

# Blessed are the Poor in Spirit for Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

## Matthew 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23

**DIG:** What is the most important aspect to the background of the sermon to you? What are the two categories of happiness that are seen in these verses? The first four are characteristics of those who have attained true righteousness in relationship with whom? What are the next five characteristic of?

**REFLECT:** Do I recognize my need for **YHVH** and know I don't have to earn His love? Can I let others know when I am hurting and share the grief of others without embarrassment? Have I given **ADONAI** the steering wheel of my life so I don't have to "win" all the time? Do I long for **God's** perspective in my decision-making? Can I be with someone who is hurting and lonely and come alongside them in their pain? Can I be completely open and honest with **the LORD** and others, transparent because I have nothing to hide? Do I deal with feelings of anger and disagreement immediately, not letting them fester? Do I encourage those around me to work out their differences without hurting anyone? Am I willing to "take the heat" and stand alone for what is right? Can I take criticism without feeling self-pity or self-**righteousness**?

To establish the background to this sermon, there are four things that should be noted. First, it took place after intense interest in **Jesus** was stirred up. By that time, **He** had traveled all over Isra'el proclaiming that **He** was **the Messiah** and backing **His** claims up with many miracles. Second, this sermon also took place after **the twelve apostles** were chosen. Third, it came after several conflicts with the Pharisees over the Oral Law (see **Ei - The Oral Law**), and fourth, this was a period of Jewish history when the Jewish people were looking for redemption (see my commentary on **Exodus Bz - Redemption**). It was a time when Isra'el suffered greatly under Roman oppression. The people were looking for some type of messianic redemption, primarily, a national redemption from Roman persecution. They were looking for **the Messiah** to come and establish **His Kingdom** and throw off the Roman yoke. According to the prophets of the TaNaKh, righteousness was the means of entering **the Kingdom**. The Sermon on the Mount is **Jesus'** interpretation of the standard of righteousness that the Torah demanded, in contrast with the Pharisaic interpretation of righteousness. Thus, this section deals with the characteristics of true **righteousness**.<sup>501</sup>

The Greek word translated **blessed** means *happy*. This section is often called the beatitudes (Latin for **blessed**), which can be traced back to an earlier Jewish concept. The word **blessed** would sound familiar to any Jew who had been brought up studying the TaNaKh. The Hebrew word *ashrey* is common throughout **the Psalms** and the *siddur* or prayer book. The root word (Hebrew: *asher*) would more accurately mean *happy*, but not in some superficial temporal sense, but in the most fulfilling reality of doing the will of **ADONAI**. Some of the specific beatitudes do not seem good in themselves; yet if a person fulfills **God's** will in these ways, there is a blessing and even a sense of happiness that the world cannot offer.<sup>502</sup>

**Therefore, happy are the ones who attain these are two categories in these verses. First, there are four characteristics of those who have attained true righteousness in relationship with God. Looking at His disciples, He said:**

1. **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20).** While **Matthew** says: **Blessed are the poor in spirit**, **Luke** says: **Blessed are you who are poor**. In the first century the term **poor** referred to economic status, but it was also used metaphorically to refer to a spiritual attitude. **Psalm 40:17** states: **But I am poor and needy; may Adonai think of me. You are my helper and rescuer; my God, don't delay** (also see **Psalm 86:1** and **109:22** where David used the same terms to describe himself)! These are not economic terms because King David was not poor, so the term should be understood metaphorically. Poor, therefore, could be and is used in the TaNaKh to describe a spiritual state of being **humble**.<sup>503</sup> **Poor in spirit** is the opposite of pride. When we have a right relationship with **God** we have no **righteousness** of our own. Therefore, one who is **poor in spirit** is completely dependent of the **righteousness of God**. This is the place to start when we interpret the Torah. Searching for **Messiah's Kingdom** means that we must humbly realize our need for **Him**. Those who look upon themselves as thus impoverished will enter into **the kingdom of Heaven**.

