*Introduction*

Having had a quit in depth introduction to this sermon, although some time ago now, we come this morning to consider the first of the beatitudes ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”***.

Just to quickly recap on the introduction, we saw that:

The sermon is not for unbelievers but for believers. It is all about Christian conduct and to expect a non-christian to conduct himself or herself in this way would be wrong.

The Christian is a man/woman who of necessity must be concerned with keeping God’s law.

The Christian is one who lives always realizing he/she is in the presence of God.

The Christian is a man/woman who always walks in the fear of God.

We also saw that these beatitudes were for ALL Christians and

These beatitudes are the essential, utter difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.

As we go through the beatitudes you will clearly see that they are not haphazard in their sequence but that there is a definite and deliberate order in which Jesus spoke them.

In this first one there is an enormous challenge to all of us. For there is no entry into the Kingdom of heaven, apart from it and there is no-one in the kingdom that is not poor in spirit. It is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian.

As we look at this we shall see that it really means emptying, while the others are a manifestation of fullness.

We cannot be filled until we are first empty.

There are always two sides to the Gospel; there is a pulling down and a raising up.

When Simeon held Jesus in his arms, he said

***LK 2: 3-354 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."***

The fall comes before the rising again. An essential part of the Gospel is that conviction comes before conversion, the Gospel of Christ first condemns before it releases.

Therefore being poor in spirit is the foundation to everything else.

The Sermon on the Mount comes to us and says ‘There is a mountain that you have to scale, heights you have to climb; and the first thing you must realise as you look at this mountain which you MUST ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof that you have not understood it.

Before we get right into this let me say one more thing which is important.

Some would, using a parallel verse of Luke 6:20 which says:

***LK 6:20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.***

In reading this verse out of context some would argue that in this sermon Jesus is really saying blessed are those who are poor – or in poverty. In fact they would commend poverty.

The Bible never says that poverty as such is a good thing. The poor man is no nearer the kingdom than a rich man, naturally. There is no merit or advantage in being poor. So clearly the passage in Luke, and here does not mean that.

When you consider the whole paragraph in Luke, it is perfectly clear that Jesus is speaking of ‘poor’ as meaning ‘not being possessed by the worldly spirit’, poor in the sense, if you like, that you do not rely upon riches. The thing that is condemned is the reliance on riches.

In the beatitudes the Lord is concerned with the spirit; it is poverty of the spirit. In other words, it is ultimately a man’s attitude towards himself.

The world places great emphasis on its belief in self-reliance, self-confidence and self-expression! If you want to get on in the world, it says, believe in yourself.

It is self belief that controls our lives in this world. In the world’s eyes, what is the essence of a good salesmanship? It is giving the impression of confidence and assurance.

I often have to be like this in my day job as a police officer, because I get called to a situation that people expect I can deal with. I have to appear confident, I have to take control. It’s what we all expect.

If you want to succeed at something, you have to give the impression that you are more successful that you actually are.

Self-confidence, self-reliance and self-assurance.

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn called “Jesu, Lover of my soul”. Within it is a verse that says *“Just and Holy is thy name, I am all unrighteousness, Vile and full of sin I am, Thou art full of truth and grace.*

A few years ago, in the name of what he called Christianity a man ridiculed this verse and asked,

“What man desiring a post or job would dream of going to an employer and saying to him, “Vile and full of sin am I”? Ridiculous! He said.

This beatitude is not about men confronting men, but about men looking face to face with God.

If anyone feels anything other than utter poverty of spirit in the presence of Almighty God, it ultimately means that you have never faced Him. This is what this beatitude is about.

Needless to say it is not a popular beatitude in the church today, and many would say it is all to do with ‘personality’. In fact many leaders, preachers and teachers in the church today do not promote this, but rather promote themselves. We see their photos everywhere, their ministries are in their names, it is the man that is being advertised.

We are to be ‘poor in spirit’.

So having looked at the negatives, let us look more positively at this subject.

What does it mean to be ‘poor in spirit’?

Well, in keeping with the negatives for a moment, being poor in spirit is NOT:

That we should be shy, unobtrusive or nervous, nor does it mean that we have to be weak or lacking in courage.

There are certain people who come across this way, non assertive, and the church foolishly describes them as lacking personality.

It is nothing to do with ‘personality’. Personality is a natural thing, some have more than others. Some come across as being quite boring whilst others, over the top.

