

Matthew 5:3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-5/matthew-53/>

The first statement (A) of Jesus's chiasm focuses on having a realistic opinion of one's self.

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Luke 6:20.

Jesus's statement (A) *Makarios are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, corresponds with (A') *Makarios are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

Jesus says *Makarios* (happy and fulfilled) *are the poor in spirit*. To be *poor* means to lack something. If we are *poor*, then we have need. We often use the word *poor* to describe someone who needs more money in order to have a sufficient livelihood.

The Bible uses the Greek word *pneuma* (G4151), translated here as *spirit* in many different ways. It can mean wind (John 3:8). It can mean the immaterial part of man that relates and interacts with God (Romans 8:16). It can mean a spiritual being such as an angel or demon (Matthew 12:43). It can mean the Third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:1). In this instance, *spirit* does not refer to any of these uses. Instead, *spirit* here describes what we might call "self-image." To be *poor in spirit* is to realize spiritual poverty, and therefore have a sense we have a great spiritual need. To be *poor in spirit* means to reject having a false opinion of self-sufficiency. To realize spiritual need is the opposite of self-sufficiency. It leads to spiritual dependence. To be filled with God's Spirit, we must first empty ourselves of "self."

Jesus teaches that *the poor in spirit* are *Makarios* because *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. The *kingdom of heaven* refers to the new spiritual and political order that Jesus has come to bring. If we do not recognize our spiritual need, we will not seek the benefits of heaven. The benefits of heaven come through spiritual dependence. When we live in spiritual dependence we serve one another, which results in the principles of heaven reigning on earth.

The Kingdom of Heaven is unlike the kingdoms of this earth who are ruled by those rich *in spirit* and full of themselves. Those who seek power for themselves squabble and fight one another for the position to rule the kingdoms of the earth. The opposite of Jesus's statement would read "Wretched are the rich in spirit, for theirs are the fleeting kingdoms of the earth." Once attained, the earthly rulers exhaust their energy clinging to power or selfishly exerting their power at the expense of those beneath them. As Shakespeare says, "Uneasy lies the head that wears such a crown."

The kind of people most recognized as being *poor in spirit*, might have been slaves or servants. Servants had only the authority granted them. Servants were expected to quietly and simply do what they were asked without making a fuss. Jesus will use servants in many parables to describe how to live kingdom principles. Jesus teaches, paradoxically, that in the Kingdom of Heaven, the servants are the rulers.

Jesus is saying that those who serve others rather than demand of them, those who lay down their own claims for the sake of loving their neighbor, those who have an attitude of being *poor in spirit* have full reign in the *kingdom of heaven*. The servant-hearted are the rulers in God's Kingdom. It is these servant kings who are happy and fulfilled (*Makarios*) because God created mankind to rule with Him in harmony with others. It is Satan who embodies the spirit of tyranny.

It is interesting to note the present tense. When believers serve, they are ruling from the standpoint of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a matter of faith to have the eyes to see that true greatness lies in serving.

Biblical Text

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