

## Joy in the Wealth of Poverty

Luke 6:20

June 11, 2017

This morning, we're really continuing a message we began last week. We want to understand more fully, more completely what Jesus meant by what he said and implications for us. It's been 12 years since sociologist Christian Smith published his book called, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. The book came out back in 2005, and it did not reveal a pretty picture. It revealed the spiritual condition of America's evangelical youth. Smith and his team of researchers coined a term that has become a very apt description of their theological beliefs. It's the term "moralistic therapeutic deism." Moralistic therapeutic deism. That's how many of today's young people believe.

Now, keep in mind, this is 12 years ago. The research being conducted probably over a decade before that. Many of these people who were studied are now in their 20's, 30's. "Moralistic, therapeutic deism." It's moralistic in the sense that it's moralizing, high-minded, not in any biblical sense.

They take their cues from the culture. They're high-minded and moralizing about their set of standards and values, moralizing about political hot-button issues like social justice, poverty issues, the need to make reparations for all the injustices done against the marginalized people in our society. Namely today, it's very popular to talk about reparations to the LGBTQI- whatever letter you want to add to that. Now community climate issues and all the rest. They're moralistic in that sense, not in any biblical sense.

It's therapeutic because for them religion is all about feeling good about themselves. Terms like "sin," "repentance," "righteousness," all those are too judgmental. They're more into things like "healing," "brokenness," "woundedness," finding out how Jesus is the balm that salves our broken hearts. He's the life-coach who buoys up their self-esteem.

Finally, it's called moralistic therapeutic deism because they're not atheists, after all. They believe there is a God, they just don't see God as being actively involved in their lives. He's remote. The God they acknowledge is remote and uninvolved, kind of like many of their parents were. It's a God

who is benign, nonjudgmental, passive. And they feel no sense of accountability to him, see no need to submit to any standards.

This God asks nothing of them, but merely exists to bless them. He merely exists to give them unconditional love and healing their wounds and taking them into heaven. Christian Smith and his team came up with a creed for moralistic therapeutic deism, which described pretty accurately how many of today's younger evangelicals think.

Listen to this creed of moralistic therapeutic deism:  
"Number one, a God exists who created and orders a world and watched over human life on earth. Number two, God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. Number three, the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. Number four, God does not need to be particularly in one's life, except when God is needed to resolve a problem. Number five, good people go to heaven when they die."

That may be the description of how some believe, but that is not biblical Christianity, is it? Today's young people,

though, are fluent in religious language, Christian language, using words like, "God," "Bible," and "heaven," but divorced from any Christian meaning. They use God-talk, but they're not actually talking about the God of Scripture. Frankly, they're really not into that God. They refer to the Bible, but they've learned to read the Bible through the grid of what they'd like to think is its main message: God wants people to be "good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions."

So every verse become further affirmation of what they already think. They want to go to heaven, but heaven for them is the culmination of their therapy. It's a place of wholeness and healing. It's a place where they become their best selves, and for all of eternity, they'll be with the God who helped them along in realizing their fullest potential. It's a very far cry from Christianity, isn't it?

But we need to stop and realize before we condemn these generations for their moralistic therapeutic deism. We need to stop and realize the vast, vast number of the 3,000 young people interviewed by Christian Smith and his team of researchers—many

of them came from evangelical homes. And as I've said, these young people are in their 20's and 30's now. I've met some of these who subscribe to, even though they don't say it, they subscribe to this moralistic therapeutic deism. They don't call it that. Do you know what they call their religion? Christianity. They attend evangelical churches. Not our church, they, they find our church rather boring and unfulfilling. I think the sermons are probably too long, something like that.

But they do believe that what they think is Christianity. They think that they are Christians. Why would they think that? What would give them that impression? Because their parents, their educators, their Sunday school teachers and sadly, their pastors, all were complicit in contributing to their sense of self-assurance, self-affirmation and self-deception. They never taught them true Christianity, or if they taught them, it was only by rote. They never showed them how to live a radically ordinary Christianity, the kind that Jesus describes here in the Sermon on the Mount.

And, beloved, it's time for you and me to repent. It's time for us to take responsibility for what we see out there, to not

cast dispersions and blame on all that "terrible millennial generation," but to take responsibility for where they are. And say, "You know what? It's on us to go back, re-learn these words of Jesus. It's on us. We need to rediscover what true Christianity looks like and return to this pro-poverty Gospel." Not only is it not a prosperity gospel, it's a pro-poverty gospel. The kind that Jesus is announcing here with the opening line of the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." That is the Gospel, folks. There is no other Gospel.

Take a look then, again, at that first section in verses 20-23. We see there a series paradoxical and seemingly, seemingly radical sayings of our Lord, but really, we need to understand this is just normal Christianity. This is something we've become less familiar with over time, but this is just normal.

