The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION TWO — Blessed Are the Poor

Part One: The Blessings of the Kingdom · Texts: Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20, 24

The Texts

> **Matthew 5:3** *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
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> **Luke 6:20** *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*
>
> **Luke 6:24** *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*

Where the Kingdom Begins

Of all the places to start. If you were writing the charter of a new people — the constitution we spoke of last week — where would you begin? With the strong, surely. The capable. The ones whose names open doors. That is how the kingdoms of this world write their founding documents: from the top down, if they work down at all.

Jesus begins at the bottom.

The very first word out of his mouth in the Sermon — the opening line of the Kingdom's constitution — is a blessing, and he lays it on the poor. Not as an afterthought. Not as charity handed down from the winners. First. Before a single word about how Kingdom people are to live, Jesus tells us where the Kingdom's blessing lands — and the answer rearranges everything: it lands on the ones the world has written off.

Let's search the Scriptures together, and ask why.

What Is a Beatitude?

Before we touch the first one, we need to know what kind of thing we're holding. The word behind "blessed" is *makarios* — blessed, flourishing, honored.[1] And here is what a Beatitude is *not*: it is not a command. Jesus is not ordering us to go be poor, or to manufacture grief on cue. Nor is it a ladder of virtues to climb, or a list of requirements to earn our way in — we settled that last week. A Beatitude is a *declaration*. With the settled authority we watched him take up on the mountain, Jesus is announcing where God's favor is actually falling. And the

[1]The Greek makarios means "blessed, flourishing, honored." Beatitudes are not commands ("be poor!") or entry requirements but declarations—Jesus announcing where God's favor is falling. See Jonathan T. Pennington, The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing (Baker Academic, 2017), and Scot McKnight, Sermon on the Mount (Story of God Bible Commentary, 2013).

Beatitudes map the shocking geography of the Kingdom: God's blessing keeps landing exactly where the world swears it never should.

Poor in Spirit — or Simply Poor?

Now, the two versions. Matthew says "poor *in spirit*." Luke says "you who are poor." For centuries the comfortable have preferred Matthew — and quietly spiritualized him. "Poor in spirit," we decide, must mean something tidy and inward, a humble attitude that leaves the bank account untouched. Hear me: that reading drains the blessing of its blood.

Matthew's phrase reaches back into Israel's own Scriptures — to the *anawim*, the poor of the LORD: the faithful ones in Isaiah and the Psalms who have nothing left to lean on but God, whose only wealth is their dependence on him.[2] To be poor in spirit is to stand before God with empty hands and drop the pretense that we built ourselves.

And Luke will not let us float up into the abstract and stay there. He strips the phrase to the bone — "you who are poor" — and then, in case we missed it, he adds the line most of us would rather skip: "woe to you who are rich." Read together, mountain and plain, they tell the whole truth and neither half alone: the Kingdom belongs, really and materially, to the literally poor — and blessing falls on everyone, of any income, who comes before God empty-handed, without the illusion that they built themselves.[3]

"Theirs IS the Kingdom"

Now catch one small word that changes everything. Watch the verb. Most of the Beatitudes promise a future — they *will* be comforted, they *will* inherit, they *will* be filled. But the first and the last break into the present: theirs *is* the kingdom.[4] The blessing on the poor is not a rain check. The poor are not told to wait their turn in some far-off heaven; the Kingdom is theirs, now. That present tense wraps the whole list like two arms, and it is pure Kingdom-now: the reign of God has already begun — and it began by belonging first to those who had nothing. The last are already first.

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[2]"Poor in spirit" echoes the anawim—the faithful poor of the LORD who have nothing to lean on but God (Isaiah 61:1; the Psalms). It is not a merely humble disposition detached from real need. See W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, and R. T. France, on Matthew 5:3.

[3]Against spiritualizing away the material edge: Luke keeps it plain—"you who are poor"—and adds the woe (6:24). On God's preferential option for the poor, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation; James H. Cone; Obery Hendricks; and Clarence Jordan, who lived it at Koinonia Farm.

[4]Only the first and last Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3, 5:10) use the present tense—"theirs IS the kingdom"—bracketing the list: the reign of God already belongs to the poor. On this inaugurated "already/not-yet," see N.T. Wright and George Eldon Ladd.

The Woe We'd Rather Skip

We cannot preach the blessing and mute the woe; that would be the very spiritualizing we just refused. "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." This is not a curse spat in anger. It is a *lament* — the ache of a prophet, the same grief in Jesus' voice when he weeps over the city.[5] And it is a warning: the comfortable have already collected their reward, and it is thinner than they think.

Here is the hard, honest word for a corridor like ours — and for most of us in this room, who are, by nearly any measure the world has ever known, rich. The danger is not that God is against us. The danger is that we will take our consolation — our comfort, our stuff, our quiet certainty that we earned it — and miss the Kingdom that was reaching for us the whole time through the poor at our door. I will not soften that, because love does not lie.

