

## THE GOSPEL IN PRINCIPLE 1

### Introduction

Just as we took a focused look at the Gospel in the Twelve Steps in 2012, so now in 2013 we will look at the Gospel in the Eight Principles of Celebrate Recovery. The Twelve Steps and Eight Principles have always tracked with each other, but where I looked for specific Bible texts to bring out Gospel truth in the Twelve Steps, with the Eight Principles, the Gospel passage for each lesson will be right in front of us, found in the Beatitudes, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (beginning in Matthew 5). So as we work our way through the Eight Principles in 2013, we will attempt to draw out as much good news as we can from this sermon of Jesus – there is much good news for the Christian in just ten verses. I pray that I'll effectively communicate some of that truth, for our encouragement and strengthening, as we all continue our recoveries from sin.

Now Principle 1 says this: "Realize I'm not God; I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable." "Realizing that you are not God is a very important part of the recovery journey. It's foundational, which is why it's Principle 1. We'll talk about what it means to think you're God in a little bit, but as we start out, understand where the Gospel is – it is the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God is offering His kingdom to you. God's kingdom can be yours – that's good news, isn't it? And to get God's kingdom, all you have to do is confess your need for His mercy. You just have to admit that you are poor in spirit, and that you need Jesus. The good news in this first beatitude is that

when you admit that you **need the King, you get His kingdom**. It's a paradox – admitting you're poor in spirit makes you rich in heavenly blessing. It's a paradox, and much harder to do that it might sound. But even though it's a paradox, and hard to understand, believe it to be true because Jesus Himself is the one telling this to you. **Need the King, get His Kingdom.**

So yes – we need to realize we're not God. But tonight I want us to realize some other stuff as well – some other stuff about the good news of Jesus Christ.

### Realize Who Blesses You

Jesus Christ blesses you. Not just any man, not even a pastor or a priest. We say, "May God bless you." That sounds better than me saying, "Bless you my son." (I can't really say that seriously.) We pray that God would pronounce the blessing, because our blessing isn't worth much. God himself says you are blessed, if indeed you are poor in spirit. You are poor in spirit, and God is rich in blessing. The value of this blessing cannot be calculated.

It is God himself pronouncing the blessing in this beatitude – the creator of the universe – for surely God the Father and Jesus the Son are one.

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth."

<sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

It is a man saying to a worm, "Blessed are you, little worm, for now you will live like a man with me."

It is not just God who blesses you. It is God with us – Emmanuel. It is Jesus Christ himself; God who became man, to transform us into his likeness. The King became poor for us so that we would become rich kings in his kingdom. It is the man becoming a worm, to transform that worm into a man. Ah, to see ourselves as worms so that we might be transformed into kings!

And because Jesus is one with the Father, he speaks with the authority of the Father. The Sermon on the Mount is a sermon, preached by a preacher. And just as the blessing has unlimited value because of the unlimited value of God Himself, so is this blessing to be believed as rock-solid truth, because the preacher speaks with the authority of God.

And it is your Savior who blesses you. He knew that he could offer His kingdom to those who would trust Him with their souls, because He knew that His sacrifice would pave the way for entrance into that kingdom: <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

So realize who it is that blesses you – your Creator, your Savior, and your King. May God bless you, indeed.

#### Realize What the Blessing Is

Remember that it's not being poor in spirit that is the blessing. The blessing is that *if* you are poor in spirit, that Jesus promises you His kingdom. The blessing is the promise of the kingdom of heaven. It is a taste now of what we will enjoy forever in heaven. It is better than the best piece of chocolate, and the

memory of that taste is sweet, leaving us longing for more. “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” says King David.

So let’s understand what the blessing is not:

It is not external – it is not something that we see and want, but can’t quite grasp. And yet we still chase after it. We want the blessing of comfort, the approval of man, security, self-esteem – we chase these blessings, and even when we seem to have them, the taste leaves us unsatisfied.

So here is a challenge for some of us tonight. Do we want the external blessing of improved circumstances and less pain and suffering, or do we want the kingdom of heaven that Jesus promises us? Actually, both desires are good, but what is it that Jesus promises?

He promises the kingdom of heaven – but he never promised less pain and suffering. In fact, he is clear about telling us that God will use the pain and suffering of this fallen world, including our pain and suffering, to draw us to Him.

“Thy will be done, thy kingdom come” has to have priority in our prayers. The King blesses you with a piece of His kingdom. Pray that this would be a reality for you today.

The blessing of the kingdom of heaven is internal. It is a sense that God is working out his plan for your salvation by changing your heart. It is a sense that despite your external circumstances, “Thy kingdom come” is being answered inside of you.

And it is a present reality. It is a promise of what is to come that should give us tremendous hope in the present, regardless of external

circumstances. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.”

It is a present, internal reality, for those who are poor in spirit. It is to believe all the promises of Scripture:

- You are not guilty.
- You have been reconciled to God. Your faithful husband has brought you back into a right relationship with Him.
- You are being transformed now, into ever-increasing Christ-likeness.
- Because all of this is true, you will one-day reign with Christ in heaven, forever.

