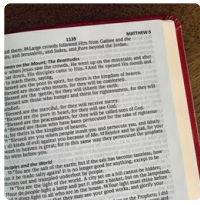


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Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit



The Beatitudes - Steve Gregg

In this lecture, Steve Gregg explores the meaning behind the first of the eight Beatitudes - "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Drawing from Old and New Testament scripture, he delves into the concept of a contrite and repentant spirit, emphasizing the importance of humility and the dangers of excessive self-esteem. He ultimately concludes that it is only by humbling oneself and receiving grace that one can truly find happiness and fulfillment in this life and in the afterlife.

Transcript

Tonight, we're going to be looking at the first of the eight Beatitudes that are collected in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. I say collected because it is my suspicion that what Matthew has done is collected Beatitudes that Jesus uttered on a variety of occasions and put them in one place. I could be wrong, and no one really knows for sure. It's just one theory.

We know that there is another group of Beatitudes, similar but not identical, in Luke 6, beginning at verse 20. And the differences of that group of Beatitudes are as many as the similarities. And it's like many things in the Synoptic Gospels, where one Gospel writer records an event or a saying from the life of Jesus, and another Gospel writer seems to record the same event and same saying, but the details are different.

It raises what is called the Synoptic Problem. We won't get into that tonight, but the resolution of it can be multiple. Sometimes we could say, well, Jesus did similar things on more than one occasion.

Matthew records one of the occasions, and Mark or Luke, a different occasion. That accounts for the differences. In the case of the Beatitudes and the differences between the list in Matthew 5 and the list in Luke 6, it has been suggested that the difference exists because Matthew has collected the sayings of Jesus and grouped them into topical arrangements.

He has done this, we know, in some chapters of Matthew, and it seems to be fairly typical of Matthew to do so. And so I'm not sure, and it wouldn't make a difference if I

knew or didn't know. It really makes no difference whether this is the case or not, but I believe that we have probably a collection of Beatitudes spoken on more than one occasion and collected here by Matthew.

If your opinion is different than that, it will make absolutely no practical difference to us. But there are a larger number of Beatitudes in this passage than any other one place in Scripture, and there are eight here. Let me read them again, all of them, as we did last time, so we might get sort of the whole scope of what Jesus is saying in the passage from beginning to end, because it is really a... it is a complete paragraph of thought.

In verse 3 of Matthew 5, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. As I pointed out last time, each of these statements begins with a pronouncement of blessedness or blissfulness or happiness or fortunateness or enviableness that accrues to a certain category of people.

There are eight such statements, but there are not eight different categories. The category is those who are the citizens of the kingdom of God. And this we can deduce from many things.

Common sense itself would probably tell us this, but we can see that each of these beatitudes, not only it contains a statement of blessedness, but gives a reason, a rationale, as it were, for the proclamations these people are happy. It is not at all obvious in some cases why such people described would be happy. Why would a person mourning be described as happy? Why would a persecuted person be described as happy? Well, there is a good reason.

Jesus isn't just speaking in mysterious things that can never be made sense of. He makes perfectly good sense of every statement. Those who mourn are happy because they'll be comforted.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteous are happy because they will be filled, satisfied. Those who are persecuted for righteous sake, they're happy because they possess the kingdom of heaven. Now, these different blessings that accrue to these different statements really are all the conglomerate, or not a conglomerate, but a gathered group of saints that apply to the same people, the followers of Jesus, who are

citizens of the kingdom of God.

And that is sort of indicated by the literary device of having the first and the last beatitude end the same way. Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who are persecuted, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

All the ones in between are different as far as what their blessing is, but he sort of brings it around to a literary whole by coming back to the first step again in the last statement. So we are going to proceed in our studies on the assumption that the people described are one people. There's not a group of people over here who are poor in spirit, and there's another group over there that are meek, and here's some over here that are peacemakers.

But the citizens of the kingdom, ideally, they fit all of these descriptions. These are the traits of kingdom citizens, and the blessings that are described, that is the rewards or the reasons that they are blessed, are also they all belong to every citizen of the kingdom of God. Certainly we could not argue that some Christians will be called the children of God, and some will not.

And some Christians will see God, and some will not. And some Christians will be satisfied, but some will never be satisfied. And some will have the kingdom of heaven, and some will not.

Obviously, all of these things that are said about these people accrue to all believers who fit these descriptions. Now, I'm going to suggest to you that these descriptions are descriptions of genuine disciples. Now, you might say, well, you know, I know some people in church, they're a little bit this way, but they don't contain some of these traits.

Well, true Christians, I believe, possess all of these traits in measure. Some Christians are more eminent in one trait than another. But I don't believe that you can truly be a Christian if all of these things are not true of you in some measure.

And to the greater measure, or the greater this measure is in us, the more it is true that we are happy in the sense that Jesus speaks of it. And I said last time that the happiness of which he speaks is not something that is the happiness of this world. Jesus said that he came to give his disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives.

Likewise, Jesus came to bring a happiness to people, but it's not a happiness such as the world gives. In fact, the very people that he declares to be happy are the ones that the world would call pitiable in many cases. And certainly it is the case that many times the world looks on someone who is an uncompromising follower of Jesus and says, what a shame, how much he's missing out on.