Freedom for Others

So let's put this first blessing to the test we will carry all the way through. It tells us where the Kingdom starts — with the poor — so any community actually shaped by this Sermon will start there too. Ask it with me: whose flourishing does this passage put first? The poor's — plainly, materially, first. And what might it cost those of us who are comfortable? Our consolation. Our self-made story. The tidy certainty that we are the blessed ones and they are the project. *Freedom for others may cost us something — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- Where were you taught the Kingdom begins — with the strong, or with the poor? What formed that picture?
- Matthew says "poor in spirit"; Luke says "you who are poor." Have you heard one used to quiet the other? What happens when you refuse to let go of either?
- Read Luke's woe out loud. Where does it land on you — honestly?
- In our own corridor, who are the anawim — the ones with nothing to lean on but God? How might the Kingdom look, in practice, for them?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. What consolation might you need to lay down to hear this blessing as good news?

This Week — A Practice

[5]Luke 6:24 is prophetic lament and warning, not a vindictive curse—the grief of one who sees people settle for their "consolation" and miss the kingdom. On hearing Jesus' hard sayings within his Jewish prophetic tradition, see Amy-Jill Levine.

Two movements. First, sit with the woe as long as you sit with the blessing — most of us are quicker to claim the one than the other. Ask honestly where you are rich, and where you are poor. Second, do one concrete thing this week that puts the poor first — not charity handed down from above, but a neighbor meeting a neighbor on the level ground where Jesus stood. Then bring back what you noticed. The Kingdom is mostly learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session the blessing turns to grief: "Blessed are those who mourn" — and Luke's sharper "you who weep now." We'll ask how in the world the Kingdom can call the grieving blessed, and what that means for a people who refuse to look away from the world's pain.

Benediction

So go this week and look where Jesus looked first — down, and out, to the ones the world overlooks. And if you find yourself among the comfortable, do not despair at the woe; let it loosen your grip. The same Kingdom that belongs to the poor is holding a door open for you, too — but the door is down low, where the poor are, and you may have to stoop to enter. May you have the courage to stoop.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION TWO

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still. A warm welcome-back.]

Welcome back to the table. Last week we said the Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of the Kingdom — the founding charter of a whole new people. Well, today Jesus starts writing it. And I want you to notice where he starts, because it tells you everything.

Imagine you're founding a nation. Where do you begin your charter? With the strong. The capable. The people whose names open doors. That's how the kingdoms of this world write their founding documents — from the top down.

Jesus begins at the bottom. The very first word out of his mouth is a blessing, and he lays it on the poor. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Matthew says, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And Luke, blunter, standing on that level place: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

[Careful, pastoral — name the dodge.]

Now here's where we have to be careful, because there's an old dodge, and most of us have been handed it. We hear Matthew say "poor in spirit," and we quietly decide it must mean something tidy and inward — a humble attitude — something that leaves our wallets alone. Friends, that reading drains the blessing of its blood.

"Poor in spirit" isn't a nice mood. It reaches all the way back into Israel's Scriptures — to the anawim, the poor of the LORD: the faithful ones who have nothing left to lean on but God. To be poor in spirit is to stand before God with empty hands and drop the pretense that you built yourself.

And Luke won't let us float up into the abstract and stay there. He strips it to the bone — "you who are poor" — and then he says the line we'd all rather skip: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation."

[Let it sit. Don't rush.]

Don't hurry past that. That woe isn't a curse hurled in anger — it's a lament, the ache of a prophet who watches people settle for so much less than the Kingdom. And it's a warning, and it's for most of us in this room, because by nearly any measure the world has ever known, we are the rich. The danger isn't that God is against us. The danger is that we'll take our consolation — our comfort, our stuff, our certainty that we earned it — and miss the Kingdom that was reaching for us the whole time through the poor at our door. I won't soften that, because love doesn't lie.

[Brighten — the hinge word.]

Now catch one more thing — one small word that changes everything. Watch the verb. Most of the Beatitudes promise a future: they will be comforted, they will inherit, they will be filled. But this first one is in the present tense: theirs IS the kingdom. The poor aren't told to wait for some far-off heaven. The Kingdom is theirs, now. It has already begun — and it began by belonging first to the ones who had nothing. The last are already first.

So here's the question I want you to carry this week — it's our thread, freedom for others: this blessing tells us where the Kingdom starts, with the poor. So where does that put us? Whose flourishing comes first? And what might we, the comfortable, need to lay down to hear this as good news instead of a threat?

[Direct — the practice.]

Two things before we gather again. First, sit with the woe as long as you sit with the blessing — most of us claim the one and skip the other. Ask honestly: where am I rich, and where am I poor? Second, do one concrete thing this week that puts the poor first — not charity handed down from above, but a neighbor meeting a neighbor on the level ground where Jesus stood. Then bring back what you saw. The Kingdom is mostly learned in the doing.

Next time, the blessing turns to grief — "Blessed are those who mourn," and Luke's sharper "you who weep now." We'll ask how in the world the Kingdom can call the grieving blessed.

[Slow down. Let the last lines land.]

For now, go and look where Jesus looked first — down and out, to the ones the world overlooks. And if you find yourself among the comfortable, don't despair at the woe. Let it loosen your grip. The same Kingdom that belongs to the poor is holding a door open for you too — but it's a low door, down where the poor are, and you may have to stoop to enter. May you have the courage to stoop.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

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Blessings, Pastor Mick Finch.