

Spirit Vagabonds

Read Matthew 5:1-3 (compare Luke 6:17-20)

Jesus was one of those overnight celebrities. After His bout with the devil in the wilderness, Jesus stepped onto the stage of Judaism and left everyone with an open mouth with His teachings. Just imagine being part of the crowd that day, and this Jesus tells you that even though you're poor, you will someday inherit the wealthiest kingdom ever!

But did He really mean those who were poor as we think of them? After all, He said poor in spirit in Matthew. What does it mean to be poor in spirit anyway? This means to be desperate for God's Spirit. Are you desperate today? Desperation drives people to do desperate things. As has been said, "Desperate times call for desperate measures."

What would a "desperate measure" look like in your life? How would people know you're desperate for God? What steps could you take to show desperation? There are many different ways to show desperation. One good way is to fast and align yourself with God's will. Another way is to yield to God's plans for this day. If He tells you to do something, do it with a smile on your face.

Focus on God today more than usual. To be poor in spirit, you need to realize that as much of God you do have in you is not enough. You need more of Him now! That's desperation. So today, whatever it takes, fasting a meal and praying, doing something good secretly for someone, praying for or blessing that guy who cut you off yesterday in traffic, or whatever it is.

In America, we often laugh at the pitiful and desperate. We think we are self-sufficient. But if we don't realize how much we rely and depend on God every moment of everyday, we will never be poor in spirit.

A Promise to Mourners

Read Matthew 5:4 (compare Luke 6:21b)

Has anything ever happened in your life that has made you weep or mourn? These two words mean different things. People weep over small trifles that didn't turn out the way they had planned. But mourning in our language is different than that. Mourning is not a reaction, it's a state of being. In the times of Jesus, there were actually professional mourners for funerals!

Now whether you wish to go with Matthew's mourning, or Luke's weeping, one thing is clear: this is not a fun thing to go through. Remember with me the sense of great losses you have felt when you've mourned, or the negative consequences of something that called for weeping. These are not "good" experiences for us and we don't seek them out. Maybe you're not in a state of mourning at this very moment, but maybe you've been hurt in the past. Most, if not all, of us have. There is a deep wound in just about everyone. God wants to comfort your wound today. But He doesn't just want to comfort you, He is in the business of healing us from all hurts. Jesus declared a prize for those who come across times of weeping and mourning.

In both places, Jesus declares that comfort will be the mourner's closest companion. Jesus does not tell us how we will be comforted. He could refer to God as our Comforter, or God's sending someone to comfort us. Either way, we will be comforted when we mourn. But God does not just put the bandage on our wound. No, He does better. He heals us. Luke says we will laugh again. There is a time coming when God will not only comfort us through some means, but He will heal our broken hearts.

What about you? Are you mourning or sad today? Now's the time to think about how God has been comforting you all along. If you can't think of anything or anyone, maybe He's using me to comfort you right now? God's done crazier things than that, hasn't He? Remember that God is always with you no matter what the occasion. And He will help you through it. But not only will He just help you, He will make you joyful again! So cheer up, because God has something special planned just for you. He will comfort and heal you! Ask Him to be able to see what He's doing for you right now.

Overwhelming Meekness

Read Matthew 5:5

What in the world does this word "meekness" mean? That's not an easy answer. The word meek means "gentle power." In a sense, it is a way to overwhelm people with gentleness. Instead of yelling when I am angry, I am gentle and accepting. Instead of always getting my own way (which is only natural), I seek the way of others.

This is not an easy trait. In fact, it's downright hard to be meek. But Jesus says that in using my "gentle power" to bless others, there is great happiness in this state of being for me. When I treat others with gentle respect and calm, quiet love and care, I am the one who becomes happy. This, like all of these Beatitudes, is contrary to natural behavior. It seems that all those things I don't naturally do are on Jesus' list.

