

Sermon on the Mount

May 11, 2014

Title: Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Text: Matthew 5:3-6

Summary: Life is a "needy" proposition. To truly discover God's New Life, we need to begin by being willing to be needy. Only then will His blessings come.

Life = Needy

Of babies and other needy people:

Living is a "needy" proposition. From the moment we're born to our last breath we are constantly in need.

Moms know this better than anyone. Just think of how many needs a baby has -- even before being born! According to americanpregnancy.org a pregnant mom needs an extra 300 calories daily through the 2nd and 3rd trimesters of her pregnancy, if she wants to have a healthy baby.

And when the little bundle of joy arrives, then the neediness really sinks in! Baby comes into the world cold and hungry. And baby comes with a remarkably efficient "need alarm" mechanism. You know when baby has a pressing need, even if the little wonder can't articulate it for you.

The other day Suzanne and I were on a plane heading home from South Carolina. There was a baby on board a few rows behind us. Believe me, the whole plane knew when baby wasn't pleased.

And we go on being needy our whole lives.

Living is a needy proposition.

The Strong and the Weak:

God is God for us in our neediness. The Psalm writer says:

Psalms 9:18 ESV

**For the *needy* shall not always be forgotten,
and the hope of the *poor* shall not perish forever.**

Psalms 10:17-18 NIV

**You, Lord, hear the desire of the *afflicted*;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals
will never again strike terror.**

Psalms 40:17 NIV

**But as for me, I am *poor and needy*;
may the Lord think of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay.**

I think back to that plane ride with the screaming baby. The good news is that the baby didn't scream all the way from Charleston, S.C. to Washington, D.C. He was in the arms of a loving parent who, time and again, found a way to meet a need and bring the child to rest.

Isn't that a picture of our loving Father, Who unseen to us, nonetheless hears our cry, remembers our neediness, and comes to our aid?

Starting the journey into God's Rule:

The journey from this broken world into God's Rule or Kingdom always starts in our neediness. We saw last week that Jesus came with a startling announcement: the long spiritual Exile of God's People had come to an end. God's Rule -- the Kingdom of Heaven -- was at the door. Kingdom near; Kingdom here!

Jesus' first actions? To go find needy people to work alongside Him to bring God's Rule to a needy world. He recruited fishermen -- men who got up in the middle of the night to go out on Lake Galilee to try and catch another day's pay. Then He went all over Galilee announcing God's Kingdom and meeting needs. He healed sick people and set free those under spiritual oppression.

God's Kingdom came first to the neediest people. As Jesus Himself put it:

Matthew 9:12 NIV

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."

You and I are just as needy as the people Jesus encountered when He announced the coming of God's Rule. Some of our needs are the same; some are different. But we're needy, nonetheless. And being needy qualifies us for the coming of God's Rule into our lives.

Blessed are the poor...

The Blessings (Beatitudes):

Jesus put words to the coming of God's Rule in a series of bold pronouncements that all begin with the word "blessed." Once again, He was inviting people to join Him on the New Exodus out of the slavery and death of a broken world into the freedom and life of God's Rule. He proclaims a series of blessings for those who take the journey into God's New World. But He does so with a special twist: the first four blessings are only for those who are willing to be needy.

Here are the first four blessings:

Matthew 5:3-6 NIV

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

Blessings for Needy People:

Each of these four blessings focus on what it means to be needy in a dangerous and uncaring world.

- Poor
- Grieving
- Oppressed -- the actual meaning of "meek" in this verse
- Hungry and Thirsty

Every mom knows what it's like to try and meet these kinds of needs on a 24/7 basis! How many kids come to you and say, "Wow! I have everything I need. I'm all set." How many times have you had to try and cheer up an unhappy camper? How many times have you had to stand up for the underdog? How many times have you heard the words, "But it's not fair!"

And our neediness far outlasts our childhood. The world we live in is not "fair." It is a place where money buys influence and power. It is a world in which bad things happen, and all we can do is grieve.

Jesus says that being in just such a needy place -- and accepting that reality -- qualifies us for God's Kingdom!

Kingdom Blessings:

In each of the four areas of need Jesus promises that God's Rule provides what we were looking for:

- Poor in spirit? Yours is the Kingdom of Heaven!
- Grieving? You will be comforted!
- Oppressed? You will inherit the earth -- God's reborn world!
- Hungry and thirsty for justice? God will come through for you!

Jesus was announcing the end of Exile from God and His promises, just as Isaiah the prophet had promised when he wrote:

Isaiah 61:1-3 NIV

**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.**

**He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,**

**to proclaim the year of the Lord 's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,**

**to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty**

**instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.**

Willing to be needy

Need priorities:

For each one of us, life is full of needs. Living itself is a "needy" proposition. And often it's hard to determine what we need the most. When I'm driving around lost, I feel the need to find my way to my destination. I turn here, turn there, all the while trying to see something that will get me on track. My wife, much more wisely, suggests that maybe what I *really need* is to be humble enough to be needy -- and ask directions.

So what do you *really* need? More stuff? More time? Another chance at something? More of *you*?

Thirsty for God:

What would happen if we decided that we didn't need more of ourselves or our abilities, but needed more of God and His Rule in our lives? Again, the Psalm writer says:

Psalms 63:1 NIV

A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

**You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.**

There was David in the desert, running for his life from King Saul.

What did he need? In a word, everything: food, water, a safe hiding place, justice.

What did he ask for? Only one thing: His God.

Psalm 42 says much the same thing:

Psalms 42:1-2 NIV

**As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?**

Willing to be needy:

A baby figures out pretty quickly that the fastest way to get a clean diaper or a hot meal, not to mention just being cuddled by a loving parent, is to be needy and make the neediness known. Babies raised in orphanages where there is no one who will come and care for them when they cry simply stop crying.

The pathway to God's blessings always takes us through the desert of need. In fact, that is where the journey always begins. But Jesus tells us that the moment we determine to need God and His Rule more than everything else, we are ushered into His heavenly Kingdom.

Matthew 5:3 NIV

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

"Theirs ***IS*** the kingdom of heaven."

Are you willing to be needy?