But Jesus says, no, he's not missing out on anything of value. And those who are not in his shoes are missing out on the only thing that will matter to them ultimately, whether

or not they possess the kingdom of God. Later in the same sermon in Matthew chapter six, Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other necessary things will be added unto you.

And therefore the kingdom of God is presented by Jesus as that ultimate value, that ultimate desirable thing to possess. And he describes here the persons who possess it. Therefore, we could argue that those who do not fit these descriptions do not possess it.

Now you might say, well, that's going further than Jesus goes on this. I mean, Jesus doesn't say that only the poor in spirit will possess the kingdom. Only those who are meek will inherit the earth.

Well, he doesn't say that here necessarily, but as you look at some of these, it's very clear that when he says, for example, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy from the whole teaching of Jesus. And of the scripture, we know that only the merciful will obtain mercy. They and they only will obtain mercy.

How do we know that? Jesus says later in chapter six, if you don't forgive others, you will not be forgiven. James picking up this passage from, uh, from the sermon on the Mount says judgment will be without mercy for him that has showed no mercy. In other words, only the merciful shall obtain mercy.

Only the poor in spirit possess the kingdom of God. Those who are not poor in spirit do not only the pure in heart. She'll see God.

The writer of Hebrews tells us this. It says, pursue peace with all men and holiness without which no man will see the Lord. Those who are not pure in heart will not see the Lord.

So he's not just saying these people will. And so will some others. He's saying these people and only these people will.

And that being so, when he says, let's start the pure in heart for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In keeping with the trend of the, of all the statements we could, we should, would not be going too far to suggest that only the poor in spirit possess the kingdom of heaven. That is one who is lacking in this trait simply does not possess the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of God has not been obtained by that person. Now, of course, that raises a powerful incumbency on us that we, that we discover what it means to be poor in spirit, just in case we aren't or, you know, to discover what direction we go from here to fit this description. What, what after all, does it mean poor in spirit? I've been acquainted with the Beatitudes since my childhood.

I've always loved them. I've grown to love them more as I've gotten older and become

more familiar with their meaning. But I remember from childhood when I read, blessed are the poor in spirit.

It seemed to me like that statement was not quite worded correctly because I knew that by saying poor in spirit, he didn't mean materially poor. He could have said blessed are the poor as by the way he did in another place in Luke six, 20 blessed are ye poor for yours is the kingdom of God. But that's not how Matthew represents it.

This was apparently a different Beatitude utter on a different occasion or else Matthew, but through the Holy spirit understood that this is what Jesus meant when he said, blessed are you poor in any case, the modifier of spirit, poor in spirit makes it clear. He's not talking about those who are materially poor, but poor in some other sense. Now, when I was younger, I thought, well, okay, you've got material things.

You can be richer, poor in those things. Those who have a lot of material things are rich in material things. Those who have very few are poor.

I presume there must be a parallel reality in spiritual things. Those who have many of them, what many spiritual things would be rich in spirit. And those have few spiritual qualities would be poor in spirit.

And I thought that that doesn't seem right because it seems like Jesus should say, blessed are those who are rich in spirit because spiritual things are value in the kingdom of God. Spiritual virtue is something that Jesus advocates. Why would he say those who are poor in spirit? And I, I came to realize much later from comparing scripture scripture that he did not mean to say those who lack in spiritual qualities, the poor in spirit are not those who lack in spiritual qualities.

As for example, those who are poor materially lack in material things. It's a, it's a Hebrewism, a phrase that comes actually from the old Testament as all the beatitudes do, by the way, every one of the beatitudes essentially is found in the old Testament in a, in either exactly the same form or one's very similar. And the idea of being poor in spirit is something that Jesus did not originate the phrase, although he only used it one time to our knowledge in his teaching.

And that was here. We can find no other place in the teaching of Jesus, nor in the new Testament at all that the term poor in spirit is found. However, the phrase, like I said, similar to all the beatitudes is simply a restatement of something in the old Testament.

I have searched the old Testament for the background of this statement for, for some time. And there's one verse in particular that strikes me as the source of the expression poor in spirit. And that is Isaiah 66 verse two.

Now I was, I'm most familiar with some of the scripture I can show you in the King James version. I'm currently using the new King James. And I've found that in some cases, the

wording is, is different.

And, uh, and yet I have looked up all the words in the Hebrew and the Greek in preparation tonight, uh, that I'm going to make reference to so that, uh, whether your translation, uh, is the same as the one I'm using or not, I will, I will tell you what the word actually means in the Hebrew. Not that I pretend to be Hebrew scholar, but anyone can look these things up. Uh, as long as you're can read English, uh, in Isaiah chapter 66 verses one and two, God said, this is what the Lord says.

Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build me? And where is the place of my rest for all those things? My hand has made and all those things exist, says the Lord, but on this one, will I look? And he means look with favor, look with approval on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit and who trembles at my word. Now the translation I'm reading says him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, but the word of in the sentence can be placed elsewhere.

As for example, the new American standard does. Now the new American standard, I think doesn't use the word poor, but some other synonym here, but the translation can read like this. He that is poor and contrite of spirit, the person is poor of spirit and contrite of spirit, or as Jesus put poor in spirit, a person is, is poor of spirit.