Today I will be meek, though it is hard. Ask Jesus to help you with this one. Ask Him to make you meek. Ask Him for the same revolutionary power He had, that when He went to the cross, He forgave His murderers and did not defend Himself. It's possible to live that way today. But not without God's help. He's waiting to work in you. Don't be shy. Be meek.

Hungry? Why Wait?

Read Matthew 5:6 (compare Luke 6:21a)

Luke will start us off today with an interesting three letter word. Now. Blessed are you who hunger now! This present life, in this moment, at this time you are hungry. But the biggest question is "Hungry for what?" Although I could be hungry for a Snickers bar, I am more concerned for God's righteousness.

To be filled and to be satisfied are not the same thing. They are very different, but both do apply to me now. For instance, I can be satisfied at the table without being full to overflowing (which isn't satisfying, but could actually make me sick). Then I can be filled to the brim, and maybe even running over. In the Bible, though, to be filled means to be satisfied.

Don't miss this great blessing. You see, with all of the wickedness we drudge through every single day, it is good to know that right now, in this life, today, I can be filled with righteousness that comes from God! When I walk out into a depraved and fallen world, I know that I am satisfied because God is doing in me what I cannot do for myself. He is making me holy! Lest I forget that I have this personal joy or blessedness about me of righteousness, I must not forget to share it. You see, if I really hunger to see God's righteousness in me and in the world, I will want to spread that righteousness around! What about you? Are you hungry? I mean dissatisfied. I mean not full of God's righteousness? If you are, then you're the person Jesus is talking about here.

Today, I will try to hunger for righteousness. I will forget about the lure of sin just this once so that I can be "blessed." I will give in to this continual hunger, this state of needing to be filled with God because that is where Jesus says blessing comes from. I will bless others today with righteousness and seek the righteousness of God in my own life, and in my world. I'm so hungry I can taste it. Can you?

Meaningful Mercy

Read Matthew 5:7

In a world filled with rights and demands, where people are more concerned with themselves than others, Jesus once again highlights the opposite of what society worships. The same thing is still true today. Some are confused by the two words grace and mercy. Their definitions are similar, and yet so different. Grace is receiving what you do not deserve. Mercy is being exempt from what you do deserve.

So if you put this definition into the text, you get, "Blessed are those who don't give people what they deserve, because they will not get what they deserve also." What do we deserve? We deserve punishment for our cruelty, our pride, our selfishness, and our sinfulness. We deserve death! We deserve to be as far away from a holy God as we can be cast. But that's not what we get.

When I think of the mercy Jesus gave me at the cross, I can't help but remember that I'm supposed to look like Jesus and imitate Him in all of His character. I'm supposed to have that kind of mercy. But I'm far from it. In fact, I'm the first to point the finger when I've been treated unfairly, or someone got away with something. But that's not mercy; it's judgment. And in Matthew 7, Jesus had words for guys like me.

Meaningful mercy is the kind of mercy that no human can live without. Wrapped in this mercy is a forgiveness most of us do not find natural. This stuff Jesus commands us isn't easy, but it is possible. Mercy is the opposite of "letting 'em have it." It's the very epitome of kindness and grace, of unselfish and humble action. Jesus makes a simple principle here: If you show mercy, you will be shown mercy. We will be shown mercy by others and also by God!

Maybe you're thinking, "OK, this one's over the edge. Everyone will get away with walking all over me if I do this one." That may be true, but do you remember God's mercy toward you? Do you remember when someone was graceful to you? How would you like others to treat you when you deserve punishment? Today, seek out an opportunity to show mercy, not just because Jesus promises the reward of receiving mercy also, but because you want to be like Jesus. Look for an opportunity to surprise someone today!

The Purest Passion

Read Matthew 5:8

Everyone's got a hobby. It's the one thing you major in, read books about in your spare time, or do when you don't want to "work." It's that thing you could talk about for hours on end. You know what I'm talking about.

