

CINDERELLA'S SECRET, MT.5:3

Once Upon a Time...#2

◆Intro: How do we find real blessing? How do we find the “happily ever after” that the Cinderellas of the world talk about? I will, no doubt, begin to dawn on you as we look at the words of Jesus that what he says seems to rub our fur the wrong way. I mean, if you were to ask a young girl on the street about it she’d probably mention things like

◆being “rich”, or at least rich in spirit, having a healthy self-esteem, being self-confident, a hot-shot who knows who she is and that you’re not! That’s the happy gal!

◆Or blessed are those who can par-teah!

◆Instead of meekness, we honor the tough guy who will disregard the law.

◆Blessed are the,...not the merciful, but those who show no mercy; not the persecuted, but those who fight back with every ounce of energy!

◆So I should warn you, that what we are about to see about having our “once upon a time” turn out “happily ever after” probably isn’t going to come naturally or sit well with you, at first.

◆Today’s question is, “What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?”

◆**1. To be blessed, I need to get honest about my spiritual need.**

◆When we say spiritual need, we’re talking about our fallenness. Our spiritual bankruptcy.

◆A. In Matthews Gospel, this poverty has nothing to do with economics, although it is true (as Jesus teaches elsewhere) that the wealthier you are, the harder it is for you to go along with the ways of God’s Kingdom.

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- ◆ Wealth and going my own way tend to pair up. So do poverty and humility, and thus too the seeking of God. That's the story of Cinderella: rich, evil step-sisters; humble, impoverished Cinderella - who knew she has nothing in herself to secure happiness. It was all up to grace, outside help. (But once you get the palace and the prince, it's easy to lose humility!)
- ◆ The Old Testament is our backdrop. In the OT the "poor man" was one who was afflicted and unable to save himself, and who therefore turned to God for help and salvation.
 - ◆ *This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. (Psalms 34:6, NIV).*
- ◆ Because the needy have no refuge but God, poverty came to have spiritual overtones and to be identified with humble dependence on God.
- ◆ So then, if I want to receive the Kingdom of God, step one is admitting my need. The one who is poor in spirit knows he is fallen, knows he is sinful, and unable to merit the blessing of God. The one who is poor in spirit is open to grace. This is the art of spiritual humility without which no one can reach heaven or salvation.
 - ◆ No one walks into heaven standing fully erect.
 - ◆ No man gets an audience with God whose knees aren't bent.
 - ◆ Think of the film Indiana Jones and the Search for the Holy Grail. He's in a cave of sorts trying to figure out how to thread a dangerous hallway where men keep losing their lives. He knows only the humble shall pass. At the last minute it dawns on him the humble

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man kneels so he kneels just as a glistening blade slices through the air at head level! It's a good lesson, a spiritually true one.

◆ *"This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:1,2, NIV).*

◆ To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge our spiritual need before God, to get honest about ourselves, and to get to the end of ourselves.

◆ B. Well, what does that look like? Let me give you two biblical pictures.

◆ 1) Peter (Luke 5). He and others, having caught nothing all night, meet Jesus near the shore of Galilee. Jesus tells them to throw their nets out. They do so mostly, I think, to be polite. Surprise! They pull up so many fish the boat starts to sink! And do you know what Peter does? You might think he'd be like, "Whoa, dude, you're awesome! How'd you do that?" or maybe "See, I told you there were fish out there! High Five!"? No. He realizes he's in a wooden boat with the maker of wood. Peter says, "Get away from me Lord. I am a sinful man."

◆ What does he know? He knows God when he sees him. He knows no one with sin stands a chance of survival in the presence of burning purity!

◆ 2) Isaiah (Isa.6). No, not the famous basketball player. The prophet, who has a vision of God in the temple. He actually saw angels. He saw God! God is so big that the hem of his robe –you know, the bottom edge that drags on the ground a little, like the part of your jeans that your heel walks on if they're a little longish – that part all by itself FILLS the whole temple!

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◆What does Isaiah do? “Whoa, God! You can really shake the place! Hey angels, check this out! Look how big God is!”? No. Isaiah says “Oh no, I’m toast, because I’m unclean, and this is ...God!” [Biblical language goes like this; “woe is me, I’m ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips... and my eyes have seen the King! the Lord Almighty!”]

◆Isaiah got honest really quickly about his spiritual need. He didn’t see himself in comparison to his hillbilly neighbors with the wash machine on the front porch. He saw himself in comparison to God.

◆C. How do I become poor in spirit?