Now, even that is not self-explanatory, although it is connected with the word contrite. The person who is of a poor spirit is of a contrite spirit. Now that word is a good Bible word that most people in modern English have never used.

What does contrite mean? The literal meaning of the Hebrew word contrite means crushed, small, broken into tiny pieces. And it is of course a metaphor. Uh, the Bible speaks of a broken and a contrite spirit in other passages or a humble and a contrite spirit.

But God always is, uh, shows his approval for a contrite spirit, which is, uh, according to the figure of speech used, uh, repentant spirit, basically broken before God, broken over the sense of guilt and unworthiness before God. Now, as we can see in Isaiah, he that is of a poor spirit or poor of spirit is in some sense connected to him. That is of a contrite spirit, though that doesn't explain it all.

Uh, in fact, he also describes the person there as the one who trembles at my word. That's a very favorite expression of mine in the old Testament, although it doesn't necessarily connect to the meaning of poor in spirit. It obviously is, uh, a trait that is consistent with being poor in spirit.

We get more understanding, I think, of what is meant by this. When we look at a very similar passage, also in Isaiah, a similar phrase, not identical, but close enough coming from the same writer to, uh, for us to conclude that he has the same basic thoughts in

mind. And that is an Isaiah 57 and verse 15.

God says in Isaiah 57, 15 for thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place with him who has a contrite and a humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Now, the similarities between this statement and the one in Isaiah 66, two are more than one.

One thing that we see similar is both places talk about where God lives. Both these places give us God's address in Isaiah 66. God says, heaven is my throne.

Earth is my foot. So what house are you going to put about for me to live in? I'll tell you where I'll live. I'll tell you where I, where I am comfortable.

I'll tell you who I approve. The one who is of a poor and a contrite spirit. Okay.

Now he says, the same thought is in view. The wording is only slightly different. He says, I dwell in the high and lofty place.

That's what he said in Isaiah 66, one, I heaven is my throne, but he has two dwelling places. One is heaven in the loftiest of places. And he also draws in the lowest of places in the lowliest of hearts.

He, that is of a poor and contrite spirit, Isaiah 66 says, but Isaiah 57 says, he, that is a humble and a contrite spirit or a contrite and a humble spirit. Notice the phrase is similar. The idea is the same, but the word poor of spirit is substituted with humble of spirit.

Now this is not very surprising, although there's a different Hebrew word here, humble than there is in Isaiah 66, where it says poor yet. Uh, I looked up the principal Hebrew words for poor in the course of preparing for this and found that the Hebrew words for poor, and there are a few of them, all of them seem to have kind of a range of meaning, meaning poor, afflicted, helpless, needy, humble. All these things seem to be traits that the Hebrew language assumes exist in the same person.

The person is poor, needy, afflicted, humble are the same persons. And I dare say that we would be in the company of the vast majority of Bible scholars. It's rare times that I can be in that company.

So I'd, I'd like to exult in it when I can, that the vast majority of Bible scholars would say that poor in spirit is speaking of spiritual humility. Now, why would that term be used? Well, there's a reason for that. The Greek word that Jesus uses for poor in the phrase, poor in spirit.

I've given it to you. I'm not sure I can pronounce it because it starts with in our English, a

PT. And I was told by one Greek teacher that you always pronounce the P and the T and others say, you don't do that.

So I'm, I, no one speaks ancient Greek anymore. So no one really knows how it's supposed to be pronounced, but the way I was taught, you'd pronounce it Patokos. Okay.

If I'm, if it's wrong, I, no one here can prove me wrong. So that's, I'm safe here. And the word that Jesus used, or I should say that Matthew used because Jesus spoke a different language than Greek.

He spoke Aramaic. Matthew translated Jesus' words from Aramaic into Greek. The word to express Jesus' concept used by Matthew in the Greek is Patokos.

That word is an adjective that is a cognate of the verb Patokio. Now I told you, I don't speak Greek. Patokio sounds like a Walt Disney character, but the fact of the matter is this word means to become a beggar.

It's, it's a verb. Of course, the word Jesus used in the Beatitude is a, is an adjective poor in spirit, but the word is related to the verb Patokio, which means poor as a beggar, according to W.E. Vine, to be destitute. Now, not all poor people are quite that poor.

There are, in Israel, there were the poor of the land who had very little more than just the property they inherited from their ancestors. And they eked out a meager living on it. They weren't wealthy enough to have servants and a lot of livestock and so forth, but they had inherited as, as the Jews did the land from their ancestors and, and they were able to get by.

But there was another class of poor in Israel, and they were people who didn't own any land for some reason or another, and, and who were incapable of working for some reason or another, that they might be blind or lame. These people were so poor that they had absolutely nothing and no way to change their circumstances. These were the beggars.

You'll recall that in the Gospels, Jesus, and in Acts, the apostles often ran into beggars. These beggars were usually blind or lame or in some other way, absolutely helpless to provide for themselves. And therefore they resorted to the one thing they could do, and that's put their hand out and ask for alms.

That's essentially the kind of poor that this word that Jesus used is. Now, of course, he's not talking about people who are materially poor. He says poor of spirit, but the idea that the poor of whom he speaks, the word that he uses suggested absolute destitution.