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you

and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets."

The thesis verse for that section is verse 20, "Blessed are the poor," and all that follows is just further elaboration of the same theme. The hungry, the weeping, the hated, excluded, reviled and spurned. They are the poor. They are those who have forsaken this world, which they can't hold onto forever, and they've forsaken this world in exchange for the Son of Man, who will always hold onto them forever and will never let them go.

This is the gateway into the entire sermon. It's through this "Wicked Gate" in the words of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it's through this right here that we enter into the rest of the teaching. Without this, none of it makes sense. But when we understand this, everything makes sense. So because that verse is so important to understand, we asked and answered a couple of basic questions last week: Who are the poor and why are the blessed?

We answered the first question by saying the poor are those who have been stripped of all confidence in the wealth or prosperity of this world. They are like the destitute beggar. They hold an open hand out to God. The poverty Jesus speaks of is not financial in nature, even though he's alluding to that, he's referring to that. It's not about being underprivileged. It's not about social justice. It's not about people below, living below the poverty line. I've met plenty of poor people who are more tied to the riches of this world than the rich are. The greedy rich may be tied to the riches they have, but the greedy poor are a truly miserable lot because they're tied to the riches they don't have. And they're consumed with covetousness.

But the word here, "poor," is *ptochos*, a beggar, referring to absolute destitution. And when Jesus spoke of this *ptochos* this kind of person, he's using this poor destitute beggar as a metaphor for all of those who put no confidence in wealth, no confidence in anything they find in this world, including the self. Being a *ptochos* person, as I said it's not necessarily about a financial condition. This is a spiritual condition.



And when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor," he's using the poor, the *ptochos*, a very vivid, graphic word that brought to mind in every one of his hearers then, brought to mind a crippled, destitute, probably sore-covered beggar, whose very survival from day to day depended on the pity and the charity of his fellow man. So Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor," he wanted to evoke that image in the minds of all his hearers. He wanted them to understand that that kind of poverty as a spiritual condition is the condition that they must have before a Holy God.

That is the attitude they need to have toward the wealth of this world. This is the person, who, like the crippled, hopeless, destitute beggar. This is the person who puts no confidence in himself, no confidence in money, no confidence in prosperity. He possesses no self-reliance whatsoever, no reliance on any material or financial advantage. Everything is stripped away in the heart and he finds no ultimate joy or satisfaction in this life, no contentment, no fulfillment ultimately in this life in anything material, physical or temporal.

We also need to be quick to point out here that for many of Jesus' first century followers, following Christ actually did mean financial ruin. True poverty resulted from following Christ. They were excommunicated from the synagogues. Do you know what that meant? It meant expulsion from society, expulsion from the community. If you were excommunicated from the synagogue, you became a veritable social pariah. No one wanted to risk association with you, and that made buying and selling extremely difficult, which meant the actual financial condition of being poor literally having no money, could be the result of identifying with Jesus Christ.

Turn for a moment to the Book of Hebrews toward the end of your Bibles there. And it's a letter that is written to encourage exactly these kind of people who are struggling with just this reality. Hebrews chapter 10. The writer is trying to hearten those Christians who have suffered for following Christ, and some of these Christians are contemplating, they've professed Christ, but now they're contemplating because of the suffering, because of the loss of everything, they're contemplating giving it up and returning back to a Christ-rejecting, Christ-hating Judaism.

That's why you find throughout the letter of the Hebrews a number of warnings, very strong warnings written against that return scattered throughout the letter. So to go back for these people would be to reject Jesus Christ, a very serious sin. If you're in Hebrews 10, take a look starting in verse 32, verse 32.

Hebrews 10:32, he says to encourage them again, "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

"For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

What's the writer doing there? Do you know what he's doing? He's encouraging them to endure in the face of persecution. He's encouraging them to endure the suffering that Jesus himself promised in the opening beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. You can turn back there. Hebrew Christians had suffered loss, but they needed to remember they're possessors of an eternal kingdom. They are the *ptochos*, poor, but they are blessed because their hearts have been stripped away of all affection for this world, its wealth, its treasures and pleasures.

Commentator J.C. Ryle said it very well. He said, "The poverty spoken about here is a poverty accompanied by grace. The afflictions are the afflictions of the Gospel. Such poverty and persecutions were the inevitable consequences of faith in Christ at the beginning of Christianity. Thousands had to give up everything in this world because of their religion."

Jesus desires to give these people, and all who suffer like them for the Gospel's sake, special comfort and consolation. Indeed, he knows my name. He knows my every thought. He knows my breaking heart. He knows when we suffer. The question is,

are we willing to join them who've suffered the loss of all things for the sake of Christ? Are we willing to join them and never turn back?