You experience God’s grace now – you have been saved by grace through faith – but God’s grace now will be transformed into glory later. Thomas Watson says that, “Grace and glory differ not in kind but in degree.” God’s grace to you now is simply a taste of the glory you will enjoy forever. But that taste can be tasted now, by those who are poor in spirit.

What tastes really good to you right now? There are some things that really taste good (even to the point of enslaving us). There are some relationships that really taste good – that seem to satisfy all our desires (even to the point of enslaving us).

There are good things in this life to enjoy. We are all here because we made these good things ultimate things, and need to repent of that, but some things and some relationships taste good.

But consider what this blessing offers. Jesus blesses the poor in spirit with His kingdom. Can anything else satisfy in comparison? C.S. Lewis says this:

“Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promise of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

All it takes to taste this blessing; to experience the kingdom of God now – is to be poor in spirit. So let’s affirm that if Jesus himself blesses us – God incarnate, our Savior and our King – and if the blessing is the kingdom of heaven **now** – a taste of the kingdom now that we will enjoy fully, forever – that we truly want to become poor in spirit.

### Get Poor in Spirit

So how do we get “poor in spirit”? We dig down deep into the dirt of lives, because it is there we will find the seed of grace planted in us.

You start by confessing that you are not God. As Dean taught last week, stop playing God. You play God when you act like the center of your universe. Your thoughts, desires and actions must be pure, because you are your own functional god. You are entitled to blessing – you are entitled to pleasure, comfort, security, and approval.

The problem with playing God is that once you feel entitled, you will do anything to get what you’re entitled to – you’ll hurt people; you’ll hurt yourself

(without realizing it); you'll suffer consequences and it will always be another person's fault – they have not met your needs.

But if you're your own god, you try to bless yourself, with ultimately disappointing results. There is no kingdom of heaven – there is the prison of your own personal hell. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan says, "It is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." But in hell we are slaves to sin forever, while in heaven, Watson says, "All those who serve Christ in heaven are kings." Yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Also, as Dean taught, stop denying the pain. The pain of our circumstances and the pain of our own choices often blind us to our own sin. If we're trying to be our own god, it follows that we need to be indestructible. When we admit that our circumstances really hurt, and more importantly, that we are really hurting inside, we are on our way to recovery. You are not only admitting that you really hurt, you are admitting that you cannot heal yourself. You are powerless to control your behavior, but Jesus is all-powerful to change your heart.

At The Orchard, we talk about "roots, life, fruit." We dig our roots down deep into God's word, we grow and live in the truth of the Gospel, and we bear fruit by serving our Lord and serving those He puts in front of us.

But "roots" in the context of becoming spiritually poor means even more than spending time in God's word. It means working the soil of your sin nature, digging deep and realizing that there is a seed of grace planted there. Remember the Thomas Watson quote: "Grace and glory differ not in kind but in

degree.” Glory is to come, but for now we look to experience God’s grace, and we find His grace growing a root structure in the dirt of our lives.

Watson then says, “The flower of glory grows out of the seed of grace.” The root structure of your recovery, to be effective, must grow deep, because it is there that the seed of grace begins to transform into a glorious flower.

There is dirt in your life. It is messy. But God’s grace is buried deep in your dirt. The more you dig deep into the sin of your life – working hard and consistently to understand your pain and the causes for it – the quicker you will find God’s grace beginning to grow a root structure that will one day become a flower of glory.

### Get the Kingdom of Heaven

I’ve used two word pictures tonight. One is the blessing of the kingdom of heaven as a taste of what is to come. A taste that is sweeter than anything you might sample here on earth. The second is working the dirt of your sin nature to find the seed of grace growing into the flower of your glory in heaven. It is digging deeper and deeper, making yourself lower and lower – this is getting poor in spirit. “Until sin is bitter, Christ will not be sweet.” The taste of the blessing is sweeter as you become more and more aware of your sin.

As I said, it is the Christian paradox. “Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up.” So here’s my third, and final word picture. It’s the picture of a seesaw or teeter-totter. A seesaw is simply a plank functioning as a lever, and a fulcrum in the middle. The weight applied on either end determines whether the other end goes high or low. Picture yourself on one end of the seesaw and a crown,



a robe and a scepter on the other end. These items represent your inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. The lower your side goes, the closer you get to the ground, the dirt of your life, the more the vision of the kingdom of heaven is lifted up. When you hit the ground, you have become poor in spirit. And it is at that point that the kingdom of heaven is most visible to you.

There may have been a time when you were on another seesaw. For a time, what you valued was important enough, heavy enough, to lift you up on your side. But somewhere along the line, someone or something knocked that stuff off, and you came crashing down.

But in recovery, your sin does not have to keep you down. There is, for those who trust Christ, the simultaneous effect of being brought low by our sin and exalting Christ and his kingdom that we will inherit, just as one side of the seesaw goes down while the other goes up.

You are not God, but thank God Jesus is. His blessing is secure, uttered with complete authority. The value of the kingdom of heaven is far more than any temporary, fading material blessing in this world. So get poor in spirit – dig down deep in the dirt of your life, where the seed of grace is. Believe that this seed will produce a flower of glory, and look up, on the other end of the seesaw and catch a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven, real to you even now.

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