2. **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (Matthew 5:4).** Regrettably, Isra'el has had a long history of **mourning**, as she has endured many trials and attacks by her enemies. The crowds on that mountain could easily relate to the concept expressed in the Hebrew term *aval*, which is a common response to the tragedies of life. The promise of **Yeshua** here is similar to that of the prophet **Isaiah**, who promised Isra'el **the oil of gladness instead of mourning (Isaiah 61:3 CJB)**. To **mourn** in this context, however, means to be sensitive to sin. Those who are sensitive to sin will naturally confess their sins to **God** and be mournful over those sins. **Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh (Luke 6:21).** **One of the Talmudic titles given to the Messiah is the name *nachem*, which means *comforter*, as**

this would be an important ministry of King Messiah (Tractate Sanhedrin 98b). In Yeshua's later teaching, we are told that another **Comforter** will come to us as well - **the Spirit of Truth**, who will **live within** all believers (John 14:15-17).<sup>504</sup>

3. **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Land** (Matthew 5:5 CJB). To be **meek** does not mean to be a cowardly doormat; rather, it means to have a quiet confidence in **God**, in recognition of, and in submission to **His** authority. The Hebrew word *anav* implies power under control. People like this are not pushy or self-centered, but purposely limit their own power and rights. Those who have this quality and live a life of submission to **God's** authority will one day exercise authority when they **inherit the Land**. This phrase implies both a physical inheritance of the land of Israel as promised to the Jewish people, and a spiritual inheritance of eternal life in the messianic **Kingdom** for all believers.

4. **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled** (Matthew 5:6). To be **righteous** means to live in accordance with an absolute divine standard. To those hearing **Christ's** words, the standard was the Torah. **Those who hunger** for the things of **God will be filled**. The Talmudic tradition mentions with delight **the coming Kingdom of Messiah**. One much anticipated highlight will be the banquet of **Messiah** that is said to take place in the restored garden of Eden. As the **Meschiach** gathers **His** redeemed people together, a cup of wine is **blessed** that has been aged from the days of **Creation**. King David himself is said to have the honor of singing the **blessing** (Patai, pages 238-239). But as great as the physical banquet might be, here **Yeshua** emphasizes the greater blessing of having our spiritual hunger completely satisfied in the messianic **Kingdom**.<sup>505</sup>

**Second, there are five characteristics of those who have attained true righteousness in relationship with others.**

1. **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy** (Matthew 5:7). **Mercy** means that you don't get something you deserve. We all deserve eternal punishment for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of **God** (Romans 3:23), for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but **God** demonstrates **His** own [**mercy**] for us in this: While we were still sinners, **Christ** died for us (Romans 5:8). Therefore, **Jesus** teaches that those who will enter into **the kingdom of Messiah** must have this attribute that beautifully reflects the character of **ADONAI** Himself. We will be shown **mercy** from **the LORD** as we show that same kind of **mercy** to those around us. Without a doubt those who understand the **mercy** of **Yeshua**, who removed judgment from us (see **Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**), will be slow to judge others.

2. Now the requirements get even tougher: **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God (Matthew 5:8)**. Being **pure in heart** seems impossible for us to obtain. We all fall short of the perfect standard as reflected in the Torah (see Dg - **The Completion of the Torah**). In fact, only **the Meshiach Himself** attained it! So even with our best intentions, our actions and thoughts do not come close to fulfilling the requirements of a righteous **God**. Although we should continue **to be conformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29)**, this blessing clearly convicts us that we need **God's** help. It is only when His righteousness is credited to our account (see doctrine of **imputation** in Fr - **Jesus the Bread of Life, John 6:63**) that we can even have the hope of enjoying **the Kingdom** to come. In other words, **Jesus Christ** not only came to teach us about **Ha'Shem** but to actually pay the price of redemption (see my commentary on Exodus Bz - **Redemption**) to bring us into the promised messianic **Kingdom**.

3. **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9)**. Aside from **God Himself, shalom, or peace** is a concept that is perhaps the most revered among Jewish people. The Hebrew term **shalom** is very different from the Greek concept of peace. The Greeks used that term to describe the absence of conflict. When a war stopped there was "peace." In the Jewish culture, however, the term is much broader and deeper. Not only does it describe the absence of conflict, but also a state of completeness, fulfillment, and positive **blessing**. It should come as no surprise that those who seek **shalom will be called children of God**. So what does **peacemaking** look like? **Peacemakers** are those who **turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39)**, go the extra mile (**Matthew 5:41**), and **love their enemies** while praying **for those who persecute** them (**Matthew 5:43-44**). Why should we do this? Because **God** is a **peacemaker**, and when we make peace we are called **children of God**. **Peacemaking** is a family thing.<sup>506</sup>