We're living in a country that has afforded us a great measure of freedom, freedom of assembly, freedom to gather and worship here together without threat like I just read happened in China. Just within days ago, they broke down the churches and they killed some of the Christians and dragged a number of them away. We're not living in that kind of fear right now at this moment. It would be interesting if that started to happen, wouldn't it? Just to see if it thins the ranks. But I have a better belief about all of you. We're together in this. We are the *ptochos*, poor. We're like those first century believers who are willing to suffer the loss of all things that we might gain Christ, who is most precious to us.

As many in the first century who put their faith in Jesus Christ and they had their goods, their livelihoods, their families, friends completely ripped away from them because they were the poor already, already detached from the treasures and the pleasures of the world, it hurt. It did. They remembered.

"Wait a minute. I am the possessor of the greatest treasure and pleasure of all, God and his eternal kingdom." That's the *ptochos*. That was the first question we tried to answer last week.

What about the second question? How in the world can a person like that be described as blessed? Why would Jesus ascribe the state of blessedness to such a destitute beggar? Because for those who come to God that way, like a destitute beggar stripped of all pride, confidence in self, confidence in wealth, God is pleased to give them, in a word, himself. He is pleased to give them an eternal kingdom. And in giving them himself an eternal kingdom, do you know what he's given them? Everything! Everything!

It's precisely because all earthly wealth, every treasure and pleasure has been stripped away from the heart that we find all of our trust, all of our hope, all of our joy, our satisfaction, all of our contentment are bound up in God and God alone. That's what makes this *ptochos* person blessed because the world is dead to him and he to the world. He loves not the world, neither the things of the world because he knows in the

world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life. He counts all of that as deadness, as distraction, as poisonous. Why? Because it clouds his vision of the only One he has come to long for, the eternal God of heaven.

So beloved if that describes you, if that describes your affections, and if your outward actions are lining up with that profession, those internal affections, then blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God, present possession, continuous state of being. And if yours is the kingdom of God, then yours also is God himself. You possess him. He is yours and you are his. That's what makes you abundantly, infinitely and eternally blessed. God is your reward.

So let's ask a question about ourselves here this morning. How do we live this way? How do we find joy in the wealth of this non-prosperity gospel? How do we find joy in the wealth of this poverty gospel? I'm going to give you the bottom line, okay? Then I'll give you some outline points we can expand, expand upon, okay? But here's the bottom line: We can make sure we enjoy the wealth of this poverty gospel, which is what Jesus has announced here in the Sermon on the Mount. We, we need to

begin by making sure that we are numbered among those poor. We need to make sure we're numbered among the poor because if we are, yours is the kingdom of God.

You will be filled; you will be laughing; you will be rejoicing even in persecution because great is your reward in heaven. If you're not so numbered, woe to you. There is a series of four woes written to you who are rich, written to you whose affections are tied to this world, written to you whose every ambition is to have yourself filled and satisfied, at ease and in comfort now.

The poor, though, are those who count themselves beggars before God, having nothing at all to commend themselves to God. They're destitute physically, spiritually in all ways. They simply hold out the beggar's hand seeking God's mercy. They sing the verse of that hymn, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace, foul, to the fountain ply; wash me, Savior, or I die."



They're that serious about this. They're that serious. To these poor beggars, God is pleased to give them first of all, a Savior, Jesus Christ, who for their sakes became poor so that they might become rich. "[God] made him who knew no sin to be sin on their behalf, so that [they] might become in him the righteousness of God."

The poor are those who hunger in this world, not only finding nothing to satisfy, but knowing that only God can satisfy him. They refuse to look to this world for satisfaction. They long for God, contented only in him, and they hate any junk food offered instead of him. The poor are those who are sorrowing in this world. As James says for the poor, "their laughter has been turned to mourning, their joy to gloom."

What they see on this earth, what they see in people's lives breaks their hearts. They see a sin-ravaged earth. They see people who are hurting, torn apart by sin, and so they go weeping into heaven, not laughing. They aren't dancing around on this earth. They're crawling into heaven, mourning and sorrowful, sad over sin first in themselves and then in the other people they know, sad about sin and its effects. They hate

it. And because of all this, because they won't chase the world's ambition, they don't feast at the world's banquets and they don't dance the world's dances.

And when they won't celebrate with the world, do you know what happens? They offend the world. The poor are a convicting presence in this world like Jesus was. Do you know what they did to him? Stand by. Because of the convicting presence that they bear, because of the testimony they bear in the world, the world rejects them. The world casts them out. The world sees in the poor what they saw in the Son of Man. They want nothing to do with him. They want them off the earth, out of their presence.

But for people like that, for these poor, they count it all as rubbish to be cast away anyway. Riches, food, laughter, acceptance in this world, they forsake it all that their hands might be emptied of all in order that they might more tightly embrace Jesus Christ. For them, God is their only treasure and their very great reward. In fact, he's their present reward because Jesus said, "For yours is," not "will be," but "is the kingdom of God." The rule of God, the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven. That is what the poor live for now.

