

A sermon “Life in God’s Upside-Down Kin-dom”
From the text Matthew 5:1-12
By Pastor Peter Blank
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My sermon is entitled “Life in God’s Upside-Down Kin-dom” because Jesus turns our world and its values upside-down with his preaching this sermon we call The Beatitudes. I use the phrase kin-dom because Jesus forms us into a family as mothers and father, as brothers and sisters, etc.

Harold, can you can finish this sentence: “**I will be happy when...**” [Harold is a 3 year old youngster sitting in the second row. I put him on the spot in order to engage his energy right off the start.] He paused for a few seconds to think about it. Then he said clearly, “I will be happy when my dad comes home.” [The entire congregation sighed together, saying “Oooh!” They knew Harold’s dad is gone for 3-4 weeks each month works on board a ship at sea. Harold missed his dad!]

See if you, the congregation, can finish this sentence: “**I will be happy when...**”

There are countless ways to end it.

I will be happy when I grow up and move away from home.

I will be happy when summer comes.

I will be happy when I fall in love.

I will be happy when I get the job, the promotion, the car, the retirement.

Some might even say, quietly, “*I will be happy when it’s all over.*”

So when will you be happy? What will it take? And how long are you willing to wait—one year, five years, fifty?

Jesus speaks directly into that longing. His wisdom, however, sounds upside down. At first hearing, it can sound impractical—religious talk that never quite touches real life. Still, many people have tested Jesus’ words and found them true. They do require a shift—of vision, posture, and heart.

Jesus begins with these words: “**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**”

Notice that Jesus does not talk about *happiness*. Some translations use that word, but *blessed* is richer. Happiness is usually tied to circumstances—success, comfort, winning, relief. Blessing, as Jesus uses it, runs deeper. It reaches beyond circumstances and into the soul.

Then come words that turn everything upside down:

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the gentle.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

That is not how the world usually works. The world says:
Blessed are the rich.
Blessed are the strong.
Blessed are the winners.
Blessed are the well-fed and well-indulged.
But Jesus says, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”**

There are nine beatitudes, but the first is foundational. Get this one right, and the others begin to make sense. Miss this one, and none of them fully do.

The Greek word translated *poor* is *ptōchos*—not mild poverty, but utter dependence. True poverty strips away illusions. It teaches how much even a small mercy matters. It trains the eyes to look for kindness and the heart to long for dignity.

That is what it means to be poor in spirit before God.
The poor in spirit come with empty hands. They bring no leverage, no credentials, no bargaining chips.

They come hungry for grace.
Broken, hoping to be mended.
Sinful, hoping to be forgiven.
Grieving, hoping to be comforted.
Ill, hoping to be healed.

They do not negotiate with God; they kneel before God. And it is precisely this humility—this openness—that makes them ready to receive blessing.
But kneeling is not our preferred posture. We prefer control. We prefer to pay our own way. We prefer not to be indebted—to anyone, even God.

So we strive. We work harder. We try to master our lives. We chase security and success.
Still, many of us end up exhausted.

Years ago, *Newsweek* (March 6, 1995) ran a cover with a single word: **EXHAUSTED**. The article described people across every walk of life—leaders, parents, workers, caregivers—running on empty. Many of us recognize ourselves there.

Jesus says, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”**

Gilbert Bowen tells the story of a young boy rushed to the hospital with devastating injuries. His father arrived frantic and commanding, clearly a man accustomed to getting results. He demanded the best care money could buy. Finally, the doctor said quietly, “There is nothing your money can do. All you can do is wait and pray.”

That moment may have been the first time the father faced his own helplessness. The crisis may have stripped away the illusion of control. In that moment, he may have become poor in spirit—able at last to kneel, to ask, to trust.

Sometimes brokenness becomes the doorway to blessing.

Henri Nouwen once met Mother Teresa and was struck by her simplicity and focus on Jesus. When he shared his struggles and asked for advice, she said, “If you spend one hour a day in contemplative prayer and never do anything you know is wrong, you will be all right.”

It sounds simple, but it is not shallow.

Nouwen later wrote that her words answered all his questions—and none of them—because the real work was learning how to stand where that answer could be heard.

That is the invitation of the first beatitude.

God blesses us when we come with empty hands.

When we stop pretending we are in control.

When we bow before grace.

And here is the promise: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** Not *will be*—*is*. The kingdom is not only a future hope; it is a present reality. When we become poor in spirit, we step into it now.

Jesus does not command us to become poor in spirit. He offers a blessing. When our need is deepest, God is nearest—and grace is already at work.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

In God’s upside-down kin-dom, blessing shows up in ordinary days when we stop pretending we have it all together, admit our need, and trust God to meet us right where we are.