

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

**Sermon Series:** Life, the Jesus Way  
(Studies in the Sermon on the Mount)

### **The Definitive Beatitude**

(Matthew 1-4; 5:1-3)

Study #1

#### **Introduction: When administrations change...**

Our nation has been led by forty-four presidents. In January, we will welcome the forty-fifth.

Whenever a new president has taken office, he has always brought with him a new set of policies, his own way of doing things. Our next president will bring with her or with him the same new distinctive ways of getting things done. There will be a new administration.

Over the past several months, the candidates for president have been letting us know what their policies will be and what their priorities will be if they are elected. They will continue to lay out those distinctives for the next seventy-two days of the campaign. And then, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, you and I will enter polling booths and make our selection for President #45, who will usher in a new administration.

New administrations will always bring changes. There will be new expectations, new hopes, new challenges, and new demands. And that is true if the change is in a democratic republic, a monarchy, a business - or in the realm of faith.

Jesus was born two thousand years ago. He was born a Jew, subject to the Law of Moses. He was born an Israelite, living under the Roman regime.

He was born to usher in a whole new way of living and relating to God. He came to usher in a kingdom with a whole new administration. And in one watershed address, Jesus laid out for His people the distinctives of His new administration.

We find his policies and priorities in the best and the best-known sermon ever given, the Sermon on the Mount.

You and I are going to spend the fall season listening to and considering, wrestling with and figuring out how to live, "The Jesus Way" as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount.

The sermon begins in Matthew, chapter five. And we come to chapter five after lots of water has passed under the bridge of Matthew's gospel.

In the sermon, Jesus speaks the way any ruler speaks who is laying out the rules of a new administration. Here, Jesus is a king explaining how His kingdom works. And Matthew makes sure that we don't miss that Jesus is a king.

Everything recorded in the gospel before the sermon shouts Jesus' kingship. For one thing, He has a kingly lineage.

#### **The King's First Steps (1:1--4:11)**

##### **Birth of the King (1:1-25)**

###### *Genealogy (1:1-17)*

The first seventeen verses of Matthew are sometimes wrongly viewed as nothing more than a boring list of nearly unpronounceable Jewish names. In fact, Jesus' genealogy provides just the kind of "proof" any reader needs to be convinced of His royalty.

Starting with Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, Matthew traces Jesus' lineage forward to King David, then through every king who ever sat on the throne in Jerusalem.

### *Conception and arrival (1:18-25)*

King Jesus entered the world uniquely. His entrance is what we might expect of a king from another realm.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit of God and was born to a young, unmarried virgin, Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, a humble carpenter.

His name, Jesus, was assigned to Him by an angel of God before He was even born. "Jesus" means "Savior" and His nickname, "Emmanuel", means "God with us."

### **Reception of the King (2:1-23)**

#### *Worshiped by magi (2:1-12)*

King Jesus was welcomed the way kings are welcomed. Wise men from the east saw a bright star in the east that signaled the birth of a great king and traveled all the way to Bethlehem to worship Jesus when He was still a toddler. These Persian magi showered Jesus with extravagant gifts.

It rings true that the arrival of a king would engender worship from magi. It rings just as true that His arrival would trigger jealousy in the heart of a rival king.

#### *Persecuted by Herod (2:13-23)*

King Herod, the Roman-installed puppet king of Palestine, wanted to find the baby King Jesus, just like the magi did. But he was not interested in worship. King Herod wanted to kill King Jesus.

God warned Joseph of Herod's plot in a dream. He escaped just in time, taking Mary and Jesus to Egypt as Herod ordered the slaughter of all the male children two years old and younger in and around Bethlehem.

After the flight to Egypt, Matthew is silent about Jesus' growing up years back in Palestine. We don't hear anything about His childhood, adolescence, teenaged years, or young adulthood.

But Jesus surfaced from obscurity about the time He turned thirty. His cousin, John, appeared out of nowhere, ready to announce the arrival of a king.