So to make sure we're truly numbered among the poor, and to make sure that we will find joy in the wealth of this gospel of poverty, let's get just a little more specific. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor," "Blessed are you who are hungry now," "Blessed are you who weep now," "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man" when Jesus pronounced those sayings, they seem because they're concentrated in one place, they seem like they stand out quite a bit to us, but you know what? He's using biblical language.

For him, what was the Bible available to the people of the first century? The Old Testament, right? The Law of Moses, the writings, the prophets. That's what we call the Old Testament. For them, it wasn't Old, it was just Testament. It was just Scripture. And he's speaking in a form that was actually quite familiar to his audience, a prophetic announcement of weal and woe, a blessing and cursing, very common. In fact, if you turn back a couple of pages to Matthew or to Luke Chapter 1, Luke chapter 1 and verse 46, Jesus' own mother spoke her own beatitude before his birth in what we call the Magnificat.

Luke 1:46, listen to this language, beautiful, beautiful language from this young virgin girl Mary. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me [what?] blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

You know we've already preached through that, but I will never ever get tired of reading that. Absolutely beautiful. And if you go back to the Sermon on the Mount, you'll find the same themes that feature in her song of praise, raising up the poor who fear God, bringing down the proud, filling the hungry with good, sending away the rich empty, those same themes show up in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, don't they?

If you're going to go back to the Old Testament and trace this concept of blessedness, the word *markarios*, that's the Greek word that is used to translate the Hebrew word *ashar*, if you remember from last week. And if you go back and trace the word *ashar* throughout the Old Testament, do you know what? It provides a very interesting picture. It clarifies, helps us identify, the poor who are the blessed, why it is they are blessed and how it is they are blessed. Jesus, as I said, is speaking in biblical language in this sermon here in the opening the section we know as the Beatitudes.

Keep in mind, this is how you can know that you are numbered among those whom Jesus identifies as the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the rejected. These and these alone are the blessed, and to these and these alone belong the kingdom of God. They'll be filled. They'll be laughing. They'll be rejoicing in great reward. So if you're numbered among the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the rejected, then you are blessed, for you can be sure of this, yours is the kingdom of God. That is a reality of present possession enjoyed now, but most fully when the Son of Man returns.

Jesus told his questioning disciples in Mark Chapter 10 verses 29-30, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel," that's the poor, hungry, weeping, rejected, same group. There's none of those who've done that for my sake "who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, oh, by the way with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."

What is the "hundredfold" that he is talking about there? I mean if we've separated from all of that, including our families, what family is he talking about? The Church. He's talking about the Church. And if you will rejoice in that gift, as he intends you to do, you find a hundredfold blessing, not only in this life, along with its persecutions, but in the age to come eternal life.

I want to give you some outline points. I'm going to give you all three points just up front so you can jot them down and we'll walk through them one by one, okay? The poor are blessed,

number one, because they fear God. The poor are blessed because they fear God. This is from the Old Testament. I'm not saying anything new. The poor are blessed because they fear God. Second point, the poor are blessed because they rejoice in God. The poor are blessed because they rejoice in God. And thirdly, the poor are blessed because they obey God.

So they're blessed because they fear God, they rejoice in God, and they obey God. It's about what you might expect, right? That is how you know you're numbered among those poor, and that is how you practice this poverty gospel. That is how you practice this Christian life, and you find a hundredfold blessing right now, with persecutions.

So first point: The poor are blessed because they fear God. They fear God. According to Scripture, the fear of the Lord is paramount because it's only by the fear of the Lord that someone will be saved, reconciled to God, listen obediently to God's word. There is no salvation apart from the fear of the Lord, which is why those who have been reconciled to God can be simply called God-fearers, God-fearers. As we survey the Old Testament,

we find those who fear the Lord. They are the blessed ones, the *ashar* ones, the *makarios* ones.

So what are they like? First of all, the poor are blessed because they fear God and those who fear the Lord heed God's word. You can write that down as a little subpoint underneath fearing God. They heed God's word. What does it mean to heed? It's not something we necessarily give a lot of thought today, maybe a word that is out of vogue, but you might say the word "heed" means "to pay close attention to" or "to listen with a view to immediate, wholehearted and full-on obedience." That's the concept biblically of heeding. We listen. Why? Because we want to obey. We listen because we want to do. We listen because we want to practice, because we want to please our Father in heaven.

Listen to some of the blessed, *ashar* passages that help illustrate that point. No time, by the way, to mention all of the stuff from the Old Testament, just a few. So it starts with one very familiar to us, Psalm 1:1 and 2. "Blessed," *ashar*, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of



scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." That's a *ptochos* person, isn't it?