Well, that's also what Jesus is talking about, except that He points to the greatest and purest passion any one human can have. It's that passion that leads to a vision and experience with God Himself! What does it mean to be pure in heart? It means to be clean, unpolluted and free from guilt of sin. This kind of purity is a quality from God given to us. To be clean inside is the goal of a pure heart.

This pure heart is not just a hobby, but it is something that Christians major in. You see, when Jesus came to this earth, He invaded the human heart with righteousness and holiness. We will never be the same again! Jesus made it possible for us to be clean before God, unpolluted by sin. It was His work on the cross that caused a pure heart. Just imagine all of the religious leaders standing around listening to Jesus talk about purity of heart, instead of pure rituals or rules.

Jesus was helping us to see something in moral purity that we hadn't considered: He who lives out holiness can see a holy God. Just as much as God will not look upon sin, we, as sinful man, would never have searched out a holy God. Thank God that His Son came to us, and His Holy Spirit is teaching us! Without God reaching out to us, we would have never seen Him at all! But that's the kind of God He is.

Do you want to see God? I'm talking about knowing Him as He is, in His holiness, His purity, His power? Then you've got to be pure in heart, not messing around with sin, or compromising with low moral standards. To seek God is to imitate Him, to know Him is to have received His character and to be living it day to day. To see God is to be as He is. If we want to see God, we need to be pure in heart. We need to make purity not just some hobby, but the goal of our existence!

In this world, where everything is torn apart by probing questions and there are a million sides to every issue, a billion shades of meaning, and a trillion interpretations of language, we need to stop splitting hairs and deal with everything as it looks to God. Today, make an effort to not compromise, hide, or allow sin in your life. Seek God and His ways. Search Him out, not as a hobby or just "something I do on the side," but wholeheartedly, unabashedly run after God. Let Him give you a pure heart so that you can see Him today.

Mission Peace

Read Matthew 5:9

Have you ever been at an impasse with someone? Neither side is willing to budge. This type of stalemate leads to war. It doesn't matter whether two humans are involved, or entire nations. I would not want to be the peacemaker in such a situation.

There are many ways to make peace. One way is through war. Another comes through compromise. A peacemaker is usually a third party, not one of the people in the stalemate. In fact, the word for peacemaker here specifically refers to an outsider who makes peace. Although making peace is not easy, the surprise is calling them sons of God. Do you remember that God's Son Jesus made peace between us and God? Now Jesus, the Son, tells us that if we share in His mission of peace, we will be called God's sons also, denoting a close relationship with God, not that we are divine like Jesus.

Peace is part of the mission of God's heart. When we share in God's desires, we become closer and closer to Him. Today, look for ways to live in peace with everyone around you. If this seems impossible, look for someone whose heart beats with the heart of God for peace. Maybe you're that person. The point is that all of God's children need to demonstrate a heart of peace. We have experienced peace with God. Today, God can use you as part of His plan for peace and show that same peace to others.

Persecution Points

Read Matthew 5:10-12

Ah, persecution. It's the one thing that every Christian wants to have happen to them so they can tell all their Christian friends all about how they were "persecuted for Jesus." We like to imagine ourselves bravely fighting on the front lines at our own expense for the cause of Christ. How valiant! How...not like what Jesus is talking about here.

Rest assured, when Jesus says persecution, He means all of that bad stuff we think about and hear about missionaries and people in China going through. That is definitely persecution. But what about here in America? You don't see Christians rotting away in prison or having their Bibles taken from them. We have freedom of religion here, and it's wonderful.

But we need to make some distinctions here. Persecution is not brought on by one's own ignorance. Persecution is not suffered in America as much as American Christians claim. But it is here, I believe, in a very different form that is the same as the physical persecution we see others around our world suffering. In America, persecution can be peer pressure, legal and political pressure, educational pressure.

Let me provide some examples for this Americanized persecution. The theory of evolution demands that we neglect the very thought of God creating the universe. Anyone who stands up for God as Creator in their classroom and is laughed at, or loses a letter grade, is being persecuted. Another example: when we are scoffed at for believing and voicing that abortion is wrong, we are indeed suffering persecution.