He's not talking about people who just aren't in the middle class or the upper classes and people who have to be kind of occupying the lower classes, but still managed to take care of themselves. He's talking about that class of people who are absolutely helpless,

can do nothing to improve their circumstances and are 100% dependent on the generosity of others. Thus, the poor, using the same word in scripture, are frequently referred to as the objects of generosity to the righteous give to the poor.

When Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler in all of the three Gospels that record that story, Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus told him to sell what he had and give to the poor. And of course, he meant to beggars, give to those who needed alms, not just people who are in the lower classes, but to give to those who are beggars who needed to be supported by benefactors. Now, the word is also used by Jesus in Luke 14 when he speaks of a class of people who can in no way repay you, your generosity, people who are totally without any resources.

This is in Luke chapter 14, very important teaching of Jesus, really. In verse. Twelve, he says, then he also said to him who invited him, he was in a feast in somebody's home at this time, he said, when you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives or your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back and you are repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the tokens, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you and you should be repaid in the resurrection of the just. I don't know very many Christians who really take this kind of teaching very seriously. Don't do favors for people who can do favors back to you.

That's what he says. Do favors for people who can't do favors back to you. Why? Because if you do a favor for someone and they do a favor back to you, you will not be rewarded in the resurrection of the just.

But if you do favors for those who cannot possibly pay you back, then you will be rewarded. And what is Jesus suggesting? The rewards you get in the resurrection are far more to be desired than whatever rewards your rich friends can repay you if you do them a favor. So he is, of course, not forbidding you to ever have your family over for dinner or relatives or friends who can repay.

The point is, he's basically saying, don't simply extend your generosity to them. Reach out to those who can do nothing in return to you so that God will be indebted to you, as it were, on their behalf. It says in the Old Testament, he that has mercy on the poor lends to the Lord and he will repay him, says that in Proverbs.

And so in a sense, God identifies with the poor in such a way that if you give to the poor, you're giving to God or at least lending to him. And he considers himself in your debt and he will repay you. He's not in your debt in the sense of owing you salvation, certainly, but in the sense that, you know, as far as the ledger shows.

You've you've got something coming in the resurrection of the righteous, and that's what

Jesus taught here. Invite the poor. Why they can't repay you.

See what he means by poor. The poor are helpless. The poor have nothing by which they can improve their own circumstances or help anyone else for that matter.

That's the word in the Greek that Jesus that Matthew uses here. Likewise, in Luke 14 in verse 21, Jesus is telling a parable about a feast and the first people who were invited to this rich man's feast made excuses and didn't come. So he sent out his servants to invite others.

And in verse 20, he says, So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to the servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind. Again, notice the poor, the tocos are those who are associated with the maimed and the blind and the lame, the ones who can do nothing, who are totally helpless and who simply live on the generosity of others.

That's what this word suggests. In Psalm 10. Now, here's a case where I found differences in translation.

In the King James, the word poor is found, I think, in the New King James, something else is there. I'll find out what it is again. And also in other translations, I consulted it.

There was quite a variety of translations of this particular word, but it's Psalm 10, 14. It says, But you have seen it for you observe trouble and grief to repay it by your hand. The helpless commits himself to you.

You are a helper of the fatherless. The word helpless there in the New King James and the King James is poor. And as I looked it up, a poor is one of the one of the translations that works.

They're helpless. Sometimes they say the victims or the oppressed or the afflicted, because these are also different ways this word can be used. But the idea is the poor, because he is helpless, commits himself to God.

Remember what it says in James chapter two? He's not about people who are financially poor, but he says, Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith? Well, why would they be rich in faith? They got no choice. They can't trust in themselves. They've got to trust in God to provide for them.

Now, that doesn't mean that there's some sin in not being a poor person. I only give these examples because it shows what the word poor suggests. Somebody who is dependent, someone who is helpless, someone who, because he is at a loss to do anything for himself, commits himself to God.

Someone who is dependent upon the generosity of others and can in no way repay the generosity given to him and can in no way enrich others out of his own store, because he has no such store. That poor person is destitute. He's a beggar, and that's all he's capable of being.

Now, take that word and attach the phrase that Jesus attached poor in spirit in terms of his spiritual life. That person is a beggar. That person does not fancy himself to be God's gift to humanity or to the world or to the church.

He does not see himself as a great value. Now, I mean, when I say that, of course, first thing that's going to come to the modern person's mind is, well, you sound like, you know, you're talking about low self-esteem. I'd say, well, if it sounds that way, take it that way.

I'd say that's a pretty good assessment. It is talking about low self-esteem, which raises serious questions that if Jesus said, bless are those whose esteem of themselves is low, why is it that the modern church consistently seems to teach, bless are those who have high self-esteem, and Christians write books telling you how to build up your child's self-esteem and your mate's self-esteem and your own self-esteem. And Christian writers say that, you know, Christians need more self-esteem.

Our dear Dr. Dobson in his book Hide or Seek said that if he could write a prescription for all the women in America, he'd give them the healthy dose of self-esteem. And he says, I believe that's what they need more than anything else. That's modern Christianity for you.

It certainly doesn't resemble Christianity in the Bible. Certainly no one who uses the Bible as his guide could say what the women of the world need most. I'm quoting, what the women of the world need most is a high dose of self-esteem.

