



The message of today's messiahs is nothing really new: "Blessed are the rich, the powerful, the self-sufficient!" After all, isn't it true that "God help those who help themselves?" Frederick Bruner shows how the Beatitudes correct this distortion: "God helps those who *cannot* help themselves [the poor, mourn, meek, hunger], and he also helps those who try to help *others* [the merciful, peacemaker, persecuted prophets), but he does not in any Beatitude help those who think they can help *themselves*."

So we should not be surprised that the true Messiah, Jesus, in his inaugural address, points us beyond the temporal "here and now" and opens our eyes to reveal the unseen eternal perspective: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Was Jesus advocating a lifestyle of poverty on this earth in return for the rewards that are yet to come? Would He have joined the fight on the eradication of poverty? Was Marx right about religion being a tool of oppression, the opiate of the people?

Be assured of this: there is no direct correlation between material poverty and spiritual blessing. Jesus said, "You will always have the poor among you" (John 12:8), but clearly poverty is not a good thing (Proverbs 30:8-9).

Poverty in any human dimension exposes our inadequacy. Each of us can remember a time (perhaps this week!) when we became aware of our need for God to step in and help us. Frederick Buechner painted the perfect mental image: we sometimes live our lives like a big clenched fist. The clenched fist can do many things: it can work, hang on to things, impress, even fight. But, "the one thing a clenched fist cannot do is accept, even from the good God himself, a helping hand."

Father Michael Crosby, a Franciscan monk, concluded several things about being poor in spirit:

- (i) Material or social poverty is neither a condition nor hindrance to salvation.
- (ii) The kingdom of God can only be received by empty hands.
- (iii) Jesus warns against both material/social and religious/moral self-sufficiency, either of which can obscure true spirituality, causing us to conclude that we don't need God
- (iv) Empty hands are filled to meet the relieve the poverty of others (Read 1 John 3:16-18)

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1. Based on the following biblical definitions of "poor," how does Jesus use this word?
Greek: *Ptōchos* (used here) describes the man who has nothing at all,
Greek: *Penēs* (not used here) describes the man who has nothing superfluous
Evolution of Hebrew term: (i) simply poor, (ii) being poor, having no influence or power or help or prestige,
(iii) having no influence, therefore down-trodden and oppressed by men, (iv) the man who, because he has no earthly resources whatever, puts his whole trust in God.
 2. What, then, is the meaning of "poor in spirit?" (Psalm 51:15-17; John 15:5)
How would this be manifest? (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:3; 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:16)
 3. What would be the opposite of "poor in spirit?" (Luke 18:9-14)
 4. Compare the "rich" and the "poor" (Revelation 3:16-20 and 2:9; Luke 16:19-31)
 5. How are the "poor in spirit" blessed? (Isaiah 57:15; James 4:10)
 6. Where self is king, Christ cannot be. How will this beatitude impact your life and leadership?

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:10)