### **Identification of the King (3:1-17)**

#### *Identified by John the Baptist (3:1-12)*

John makes it crystal clear that he was nothing but a forerunner, just a herald. But he cried out for the people of Israel to get ready for the king to show up. He told them, **[3:2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

And what does a king do but reign over a kingdom? King Jesus came to reign, and John prepared the crowds who flocked to him for a new regime over which Jesus would reign by baptizing them out of their old life into a new way of holiness.

#### *Identified by His Father (3:13-17)*

When Jesus Himself came to John requesting baptism - NOT for repentance, but to identify Himself with the people He came to save - John recognized the incongruity of the moment. It was he, John, who needed to be baptized by Jesus!

But, as the king directed, John pushed Jesus under the water.

When Jesus surfaced **[3:16]...the heavens were opened, and [John] saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, [17] and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."**

Immediately after the baptism, the Spirit of God led Jesus into the desert wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

## **Temptation of the King (4:1-11)**

Turning stones into bread after a forty days fast would have been tempting. So would defying gravity from the temple's pinnacle as would accepting the gift of the world's worship.

But Jesus withstood every temptation the enemy threw at Him, relying on the strength and truth of God's Word. After all the temptations were over, the devil left Him and angels sent from God served Him.

And now, we watch as King Jesus launches His ministry.

## **The King's First Exercise of Authority (4:12-25)**

### **Authority to Announce the Kingdom (4:12-17)**

We know from the Christmas stories that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. But He grew up in the town of Nazareth. Now, He moves away from Nazareth to the city of Capernaum, located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Capernaum would be Jesus' home base for the next three years of His life. Capernaum was His ministry HQ.

Matthew doesn't want us to miss that Jesus' move to Capernaum was a strategic, royal move, anticipated by the Old Testament prophets who had written about the Messiah operating around the region of Galilee. (See Isaiah 9)

And Jesus' first message was exactly the same as John's: **[4:17] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

Jesus had the authority to announce the coming kingdom and He also had authority to recruit subjects of His kingdom. He called these subjects "disciples."

### **Authority to Recruit Subjects/Disciples (4:18-22)**

It was customary in Jesus' day for a man to attach himself to a well-known rabbi and then to ask the rabbi to mentor him in the ways of God. Jesus turned that custom on its head and proactively reached out to invite people to follow Him.

First, He approached the brothers Simon (Peter) and Andrew. Then He approached another set of brothers, James and John. They all heard the King's call, dropped their fishing nets and followed. Just like that.

Jesus then showed His royal authority by doing what nobody else could do.

### **Authority to Perform Miracles (4:23-25)**

As He proclaimed the message of the kingdom, traveling through Galilee and visiting synagogues in the towns and villages He was **[4:23] *healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. [24] The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.***

He's riding the crest of a wave. People's initial reception to Him is very positive.

He's attracted lots of attention from people in the Galilean region - and that's not surprising. It's also not surprising that people from the southern part of Palestine, in Judea, and from the city of Jerusalem, had also heard about Jesus and were following Him.

It is surprising, though, that people were following Him from the region of the Decapolis which is east of the Jordan River and is not a part of Palestine. And then people from as far away as Syria, two hundred miles to the north, had heard about Him and were bringing their sick to Jesus to be healed.

In some places in the Gospels, the writers tell us how many people were with Jesus, but not here. Matthew just says, **[5:25] *Large crowds followed Him...***

And it is at this time of great popularity and positive response that King Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount.

### **The King's First "Classroom" (5:1-2)**

#### **The Setting of the Sermon**

***[5:1] When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain...***

He saw the crowds, turned from the crowds, climbed a mountain (we might say "hill") and gave the sermon from there. It was likely near the Sea of Galilee. Matthew calls it "***the mountain***" - so it was well-known to the disciples and to the early readers. But we don't know which mountain this mountain was.

It makes sense to me to suppose that the setting was near Jesus' new Capernaum home. So, let's place the sermon in a really nice setting on a hilltop<sup>1</sup> somewhere near the north end of the Sea of Galilee.

