

Last Sunday, when Jesus began to preach to the crowds, we heard Him say, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” Today, as He begins to teach His disciples, we hear Him repeat these words in this way, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

To repent is to be poor in spirit. For those who repent, the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. So close, that it is within their grasp. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them. It is given to them. It is theirs.

Here we have, in these few words of Jesus, the entire doctrine of salvation. To hear these words from the mouth of Jesus, to believe them, acting upon them, is to be saved. Indeed, the word *blessed* here can be translated *saved*. “*Saved are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

And so I ask, are you poor in spirit? If you are, saved are you, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to you. If you are not poor in spirit, there is yet hope. For Jesus’ words have the power to convert crowds into disciples, unrepentant sinners into repentant sinners, to convert the rich in spirit into the poor in spirit.

I don’t think we care much for the word poor. Who wants to be poor? Poor in possessions, poor in health, poor in reputation. We may not care all that much if we are rich in these things, but we certainly do not want to be poor in them.

We know people, or of people, who are poor. Being poor is being destitute; not having what you need, let alone what you want. To be poor is to be beggarly; having to depend completely upon others. And so we strive not to be poor whether in possessions, health, or reputation and honor. We work hard in all these things to avoid ever becoming poor.

It can take some mental gymnastics to draw a line between being poor in all these things and being poor in spirit. Being poor in spirit is entirely different from being poor in possessions, health, and reputation. Someone can be rich in all these things and still be a disciple of Jesus. But one cannot be His disciple who is rich in spirit.

Even though being poor in spirit is very different from being poor in every other way, the word poor means the same thing no matter how it is used. In fact, to grasp what it means to be poor in other things helps us immensely to understand what it means to be poor in spirit.

It means being destitute. It means being beggarly. Having to depend completely upon another, namely upon God. One who is poor in spirit freely admits that he does not have the resources he needs to attain to the kingdom of heaven; that he does not have what it takes to even be a disciple of Jesus.

A word of warning here for us is necessary. Sinful pride kills a poor spirit. Pride is fatal to one who is called to be a disciple of Jesus. And we are all born with such pride. You have it and I have it, for we are born in sin.

And this sinful pride within us detests being poor in spirit. It detests having to admit failure and defeat. It absolutely detests being destitute before God, living day after day before Him as nothing more than a beggar.

Yet this is what the word poor means here in the Greek. It means to be a beggar. “Nothing in my hands I bring,” we sing, “simply to Thy cross I cling.” That’s a beggar – having empty hands. Your works of love, your offerings, these can and do help others, but they cannot help you. God wants our hands to be full of good works for those around us. But when we hold out our hands toward Him, they need to be empty; they need to be the hands of a beggar. We cannot cling to Jesus’ cross if our hands are full of ourselves and what we have done. If, in other words, we are rich in spirit.

Yet it is impossible for us to let go of ourselves. We cannot admit that we are failures, that our sins and weaknesses defeat us day in and day out. One who is rich in spirit cannot turn himself into one who is poor in spirit.

And so Jesus, who was rich in everything, became poor for our sake. He opened His hands to the nails on the cross to remove, from our hands, what our pride has put there. Because we refuse to let go of ourselves, He let go of Himself, giving Himself up unto death for you and me.

And so, you my friend, are forgiven. You are truly forgiven. For Jesus’ sake God freely and fully forgives all your sins. He forgives even your sins of pride.

Yet our sinful pride is at work in us daily. But so is our baptism. Baptism is pure grace and forgiveness. And it has the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Where sinful pride raises its ugly head within us, God’s grace in our baptism more than abounds to put pride back into its place.

To live in this grace is to be poor in spirit. It is to have empty hands toward God. Hands that He daily fills with His rich grace toward us. He gives you everything you need. You are a beggar, this is true, but you are a beggar before God. And so, He gives you forgiveness, life, salvation, yes, the kingdom of heaven.

“*Blessed are the poor in spirit*” is not a command. It is not a demand that God makes of you. It is, rather, what He has done for you. It is who you are in Christ now and forever. Amen.