Someone who says, "Goodbye," to this world. They don't walk in the counsel of the wicked, they don't stand in the way of sinners, they don't sit down in the seat of scoffers. They've said, "Goodbye." They've shut that entertainment off. Instead, they use the time to delight in the law of the Lord. They meditate on it day and night. Or Psalm 112 verse 1, "Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!" That's the attitude right there.

Psalm 119 verses 1-3, or you could read actually all of Psalm 119 and it'll say the same thing. I don't have time to do all 176 verses right now, but we'll do three of them. "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!" Psalm 128:1-2, "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of

your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you."

A couple of encouragements from the Proverbs, as well. The Proverbs are full of encouragements to heed the good, perfect, wise words of the living God. Those who are the blessed. You can turn in your Bibles, if you want to, to all of these, you've just got to be quick because I'm moving, moving okay? Proverbs 3:13-14, "Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her," that is wisdom. It's a feminine noun in Hebrew, *hakmah*. So, blessed is, "the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold."

Proverbs 8:32 through 36, the wisdom chapter there, "And now, O sons, listen to me." It's almost like when your children are really young and they're just like distracted by everything in the world, but they're in danger and you grabbed their little heads and turn them toward you, gently, gently. You turn them toward you and say, "Listen to me. This is important."

"And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself; and all who hate me love death." Listen, if you hate wisdom, if you hate the counsel of the wise, this proverb says you love death.

Proverbs 16:20, "Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord." All of those passages, and there are so many more, but all of those passages about heeding God's word, encouraging God's people to listen to, pay attention to, and obey God's word, they go back to Israel's national constitution called the Law of Moses.

And in the book of Deuteronomy, in particular, the final book in the Pentateuch, take the time someday to read through that amazing book and just take note of how many times Moses calls Israel to listen, to hear. The word *shama*, is "Hear, O, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one," he's not saying just, "Listen to the sound," as if it's poetic. He's saying,

"Listen with a view to obedience. Heed. Pay attention. Pay careful attention." All of it with a view to immediate wholehearted, full-on obedience. That's what loving devotion to God looks like.

And it's the first mark of those who fear the Lord, those who are the poor, the *ptochos*, the blessed, the *markarios* of Jesus' beatitude. They possess an internal desire and delight in hearing and obeying God's word. It's the heart of David who said in Psalm 40 verse 8, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law lives within my heart." If any of you are saying, "You know what? I'm not sure I have that. I'm not sure I have this,] I'm filled with this desire and longing for God's word." Listen, do you know what means?

And if you understand and recognize that, then blessed are you in a sense because it just shows you need to be regenerated by God's grace. The Holy Spirit needs to come into your heart and turn the lights on. You need to hear. Because those who truly belong to God who are the poor, the *ptochos*, they love God's Word. They have a deep affection for truth, affection for

righteousness. They hate sin. They hate evil. They love the truth, and they fear the Lord.

Obviously, if they have a heart to heed God's word, they're also going to be marked, secondly, by submitting to God's authority and by submitting to his correction. Submitting to authority and correction. So the poor are blessed because they fear God, and those who fear the Lord heed God's word and then go further and submit to its authority. So it's heeding God's word, it's the desire to obey it, a longing for it, but then it's actually lived out practically in submitting to it.

They consider themselves not like the moralistic therapeutic deism folks, but they consider themselves accountable. It's not a deism view of God, it's an immanency where he is near. They submit to him eagerly, cheerfully, heartily. They are the blessed. Listen to this in Psalm 2 verse 12. It's prophecy about the Messiah Jesus Christ and encouragement about the end, after the rebellion of the entire world and all of its kings, all of its important people.

At the end, the encouragement, the exhortation, the admonition, "Kiss the Son, kiss the Son lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." So to kiss the Son, to kiss a sovereign is to submit to his authority. Psalm 33 verse 12, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage." The nation that submits to God's authority and correction, in this case speaking of Israel as a nation, those people are blessed, *ashar, markarios*.

Psalm 28, or I should say, Proverbs 28 verse 14, "Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity." Rather than hardening the heart, stiffening the neck, they listen. Job 5:17, "Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty." They don't despise God's correction and discipline, they long for it. The humbly receive his correction.

Psalm 94:12 and 13 is a wisdom Psalm. "Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest from days of trouble until a pit is dug for the wicked." Same theme shows up, doesn't it, in Hebrews Chapter 12

verse 5 and following. The exhortation is addressed to God's true children, all of them being marked by receiving discipline, receiving correction because they fear God and desire to keep his commandments.

It says there in Hebrews 12:5, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastens every son whom he receives." Is that you? It's me. I know it's many of you, I've talked to you. I understand you long to have God's Word revealed to you so you can understand and obey it more clearly more fully. It's not a performance thing; it's a devotion thing It's not a works righteousness thing; it's a longing to please a heavenly Father thing.

