

The Mind of Christ - Lesson 67

August 14, 2020

Lesson 54 The Sermon on the Mount

Welcome to another edition of The Mind of Christ. We have been studying this for a year and a half to a year and three quarters. We're well into this study that takes us deeply into the life of Christ and everything He did and everything He said. I titled this study "The Challenger Deep" because we go deeply into The Mind of Christ. "Challenger deep" is the deepest hole in the ocean and so I thought it would be a great metaphor to use in studying the mind of Christ.

We're glad you have joined us. We're well into the study, but we have archived many of the videos and we also have archived transcripts going back quite a ways in this study if you care to go back and look at those. Much of our materials can be accessed through our website at <https://www.centernalsarasota.org/> and we invite you to join us there.

I've been following A. T. Robertson's "Harmony of the Gospels", the chronological sequence of the life of Christ so we are in what he calls '**Section 54**'. It is moving into the Sermon on the Mount. I think you will know if you know anything about the Sermon on the Mount since it encompasses Matthew 5 through Matthew 7 and then parts of Luke 6 that this is a large section. So you can just *go ahead and settle in* because for the next several months we will be in the Sermon on the Mount. It's a very challenging sermon to say the least.

We're going to read a section here. I'm not going to read all of the Sermon on the Mount in preparation for this; only sections of it. But I would have you note that there is a smaller version of the Sermon on the Mount in **Luke 6:17-49** and we will bring that into the discussion when it is appropriate ... when it parallels with Matthew. Matthew will be our primary text for the Sermon on the Mount.

I want to read a brief section of the Sermon on the Mount, just a few verses of it to kind of get us going here. In **Matthew 5:1** we read, "[When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying ...](#)" Then there are a number of short phrases that begin with the word "Blessed". We often call them "The Beatitudes". And so the first one is in **Matthew 5:3** "[Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.](#)" That's the one that is going to capture our attention for this particular session. So, we're going to dive into the Sermon on the Mount.

I almost tremble at the thought of tackling this sermon, not only because of the time I will take, but because of the depth I must ascend into to understand the mind of Christ. This section will dominate my thinking for some time to come. My prayer is that Jesus will use this message to change me in dramatic ways. My goal and method is intended by the sermon, to put each part, each truth and principle into practice as I go, as I study each part. By this, my house will be built and the storm will not be able to shake it. I'm referring there how He ends the sermon by the parable of the winds blowing against our house, and putting into practice the things that we are hearing.

Our method should be that as we learn something from the Sermon on the Mount, we put it into practice as soon as possible *so that* when the storms do come, they will not blow our house down.

I will also compare and blend Matthew's larger account with Luke's shorter version. The first observation was from Luke's setting. Jesus had been awake for more than 24 hours before He delivered this message. He had ministered all the preceding day and He stayed up all night praying. He spent part of the morning selecting and appointing the twelve. He then spent considerable time as He came down the mount at a level place healing diseases and casting out demons. What I'm saying here is that we need to understand the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has been up all night, he selected his Apostles, He has been healing and been teaching people all morning, and *then* He begins to deliver this message.

That is when He delivers what has often been called "the constitution of the Christian religion." And He did it all, it seems, without notes. He did it all from His heart because He understood what God had placed in His heart to teach and preach and share with us. That demonstrates the character and the nature of God Himself. The crowd consisted of the twelve, a great multitude of His disciples and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal regions of Tyre and Sidon. Matthew simply says that He saw the multitudes. Luke says He trained His gaze to His disciples and He began to speak.

So maybe there was a multitude of people, but His disciples were closer in to Him. Everyone could hear what He was saying but He was really training himself on the disciples.

It seems His audience includes the twelve, many other disciples, Jews from Judea and Jerusalem, and Jews and Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon. So, there is quite a crowd here and quite a diversity of people who were hearing the Sermon on the Mount.

Was there something about the crowd that prompted the sermon? Was it His way to launch the new phase of the ministry now that He had chosen twelve to be very close to Him and to be trained specifically to be the apostles? Or did the occasion not matter but rather the need to reveal His Father through this profound sermon?

Matthew says, "**And opening His mouth He began to teach them**". How could these very special people know that they were in the *right place, at the right time, to hear the most important address of all times*, greater than the Gettysburg Address, or any State of the Union message, or King's speech "I have a dream"? This is the *premier* message of all time. This is more important than the receiving of the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai. This is greater than any proclamation that has ever been made. It is called **the Sermon on the Mount**.