Matthew makes it unmistakably clear that He gave the sermon to His disciples.

#### **The Audience of the Sermon**

***[5:1] 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...***

The primary intended recipients of the Sermon on the Mount were people who were following Him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke 6 - The place where Jesus gave the Beatitudes is called "***a level place***". I assume that this sermon was given from a level spot on top of a mountain. (duh)

<sup>2</sup> We don't know how many of the twelve apostles were following Him at this early point. They were all in place by Matthew 10, but at least one - Matthew - and perhaps others were not in place as of the giving of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus was speaking, first, to His select band of disciples. They walked right up to where Jesus was.

Now there is no question but that the crowds came to listen to Jesus, too.<sup>3</sup> And they came to listen to Him because they were following Him. They identified themselves as His disciples and He considered them His followers and His people.

I am not saying that all of Jesus' hearers were saved individuals. For instance, we don't know if Judas Iscariot was already in place as an apostle at this point. If he was, and if he was present for this sermon, he would have been at least one who was not saved. And there may well have been those among the "***large crowd***" who weren't saved.

I am saying, though, that Jesus' address was given with the assumption that most were saved. This teaching is directed to and is for His people.

In just about every way possible, Jesus makes it clear that He considered those listening to Him to be His people, His saved people.

He anticipates that they will be persecuted for His sake, just like faithful Old Testament prophets were persecuted. He calls His listeners **[5:13] "*the salt of the earth*"** and **[5:16] "*the light of the world.*"**

He repeatedly tells them that God is their "***Father who is in heaven.***" (5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 9, 14, 18, 26, 32; 7:11)

Jesus is talking to people who know the Lord and who are following Him. That is His target audience.

Now, why did Jesus give this sermon? What is the sermon's purpose? And what can we expect to gain from giving ourselves to hearing it?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Matthew 7:28-29 where the crowds were amazed at His teaching.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix for a consideration of the possible purposes for which Jesus gave this sermon.

I believe that there are two main benefits we'll all derive from our time wrestling with the Sermon on the Mount. And the first benefit is that Jesus points the way to a life of fully yielded discipleship.

Do you want to know how to live as a serious disciple of Jesus? Do you want to know the priorities of King Jesus? The Sermon on the Mount will tell you.

### **The Purpose of the Sermon**

*To point the way to discipleship (a kingdom way of living)*

#### “Entering in” to a kind of life

Throughout this sermon Jesus is inviting us to “enter in” to a certain kind of life. It is like waving us through a doorway to this new life. And the life He wants us to enter is a life that reflects our submission to His Lordship. That’s what discipleship is all about. There are conditions to meet if we would live as disciples of King Jesus.

The idea of inviting people to “enter in” to something is a common biblical theme.

- At one point, God invited His people, the Jews, to “enter” the promised land of Canaan.
- On numerous occasions He invited them to “enter” the temple in Jerusalem.
- Every seven years they were invited to “enter” into covenant with God during a special ceremony at a place called Shechem.

In all three cases - land, temple, covenant - what was required to “enter” was serious commitment to God. The Jews were called to lives of praise and worship, to seek God in prayer, to holiness, to generosity to the poor, to integrity, and to love.<sup>5</sup>

Those were the conditions to “enter” - and we find all of this - and more - in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

The Lord is describing the conditions we must meet if we are to “enter in” to His kingdom, not in the sense of receiving eternal life, but in the sense of living as His subjects.<sup>6</sup>

#### “Entering in” to eternal life

This is where it is so important to remember Jesus’ audience. He is speaking to His people. They are already following Him. They didn’t need an invitation to place faith in God’s promise for eternal life. They had already done that.

Today, if you know someone - or if you are someone! - who has not yet come to God through faith in Jesus, here is the invitation.

*“God loves you so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus, to die on a cross for your sins and to rise again from the dead, so that if you would put the weight of your trust in Him, you would never taste God’s condemnation, but will have eternal life and forgiveness.” (John 3:16)*

The only way anyone ever receives eternal life is by grace through faith. It is a free gift that we don’t deserve and that we cannot earn.