The beatitudes are not about natural tendencies, therefore to be ‘poor in spirit’ is not the way we were born. So let us get rid of that idea once and for all.

Neither are we to be, what I can best describe as an imitator of Uriah Heep.

**Uriah Heep** is a fictional character created by Charles Dickens in his novel David Copperfield. The character is notable for his sickly sweet humility, flattery and insincerity, making frequent references to his own "'humbleness". His name has become synonymous with being a yes man.

Its not about going around and telling everyone we meet that we are nobodies in the Church, unimportant. Anxious to let everyone know how humble we are.

That is certainly not how Paul sees it when he describes the Church as a body of different parts, dependent on each other.

Being ‘poor in spirit’ is not about suppressing our personality, or making a great sacrifice like a monk withdrawing from public life at great cost to himself. This is not biblical, we do not have to give up life in order to be poor in spirit.

Being poor in spirit – is spiritual!!

If those are the negatives, what are the positives?

To answer this let us look at the scriptures:

 ***ISA 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.***

This is the quality of spirit and we have many examples of it both the Old and the New Testaments.

Gideon – When the Lord sent an angel to him to tell him of the great thing he was about to do said

***JDG 6:15 "But Lord, " Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."***

This was not a man who was pretending to be humble, but one who truly believed what he said and shrank from the very thought of greatness and honour. To him it was incredible.

David – King of Israel said

***2SA 7:1-18-19 Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?***

In the NT we see

Peter, who was naturally aggressive, self-assertive and self-confident whom often we see Jesus rebuking, but when he truly see the Lord for who he is says:

 ***LK 5:8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"***

He never ceases to be a bold man. On the day of Pentecost it was Peter who addressed the crowd. Yet he was poor in spirit.

Paul – what a great man, he was fully aware of his natural talents and used them. But we see that the war he had to fight to the end of his life was that of pride. He often used to boast in his epistles about who he was. Yet having seen Christ on the road to Damascus this all became as ‘dung’ to him. He felt insufficient because he was poor in spirit.

But our greatest example of being poor in spirit is that of Jesus.

He took upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Although he was equal with God, he decided that whilst on earth he would remain as a man, saying:

***JN 14:10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.***

As we see Jesus praying we see him totally reliant of his father.

*Conclusion*

So what does it mean to be ‘poor in spirit’? It means a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and of self-reliance. It means a consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God.

It is nothing that we can produce; it is nothing we can do in ourselves.

It is just this tremendous awareness of our utter nothingness as we come face to face with God..

If we are truly Christians, we shall not rely on our natural birth or our families or our nationalities for who we are, we shall not build up our natural temperament. We shall not rely on money or wealth that we have, or any natural position in life, or our education. We shall not rely on our ‘personality’.

We need to do as Paul did in regard to these things – count them as nothing.

Despite what the world will say to us, we are utterly dependent on Him and His grace and mercy.

It is to experience something of what Isaiah experience when he saw his vision of God (Isa 6), he said: ***ISA 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."***

This does not mean that we should not contend with man for jobs or in competitions to win the prize, believing that we are a match for them in the natural world.

But when a person has some conception of God, he of necessity feels “as one dead” in the presence of Almighty God for it exposes any natural spirit that is in us to go out, because it is exposed in its smallness and weakness, its sinfulness.

Let us then, ask ourselves these questions as we close.

Am I like that, am I poor in spirit?

How do I really think about myself as I think of myself in terms of God, and in the presence of God?

Do we boast about ourselves.

The way to become poor in spirit is to look at God. Read the bible about him, read His law, look at what he expects from us, contemplate standing before him.

Look at the Lord Jesus and view him as we see him in the Gospels. The more we do that the more we will understand the reaction of the Apostles when, looking at him and something that He had just done, they said “Lord increase our faith” for they felt their faith was weak and so poor, it was as nothing.

The more we look at Him, the more hopeless shall we feel of ourselves, the more we shall become poor in spirit.

As we keep on looking the more we will see that we can do nothing of ourselves.

As we keep on looking at Him, and the men of God used by Him, we will see that it is all of Him and nothing of us.

Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling.

We are empty, hopeless, naked, vile. But HE IS the all-sufficient One –

Yea, all I need, in thee to find, O Lamb of God I come.

Amen