The first word of both Matthew and Luke in the Sermon on the Mount is the word *blessed*. The word in Greek is Makarios (μακαριος) and it means to be supremely blessed, to be fortunate, to be well off, to be happy or happier. It is those receiving God's favor regardless of the circumstances. So what is the significance of this word "blessed"?

When I wrote this in 2011, I had been in a “critical incident stress management” training and the purpose of this training is to help the participants to assist others in maintaining their balance or their homeostasis during and after a disturbing event called a “critical incident”. Many things in life can upset our well-being. Our sense of blessedness is often disturbed, sometimes profoundly, so we even despair of life itself. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus will use this powerful word and concept to emphasize His desire for those who follow Him? He came to help people in body, soul and spirit to be and maintain their blessedness.

The opposite is to be “cursed”. In Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 we have the treatment of the blessings and the cursings for the children of Israel. They were to be read yearly ... from Mount Gerizim where they read the blessings, and from Mount Ebal where they read the cursings. These are the blessings and the cursings regarding the Law of Moses; blessings for those who keep the law and curses for those who do not.

In **Deuteronomy 27:15-26** we have a list of offenses that bring about curses. The man who makes an idol, moves a boundary stone, misleads a blind person, distorts justice to an alien or an orphan or a widow, or someone who lies with his father’s wife or uncovering His father’s skirt {dishonors his father’s bed}, those who participate in bestiality or incest or violence or bribery or in any way that they do not keep the law, are ***under the curse of God***.

The ***blessings are reserved for those who diligently obey God***. The blessings touch locations and offspring, commerce, food supply, defeating our enemies, etc. ... the blessings have a lot of different applications under the law of Moses. We will talk a little bit more on what a curse looks like later, but there is much to be learned about our well-being. This is the central message of blessedness – it is well-being.

The curses touch locations, sustenance, fertility, and health, both physical and mental, pestilence, drought, military defeat, sometimes called bewilderment of heart, plans not coming to fruition, helplessness, and maybe even being driven mad by the sight of what you see. It talks about exile, idolatry, and crop failure. All these things are associated with the curse. In **Deuteronomy 28:47** it says that because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things, there is a curse. And in **Deuteronomy 28:58** it says if you are not careful to observe all the words of the law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name of the Lord your God then there is a curse. He speaks of a trembling heart, failing eyes, despair of the soul so that your life will hang in doubt before you, and you shall be in dread night and day and shall have no assurance of your life. This is description of the opposite of well-being. These curses are terrible, all-encompassing, and a consequence of failing to obey with a joyful heart. How do we understand this in light of the Sermon on the Mount?

First, these blessings and cursings were made to the Jews in the context of a ‘covenant with God’; therefore the specifics should be applied thusly.

Secondly, the purpose was to provide incentives to obey and disincentives to disobey.

Thirdly, could we extract from this a general rule like in Proverbs? If we are joyfully obeying God we will generously enjoy His blessings and avoid His cursings and that this principle holds true in all of life.

Fourthly, does this set us up to ask, ‘why do bad things happen to good people’ and why do good things happen to bad people?’ Much of life’s experiences seem to cut across the grain. We see David struggle with this in the book of Psalms. We see it in the book of Habakkuk where he raised questions and certainly in the book of Job where he just simply could not figure out this idea of what is blessings and what is cursings.

Might we think of these blessings and cursings as tools in God’s toolbox and only He knows how to apply them. **When, where, why** and **how** ... we merely learn how to respond with a willing and joyful heart.

I’m particularly interested in the word or descriptions of the cursings of the mind that are found in **Deuteronomy 28** and I want to run through some of those because I believe we need to see a contrast between the cursings on one hand and the blessings on the other hand. In **Deuteronomy 28:20** he talks about **confusion** is part of the cursings. David describes his state of mind in **Psalm 55:2** when he says, “Give heed to me and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and am **surely distracted**”. To verse 5 he describes it like a panic attack or severe anxiety, “Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me.” There is restlessness, heart anguish, fear and trembling, and overwhelming horror from something that is going on in his life.

That is so descriptive, I believe, of many things that we experience when we are ‘not well’, when our being is ‘not well’. When it is ‘not well with our soul’ we experience things that we would describe as panic attacks. God says that that is part of the cursings.

