

## Matthew 5:3

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Rev Robert Denham

I was brought up in a house where we used to ask God to bless each other. It was not a very pious house, but day after day we would ask for that blessing, and even when we went to school or visiting, we would do it. It sounds a bit weird, but we had a quaint tradition. I am told it was a hang over from mediaeval times, when it was believed that sneezing allowed the devil to enter, so people asked God to bless the sneezer and stop the devil. I never knew the history; all I knew was to say **bless you** when someone sneezed.

But who are blessed by God? Who does God bless? Jesus tells us. In Matthew 5:3, he says *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Who are the poor in spirit that God blesses with the Kingdom of heaven? What does he mean the poor in spirit?

Because he said poor in spirit not just poor, he was not referring to the destitute, mud hut dwellers, starving refugees, street kids, unemployed, people after paying for their car registration, or even families who only go on one round world trip each year, (and not 5, like their rich friends). It can include those people, but poor in whatever way we might think of poor, was not the whole of what he said.

The blessed people were poor *in spirit*.

Maybe he meant cowards, who have no guts, and are poor in their spirit of fight?

Or maybe he meant those who were unaware of spiritual things, being poor from ignorance of their spirit?

But I say that the only way to get a good understanding of what he meant is to see how that expression was used in the Old Testament, for Jesus knew it perfectly, and would quote it, & refer to it freely. And in the Old Testament, the poor in spirit are described.

God's faithful people were often referred to in the prophets' books as the poor, because they were often ripped off and kept down by the ungodly.

Proverbs 16:19 says *It's better to be of a humble spirit with the poor, than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

The poor were seen as honest, not gaining quick riches from many forms of robbery. These faithful poor, had a humble spirit, and God blessed them by being with them.

Isaiah 57:15 says *This is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives forever, whose name is holy; 'I live in a high and holy place, and also with him who is contrite & lowly in spirit'.*

And in Isaiah 66:2 God says *The person I regard highly is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.*

So Jesus did not mean the poor in spirit were cowards or spiritually ignorant. He meant people who knew they were spiritually bankrupt -- who knew they were unworthy of heaven, not good enough for God.

But being spiritually poor does not mean feeling like a microbe who should be squashed as a worthless pest. It is not the hating of yourself. I know some people who hate themselves, because of what they have done, or because they have been told they are worthless from a young age.

We are unworthy not worthless. God gives us worth by loving us and giving us life.

Being poor in spirit is a recognition that we are not good enough. We need God, and we can only have God's kingdom when he gives it to us.

You cannot fake this type of poverty. There are some who try, and they may fool us into thinking they're humble and poor in spirit, but God is not fooled, for He knows our heart. He knows what we think, and what we are really like. And most of us are fairly harsh on people who are shown to have that sham of humility.

But some Christians do not worry about humility and poverty. Instead, being full of knowledge is so important. Later in his sermon on the mount, Jesus does say we're to hear his words and obey them. We need to know them, but some Christians never stop showing others that they are chock-a-block full of Bible verses. Their pride is great.

It is good to learn more, and to put Jesus' words into action in your own life. But pride in what you have learnt is so dangerous.

Some years ago I played a friend in a Bible Trivia game, sort of like Trivial Pursuit. I was flogging him, for the questions were asking things about the Bible. He was doing the easy questions, and I was on the hardest. I was about to win and really flog him, when he picked up a card which said *Game over. You have won. You have died and gone straight to heaven.*

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I felt cheated. I had put so much effort in & answered all the right things. He had not done much. He had missed the easy bits, yet he won.

My pride showed my haughty spirit. God wants us to be poor in spirit, to recognise that we need him all the way...

Even when we know lots, we still cannot earn our way. He gives us the greatest gift quite freely when we ask humbly. For the poor in spirit are blessed. Theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

How is your spirit? How are you going with God? Are you humble before him? Have you admitted to him that you're not good enough, and you need him? Have you asked him to give you heaven?

If you have, praise God, but beware of your pride. You do not deserve rewards because of your service or knowledge. Remain a humble Christian, poor in spirit.

If you have not, why not? What is stopping you? Is it your pride? Is it something a Christian did in their pride and arrogance? Is it the thought of having to come to church and meeting with others here to learn more and be encouraged? Is it a sinful passion that you do not want to give up, because you think it is better than God?

What is stopping you coming to God, asking for help and heaven?

Let us all be poor in spirit.