The persecution Jesus calls for is persecution for righteousness. Whatever we are defending that is righteous, when we receive insults and the like, we are being persecuted.

You see, the Devil cannot physically persecute us according to our nation's laws. So he tries to get us a different way. We need to be ready for it. He will attempt to take away our suppositions, our mind and understandings of God's Word and how it works in American culture. The Devil's desire is to make us ineffective. He doesn't need to beat us up to do it. Instead, he will take away our reputation in education as intelligent believers, our representation of God in politics, and our moral backing in ethics. Satan is out to destroy us psychologically.

Today, you must be prepared. Look for the whiles of the Devil, because they are not always so easy to find. Suffer for Jesus in all the venues of life. We do not seek out persecution, but we don't run from it either. Pray for those who are being physically persecuted overseas and don't let down your guard in America. The Devil scratches at us with clawless paws as a kitten in a last ditch effort to escape impending doom. Don't let him get to you. Fight the good fight for righteousness wherever the battle lines are drawn!

The Gold Standard for Salt

Read Matthew 5:13

Right after Jesus explains why people are happy and blessed, he begins to move into a passage about the disciples listening to Him. And we are listening today! He talks of things that will happen to us for sure, like persecution. Then Jesus sets out to explain to us something very important.

Jesus equates us with the salt of the earth! You're salt! I'm salt. Christians are salt. What in the world was Jesus thinking? Well, He was thinking of an illustration to show you how important you are to the Kingdom of God! Let me explain. You see, in Jesus' day, salt was a commodity. By commodity I mean it was more valuable than gold! The people of Jesus' day understood the value of salt, because they used it as a preservative, as a spice, and for other reasons. It preserved meat in a world without refrigerators and freezers. We still use salt to preserve our meats today.

Jesus was talking about Christians who have the character we have been talking about (hungry for righteousness, meekness, mercy, etc.) being the preservative for the evil world. Do you realize it? You are a preservative. When God made the world, He did use preservatives! Very healthy ones. You see it is up to you and me and every other Christian out there to live out this Kingdom character Jesus is talking about every day of our lives. He says in this verse that when we don't, we "lose our saltiness" and we can't be made salty again. That means that we can blow opportunities to preserve godly character in our lives and the people around us.

Another thing we need to emphasize here is that salt was a commodity, a valuable and sought after thing. Do you realize that you are so valuable to God today just because you're His child? And when you live a "blessed" life through these Beatitudes, you are even more precious to Him. He's watching you deal with the evil around you and He's helping you win. He's blessing you! But without you, the world would not be preserved. There would be utter sin and chaos all around if it weren't for us secret agents keeping the grace around. If you live life the way Jesus commands in Matthew 5-7, you are blessed and grace abounds upon you.

Jesus issues two challenges to you today. The first is to live the life He commands and be blessed. This is the same as being "salty." The other challenge is for you to preserve the earth and say no to sin. Expose it and get rid of it wherever you see it because you are salty. Now go out into your world and be salty for Jesus!

The Electric Bill

Read Matthew 5:14-16

The bill comes in the mail. How could it be so high this time? I thought I was being more "environmentally conscience." Then you remember the kids leaving their lights on in their rooms, in the bathroom, and everywhere else in the house. No wonder! You pray and thank God that the bill is as low as it is.

That wonderful bill is higher than you expected because of all of the wasted electricity you didn't know about. Imagine God's light bill when He sees how many of us are hiding or not being seen by the world. You know how He can tell? Less glory is coming His way via the big blue and green ball near the sun. That's right, people aren't seeing your light and their not praising Him for your good works. Oops! But don't worry. It's easy to fix. Just turn the light on.