In **Deuteronomy 7:23** and discussing God’s removal of the nations in Canaan, part of God’s strategy is to throw these people into great confusion. And when the Philistines captured the ark of God, the Lord caused great confusion followed by tumors, it says, or a deadly confusion. The heavy hand of the Lord is spoken of in **1 Samuel 5:9** and following. **Isaiah 22:5** speaks of a day of panic and subjugation and confusion in the Valley of Vision. **Ezekiel 22:5** speaks of a city full on turmoil. Amos speaks of the great tumults in the Mount of Samaria. And then, in **Proverbs 15:16** we read, “**Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and turmoil with it.**” So you can have great treasure and you can still be very disturbed in your spirit and you can have great confusion. So, **confusion** is one of the words that talk about the state of mind when a person is not under the blessing.

In **Deuteronomy 28:28** it says the Lord will smite you with **madness** and with **blindness** and with **bewilderment of heart**. Could blindness here be more mental and emotional instead of physical? I have no reference for these words but let them stand at ‘face value’. Verse 34 adds, “**They shall be driven mad by the sights that they see.**” Is this something of psychosis; is there some mental illness involved in this? But a similar passage is **28:65**, “... **but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul.**” Trembling is the word “shebet” in the Hebrew. It means a branch off, or a rod, or scepter, it can even be a tribe or a branch off of something. I’m not sure of the connection (I guess I should have taken Hebrew when I was in school so I would know more about these things). But these are instructive to understand that the cursings affect our mind, the way we think. And then in **28:66** we see, “**So your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you will be in dread night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life.**”

Just think about how that describes so much of what people go through. The word dread is “pachad” meaning alarm, fear, or terror. It often uses the words ‘sudden terror’, certainly an anxiety reaction, a stress response to something that can’t be controlled. These terms connected with cursings indicate a disrupted state of mind. Jesus wants to bring blessings to the disruptive state of mind that we often find ourselves in.

And so the first Beatitude ... The word “Blessed” comes from the Latin word “Beatus”, meaning happy or blissful which is different from “blessed” when it comes to ‘benedictus’. Benedictus is the participle form and it is only of God. So when we talk of certain blessings, we’re talking of God. The adjective form of “Beatus” is used of men recognizing their state of happiness, an approving proclamation of fact.

So there is a blessedness that applies to God where He is **blessed** or **blessed**. And then there is a blessedness that applies to man. One blessedness kind of blessed is reserved for God alone; another kind of blessed is reserved or includes man. The idea of our blessedness is a form of congratulations or it is slightly different in that it’s a word you can imagine if you’re being congratulated for something you have done, something that you have accomplished, and you feel blessed to have been able to accomplish something or to do something. There is a blessedness that comes in that.

The first one is **Matthew 5:3** “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. **Luke 6:20** says, “Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.” So Matthew and Luke have a little different take on what is actually being said. The first difference is that Matthew speaks in ‘third person’ and Luke speaks in ‘second person’. Luke indicates that Jesus is speaking directly to the *poor in his audience*, while Matthew is *more generic of any poor*.

Secondly, Matthew’s focus is on the poor in spirit. Luke is simply talking about ‘the poor’. The same word “poor” is used in both Matthew and Luke. It’s the word that means ‘to crouch’. It’s a beggar, someone who is perhaps cringing, or someone who is a pauper; or one who is distressed. It means to cower. It is one who is destitute of the necessities of daily life. Certainly, a mere lack of resources is not all that is contemplated here. He’s not just simply talking about people who have a lack of resources.

Poverty does not always mean a person is virtuous, but the lack of personal resources tends to make the path to happiness or joy easier than one who is rich; and that doesn’t seem right and we’ll talk about the paradox of this later. This is a theme of Jesus’ teaching. So even though Luke does not say ‘poor in spirit’, we should not conclude that there is inherent virtue in being materially poor. So, just because someone is materially poor does not mean that they are virtuous. Though material poverty may make the way to it; that is ‘virtue’, and it may make it less complicated than if they were materially rich.

The third difference is Matthew says the Kingdom of Heaven and Luke says the Kingdom of God. There is really no significant difference in meaning, but indicates the text is not quoting Jesus per se.

Then in **Luke 14:13-14** Jesus says we will be blessed if we invite the poor and the crippled and the lame and the blind instead of friends, brothers, relatives or rich neighbors. “But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,¹⁴ and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Blessing or repayment comes at the resurrection of the righteous. Could this then be that our current happiness is in *some* part in anticipation of our future blessing? So it’s not simply we’re blessed now if we’re poor in spirit, but we’re anticipating future blessing because of poverty of spirit now.