So who are the poor? Who are the blessed of whom Jesus speaks? They're those who fear the Lord, which means they have a heart to heed his word and to obey it and to submit themselves to its authority and to its correction. And the poor count themselves as nothing. They count themselves as veritable beggars before God, and they rejoice that God himself, the holy

God of heaven, would condescend to discipline them, to reprove them, to chasten them for their good.

This leads us to a second mark of the poor Jesus speaks about, which is another category of those *ashar* verbs in the Old Testament. Again, remember Jesus is being very biblical in his Sermon on the Mount, using biblical language to introduce his sermon because he wants people to understand in his hearing that he's not disconnected with the Old Testament. He's united and in firm continuity with what the law and the prophets spoke. He wants everybody to understand that. He's not some maverick. He's the servant of God.

The second point: The poor are blessed because they rejoice in God. They are blessed or the blessed because they rejoice in God. Why do they rejoice in God? Because he is, first of all, their Savior. He's their Savior and Deliverer. There are a lot of passages in the Old Testament about talking about "Blessed are you, the nation of Israel because God has delivered you from all your trouble and affliction." He's talking really about deliverance from Egypt or deliverance from enemies. But David used the same language in Psalm 32:1 and 2, "Blessed is



the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose Spirit there is no deceit."

You know who our greatest enemy is before we come to Christ? It's God. What can man do to me? God is the one who has the power to kill both body and soul in hell. But when our transgression is forgiven, when our sin is covered, when our iniquity is taken away, you know what? God no longer counts us an enemy; he counts us as a friend. God has delivered these people from their sin, reconciling them to himself. God has forgiven their transgression. He's counted none of their iniquity against them. All has been forgiven for the one who puts his faith in God through the now revealed atoning work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Again the poor are poor not because they have no money, but because they, like the poor, have found no resources within themselves whatsoever, nothing at their disposal that is going to secure a right standing before a holy God with a penetrating gaze. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." They recognize they have nothing. They recognize they have no

money, no resources, no self-reliance, nothing whatsoever that can make the acceptable to God, so they reach out for God's mercy and grace with the hands of a crippled, destitute beggar, and the only hope they have is in God's pity, his mercy and his charity, and you know what?

When God sees that lifted crooked, crippled hand, he is so pleased to run, like he did to the prodigal, like the father lifting up his garment there and running in a way that would be mocked at in that culture, scorned. He threw away all dignity and ran after that prodigal. God looks upon the faith of the poor, and he is so pleased to rush to their aid, to save. He opens the floodgates of the storehouses of heaven and he pours and dumps on them rich spiritual treasures that are filled to overflowing.

That's why Paul tells the poor they are truly and eternally blessed; they're irreversibly blessed because God has poured out his riches upon them in Christ Jesus. You're familiar with Ephesians 1: "In him we have redemption through this blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he gave us just a little bit of" no! "He lavished

upon us." Lavished! Love that word. In Ephesians 1:18, God has called the poor to receive and enjoy "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints," and that inheritance is guaranteed by his immeasurable greatness and almighty power. Who's going to keep God from blessing the people he wants to bless?

Ephesians 2:7, God intends to show us in the ages to come, the "immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." All of those riches are in contrast to the riches and the enjoyments and the pleasures of this life. No accomplishment, no ambition, no fulfillment, climbing the top of the tallest peaks or going down to the depths of the seas or getting all the treasure, all of that, all the power, everything you could have in this world, nothing in comparison to eternal treasures in inheritance.

James sounds that call and he sounds remarkably like his half-brother Jesus when he refers back to, he sounds very Sermon-on-the-Mountish and he wants the rich not to trust in their wealth because it's so temporary. "Don't give yourselves to treasures and pleasures," he says.

James 5:1-3, he says, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted." Do you know what he's picturing for them? The judgment seat. "Your riches have rotted, your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire." You have done the stupidest thing in the world. "You have laid up treasure in the last days."

As Jesus said in Luke 6:24, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." But the poor, they have abandoned the pursuit of treasure and pleasure in this life because they sought one thing and one thing only, the forgiveness of sins that they might be reconciled to God and have him and him alone as their treasure and pleasure forever. And you know what? God rejoices to give them what they seek: himself.

So the blessed, the poor. They are those who trust and rejoice and hope in the goodness of God. Listen to this sentiment, the cry of the heart that comes in these psalms. Psalm 34:8. Ready to turn pages? Here we go. I'm going to go

in consecutive order if you'd like to follow. But Psalm 34:8, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." Taste, find out he's good. Psalm 40 verse 4, "Blessed is the man who make the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!" What's the lie? That this world can satisfy you.