The main point is visibility. How many people know you and I are Christians? How many people are completely oblivious to God because we are completely oblivious to Him also? It's a scary thought, I know. But we need to stop wasting God's electricity. There are people out there who cannot see without the light! Our world needs the light of truth, especially in our morals and ethics, in our politics and our education. We have been chasing ghosts in the dark for so long, we think they're real. We need a light to illuminate our society. That light is you.

As a child of God, you are the light. You know right from wrong, and you have the heart and Spirit of God implanted in you. People look to you to know the truth. Shine as stars in the heavens today. Shine for all your worth, so that God's getting His glories' worth out of you. I dare you to blind someone with your light today.

Code Breakers

Read Matthew 5:17-20

There's an old debate in Christianity about whether the Old Testament is still important because we have Jesus and the New Testament now, a clearer and more advanced revelation of God. But according to Jesus, this is a worthless debate, for He said He came to fulfill the Old Testament. And fulfill it He did. He was the sacrificial lamb, the innocent blood the Old Testament law required. He taught us the heart of the Law, to love God and to love others. Indeed, through the Holy Spirit, He is still teaching us today.

But look at the rest of what Jesus says. He says that we still have to follow the Old Testament Law! It's not as hard as you think it is. You see, if you truly love Jesus with all of your heart, then your goal will be to do whatever He wants you to. And you'll do it out of love, not because you have to. Guess what pleases the heart of God? Doing the Law! That's it. When we follow all of the Bible in our daily lives, we please our heavenly Father.

Jesus told us to do the Law. But right after that, He said we've got to do a better job than the Pharisees, who were very legalistic about the law. They did follow it to the letter. So then what does Jesus mean? He means that they followed the words of the Law, but not the heart of the Law. They would never kill anyone, but they would defame their character in public and kill their social existence. Jesus said we've got to do better.

Today, as you go about your daily tasks, try not to just follow the rules of the Law. Try to see people through Jesus' eyes. Try to feel how they feel. Try to love them and love God with all your heart. Don't be legalistic like the Pharisees, look for what pleases the Lord, and you will bless His heart today.

Rep Killers

Read Matthew 5:21-22

Have you ever murdered anyone? Most of us haven't. But according to Jesus, most of us have! Let me explain. Jesus quotes from the Ten Commandments and then He says that if we've ever been angry at his or her brother. Anger is one of the causes of murder isn't it? Anger leads to hate and many other feelings that make us want to what? Kill someone.

Jesus is saying that even though we've never killed anyone physically, we have indeed killed their soul with our words and with our deceitful deeds. You may not even touch anyone and still kill them now! The tongue is such a powerful thing. The word *raca* is a word used to describe someone who is devoid of substance. In other words, it's like saying, "You empty head!" or "You brainless person!" Another way to say it is "Ignoramus!" or the more common reputation killer, "Stupid dummy!"

We use them all the time, mostly to poke fun. We may not even be serious when we say them, but in any case, Jesus is calling us murderers for even thinking that other human beings are empty headed, or even worse, without a soul. You see that's the heart of the word *raca*. It means to be devoid of life and soul. And every human has a soul. When we say these things to others, we take their soul away from them, and to God, that's murder plain and simple.

Today, take count of the times you accidentally, playfully, or seriously use these terms to describe anyone: your spouse, son, daughter, co-worker, boss, or anyone for that matter. Even if you use it for some homeless guy or someone you really think doesn't contribute to society. Look through God's eyes and you don't see a bum, you see a soul in need of grace and love. You see the reason Jesus died with His arms stretched out, waiting to hug that person. Don't just count the times you slip up, stop slipping up. Everyone is valuable to God! There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

If you have ever been on the receiving end of such talk, you need to forgive the person who said it to you. Even if they meant it, the Bible is full of times where God tells each and every one of us how valuable and important to Him we are. God chose this moment as you read this to set you free from all of the hurt and pain that someone else enslaved you to. Now is the time to forgive and experience God's freedom in your life! Grab it and never let go. God loves you, and that's all that matters.