I would have thought someone reading the Bible would have gotten the impression what the women of the world needs most is Jesus. But you see, self-esteem is in our culture, the great savior, the great adjuster of wrong behavior and wrong, you know, of unhappiness. Everything that's wrong in society is because someone's got poor self-esteem.

That idea, of course, is not biblical, not even close. There's not anything in the Bible that approaches it. And in fact, it is not only an idea that is not supported in the Bible, it is refuted in the Bible every time the subject comes up.

And it comes up at the very beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here he's called his disciples, according to the story in Luke 6. He has just chosen his 12 disciples that night. He comes down from the hill and preaches the sermon.

He's got these guys. And these are not just Christians. These are the leaders of the

Christian church.

These are the 12. There were many disciples. That is somehow a great asset to the Church of Christ, and that God is certainly fortunate to have gotten you on his team with all your talents and all then.

You're not yours is not the kingdom of God. You think you're rich and you're really poor. The word poor in spirit coming from the Old Testament, as it does.

Connotes the idea of humility, of a lowly self-image, especially when it comes to spiritual things. Now, self-image, of course, can be based on other things, too. But I personally think that a low self-image is appropriate in most respects.

The Bible does not teach that you have must have a lower than realistic self-image. But what the Bible teaches is that the self-image that most accords with reality is much lower than we suspect. That we are we tend to not think of ourselves soberly, but think of ourselves more highly than we are, whereas we are told continuously by the modern church in the modern world that we've got a terrible plague of low self-image in our society, in the world.

The Bible says, no, the problem is we have a terrible plague of high self-image. Low self-image is hard to find among people. Many studies have been done about that.

People, criminals were studied by a group of psychologists and given self-image tests that were developed by these psychologists. And they found that most criminals have higher than average self-image, which raises serious questions about the theory that crime happens because people's images of themselves are too low and they need to elevate. As a matter of fact, self-image is a distinctly American concern.

People in Europe think we're silly to be thinking about self-image all this time. It's an American obsession. And as you may have heard that when American students are tested on many areas against students in Germany or Japan or England or France or Switzerland or Vietnam or China or whatever, when they combine these tests and compare them, Americans score in low percentiles against the students of other countries except in one thing.

American students rank pretty low in math and science, much lower than they would have a generation ago in comparable tests. Low in history and geography, even reading and language skills. We're not really near the top.

But you know where our students rank higher than anyone else? Self-esteem, which is very interesting because self-esteem obviously is high when all things that might be the basis of self-esteem are low. American students show themselves to be inferior in reality to most students around the world, but abounding in self-esteem. And by the way, the social problems in our country are fairly abundant as well, coming largely from that

generation that has such high self-esteem.

I'm not here to pound on the issue of self-esteem, but we can't talk about, we can't seriously discuss the meaning of being poor in spirit and what Jesus taught on this subject without interacting at least a little bit with our culture, because our culture and the church typically tell us just the opposite of what the Bible teaches us on some issues, not all, but on this one certainly. Now let's look at some of the greatest men in the Bible. We could select others.

We don't have time to look at them all, but let me pick some of the most outstanding men in the Bible, the ones who are the models and the heroes of the faith. We won't look at all, as I said, but let's talk about the men who are great leaders and who are highly commended in the scriptures. Moses.

The Bible says that Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth. He also happened to be one of the greatest leaders of a nation in all history. Secular history, if it compared Moses against other secular leaders, would have to place him among the highest ranking leaders of any nations in history because he took a group of people who were illiterate slaves.

And by the way, we think that because say black people in America spent a century or two or less in slavery here that they are still disadvantaged, you know, academically inferior people. I don't believe this, but I mean, this is kind of the conventional wisdom of our country that because these people spent a century or so in slavery here that they are almost permanently disadvantaged, right? I mean, we owe the present generation of black people in America never were slaves, nor were their parents. Most, most of them didn't even have grandparents who were, but their great grandparents maybe were.

And yet we are told that these people still are laboring on a tremendous handicap because of what was done to their ancestors who spent maybe, you know, a few generations in slavery. Take the Jews. They spent 400 years in slavery and they came out and within a single generation.

I better make that to the generation that came out of Egypt with Moses and their children were molded into one of the greatest nations, the most, the nations that has the most longevity, had the highest legal code. Certainly, I mean, when we think about it, the Jews as a people, the Israelites as a people are some of the most surviving, you know, categories of people on the earth. And these people had been slaves for 400 years.

They come out and Moses, of course, it wasn't he who did it was God through him. But I mean, in human terms, he was the guy. There wasn't another one in that group of 3 million Jews who came out of Egypt.

There was not another man who came close to having any responsibility for the transformation of those people into a nation from a, from a body of slaves. I mean, Moses is the guy. Now we all know it was because of God, but that's just the point.

It wasn't because of Moses. It was because of God and Moses knew it. In terms of human history, Moses would stand above almost every other great deliverer and great leader who ever became the father of a nation.

He accomplished more than any other man probably ever did in terms of secular founding of a nation. But what was his self image like? Well, early in life, it was pretty good. He was raised in the Pharaoh's house.

He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. According to Stephen's sermon in Acts chapter seven, Moses was mighty in word and deed. He was a guy who, when he saw an Egyptian smiting one of his fellow Israelites, he just felt like he had the right to go down there and take matters into his own hands.