◆1) Realize your imperfection. Notice your own inability to do anything about it! This is generally easier as we get older and see how little we’ve conquered over the years in our personality flaws, although sin gives many of us the remarkable ability to remain oblivious to the obvious.

◆2) Stop pretending you’re so good. Know what that looks like? when you fail, you don’t make up an excuse!

◆“Oh well, you know how it is!” Yeah, we all know. And no, it’s not OK.

◆“We’ll sure it could be construed that on occasion I’ve been less than on the up and up, but isn’t everybody?” Yeah, and it’s a problem!

◆The “rich in spirit” are those who can’t see their need, and would never admit it. “Well, we all have lots to learn, don’t we? Nobody’s perfect!”

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◆ We gotta stop our double talk.

◆ “We’ll yeah my marriage isn’t what it could be.” But we never say out loud to each other “I’ve been a selfish, complaining spouse. I overwork and ignore my spouse.”

◆ “I give to charity.” Did you mean that dollar you threw in the offering plate? Or that 6 cents you gave the Ronald McDonald House? No, that’s not really giving. That’s tipping God, and not very well, either. Even the waitress gets 15-20%!

◆ 3) Seek out the commands of God. That’s why we used to hang the 10 Commandments on school room walls, because when you are reminded of how it’s supposed to be, you notice more when it isn’t.

◆ We don’t become poor in spirit, and then also in line for blessed living, until we get brutally honest about our own spiritual need. Now why is this so important?

◆ **2. Admitting my need is my admission into kingdom blessing.**

◆ Remember, “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

◆ A. Admitting my sin is the way to heaven!

◆ *“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”--and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Psalms 32:5, NIV.*

◆ Listen folks, you don’t get clearance into NASA because you have a paper airplane, and you don’t get clearance into heaven with repentance of sin, and no one can repent who cannot see their moral failures.

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- ◆“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23, NIV.
- ◆B. Admitting my sin is the way to earthly blessing too.
 - ◆*“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6, NIV).*
 - ◆...he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:51-53, NIV).
- ◆Is it possible that God is actually opposing you in your pursuit of happiness? Is there anything in you that pushes his presence away, his blessing away?
 - ◆Sometimes it’s in our businesses where we say, “This is my business. I run it my way. They are my profits. It is my time I’m spending.” Well, it’s not really your time. Your moments are on loan to you from the time Maker.
 - ◆Sometimes its in our schooling where we say, “This is my career, my course of study. This is my future. This is my life. I’ll do what I feel like, and I feel like making money!” Well, it’s not really your life. Your breath is on loan from the breath of God.
 - ◆Sometimes it’s in our marriages where we say, “This is my marriage, and this is what I must have or I will not follow God’s directions. This is what I need for fulfillment and unless God gives it to me, I’m not making any adjustments.” Well, it’s not really your

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marriage. God is the inventor of marriage. He's right about what he says about it whether it feels good to you at the moment or not.

◆ There's a benefit to being able to see your own fault, or to see your own poverty: it changes your perspective on everything!

◆ When your son almost dies in a car accident, the scratch on your paint is the least of your concerns.

◆ When you see your spiritual poverty, you also see that everything is grace. Everything is mercy. Everything is gift. God's love and compassion are overwhelming.

◆ Peter saw God in his boat and God did not kill him. God loved him, and lived with him. It was all about perspective.

◆ Isaiah saw God in the temple and God did not kill him. God cleansed him and sent him.

◆ Here's the thing: if you or I stand before God and we haven't admitted our guilt, it will kill us. But if we have, he offers forgiveness.

◆ **Conclusion:**

◆ Poor Cinderella in our drama; she was taken by how great she had become that she forgot who she was.

◆ An ancient document (from 1563) puts it like this. "What three things do I need to know to live and die in the joy of God's comfort? First, how great my sin and misery are. Second, how I am set free from all my sin and misery. Third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance."

◆ Getting honest about our spiritual poverty is step one into the Kingdom of God. I want to challenge you with this today.

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- ◆ I'm not talking about joining this church, although that would be a next step. I'm not challenging you to become a gospel singer or go to seminary, although those are good things too.
- ◆ I'm challenging you to take one step in your spiritual walk: own up to something. Get honest. AW Tozer reminds us that the person who is poor in spirit "knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is, in the sight of God, more important than angels."
- ◆ In the meantime he will have attained a place of soul rest: happy to let God defend him, free from the daily burden of comparison, free from fighting for significance and reputation, free from pretending to be able when he/she is in fact so dependent on the outside grace a Father whose love is more important than the temporal blessings he gives.