Psalm 64, or 65 verse 4, "Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!" When I read that I picture the queen who came from Ethiopia, come to Solomon in his splendor and glory, and she said, "How blessed are your servants, how blessed are your wives, how blessed are everybody who stands in your presence to not only see the wealth and it be lavished and fed at your table, but to hear your wisdom. Blessed is the one you choose, O God, and bring near to you into your courts, into your temple."

Psalm 84:4, there are a few of them here in Psalm 84. It's a great Psalm. "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!" Verse 5, "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion." And then

verse 12, "Blessed, O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!" Psalm 89:15-16, "Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face [or your countenance], who exult in your name all the day and in your righteousness are exalted."

Psalm 144:15, "Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose trust is the Lord, whose God is the Lord!" The Lord is good, and we don't know the half of it. He is wise beyond all wisdom we can know. He's, he's our trust, he's our strength, he's our hope. We love his goodness. We're completely satisfied in him. And we rejoice to sing his praises because his name, that is his character, his essence, his glory, his name is excellent. His name is wonderful, and so we exult in his name all day long. It's what really fills us all the day. We're the blessed because we've become the poor of this world; we've cut the cord of the world that we might become rich, truly rich. Blessed are we because our God is the Lord. What more could we want?

So the poor fear God. They are the blessed. They enjoy the kingdom of God now, that is, the rule of God. They will enjoy

the kingdom of God in its fullness when the Son of Man returns and all the world, all the earth is doing his good pleasure. The poor rejoice in God and they are the blessed, and nothing can take away their joy in the Lord. They rejoice to grow in their knowledge of him, and that brings us to a third and final point: The poor are blessed because they obey God. They fear God, they rejoice in God, and they obey God.

I quoted earlier from David in Psalm 40:8 when he said, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law lives within my heart." Why do the blessed, the poor, delight to do or to practice or obey the Word of God or the will of God? Answer: Because you're never more like God when you imitate him, when you're actively practicing doing his will. When we imitate him, we're like him. When we're like him, we know him. Paul said in Ephesians 5 verse 1, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love."

That is not the love that's defined by this world, very self-seeking, really a synonym for lust. Many people use it that way, the word "love." We need to define the love that he's describing here biblically. It's a sacrificial, obedient,

pleasing-to-God love. That's what it is in context. And we're to walk in love, living lives of love, giving ourselves up for the glory of God and the spiritual good of others around us. If we're to do that well, we're going to need to understand what God has said and what he meant by what he said.

Ephesians 5:8-10 says we're also to "walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." God doesn't leave it to us to self-define how loving somebody else looks like. No, he gives us a whole Bible that we might learn and grown in wisdom, so that we can wisely love other people.

I just got to say, that's one of the greatest joys about being in a church, being in a local community like this because we have the opportunity to practice this all the time. And there are some, I know, who remain a bit aloof from the church during the week. They come on Sundays and they come for some of the things, but they don't really know anybody. They come, they go, they come, they go. And my heart grieves for you. Why?



Because I want to see you give the love and live like this. These are the *ptochos*, these are the poor that Jesus described. Blessed because they fear God, they rejoice in God, and they obey God, giving themselves to one another to love and to service, to sacrifice. That's true life. That's true riches. What else are you going to do? Go on vacation? Like John Piper said, "Pick up seashells the rest of your life?" Why? Don't waste your life on stupid stuff like seashells and vacations and stuff. Seashells, you know what they are? They're carcasses of dead things!

The poor rejoice to do the will of God, to obey him, to give themselves to one another in love and wisdom, the wisdom of God, loving one another. They rejoice. They find themselves blessed possessors of the kingdom of God, the present rule of God on earth. And they rejoice in doing his will, in practicing the wisdom of the living God. They're those who practice righteousness with one another, showing fairness, impartiality, caring for people.

We're to "Keep justice," says the Lord God Yahweh in Isaiah 56:1-2. And we're to "Do righteousness for soon my salvation

will come, and my righteousness be revealed. Blessed in the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." How do you keep the Sabbath? It's a principle we now observe on Sundays. But how do you treat the Sabbath? Do you treat it like any other day after you leave here? Or do you treat it as the Lord's Day, as in a possessive word, Lord's, it belongs to him, devoted to him, for our spiritual refreshment and good.

Listen, by coming into the house of the Lord week after week, it refreshes your soul in the truth of your God. It reminds you to stand firm in that truth. As the writer to the Hebrews constantly was reminding them, "Don't leave. Don't be discouraged. Stay strong. Stay encouraged. Hang in there." We need to do that with each other day after day, right? Certainly week after week. By honoring that Sabbath principle, obedient to attend church regularly, it informs your understanding. It gives you wisdom from God in how to walk in love, on how to walk in the light, finding out what's pleasing the Lord, to the Lord so you can obey him in wisdom.