He killed the guy. And when Stephen tells the story in Acts chapter seven, Stephen says, Moses did that thinking that the Israelites would appreciate the fact that God had sent him to deliver them. He acted as a self-conscious deliverer of his people.

He saw himself as the man for the job and for very good reasons. He was educated, eloquent, a man of war, a man well connected. Who else would be qualified to deliver the people of Israel? Well, when he thought that way, he didn't manage to do it.

In fact, he ended up fleeing in exile for 40 years, doing something that in his culture that he'd been raised in, which was the Egyptian was an abomination. He had to be a shepherd for 40 years and every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. We read in Genesis.

So Moses, who had been trained in one of the loftiest, most exalted, one of the most self-affirming kind of positions he could have been in for 40 years, spent another 40 years in an occupation that he had been trained to see, to look up on with contempt and with loathing. And at the end of that 40 years as a shepherd, his self-image had radically changed. It had plummeted.

And when God finally called him at the end of that second 40 years, we find from his reaction that he did not see himself as qualified for the job. And in the third chapter of Exodus, we have the beginning of that dialogue between Moses and God who was meeting him in the burning bush. And Moses first reaction when he heard that God was sending him to Pharaoh to deliver the people of Israel, something that Moses was quite ready to do 40 years earlier.

He was a changed man. In verse 11, Moses reaction was this. Moses said to God, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt.

You could not imagine Moses having uttered those words 40 years earlier, 40 years earlier. If God had appeared to him, says, listen, Moses, I'm going to use you to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses would say, of course, what else? Who else is better positioned for it? Who else is more qualified? Obviously, God, you got the right choice.

I'm the man. But by the time God finished dealing with Moses so that he really was qualified, Moses no longer thought himself qualified. He said, who am I that I should go into it? Who am I to stand before Pharaoh? Who am I to be the deliverer of the people of Israel? Yet Stephen tells us that Moses saw himself in that role 40 years earlier, that God had to reduce him.

So he saw himself not as one who has much to give, but one who has nothing to give, unworthy and unqualified. That is not what we call a high self-esteem. Now, it's interesting that when Moses said, who am I to stand before Pharaoh? And later on, Moses said, you know, I'm slow of speech.

Now, Stephen tells us in his sermon that Moses was mighty in word and deed. I guess he was when he was at the height of his self-esteem. But after being in the wilderness, he didn't have many people to talk to for 40 years, sheep.

I guess he lost a lot of his eloquence and he and he did not see himself as eloquent, gifted, qualified. And it's interesting that God did not say to Moses, Moses, I can see I've got a problem with you. I was kind of hoping you'd be more qualified.

I was kind of hoping you'd have better self-esteem. We're going to have to puff you up a little bit because you just don't have the confidence you need in yourself. When most said, who am I? God said, I'll go with you.

It doesn't matter who you are. You've got the right idea about yourself now, but now you need to get an adequate idea of who I am. It doesn't matter who you are because you and I together are a majority.

Even if you are zero, I am God. And if I'm with you, everything I'm planning to use you for is within the range of possibility. It's it's amazing.

God didn't try, didn't see it as his his task to elevate Moses to the point where he had high self-esteem so that he could be useful as a leader. David also expresses this kind of humility many times in his life in wishing to give an example that I'd turned to one of his writings rather than one of the stories of his life. But you can find in David's life many evidences of a deep humility, although David certainly had his moments where he sinned like every other man.

But he was very humble before God, generally speaking. We read of his. Humility and his poverty of spirit, for example, before God in Psalm chapter eight, verses three and four, David said, when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the

stars which you have made, you've ordained.

What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you visit him? Now, David said. I'm the king, I stand above all the men of my nation and my nation is above all the nations of the world, they all pay tribute to me. I conquered them all.

I not only killed Goliath, I conquered all the Philistines who've been plaguing my people for several generations before I brought the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites all under tribute. All the nations around me pay tribute to me. I'm the mightiest king in the whole region of the Middle East.

But he says, but when I look at the stars and when I look at the sun and the moon that you've ordained, I think, what is any of us? Who are we men that you even notice that we're here? What is man that you visit him, that you're mindful of him? You see, David saw himself not with reference to other Israelites or other people, but with reference to God. And it is a humbling revelation. He saw himself as like most said, who am I? David said, what is man, including me? The question, of course, is rhetorical.

It implies nothing. I'm nobody. Man is nothing.

That you should pay any attention to him. Again, not a real glowing example of self-esteem there. Job, of course, we know was a godly man commended both in the prophet Ezekiel and also he was commended in the New Testament also in James.

Job is a blameless man for the most part. He was at least blameless before his trials began, but he did have a little bit of a self-esteem problem. I won't turn to all the passages in Job that point this out, but Job had a self-esteem problem.

That problem was he thought he was pretty good. He, as you read through the book of Job and read his speeches, he recollects the time when all the people in town would stand up in reverence as he'd walk into town because he was a mighty chieftain. He's a wealthy man.

He was a good man. All the poor were fed from his hand. He liked that.

He liked he liked the respect he got. He also argued that he was quite a righteous man, and that's why it was so perplexing to him that these bad things were happening to me. He argued his own righteousness a great deal.