4. **Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:10)**, to live righteously means to live in accordance with an absolute divine standard. Those who truly love **God** will live consistently with His standard, which will result in a love for one's neighbor. Indeed, the Torah demanded that one must first love **God** totally, and then love one's neighbor as oneself. **Jesus Himself** taught that these are the two **greatest commandments (Matthew 22:36-40)**. However, **Yeshua** exhorts His disciples to prepare to be persecuted as they pursue **righteousness**. The reality is that the world's system is not seeking **the righteousness of God**. It uses situation ethics, not a righteous standard, and the darkness hates the light. True believers in **Messiah** can expect persecution from the world that neither seeks nor understands **God**.

5. While it is not always easy, **Messiah** gives the assurance that **the kingdom of Heaven** is ours. He even goes into detail, saying: **Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute**

**you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me (Matthew 5:11).** The Adversary and the world just hate the absolute standards and righteousness of **the Messiah** and **His children**. Yet, it is for this very reason we are told to **rejoice and be glad, because our great reward is in heaven.** We can also take comfort in the reality that **they persecuted the prophets who were before you in the same way (Matthew 5:12).** Therefore, **blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man (Luke 6:22). Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets (Luke 6:23).** The fifth blessing is for those who strive to live a life of **righteousness** in the face of persecution. Happy are those who are persecuted for the sake of **righteousness**. If **Yeshua** was persecuted to those who were threatened by the Gospel, can those who identify with **Him** expect any less?

Up to this point everything has been directly related to the Dispensation of the Torah (see my commentary on **Exodus Da - The Dispensation of the Torah**), but here **He** adds one further step in light of **Christ's** coming. We must acknowledge **Him** as **King Messiah**, this will produce persecution, but also great reward in **the Kingdom**.<sup>507</sup>

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series of articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

Now it came to pass that I journeyed to a far away country called California. And there I found a friend, a citizen of that country, and he had an automobile, and he took me on swift journeys to show me Orange Groves and Grape Fruit Orchards, and Vineyards, and many trees whereon grew prunes.

And it came to pass that I heard often a town called Corona, and always this was said of it: Corona, Home of the Lemon.

Now on a day we passed through Corona, and the day was warm and dusty, and I spoke to my friends:

Behold, this is Corona, the Home of the Lemon. Let us tarry, I pray thee, for lemons are concocted and a cunning drink that maketh glad the heart and doth not intoxicate.

So we rode through the street, and we came to a place where it was written: Ice Cream, Soda Water, Sundays and All Kinds of Soft Drinks.

And we alighted from the chariot, and went in, and behold, a man in a White Apron.

And I was about to speak to him, but my friend spoke: Be thou silent, and keep thy money in thine own pocket; I am paying for this.

And I kept silent willingly, for those are pleasant words to hear.

Then spoke my friend to the man in the white apron: Hasten thee, lad, and prepare for us four good, ice-cold lemonades, and make them Good, and make them Speedily.

And the man in the White Apron heard him as one who understood not what he said.

Then spoke my friend again: This friend of mine is from Chicago, and these other friends are from Boston, and they think they know what good lemonade is; but I want them to have a drink of lemonade that is Lemonade. Hasten thee, and prepare it for them.

Then spoke the man in the White Apron: We have no Lemonade.

And the man from California grew red in the face, and he said: What? No lemonade in Corona, the home of the lemon?

And the man in the White Apron answered, We have Soda Water, Root Beer, Ginger Ale, Ice Cream, but no lemonade.

Then spoke my friend: Hasten now to the grocery store, and buy a half-dozen good lemons, and quickly make us lemonade.

And the man in the White Apron hastened, and returned, and said: There isn't a lemon in town. They ship them all to Chicago and Boston.

And when I heard this I meditated, and I said: I have suffered for lack of good Fish at the Seashore, and Fresh Eggs in the Country, when both were abundant in Town, and now I behold that that place to buy good Lemonade is where they do not raise Lemons.

And as I meditated, I remembered that in many other things the shoemaker's family goeth unshod. Yes, this shall be to me as a Parable, lest having preached to others I should become a Castaway.

So I resolved that with all my exportation of the Gospel, I would keep some of it for Home Consumption.<sup>508</sup>