Discipleship is another matter. Discipleship involves rigorous work and strong commitment. There are no conditions to receiving the grace of God. There are conditions to following Jesus as a disciple.

#### “Entering in” to the life of discipleship

The commands and the exhortations and the warnings of the Sermon on the Mount don’t give us tell-tale signs as to whether someone is eternally saved. They are conditions for entering into the life of rigorous, make-God-smile discipleship.

The sermon has to do with Christian growth and conformity to the image of Jesus and transformation of character.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Psalm 15, for instance.

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<sup>6</sup> So Kenneth E. Kirk and R.T. France (who calls the sermon “A Discourse on Discipleship”) and Craig L. Blomberg in their commentaries on Matthew.

To live the way Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount is to say “Yes” to His invitation to “enter in” to His kingdom rule. It is to live in submission to His Lordship.

This is what it means to “**seek the Kingdom**” (6:33) and this is what it means to “**enter by the narrow way**” (7:13)

Second, the sermon points the way for us to have a rich inheritance in the life to come.

*To point the way to a rich inheritance*

You’ll notice that the first and the last Beatitudes are given in the present tense. They offer promises to a certain reality, here and now.

All the in-between Beatitudes (all six of them) are given in the future tense. They speak of a blessing yet to come, a blessing after this life is over. And the blessings are for character we have displayed in this life or for experiences we have suffered for Jesus in this life.

When you read through Jesus’ comments about giving to the poor (6:2-4), prayer (6:5-15), fasting (6:16-18), storing up treasure (6:19-21), and faith in God for everyday needs (6:25-34), you can’t miss the emphasis on rewards in the life to come.

The Sermon on the Mount assumes a life beyond this life. Jesus assures us that as important as *this* life is, *that* life is much, much more important. He tells us that suffering and sacrifice *here* and *now* will be rewarded *then* and *there*.

This life is transitory, “iffy”, and fleeting. That life is solid and never-ending. Investments made in *this* life for *that* life are the only sure bets.

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<sup>7</sup> From Jody Dillow, “When He invites His audience to “enter the kingdom” Jesus is not inviting them to accept the gospel and be saved. They are already saved. Rather, He is inviting them to enter into a rich experience of life; to enter a kingdom way of living (discipleship); to enter a higher status of blessing in the future in the eschatological kingdom.” (Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings)

One of the first Christian biographies I read after coming to faith in Jesus as a teenager was a book that chronicled the cut-off life of Jim Elliott. Elliott was killed while serving as a missionary to the Huronani Indians, a tribe living in the Amazonian jungles of Ecuador.

Jim Elliott’s widow, found this written in his journal: *He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*

Jim Elliott understood what Jesus was saying in the Sermon on the Mount.

It is to the glory of God and to our benefit to live in submission to Jesus’ Lordship and to “enter in” to the life of discipleship. It is wise and God-honoring to count this life as the proving ground for the next and to lay up treasure *here*, for *there*.

This is what the Sermon on the Mount tells us. And the sermon begins with a series of “blessings” that are so well known that we have named them. We call them “The Beatitudes.”

### **The King’s First Word (5:3)**

**[5:2] He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,**

**[3] “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**[4] “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

**[5] “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.**

**[6] “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

**[7] “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**

**[8] “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

**[9] “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**

**[10] “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**[11] “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecuted you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because Me.**

**[12] “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

## About the Beatitudes...

There are stylistic differences in these eight Beatitudes. But they are all words of blessing on those who live in a certain way, hold to certain mindsets, and who experience certain things for following King Jesus.

By *“blessed”* Jesus means at least a couple of things.

On the one hand, He means to say that the person described is “approved by God.”<sup>8</sup> On the other, that in some way, benefit comes to that person.

As I pointed out a minute ago, the emphasis in the sandwiched, middle Beatitudes is on future blessing while the emphasis of the first and the last - those who are *“poor in spirit”* and those who are *“persecuted”* - is here and now.

