that we are steeped in sin and helpless apart from Jesus. We are spiritually bankrupt. And here's what this means, we don't gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven because we are quote, "Good people." We are not good! We are sinful. We are spiritually destitute. We gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven by acknowledging our spiritual poverty and trusting in Jesus. The cross is the only way by which God deals with the horridness of our sinfulness.

And this runs contrary to the thinking of the world. It's upside down, isn't it?! We hear it said all the time, "I think God will let me into Heaven because I try to be a good person. I have done this and that and tried to be the best I possibly can be." But that is not how we gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Being a good person does nothing to satisfy the penalty of our sin. We only gain entrance by placing faith in Jesus and in the finished work of the cross.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Why? Because theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. The upside down kingdom has upside down vision and upside down thinking. Thirdly, ...

### 3) The Upside Down Kingdom has... Upside Down Citizenship

Again, Jesus says, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for **theirs** is the kingdom of heaven.*" In other words, the poor in spirit, the ones who realize the gravity of their sin, come to repentant faith in Jesus as Lord, are the ones that become citizens of Heaven. Now this is important to realize for a couple of reasons.

First, we realize that **this world is not our home**. To be a citizen of Heaven means that Heaven is our home, not this world. Philippians 3:20 says, "*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

While we are in the world, beloved, we belong first and foremost to the Kingdom of Heaven.

What about the Kingdom of Heaven? Well, the Kingdom of Heaven is eternal. The kingdom of this world is temporary. The Kingdom of Heaven will stand forever. The kingdom of this world will pass away. Our citizenship is not rooted in the temporary but rather in the eternal. This is why we invest in the things of eternal significance. This is why we live by God's design, not man's ways. This is why we seek to gratify the desires of the Spirit and not the desires of the flesh.

We belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. And this determines how we live here and now. Our citizenship reveals to whom our allegiance lies. We do not seek to please man, but to please God. We are to realize who we are and whose we are. We are to cling to the words of life from the Kingdom of Heaven, and not merely to the wisdom of this world. And that drives everything about how we live here. I heard one Pastor say, "I'm just passing through."

We are to realize that this world is not our home. Secondly, kingdom citizenship means that we realize that **this world is not our best life**. As believers in Jesus, the best is yet to come, it's not now. Whether it be when we leave this earthly tent and go to glory, or in the glorious return of our Lord, the best is yet to come for the believer.

But we often live like this life is better than the next. What does that lead us to do? We often pursue the pleasures of the flesh at the expense of the calling on our lives. We pursue worldly gain at the expense of serving The Lord.

Hear me, I'm not saying that dreams, aspirations, and goals are ungodly. I think those things are given to us by God. I'm simply saying that if we are pursuing those things only, or those things above the calling God has on our lives, we are not living as citizens of Heaven. We have to reorient our pursuits and align them to our true Kingdom.

So, the Upside down Kingdom has upside down vision, upside down thinking, and upside down citizenship.

### **CONCLUSION:**

As we come to a time of response in our service this morning, I want to ask the band to come back up and lead us in that time of response. And as they are coming, I want us to come to a few conclusions.

First, as we work our way through this study of the Beatitudes, we must realize that these are not things we are to do to be saved. But rather, they are to reveal to us who we are as a believer in Jesus. They are not called the do-attitudes. They are called the Be-attitudes. We are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven by the grace of God in the free gift of Jesus as Lord.

Second, evaluate your citizenship. Are you a citizen of Heaven or of this world only? These beatitudes are characteristics of those who are citizens of Heaven.

Thirdly, if you are not a citizen of Heaven, I'm asking you to consider your sinful state. Consider your spiritual poverty. And if you have never come to a repentant faith in Jesus as Lord, today can be the day of salvation for you.

I want us to consider how upside-down the Kingdom of Heaven is in relation to the kingdom of this world. God's Kingdom is opposite of the earthly view. In an earthly kingdom, the people under the reign and rule of the king would never get to know or even see their king. In an earthly kingdom, the king makes demands of the people without relationship with them.

But Jesus does something entirely different. He flips the script. The King of the Upside Down Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, wants to know and be known by His people. So much so that the King of kings became common so that we, the common, might be a part of an uncommon Kingdom. Completely backward to the world.<sup>iv</sup>

God loves us in such a way that He made it possible for sinners like me to belong to His Kingdom. By grace, through faith in Jesus as Lord, you, too, can belong to God's Kingdom.

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ENDNOTES:

<sup>i</sup> Works Consulted in preparation of this sermon: Chris Colvin, “How to Preach the Beatitudes” article written September 2, 2020; John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7 MacArthur New Testament Commentary*; Fight the Good Fight of Faith blog, “What Does it Mean to Be Poor in Spirit,” posted March 28, 2016; Bible Tools, “What the Bible says about Poor in Spirit;” David Guzik, “Study Guide for Matthew 5,” Blue Letter Bible; David Brown, “The Gospel According to Matthew Commentary,” Matthew 5:1-16; Dr. Michael Gossett, *The Upside Down Life: “Descending into Greatness,”* Green Acres Baptist Church preached September 19, 2021; Dr. Michael Youssef, *The Master’s Manifesto: Private Life / Public Character,* Leading the Way with Dr. Michael Youssef; Skip Heitzig, *Expound, Matthew 5:5-16,* Calvary Church

Albuquerque, October 19, 2011; Matt Darby, *The Blessed Life: “Uncommon Life,”* New Beginnings Baptist Church, Gilmer Campus, preached September 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Borrowed this little quip from my friend, Matt Darby.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-happiness-usa/americans-less-happy-today-than-30-years-ago-study-idUSL1550309820070615>

<sup>iv</sup> Adapted this visual from my friend, Matt Darby.