In the next parable in **Luke 14:16- 24**, there were certain ones invited to a dinner but they had excuses for why they could not attend. All of the invited had some wealth or privilege, and so the poor, the crippled, the blind and lame were invited next because those who were privileged declined. In this parable, the first invites were given to the Jews. “Jews first” remember, and secondly to the Gentiles, or to the Greeks. Of course, here the emphasis is on those who had enough *poverty of spirit* to know that they needed to come to the banquet.

In **Luke 16:19** the story contrasts the rich man and the poor man who was named Lazarus. This story has the same intent and meaning. And then, in **John 9:8**, the blind man is called a beggar. In **Matthew 19:21** the young and rich ruler was told to “sell his possessions and give them to the poor”.

But the focus is on “*poor in spirit*”. Jesus’ answer to John’s disciples was that the evidence, or at least one, was that the poor have the gospel preached to them. Some recognize their poverty and desire to hear the rich words of Jesus. Some notes on **Luke 14:18** go back to a study I did way back on December 31, 2010 in a previous study that we did.

Some have gone to the extremes of taking a vow of poverty. One site describes the modern day vow more like pure communism where income resources are made available to the group and all share to have their needs met. The Sisters of Mercy order; you can go to their website which explains what this looks like today.

There **is** something in our souls, at least in mine that desires to live more simply, to have less clutter, to be more intentional and focus on what is important and not fill life up with so many things. A day-by-day existence appeals to me in many ways, but is this what “poverty of spirit” is really about; or merely a symptom of a deeper longing? Perhaps “poverty of spirit” is a deep humility that begins in one’s spirit. *The spirit is what is uniquely you*. So, to feel poor in spirit means that I am poor – not simply that I lack goods; my poverty is real no matter how much money I have.

Does the spirit begin poor as a baby does? When God places a spirit within a person is that spirit poverty stricken, but through time as the personality emerges we are able to think, and feel and to know what we think and feel we lose that sense of poverty? Do we become a beggar who is psychotic and out of touch with reality and pretend to be a king? The reality is that we are born dependent and we remain dependent, but acts sometimes as if we are independent. It is also true that in our dependence God provides all we need for life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3). And we are truly rich in Him.

But if we can be convinced that God does *not* provide what we need, and He is *not* good and He is *not* powerful, then we feel that we are lacking; and then we seek our own provisions elsewhere. ***This was the first temptation.*** Satan convinced Adam and Eve that God was withholding some good and needed provisions from them and that it would have to be obtained by disobedience. That's what the first man and woman did; they disobeyed God thinking they could obtain something through their disobedience.

Man, all of us, including me, has been falling for this ever since. God, help me to know I have through Jesus returned to the Garden to dwell with Jesus and need nothing. Help me to believe You have fulfilled all my needs in Jesus and that I lack no good thing. May this seep into my soul from your well-spring and may my spirit recognize that the more I seek to fulfill my needs in illegitimate ways, the more poverty stricken I have become. Help me to believe that. ***Help me to be content in the garden You created without trying to rearrange it or to improve upon it.*** Help me to accept the paradox that when I am weak then I am really strong. When I am poor, I am actually rich.

The idea of poverty of soul still fascinates me. The word intrinsic comes to mind ... ***belonging to the essential nature or constitution of a thing.*** That's what intrinsic means. It is often used with the word 'value'. Intrinsic value ... a gem has intrinsic value. It doesn't gain its value from an outside source although it did not create itself. In one sense, does anything exist intrinsically? The idea from my college days of "necessary and contingent beings" **God alone is necessary** in that He **cannot** 'not' exist. He **must** exist or nothing would exist. And if something does not exist, then it has no intrinsic worth or use. So, on this level, only God is of intrinsic value or nature. And man has no intrinsic value but conferred value. Man is totally dependent on God; body, soul and spirit. So, in reality, **all** spirits are poor. So what does Jesus mean?

It must be that those who acknowledge the reality of this impoverished spirit will have the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God for their own. We are much happier people when we relax in the reality of our utter dependence on God ... not just physically for our lives connected to this earth, but in our very spirit; a spirit God gave and can extinguish as easily as He gave it. We exist at God's will and pleasure. ***Carrying the knowledge within us, and living accordingly, may be the single most important point of our relationship with God.***

How would this change how we relate to the Father and to one another if we believed this wholeheartedly? It should create an unwavering dependence and worship and humility that would change everything! It would root out all pride. It would eliminate all feelings of being better than anyone because of who I am or what I have done. ***Status and accomplishment cannot change for a second my utter dependence on the Father who creates and sustains my life.*** Amen and amen.