Next Sunday we’re going to move through the last seven Beatitudes. For the time remaining today, though, I want to highlight the first one.

### The Pre-Eminent Beatitude

**[5:3] *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

*First for a reason*

I’m not so sure that there is a tight reason for the ordering of Beatitudes #’s 2-7. But I’m convinced that this one is listed first for a reason. Lots of people who have spent more time than I have in the Sermon on the Mount agree.

Jesus said, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”* first because it is the summation of all the rest. Being *“poor in spirit”* is the essential condition for blessing and is the defining trait of an obedient disciple of King Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

To get a handle on what Jesus is saying by the words, *“poor in spirit,”* let’s think first, about being poor, materially.

*Poor, generally*

Poor, materially

“Poor” is an elastic word. “Poor” to me might not be “poor” to you and poverty, like beauty, can be in the eye of the beholder.

The US Government sets the poverty level for a family of four at an annual income of \$24,000. Lots of people living in other parts of the world would not consider that level of income “poverty.”<sup>10</sup>

We need to go below the US standard of poverty to reflect the meaning of the word Jesus uses here.<sup>11</sup> It is not the word used to describe lower-middle class, or the working poor in our society. It describes abject poverty.

“Poor” here speaks of being destitute. We might be tempted to use the word “bankrupt.” But “bankrupt” that doesn’t quite say it, either, because here in the US, people sometimes declare bankruptcy to protect their assets.

Jesus’ word describes someone with no material assets. There are no possessions and there is nothing in the bank. *“Blessed”* does not seem a fit term to describe people in this kind of poverty. Most people speak of the *“curse”* of abject poverty.

<sup>8</sup> I’m indebted to Bob Deffinbaugh for this insight, from a sermon on [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org). Bob was the teaching elder at the church Kathy and I attended while I was in seminary “back in the day.”

<sup>9</sup> So, J. Dwight Pentecost and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

<sup>10</sup> One source reports that 1/2 of the world’s population live on \$2.50 per day.

<sup>11</sup> The word is “ptokoi” (*ptwkoi*)

To be poor in this sense is to have no power, prestige or influence. The poor have no resources to protect against those who would take advantage. He is oppressed. She is abusable and abused. The poor have no competitive advantage.<sup>12</sup>

That's the sense of the word "**poor**" Jesus uses in the first Beatitude. But He's not talking here about material poverty. He says, **[5:3] "Blessed are the poor IN SPIRIT."**

### Poor, in spirit

So, let's now take everything that we just saw about material poverty and transfer it directly to the realm of the spirit.

Jesus pronounced blessing on the person who has no resources, no strengths, no assets, before God.

And that, by the way, is where anyone is who comes to Jesus in need of eternal life.

### POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR ETERNAL LIFE...

When you first turned to Jesus, it was because at some level you understood that there was nothing you could do that would impress God. There was nothing about you that would commend you to God.

Spiritually speaking, you were flat busted broke. And it was worse than that. Not only did you have nothing positive to bring to God, you also owed a debt to God that you couldn't pay, namely, your sin.

Then, somebody told you some really good news. Someone told you that the Lord Jesus Christ had died on the cross to pay the debt you owed. They told you that Jesus' abundant resources were all made available to you. He willingly became poor so that you, through His poverty, might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

<sup>12</sup> The Greeks were repulsed by the destitute. Those who were poverty stricken were often banished from the culture (so, Plato). The word was always used in a bad sense in secular literature.

In light of your sin, your spiritual poverty, there was nothing you could do to win your way to God's favor. You didn't deserve eternal life.

So, you received it the only way anyone can, as a free gift. You accepted the reality that your standing before God was all because of what He did and had nothing to do with anything you did. He had provided for your in-adequacy by His own super-adequacy.

That is how anyone who is far from God comes near. They recognize their poverty before God.

And here, in the first words of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, speaking to His disciples, says that the way to live as His follower, is to embrace that poverty as an ongoing reality.

### POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR DISCIPLESHIP...

### **[5:3] "Blessed are the poor in spirit..."**

This is the first step on the road to spiritual health, to spiritual growth, and to a make-God-smile life of discipleship. From beginning to end, there are few biblical themes that are as pervasive as the that says, "I am powerless to accomplish what means most to me in life and I am utterly dependent on God."

- We see it in the story of Gideon's army, reduced from 22,000 to 300 so that everyone would know that the victory Israel won over their enemy was due to God's power, not theirs. (Judges 7)
- We see it in the battle between the giant, Goliath, and the teen-aged David. (1 Samuel 17)
- We see it in the twelve apostles Jesus chose to be His change kingdom agents, none of them what we would call "world-beaters."
- We hear it in Jesus' words, **[John 15:5] "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."**<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> And among other places, we see it in Paul's description of the Corinthian church, **[1 Corinthians 1:27] but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things**



Blessed are those who admit that they have nothing to boast about before God. No pedigree to depend on. No assets they have not received.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus promises that if we will live this way, we will enjoy a real-time possession of the kingdom of heaven.

*The real-time possession of the kingdom of heaven*

**[5:3] Blessed are the poor in spirit, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.**

The kingdom of heaven is the realm over which King Jesus reigns. One day He will reign over everyone and everything. That day is coming, but that day has not yet come.

But this day, He wants to rule and reign over you and over me.

In the words of the Sermon on the Mount, that means that we admit to our spiritual poverty. We come to the end of ourselves. We embrace the reality that everything comes from God; nothing comes from us.

So.

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*which are strong, [28] and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, [29] so that no man may boast before God.*

<sup>14</sup> Looking for a case study? Consider the life story of the Apostle Paul. Before he became a Christian, Paul thought that he lots of things to boast about before God (See Philippians 3 for his “spiritual pedigree”.) Then he was blinded outside the city of Damascus, came to the end of himself, and was wonderfully converted. He immediately became a powerful witness for Jesus, persuading many to believe by his testimony and by his knowledge of the Scriptures. But then, Paul ran into trouble and was forced to flee Damascus to escape persecution. Later, as an apostle of the first rank who was spreading the Gospel throughout much of the previously unreached regions of Macedonia and Achaia and who had planted churches everywhere he went, he was challenged to defend his apostleship by the Corinthians. He did so by reminding them of the humiliating way in which he had escaped Damascus all those years ago - by being lowered over the city wall in a basket! Paul had learned to embrace the reality of his weakness [2 *Corinthians* 12:5] so that the power of Christ [might dwell in him.]

Have you come to that place of surrender? Does “*poor in spirit*” describe the way you are approaching life? Are you moving more and more toward more and more dependence on God - in your family life, in your career, in your relationships with friends?

Today, hear Jesus’ gracious invitation to experience His kingdom reign in your life through submission. This is the path to the life blessed by God.

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## APPENDIX

*What is the purpose for the Sermon on the Mount?*

There are numerous constructs suggested by Bible students as to the purpose for the Sermon on the Mount. Among them are that the sermon was given:

- (1). to show people - by means of obedience to its precepts - how to obtain eternal life. This view, though, violates Jesus’ and Paul’s teaching that eternal life is a free gift of God’s grace, given to the one who believes;
- (2). to point the way to social salvation, the redemption of culture. Sadly, in opposition to this theory stands history...;
- (3). to raise the bar of required holiness so high that people would realize that their only hope for eternal life was God’s grace. However, most of those listening to the sermon were already saved and all were disciples. Of course the sermon does convict any serious reader of sin and of the need for change, but most of Jesus’ audience is not in need of this message;
- (4). only to those living in the period of the Millennium, the time of the earthly reign of Jesus, the Messiah. But this view doesn’t square with much of what the sermons says about how Jesus’ followers should live in conditions that will NOT exist during the Millennium (i.e. - persecution; the existence of false prophets).

In short, the best interpretative framework for the sermon, it seems to me, is to see it as applicable to the lives of Jesus’ followers between His resurrection and His return - the age in which we live today.