

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer

May 3, 2009

[www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org)

**Blessed Are the Broken-hearted**  
**Matthew 5:3**

For those who have lost their jobs; for those who are underemployed;  
for those who have given their lives to a company only to see it disintegrate before their eyes;  
for those who have watched the fruits of years of faithful investing wither in this dire economy;  
for those who have been broken by a relationship with a spouse, child, or friend;  
for those who have tried to change the circumstances of their lives or their loves  
and seen those efforts come to naught;  
for those whose body has betrayed them in some significant way –  
for those whose hearts have been broken by events of one kind or another,  
the Word of the Lord speaks a message of hope unto your heart:  
**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”**

Oddly enough, when I examine the work of preachers in past generations concerning this topic,  
they all first spend time trying to identify and define those who are poor in spirit.

In these dark and difficult days, such a task is unnecessary.

The poor in spirit are all around us. That description may describe our own lives.

I remember the late celebrated preacher John Claypoole saying to me one time, “Life beats us all up.”

That pronouncement seems especially true in our time. As people talk about their lives these days,  
what comes to my mind is that lament voiced by Paul Simon in his great classic, “American Tune”:

*“Many’s the time I’ve been mistaken, and many times confused.*

*Yes, and I’ve often felt forsaken, And certainly misused. . . .*

*I don’t know a soul who’s not been battered. I don’t have a friend who feels at ease.*

*I don’t know a dream that’s not been shattered, or driven to its knees.”*

That sounds like us, alright. Life has pronounced a paralyzing No over our lives in the form of a failed  
marriage, a betrayed love, a ruined body, an incurable affliction, an inconsolable grief, an irretrievable loss.  
Like Paul, perhaps, we have prayed earnestly that God might remove some fierce thorn from our flesh,  
but as best we can tell the answer remains an implacable No.

In the face of that No, how do we keep from lapsing into despair?

We must cling to the theological conviction that the God who says No to us also says something else to us,  
speaking to our broken hearts, directly, confidently:

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”**

We cannot help but wonder, “What in the world do these words mean?”

Yet before we can wrestle with the meaning of these words of God, we must wrestle with ourselves first.

For in the face of God’s No unto us, our first tendency is to seek refuge in the drug of self-pity.

In the common parlance, we tend to say that people ‘wallow in self-pity,’

like a pig might wallow in a comfortable mud hole.

This common image does not do justice to self-pity’s insidious power.

After all, the mud doesn’t get inside the pig, whereas self-pity can certainly get inside us.

Self-pity can become so much a part of us that it colors our every action and word,  
mars our countenance, oozes out of every pore of our being.

Self-pity allows us to fixate on the past and become paralyzed by the notion that we are a perpetual victim. Self-pity distracts us from recognizing our responsibility in appropriating the grace and power of God to move beyond brokenness, to move beyond being poor in Spirit. To be addicted to self-pity is to be incapable of appropriating the power of promise inherent in God's words, **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs in the Kingdom of heaven."** That is why the drug of self-pity is not an option for moving forward with a broken heart. So, how can we move from our brokenness toward blessedness? I can only begin to answer that question by means of an analogy. Some years ago a French Resistance fighter admitted that his small group was constantly in danger of being infiltrated by spies who wanted to betray them to the Gestapo. With their lives on the line, they employed one person to interview every volunteer to see if they were genuine. They employed a blind man. True, this man's eyes did not work like anyone else's, but this handicap that made him poor in spirit in one sense gave him a second sight in another, gave him an ability to peer into the human heart and discern truth from falsehood. That's what being poor in spirit can do for us, give us a second sight that allows us to see truth from falsehood. To be made poor in spirit has the potential to give us a second sight that makes us capable of seeing what is truly important and what is dross in our lives. Most of us go through life thinking we are completely self-sufficient. We think we can go through life completely on our own. Then suddenly life knocks the props out from under us and we fall to the earth, broken in mind and spirit. Life exposes our self-sufficiency as a sham and gives us a second sight, empowering us to perceive God's nearness and appropriate God's strength. The great German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher observed that at the heart of all genuine faith is a feeling of absolute dependence upon God. When we are broken in spirit, we are more apt to feel our absolute dependence upon God. When we are broken in spirit, we are more likely to grasp what Paul meant when he said, "In God we live and move and have our being."

We read in the newspaper of a French journalist kidnapped and held hostage in Beirut, Lebanon. We think to ourselves, what a horrible thing! In one sense we are right. But when this man's so-called normal life was violently interrupted, when he was thrust into physical darkness and his freedom was ripped away, this man who had spent a lifetime as a nominal Catholic at best, suddenly found in his physical darkness that his eyes had been opened to see the nearness of God. His physical vulnerability to his captors allowed him to sense God's spiritual nearness and power. His physical limitations opened him up to perceive the reality of the spiritual world. He received a second sight. Physical deprivation freed him to feed on inner vitality. Sure, his physical freedom was gone. His right of self-determination had been taken away. But he had received the compensation of the second sight of the Spirit to discern that God's power and presence were there for him. Upon his release he was, of course, overjoyed. But within a few months he wrote an essay in which he spoke wistfully of his captivity. He admitted that since he was no longer poor in spirit, he was no longer as attuned to the nearness of God. Physical liberty had brought a corresponding loss of spiritual liberty. For the first time in his life this man truly understood the power of Jesus' words: **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."**

I pause here to address a certain fundamental paradox:

*just because being poor in spirit opens our eyes to God's presence  
does not mean that God intends us to stay poor in spirit.*

Oddly enough, there is a school of Christian thought that thinks exactly that!