Now, I'm not saying that the man was sinning necessarily in that. Maybe he was inside of God. I don't know.

But but I'm saying the man had a high opinion of himself. However, in at the end of his story, God appeared. And in Job chapter 42, after God had appeared to Job and kind of changed his whole perspective, Job made this statement.

This is Job 42, verses five and six. He says he's speaking to God. He says, I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.

Therefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. I abhor myself. Sometimes I say I loathe myself.

Now, you take that man and put him in the modern church and his pastor is going to send him off to a counselor. You shouldn't loathe yourself. You shouldn't abhor yourself.

You shouldn't hate yourself. You're supposed to love yourself, says somebody, not God. But here's a man who had high self-esteem, and that was his problem.

When he finally saw God, he abhorred himself. And you know what happened next? He got healed. He got restored.

Everything turned around for him. God blessed him. The man, every man in Scripture, when he is little in his own sight, God approves him.

When he's not little in his own sight anymore, God rejects him. Of course, that language comes from the story of Saul, which we won't look at in detail. But the way Jesus put it in Luke 14, whoever humbles himself will be exalted and whoever exalts himself will be humbled or abased or brought low by God.

We also read twice in Scripture, once in James and once in Peter, that God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. Now, those who want to be saved have got to receive grace, but grace comes only to the humble, to the poor in spirit. Another very good example in Scripture of a contrast really between poor in spirit and the opposite state of mind is seen in the contrast between two churches that Jesus speaks to in the book of Revelation.

One is the church of Smyrna and the other is the church of Philadelphia. To the church of Smyrna, which was one of the two churches of the seven that Jesus did not find any fault with. He addressed seven letters to seven churches.

Five of them, he had something he wanted them to repent of, but two of them, Smyrna and Philadelphia, he found no fault with them. He only gave them encouragement. Smyrna was one of those churches, and he says to them in Revelation two, nine, I know your works, tribulation and poverty, but you are rich.

And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Now, when he turns to the church of Laodicea at the end of this series of letters in Revelation chapter three in verses 16 and 17, he speaks to that church this way. Now, verse 17, because you say I am rich, I become wealthy and have need of nothing and do not know that you are wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked.

I won't have to read it further, but notice the contrast between Smyrna and Laodicea. The church of Smyrna was materially poor, but Jesus said, but you are rich in any sense that matters to the church of Laodicea, which was actually materially rich. He says, you have said I am rich, but you really don't know that you're poor and wretched.

Now, what he's saying is you've got a high self-esteem. You think of yourself as rich and having need of nothing. Remember what I said earlier in the Old Testament, the word poor means needy, dependent, helpless.

The church of Laodicea was rich. It was a rich church materially, and their attitude was I have need of nothing. They were not poor in spirit.

Now, is there's the kingdom of heaven? No. Jesus said, if you don't change this real quick, I'm going to spew you out of my mouth. The word spew means vomit.

I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth. Now, when you vomit something, it is no longer in your body, is it? You vomit out because it's repugnant to your body. It does damage to your body, and therefore your body ejects it.

If Jesus says to a group of Christians, I'm going to spew you, vomit you out of my mouth, those people are no longer in his body. And why? Because Jesus said the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The church of Laodicea was anything but poor in spirit.

They were rich and had need of nothing as far as they were concerned. They didn't know that their real estate was far more pitiful than that. But the church of Smyrna, they just thought of themselves as poor because they were materially poor, and they didn't have any airs about themselves.

And Jesus said, but you really are rich in the ways that matter. You're rich because you don't think of yourself as rich. You think of yourself as poor, and you have the kingdom of God for that reason.

The great and classic picture in the teaching of Jesus of poverty of spirit, I believe, is found in Luke chapter 18, where there is a contrast that I believe, I don't believe there's any other story Jesus told that better presents what he means by being a beggar in spirit. As in Luke chapter 18, verses 10 through 14, Luke chapter 18, verses 10 through 14, it says in verse nine, actually, I'll pick it up there because the paragraph begins. Also, he spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

Two men, this is the parable, two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector here.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess. And Jesus said the tax collector standing afar off would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but he beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Now, Jesus commentary, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be abased and he who humbles himself will be exalted. It's the second time in the gospel of Luke that Jesus said that that proverb, everyone who exalts himself will be abased. Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.

He said it in Luke 14 and then here again in Luke 18. But here he illustrates it with these two men. One is rich in spirit as far as he's, he's no beggar.

God, you are so much to be congratulated that I am one of your servants. Because I mean, look at me, I don't do those atrocious things some people do. I'm not an extortioner and adulterer.

I'm not like this tax collector over here. But I actually, I'm quite a righteous person. I fast.

I give alms. I get, I pay my tithes. I keep your laws.

I thank you that I'm not like other men in these respects. Now, the man was congratulating himself in the form of a prayer. He definitely did not see himself as a beggar in need of anything from God.

He saw God as one who is a beneficiary of him. God, you're lucky to have a guy like me. And the publican, Jesus describes him so graphically, the guy wouldn't even look up.

He didn't. He was so ashamed, so lacking in any way of commending himself at all. He couldn't even lift his eyes to heaven to make a request.

He made a request, but he did so with his eyes to the ground. He beat his breasts in agony and he said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Now, the man didn't have high self-esteem, but he went home justified.

