

LESSON 19

GREAT BIBLE THEMES

THE HEART THAT THE LORD CAN BLESS

In our study we have noticed a number of individuals who were blessed in one way or another. Did you ever stop to think, however, that there are souls that cannot be blessed by the Lord? There is no question but that God is anxious to bless every individual. This was pointed out in a previous study when we noticed that "God is love". This characteristic means that He sincerely seeks the best for everyone. Why is it then that all do not receive the blessings of the Creator? For an answer to this question we must look to the hearts of those who may receive heaven's blessings and those who cannot.

In previous lessons we have noticed the blessings promised to the believing heart. Such a heart should also be a penitent and obedient one. Upon the conditions of believing, repenting and obeying the teaching of Christ, our salvation and all other blessings depend. Any heart that is lacking in any of these is not in a position to receive such blessings as God has in store for His people.

This leads us to our questions for today:

1. What is the most basic condition of heart that must characterize an individual before he is in a position to receive blessings from God?
2. Give several illustrations of this from the Scriptures.

3. Is this characteristic essential to all who become Christians?
4. Is it possible for those who have become followers of Christ to cease to be thus characterized?
5. Give several other terms that are used in the Bible that carry the same meaning.

LET US LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR OUR ANSWERS

Let us begin our study by noticing the emphasis that Jesus gave to the "blessed" life. In the 5th chapter of Matthew we have the record of Christ's sermon on the mount. He began this sermon by pointing out the real basis for such a life. People today might think that the truly blessed life is one of wealth and ease, but Jesus in these verses gives us the true basis of the life that heaven can bless. At least nine times he used the term "blessed" in the first eleven verses of this chapter. This term implies the life that is "happy" but this does not adequately give the depth of meaning that is inherent in it. It means that heaven can bless the life that is characterized by meekness, mercy, etc. (By all means read the first twelve verses of this chapter.) **Matthew 5:1-12, And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after 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 children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (AKJV)

In verse three we have the statement, "Blessed are the _____: for theirs is the _____." You may read this a number of times without getting a complete idea of what this characteristic really is. Let us look at a couple of modern speech versions of the New Testament in order to find this idea expressed in more familiar words. Moffatt's translation states, "Blessed are those who feel poor in spirit", while Goodspeed translates it, "Blessed are those who feel their spiritual need". Do we understand Christ to pronounce a blessing upon all who have any needs? Or only upon those who know that they are needy creatures in God's sight? Jesus placed this first on his list. Do you think it is fundamental to every heart that is to receive the blessings of God? To put this same idea in other words: Is the heart that does not feel its own needs before God in a position to be blessed?

The opposite to being poor in spirit is to be proud in spirit, or to feel sufficient within ourselves feeling that we do not need what God has for us. For our lesson today we want to look at several examples which illustrate the basic nature of this attitude. Did you ever wonder why the Jewish nation did not accept Christ?

What was the basic reason? Could it be in their attitude toward him?

On one occasion Jesus made one of the greatest of all his promises to some of his Jewish followers. It is found in John 8:31-32, "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye _____

_____, and the _____."

We understand that we can be free from the gift and practice of sin today through the truth of the gospel of which Christ was speaking. Notice the next verses to see the attitude of those to whom this promise was given. "They answered him, We be _____

_____, and were _____ to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall _____

_____?" Did they think they needed the blessing to which Christ referred? They were not poor in spirit, but they were self-satisfied and declared that they were already free and thus implied that they did not need to be made free. But were they really free? When Christ looked into their hearts did he see a free people or one in bondage to sin? Notice that Jesus reminded them of this in verse 34, ". . . Whosoever _____

_____ is the _____

_____."

Could it have been possible for Jesus to bless these people who had this attitude? They were very needy creatures, Christ knew this, but they were not conscious of their need. Do you suppose that we could be just as needy today and not be conscious of it? Remember Christ pronounced a blessing upon those who feel their spiritual need. It is interesting to notice the extent of the bondage of the Jewish nation. They were in bondage to sin, they were in bondage to

sin, they were in bondage to their traditions, they were in bondage to racial prejudice, they were in bondage to their hypocritical leaders. Christ knew this, but, when he spoke about being free, they declared that they were already free and not in bondage to anyone. They were not poor in spirit.

On one occasion Jesus gave a parable of a man who thought that his material blessings could satisfy all his needs and was not conscious of a much greater need. This parable is recorded in Luke 12:16-20, "And he spake a parable unto them saying, The ground of a certain rich man _____: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall _____, because _____ no room where to bestow _____? And he said, This will _____: _____ pull down _____, and build greater; and there all _____ and _____. And _____ say to _____, Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years; _____, and be _____." This man apparently did not think of anyone but himself. How many times did he use the term "I" in this parable? _____. How many times was "my" used? _____.

It seems that this man felt that he had every blessing for which he could ask just because he had an abundance of grain in the barn. Could God be a real blessing to such an individual when he did not realize that he had any further need? He really felt that he did not need anything. He was not poor in spirit. Now look at

the next verse to see if God saw him as an individual who had no needs. "But God said unto him, _____, _____, _____; then whose shall _____, which thou _____? So is he that _____, and is not _____." Could we call this the tragedy of the life that is not conscious of its spiritual needs? It was a life exactly opposite to the life of the poor in spirit.