What are the outcomes of such an understanding of life? They say 'theirs' or 'yours' is the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. It is something that becomes ours. It is something that is mine. What does it mean for a person 'poor in spirit' to possess the Kingdom? Surely it means more than church membership. The very power and authority of God to create and sustain our lives is the reality of the power in spirit and now He promises

us an ownership or participation in that same power and authority. Since we possess eternal life and possess the Spirit of God, we now have within ourselves the power and authority to order our lives according to Kingdom principles taught by the Son of God Himself.

The Kingdom truths correspond to the ‘poor in spirit’, the person and the frame of his existence. Jesus demonstrated “Kingdom living” in the flesh so as we move through the life of Christ these Kingdom principles can be noted. The impoverished spirit learns to live as a king by conferred authority and power.

As the father told the older brother, “My child, you have always been with me and all that is mine is yours” **Luke 15:31**. Here, ***the proud and arrogant son could have been enjoying Kingdom living but he missed it.*** The younger son missed it too, until he became poor in spirit and then he found what he long-sought and it had been always there all along.

So much time and energy is spent in trying to gain that which is immediately available to us. We stay enslaved when we could be ***kings!*** “You are already kings” Paul said once in **1 Corinthians 4:8**. But the door to the Kingdom is, as Jesus taught us, or taught Nicodemus the new birth, recognizing our helpless state (Romans 5). Our utter dependence is on the Father who gives us life. Whether ‘Heaven’ or ‘God’ does not matter since they are the same. One indicates **place**; and the other **person** but the place **is** the person. ***Heaven indicates elevation***; and by implication happiness, power, eternity, gospel, certainly distinct from earth and his gravitational pull to pride.

Last night in a small group the concept of oneness in John 17 was discussed. To show the value of group discussion it was the first comment that focused the group on the essential nature of oneness. That is to surrender. The Biblical word would be the word submission or subjection. Only those who have poverty of spirit would do this; laying down pride without fear, but this is primarily surrender to the Father, and secondarily, surrender to one another. But think about how paradoxical this is.

The path to kingdom power and authority living is ‘poverty of spirit’. The counter ***self nature*** of this Sermon has been noted by many people. In James Newby’s article, “Dancing with Paradox” he notes four paradoxes that he has discovered in Scripture, each one very unique.

One is the paradox of growth. ***The more you grow spiritually, the further from spiritual perfection you realize that you are.*** That is a paradox. The more you grow, the more you realize you need to grow.

The paradox of spiritual enlightenment is ***the more enlightened you become as an adult, the more childlike will be your wisdom.***

Then there is the paradox of knowing and mystery. If you are ***to know the living God, you must learn to be comfortable with the mystery of God.***

And then there is the paradox of love. ***The more love you want to experience, the more love you must give away.***

Another article, the Christian Paradox, “How a Faithful Nation gets Jesus Wrong” by Bill McKibben in Harper magazine, August 2005 is of interest on this though the paradox is more about the difference between what we profess and what we actually do.

So could it be that the deep truths of the Sermon on the Mount could be understood as paradox, and what does this tell us about the Teacher of these truths? Is God paradoxical in nature, or does he merely use paradox to cut through our paradoxical nature, or our double-mindedness as **James 1** says so we can see what is true, what is real and central to Jesus’ life? I do know that paradox is challenging. I want to possess the Kingdom. And this appeals to me. But the means to this end, poverty of spirit, does not naturally in my flesh, appeal to me. I want to be rich; but God says if you want to be rich and you want to possess the Kingdom of God you must become poor. It’s a paradox ... a paradox.

How do I live in poverty of spirit so that I can possess the Kingdom of God? How can I become a servant so that I can rule and reign with God? It’s a paradox. But understanding poverty of spirit and living in that poverty of spirit, that total dependence on God daily, is what Jesus is teaching in this first beatitude.

Well, I’m challenged. I hope you are. So let’s go and live out this week the application of poverty of spirit so that when the winds come, and the rains fall, our house will stand.

God bless you for another week. I hope you will visit <https://www.centralsarasota.org/> and where you will find many resources and much information on how you can be a part of all the things that we’re involved in at Central.

God Bless.