

Happy Are the Poor in Spirit

Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua

In my last post, we began a new series entitled The Christian Torah based on the Gospel of Matthew. We briefly explored the concept of what it means to be a talmid of Yeshua's. In this post, we will begin to explore Yeshua's teaching Believer's call the Sermon on the Mount.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua explains the values of the kingdom. Money, prayer, relationships, possessions, information, and power were a few of the categories He redefined from God's perspective. He showed that following Him would involve **radical change** for most of us. It may mean undoing the way we've always done things and rethinking traditional sources of wisdom from our parents and culture. To become like Yeshua involves a tough-minded review of our values and a thorough **change** in our behavior.

The Sermon on the Mount represents Yeshua's expectations for those who have followed Him as talmidim, both ancient and modern. The theme of the sermon is found in Matthew 5:20, **"For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim (Pharisees), you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"** The Sermon on the Mount is thus a call for Yeshua's talmidim to observe a greater righteousness.

It's important to remember that the people looked to the scribes and Pharisees as their models and teachers in the things of God. They set the rules and determined what was holy and unholy. One reason why the scribes and Pharisees hated Yeshua is because He exposed their shallowness and deceit in this sermon. The entire Sermon on the Mount is a series of contrasts between institutional religion and an intimate relationship with the Father through the Son.

Now, with that background, let's begin to look at Matthew 5:1-3. Having been to the site where Yeshua is purported to have given this teaching, it is obvious that Yeshua did not speak from the top of the hill, but rather from the bottom where He could utilize the natural amphitheater effect to His advantage. Notice that He taught sitting down which was common for a Rabbi. His talmidim would literally sit at His feet and listen to His wisdom.

"How blessed are the poor in spirit! for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs." (Matthew 5:3)

"How blessed," is translated from the Greek 'makarios' which corresponds to the Hebrew 'asher' and means 'blessed, happy, and fortunate' all at once, so that no one English word is adequate.

Verses 3-12 are known as the Beatitudes because of the word 'beatus' was used in the best-known Latin version to translate 'makarios.' Perhaps Robert Schuller captures the theme of the Beatitudes best when he describes them as the "Be Happy Attitudes." It's all a function of how we think. This is extremely difficult for the western mind. We really do have to put on the mind of the Messiah if we are able to fully comprehend His mysteries. We need a **radical change** in how we think.

It seems a surprising way for Yeshua to begin teaching about happiness by saying, **"How blessed are the poor in spirit."** There are two ways in which we can come at the meaning of this word poor.

The Greek word that is used for poor means absolute and abject poverty. It describes the poverty that is beaten to its knees. So this beatitude becomes even more surprising. How blessed is the man who is abjectly and completely poverty-stricken? How blessed is the man who is absolutely destitute?

In Hebrew, the word poor was used to describe the humble and the helpless man who put his whole trust in God.

Let us now take the Greek and the Hebrew and put them together. The Greek describes the man who is absolutely destitute, the man who has nothing at all; the Hebrew describes the poor, humble, and helpless man who has put his whole trust in God. Therefore, "How blessed are the poor in spirit" means:

How blessed is the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God.

If a man has realized his own utter helplessness, and has put his whole trust in God, there will enter into his life two things, which are opposite sides of the same coin. He will become completely detached from things, for he will know that things have not got it in them to bring happiness or security; and he will become completely attached to God, for he will know that God alone can bring him help, hope, and strength. ***The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has realized that things mean nothing, and that God means everything.***

Think about the recent disasters reported around the world. Who will be the survivors? Those who put no stock in their possessions, but have hope in the Lord to see them through this tragedy OR those you have no faith, no hope, who saw all that they put their trust in destroyed in the twinkling of an eye?

How can this first beatitude change us? By inspiring us to learn the power of two miracle-working confessions: (1) "I need help" and (2) "I am sorry."

- "I've got a problem – can you help me?"
- "I don't understand – can you enlighten me?"
- "I can't agree with you – can we meet somewhere in the middle?"
- "I'm really at a loss – can you direct me?"
- "I'm ready to quit – what is your advice?"

The chains that bind you can lead to a change if you are willing to say these three words – "I need help." If you are too proud or too afraid to admit you are hurting, don't be surprised if nobody seems to care.

And, oh, the power of those restorative words, "I am sorry!" They heal relationships between us and our friends and loved ones, and between us and God.

Yeshua says we must come to the end of ourselves. We must leave behind any self-sufficiency or self-righteousness, coming to the place where we realize our only hope is in Yeshua, our Savior and our Lord!

One caveat! We must be careful not to think that this first beatitude calls actual material poverty a good thing. Poverty is not a good thing. Yeshua would never have called blessed a state where people live in slums and don't have enough to eat, and where health rots because conditions are deplorable. The poverty, which is blessed, is the poverty of spirit, when a man realizes his own utter lack of resources to meet life, and finds his help and strength in God.

So then, the first beatitude means:

O how blessed is the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God, for thus alone he can render to God that perfect obedience which will make him a citizen of the kingdom of heaven!

If you have a need, God has an answer. He specializes in matching up answers to problems, healings to hurts, and solutions to perplexing situations. It is perfectly acceptable for us to say, in light of this teaching of Yeshua, "I need help ... I can't do it alone." You are only as blessed or as happy as you choose to be.

In my next post, we will look at how happy are the mournful.