In Luke 18:9-14, we have another parable of Jesus. This one was expressly given to correct the idea that men can depend upon themselves instead of God. Notice the attitudes of each of the two men referred to in the parable. "And he spake this parable unto certain which _____ that they were _____, and _____: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that _____ are, _____, _____, or even as this _____. In the week, _____ of all I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off, _____, but smote upon his breast, saying, _____. I tell you, this man went down to his house _____

_____ _____; for everyone that _____
_____ shall be _____; and he that _____
_____ shall be _____."

Let us notice several things about the attitude of the Pharisee which indicate that he was not poor in spirit. First, he was self-righteous. He was not conscious of any fault within himself but magnified the faults of others. In the second place, when he thought of himself he could only think how good he was. He told the Lord about his praying and fasting. Was he really trying to tell the Lord what a good fellow he was? Is there anything in his attitude that would indicate that he felt any need for God's blessings in his life? Could the Lord bless an individual with this attitude? By way of contrast, the Publican is one of the best examples of one who is truly poor in spirit for he knew he was a sinner and needed God's mercy. Could it be possible that the Pharisee was just as badly in need of God's blessings as the Publican, but that he was not conscious of his need?

The last part of the verse we are studying says that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who feel their spiritual need. In our last lesson we noticed that citizenship depends upon hearing the Word of God, believing in Jesus as the Christ, repenting of sins and obeying the teaching of Jesus by being baptized. Is it possible to thus obey Christ and at the same time not feel the need for salvation? Of course, one cannot obey the gospel if he does not feel that he is a needy creature before God. Thus the kingdom of heaven belongs exclusively to those who are poor in spirit in their acceptance of Jesus. This leads us to our next question: It is possible for Christians to forget their needy condition and thus cease to be poor in spirit?

We have an outstanding example of a group of Christians in the New Testament whose attitude will answer the question given above. Notice why God was displeased with the church at Laodicea. This is expressed in the letter written to that congregation and preserved for us in Revelation 3:16-17, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will

_____ . Because thou sayest, _____
_____ and _____
_____, and _____.

Before finishing this verse we want to pause to think of the attitude expressed regarding their needs. They had the same attitude that was expressed by the man who stored all his grain in new barns and then felt that he had need of nothing. In what were they depending? Were they poor in spirit? What did the Lord see when he looked into their hearts? Did he see people who really had no needs or did he see some of the most needy people in the world? Notice the terms used to describe their real condition. "And knowest not that thou art _____, and _____, and _____, and _____." Can you think of five terms that would express a more needy condition than the five used in this verse? Do you suppose it would have been possible for God to bless their lives with an abundance of good things as long as they felt that they had need of nothing? Is there a striking contrast between what they thought they needed and what God thought about it? Could we find such a contrast in our lives today?

There are other expressions in the Bible that suggest the same meaning as to be "poor in spirit". Notice Psalms 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a _____: a _____ and a _____ heart, O God, thou wilt

not despise.” You will also enjoy the wisdom of the statement in Proverbs 16:19. “Better it is to be of an _____ with the _____, than to divide the spoil with the _____.” Notice James 4:6, “God _____ the _____, but _____ unto the _____.”

TEST

1. The way to prepare oneself to receive the blessings of God is: (a) to humble oneself and feel a deep need for God's blessings, (b) simply to be in need of God's blessings, (c) to tell God what a good person we are, (d) to think only of ourselves. _____
2. A church can never come to the place where it is nauseating to Christ, because a church consists of religious people and Christ is always pleased with religious people. (True or False) _____
3. "God _____ the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." (True or False) _____
4. The man in Luke 12 was called a fool by God because: (a) he built new barns, (b) his land produced good crops, (c) he thought only of himself and thought he needed nothing, (d) he planned for old age.
5. What two words are used a number of times by this foolish person in Luke 12? _____
6. What makes one free from sin? (a) the truth, (b) our thinking we are free from sin, (c) the teaching of religious leaders which is not taught in the New Testament, (d) confessing sin to a man.
7. Who is a servant of sin? (a) one who harmonizes his life with the scriptures. (b) the man who continually sins, (c) those who seek salvation through an obedient, loving faith,

- (d) those who refuse to be guided religiously by any book but the Bible. _____
8. When men are proud, self-righteous and selfish they (are, are not) prepared to receive any blessing from God.

9. Would you say that the Laodicean church as found in Revelation 3 would be a part of that body of which Christ is the Savior, as long as they remained in the condition spoken of in verses 16-17? (Yes or No) **(See Ephesians 1:20-23, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (AKJV) and Ephesians 5:23, For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. (AKJV))** _____
10. The publican in Luke 18 was justified because: (a) he was a sinner, (b) he felt a deep need for God's mercy, for he was a sinner, (c) he prayed, (d) he prayed in the temple.

Score: 10 points for each correct answer _____

Correct answers to questions in lesson 18:

1. (c)
2. (d)
3. (b)
4. (b)
5. (c)
6. (False)
7. (a)
8. (False)
9. (after)
10. (False)