When someone is going through a horrible time in their lives, there are Christians who come to say,  
"Isn't it wonderful that God has placed you at the foot of the cross?"

That's where you always need to be so you can understand God's lessons."

Ladies and gentlemen, that is nonsense. You can be sure that people who say such things  
are not going through a horrible ordeal presently in their own lives.

Otherwise, they would know that the foot of the cross is no place to stay.

I heard someone express a similar sentiment recently and I responded,

"Hey, even Jesus didn't hang on the cross but three hours."

As important as the cross was in our Lord's pilgrimage,

it was but a stepping stone to his experiencing the glory of the empty tomb.

As vital as the experience of Godforsakenness was to our Lord's spiritual pilgrimage,

it was but a prelude to his experiencing the blessedness of his father's resurrection power.

Mary Magdalene does not stay at the foot of the cross.

She moves from the cross to the tomb, which is how she learns of our Lord's resurrection.

Yes, there is a strain of Christian thought that urges us to stay broken in order to fully understand God's  
Spirit, but you don't need to go looking for suffering.

Life's sorrow will find you. Suffering will find you. You don't need to go looking for it.

The roller coaster of life is marked by pinnacles of achievement and pits of despair,

and yes there are some truths that you can see from the pit of despair that you cannot see from the pinnacle.

But this is also important to know: there are some truths you can see from the pinnacle

that you cannot see from the pit.

Our Lord does not want us to stay us at the foot of the cross.

Our Lord urges us to move toward blessedness. Blessedness!

When our Lord says, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven,**"

*that is not a prediction, that is an imperative!*

God does not intend for us to remain broken.

Our Lord commands us to move toward wholeness, toward healing.

Maybe God's grace will come to us in the form of circumstances that directly address that which broke us.

More likely, God's grace will come in the form of a deliverance that liberates us from focusing upon  
whatever broke us. God's Spirit may grant us an entirely different direction and purpose.

Indeed, God's grace often comes in the form of a deliverance that does not directly relate to what broke our  
hearts. God's deliverance may come in the form of a courage that frees us to step out in a new path. In truth,  
we never exactly know what form God's grace will take.

When we think about the Beatitudes we need to remember that they are meant by our Lord  
as a companion and comment upon the Ten Commandments.

When our Lord says, "**Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven,**"

he is consciously echoing God's first commandment unto Moses:

"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.

You will have no other gods before me."

Being poor in spirit gives us a second sight that frees us from bondage.

Being poor in spirit gives us a second sight to see that God alone is truly God.

Being poor in spirit allows us to receive a liberating power

that moves us toward blessedness regardless of our circumstances of brokenness.

The greatest commentary upon this Beatitude was provided by Jesus himself when he said,  
“Two guys walked into a temple and the one guy prayed,  
‘Lord, I am so glad that you have made me so good.  
I’m so glad that I’m not like the adulterers or like the thieves or like that tax collector over in the corner.’  
Meanwhile, the tax collector with his head down quietly pleaded, ‘My God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ ”  
Jesus noted, the first man was good -- but the second man was moving toward blessedness.  
The first man was rich; the second man was poor in spirit and thus had been given second sight.  
The first man celebrated himself; the second celebrated the possibility of experiencing the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God! That does not mean we can only look forward to blessedness after we die.  
We are to experience God’s power and sustaining energy amidst the here and now.  
That French journalist experienced God’s presence amidst the gritty circumstances of his captivity.  
Jesus says to us as plainly as he can, “The Kingdom of God is within you!”  
Our Lord urges us, “Move from brokenness toward blessedness.”

It is really hard isn’t it? None of us want to admit that we are poor in spirit.  
We all want to say to those around us, “I’m doing fine. Everything is okay,”  
because we live in a culture of achievement, and we want to maintain the façade of success.  
But when you examine the list of the Beatitudes you find that Jesus pronounces  
blessedness upon people whose lives seem the very antithesis of achievement.  
Maybe what our Lord is saying is, “It is not the achievers who are open to blessedness.”  
Maybe blessedness is experienced only by those willing amidst life’s heights and depths  
to open their being to the reality and power of God.  
Blessedness is found by those whom life opens up to appreciate God’s nearness and sustaining strength.  
When you understand that truth, you begin to understand exactly what Jesus meant when he said, **“Blessed  
are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”**

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer  
May 3, 2009