The other who had high self-esteem didn't. The man who thought well of himself went home unjustified, though he justified himself. But that's just the point.

The beggars in spirit, what this means is they do not congratulate themselves. They don't congratulate God that he's fortunate to have a son. They don't see themselves as a great contributor to God's cause, enriching God's kingdom in a great way by their presence and by their talents or the gifts.

The beggars in spirit say, I can't justify myself. I've got nothing to present on my own behalf. And it's those who don't justify themselves that go home justified because you need to be justified and everybody wants to be justified.

Did you know that everybody wants to be justified? Everyone does. Have you ever met a person who didn't make excuses for their wrong deeds, who didn't justify their bad behavior and rationalize it? Why? They want to be justified. They don't necessarily want it on God's terms.

They don't even necessarily want to be just. They just want to be declared just. They want to be regarded as just.

That's what justified means. So they justify themselves. Well, that's one option.

You can justify yourself. Unfortunately, when you stand before God, he doesn't let you be the decider for your just or not. The other is to not justify oneself and rather to go home justified by God.

And that is basically what Jesus said is the option. Now, there are several mistakes that the Pharisee made, and these are wrong ways of thinking that cause someone not to be poor in spirit. One is he had misdirected confidence.

He felt like since he paid tithes and fasted that God would see him as righteous. Paul in Philippians chapter three talked about a time when he had that kind of misguided confidence. He was a Pharisee once.

He said that he had all the things going for him that the law can have a man going for him. He was rich. But he says, I count all those things lost.

I've given them all up. Everything I boasted in, I now consider done that I might know Christ. Paul realized that he had put his confidence in something that isn't something to put your confidence in.

He said, I just want to be found in Jesus. And the only way to do that is to humble yourself and receive grace. God gives grace to the humble.

Another thing the guy did wrong is he took credit for himself. That doesn't sound like he said, God, I thank you. I'm like other men.

Sounds like he was giving God the credit, but it's quite clear from his whole demeanor. He was congratulating himself. I'm not like other men.

I'm not like this guy over here. When in fact, he didn't realize he was, he was a sinner just as much as the other guy just had different kinds of sins. He's taking credit for differences between him and the other guy.

Paul said in Romans, excuse me, first Corinthians four, seven, what makes you different from another person? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if you didn't receive it? Everything we have that might be something we'd congratulate ourselves about isn't ours. We didn't buy it. We didn't earn

it.

We received it as a gift. And therefore there's no reason to congratulate ourselves or feel good about who we are. The man also made an invalid comparison.

People who are proud usually maintain their pride by comparing themselves against others who are not as commendable as they are. Of course, they wouldn't feel so proud if they compared themselves against people who are more commendable than they are. And it's one of those things to keep your self-esteem high.

You have to compare yourself with people who have less to commend themselves by. But to compare yourself with others isn't even reasonable. In second Corinthians, chapter 10 and verse 12, Paul said in comparing themselves among themselves, they are not wise.

Why? Because in God's sight, he doesn't compare you with other people. He compares you with his standard, which is a high bar. And if you compare yourself with others, you can congratulate yourself that you are better than some.

This man was not behaving as crassly as the publican was, but it's a false comparison. God doesn't compare you with other people. He compares you with Jesus Christ.

And when you see yourself in comparison with him, you know you're a beggar. You know you're a loser. And that's the first step toward grace.

That's the first step toward salvation. That is the first qualification for being in the kingdom, that you know you're nothing, that you know that you'll never qualify on your own and that you are a beggar and not any beggar. You depend 100 percent on the generosity of another.

And that other is God. Now, in the notes, I've given you some things I won't have time to go into tonight, and I probably won't go into the next time either. So you might want to read those on your own.

How ought we to think of ourselves? The various scriptures given point out you're supposed to think soberly of yourself and not think more highly of yourself than you are. Romans 12, 3 says we're supposed to be small in our own eyes. Many scriptures tell us that we're supposed to see ourselves as unworthy of God's mercies and of his privileges.

We're supposed to be confident in God, but not in our own selves. And we're supposed to ourselves as expendable. John the Baptist said, you think you're great because your children Abraham, God could raise up these stones, children of Abraham, you're expendable.

John the Baptist said of himself, I must decrease. He, Jesus, must increase. I'm

expendable.

It's so important to see yourself in that way. I wish I had the time to preach that message tonight. I don't.

I've run out of time and I have to quit. But if you don't think you're expendable, you're not in touch with reality. And yet it is one of the hardest things for us to get through our heads that we're expendable.

We somehow think it's important that we survive. It's important that our contribution continue to be available to God. When in fact, God could replace us with stones if he wanted to.

He could raise up of stones a better Bible teacher than me. He could raise up of stones, a better example of a Christian than me. He could raise up from the stones, a better father to my children than me and a better husband than me to my wife.

Everything that. That I might consider important measures. Of my goodness.

They're all gifts from God, and if I would die today, God could raise up a replacement if we don't see ourselves expendable, we we have too high a view of ourselves. So there I have that list. I can't preach it tonight, but we have that list of the various things that the Bible says we should think about ourselves.

And none of them agree with the self-esteem teaching that we hear all the time. And with that, I'm going to have to close because we run out of time.