

Happy Are The Poor

The first recorded words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount are,

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matt 5:3 (NASB)

This is a strange statement because it is paradoxical. The surprising word He used was “blessed.” The Greek word for “blessed” is *markarios*. It has the sense of being happy or satisfied. So Jesus’ words could be restated as “Happy are the poor in spirit.” I do not know about you, but this is not my normal idea of happiness. The ancients had their own concept of happiness and it is not very different from our own view.

When the Ancients Were Happy. Homer said a man is *markarios* when he has wealth, a good wife, and children. Others in the ancient world said one is *markarios* when they have power, fame, a life of pleasure, or joy without suffering. In other words, they were happy when they had constant, nonstop satisfaction. Aristotle believed a person who is virtuous is *markarios*. I have discovered that I can have a sense of being happy when I am with people who respect me, when I am busy accomplishing my goals, or when I am being entertained. If we are honest with ourselves, we are always pursuing happiness. But Jesus said we are really satisfied when we are “poor in spirit.” So, what does He mean?

Poor in Spirit. Of the two

Greek words for poor, *ptochos* and *penas*, that Jesus could have used, He used *ptochos*. This word, *ptochos*, means more than just being poor. To give you a sense of the rich meaning of the word, read Luke 16:19-25. The passage tells us there

was a poor man named Lazarus. He was so poor that he was diseased and also longed for crumbs that fell to the floor from the rich man’s table. Here are verses 19-21.

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed

with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Luke 16:19-21 (NASB)



crumbs. Now that is poor. He had absolutely nothing. The Greek word for “poor” in this description of Lazarus is *ptochos*. This helps us understand the correct meaning of *ptochos* is “beggar.”

The second word for poor, the word Jesus did not use, refers to a person who at least has something. In our culture, a *penas* person would have a place to live, a home, but *ptochos* implies one who is living in the streets. Where are you living? Do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying that beggars in spirit are really happy. Real happiness is being a spiritual beggar. Do you see yourself as having nothing, spiritually speaking? When we honestly believe we are spiritually poor, we will come begging to God for help - for His crumbs. That helps us understand the meaning of “poor in spirit.”

How Beggars Become Happy. That afternoon on the hillside, Jesus was talking to many people. Some were spiritual beggars and others were not. People are not spiritual beggars when they speak against God and ask why He did this or did that. People are not beggars when they seek honor. That is not Jesus’ idea of a *ptochos*. A street beggar knows that he has nothing and rejoices in whatever he receives. A spiritual street beggar knows he sins and displeases God. A spiritual beggar comes to God to receive a spiritual handout.

Did you know that God is giving away valuable treasures at no cost? He offers free forgiveness for your sins. He will give you the kingdom of God if you believe in Jesus. When you truly believe, you become a disciple or follower of Jesus. Happiness is dependence on God for everything in your life. Happiness is being a spiritual beggar—a *ptochos*.

A spiritual beggar knows that he or she has nothing to offer to God. So, a spiritual beggar looks for His forgiveness for his sins. If you are like the beggar, Jesus can take you “off the streets” and bring you into His mansion (John 14:2), which is called the kingdom of heaven.

How Disciples Stay Happy. As His disciples, we are no longer living in the streets of sin because God has declared every individual Christian to be justified or legally forgiven of all sins (Romans 5:1). Yet, we often feel empty or sad. Why? We forget that we are still dependent on Jesus and we still need to daily when we sin confess our sin in order to restore our relationship with God. 1 John 1:9 tells us how to restore the relationship.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9 (NASB)

Various passages in the Bible teach that even as believers we are still needy. We are still spiritual beggars. We are forgiven spiritual beggars. We came to Christ begging to be forgiven, but we are still spiritual beggars in need. For example, the Bible tells us that we should always live in submission to God’s will (James 4:13-17). We are also told to not be anxious for anything. The verse says,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4:6 (NASB)

Here are some other related passages. Matthew 6:31-32 reminds us that we need for God to meet our needs.

‘Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.’ Matthew 6:31-32 (NASB)

As result, Hebrews 13:15 says we should be thankful.

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. Hebrews 13:15 (NASB)

Conclusion. Jesus offers help to His disciples. But self-sufficient people do not constantly admit or confess their sins because they do not sense they have needs. If you claim to be a believer, are you still a beggar in spirit? Remember only spiritual beggars are happy. We came to Christ as a spiritual beggar. Then we became a forgiven spiritual beggar. The difference now is our Lord has promised to meet our every need.