



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

DESPERATE DISCIPLES*

MATTHEW 5:3

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

Matthew 5:3 has several different interpretations. Many people compare Matthew 5:3 with Luke 6:20 where Jesus is talking about those who are materially poor, and believe He is talking about the same thing here. But in Matthew 5, the word *poor* is clearly being used in a figurative sense.

Most Bible teachers recognize this, and so believe that Jesus is talking about a sense of spiritual need a person must have in order to become a Christian. Some talk about how we need to recognize our sin. Others talk about how a person needs to come to a place of need before they can become a Christian. A few say that Jesus is teaching people about their spiritual bankruptcy. It seems that each teacher has their own twist on what Jesus means in Matthew 5:3, but almost all believe that whatever Jesus is teaching, it is primarily directed at the unsaved.

The primary problem with this view is that the entire Sermon on the Mount is directed at believers who are starting out on the path of discipleship. It is the Discipleship Manual. They do not need to be justified for they are justified! Notice that in the second half of v 3, they already have the kingdom. New Christians need an answer to the question, "What now?"

Therefore, when Jesus sits down to teach His disciples, He begins right off with the very first thing they need to know: They must be **poor in spirit**. Jesus is not saying they are spiritually poor, or spiritually destitute. No, as believers, we have everything we need for life and Godliness; we are spiritually rich! The problem with Christians who stall out in discipleship is not that they don't have everything they need spiritually. Rather, it's that they don't have the desire or need to learn what they have been given or how to use it. That is what Jesus calls for here.

If I were making a loose translation of Matthew 5:3, I might write, "Blessed are the desperate." The word desperate comes from the Latin *despero* (which is also where we get our word "despair") and means to be low in spirit. "Poor in spirit" is a literal translation from the Greek of Matthew 5:3, but conceptually, "desperate" might be better.

Jesus is teaching that desperation is required for the person who will follow Him. But that is exactly where most of us go wrong. We are not desperate enough.

When was the last time you were desperate for God? When was the last time you forgot about sleep and food so that you could seek the face of God through prayer? When was the last time you opened Scripture begging, pleading, crying out to God for Him to speak to you from its pages? When was the last time you were so sick and tired of sin in your life, you considered literally gouging out your eyes or cutting off your hand? This is true desperation.

Of course, desperation by itself is not enough. Desperate lives take desperate actions. When you come to the place in your life where you are desperate enough for God, you will make the necessary changes to receive and experience all that He has for you. Experiencing life in the kingdom (v 3b) begins with desperation. Until then, it will be life as usual.

*This article, and other Bible studies by Jeremy Myers, can be accessed at www.tillhecomes.org.