And living in accordance with his thinking, his wisdom, that is the true joy of life, isn't it? Again, listen to some of these Psalms, all of them highlighting the concept of blessedness, of *ashar*, of *markios*. All of this, I will tell you, is on Jesus' mind as he's preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Psalm 41:1-2, "Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him; the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies."

Psalm 106, verse 3, "Blessed are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times." Proverbs 14:21, "Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor." Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." We're blessed because we fear God, rejoice in God. We obey him.

At this point I want you to take a deep breath, okay, and then exhale. Because having taken all of this in, we need to ask ourselves some probing questions, don't we? "If I were to actually live like that, would my life look the same as it is right now, or different?" I hope you have practiced, or you are

trying to practice, the habit of honest self-examination and self-assessment because that's what's called for now. I think we can honestly say Jesus' words strike our modern comfort, ease-loving ears as radical living. It ought not to be that way.

I'm afraid these words of Jesus have become so familiar, so common that for many they've lost their meaning. Oh, we may be familiar with the Beatitudes, perhaps even quote some of them from memory, but we need to ask, "What weight does this really have on our lives? Our decision making? Does God and his word fall heavy on us? Is there gravity to it? Do Jesus' words carry actual authority or just potential? Do they command our consciences? Do they dictate how then we shall live?" If people listened in to our conversations, what would they hear? Would they hear a lot of talk about our family? About vacation? About financial or health issues?

Or would they hear something else? Something like what Jesus is saying here, other-worldly? Would they, like, like this from the Sermon on the Mount, would they hear something that is very different from what they've heard anywhere else? "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." "Someone slaps you

on the cheek, turn to them the other also." What is that?  
You're in Colorado, what? I'm going to take up my gun and shoot  
that guy! That's how we tend to think, right?

We start living this way. Radically different, right? If  
people listened in, what would surmise from our speech? What  
would they hear that really matters to us? For many professing  
Christians today, I believe, they're just unaware of how far  
afield they live from what Jesus actually taught. And they're  
puzzled when their children or their grandchildren profess  
Christ but have no interest in practicing what he actually  
taught. They're surprised when their children follow the creed  
of moralistic therapeutic deism, seemingly satisfied with  
themselves, relatively unconcerned about the issues of sin and  
righteousness, hell and heaven, fearful judgment and amazing  
grace. They don't know anything about that.

I'll sometimes listen to sermons from other pastors, other  
preachers, and I hear a lot out there who seem intent on  
building a church that caters to exactly that kind of  
constituency, the moral, moralistic therapeutic deism. They want  
those kinds of people in their church because it's easy to

flatter them, to build up crowds of twenty and thirty somethings, teaching them that Jesus is all about making you the best "you" possible. How is that radical in this age? In fact, if you hear that message in this age, you just yawn. It's boring. That's what Oprah is saying.

It's not what Jesus said, is it? He said it's not all about you. It's all about losing you. It's all about God, his kingdom, his righteousness. And to come to God, you must see yourself as God does, a destitute beggar looking up to him from humbled hearts, bowed knees seeking his mercy and grace. And you know what? Those who do so, who lose themselves for the sake of finding his kingdom and his righteousness, they become possessors of that kingdom and are actually quite rich, not poor. Though hungry now, they look to God to satisfy. Though weeping now, they look to God for joy. Though rejected by this world and all its moralistic therapeutic deists, let them reject because God is pleased to call them "friend."

If we're to live like the *ptochos* poor, the blessed professors of the kingdom that we are, if we fear God, always heeding his word and submitting to his authority and correction,

if we rejoice in God with nothing else holding our hearts, if we obey God immediately wholeheartedly, full on walking in his love and his wisdom, if we're to live like that, what would that look like practically? Think about that for yourself because I'm thinking about it for my life and my family as well. Do you think that kind of living would make an impact on other people? Do you think it would change our conversations? Our speech patterns? Do you think it would change we spend our time? The way we invest our energy and our resources?

You know what, if we take it seriously, I'm certain it would. I can't wait to see the results of what God will do in and through our church. Because others are watching our lives, and rather than leading them astray with any hypocrisy, we want to lead them to the Savior with our lives, to the Savior who said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." There is joy of salvation in him and in him alone. That's the Gospel we have to share. Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much for this sermon, this time to explore the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and to hear from Jesus himself, and to kind of get into his mind and the Old

Testament and see how he really thought about these things, how his mind was oriented toward you, your righteousness, your holiness and how he spoke out of the abundance of his heart to a generation that's just like ours, dull of hearing, hard of heart. And we know that because we're 2,000 years later, on the other side of the world, speaking an entirely different language to an entirely different culture, we know that his words here, though rejected by many at the time and though they crucified him, his words have power because here is the church.