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This week at MRC we continued our series in the Beatitudes, examining the start of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as he preaches to his disciples.

We noted initially that Matthew has painted a picture of Jesus that seeks to persuade us to listen to him - there's a palpable anticipation as he opens his mouth. Matthew is wanting us to see that Jesus is the one the people have been waiting for... For example from Chapter 1 he's the Son of Abraham or the Son of David or from Chapter 4 he's the one who trusted God in the Wilderness where the people of God that we saw in Numbers did not.

Jesus has already started his ministry (in 4v17) - showing us both his words and actions of authority.

As he sits down to speak the people will have been perhaps confused or frustrated as it's in one sense, not what you would expect. It feels like rather a let-down...

+ Blessed are the Poor in Spirit...

To be blessed is not quite to be 'happy and it's certainly not to be 'blessed' as the world often uses the word (honoured, privileged etc). It's less about the subjective feeling and more about the objective reality. Jesus says they are 'blessed' because they are living as God made them to live. To be poor in Spirit is to have a sense of our bankruptcy before God, knowing that we need a crutch, that we're not ok. Many say that Jesus is quoting from Psalm 34v18 - a Psalm that David wrote acknowledging his total and utter dependence on God as he looks down the proverbial barrel of Abimelek's gun.

So the parallel for us is recognizing that we can't do it on our own and need God. This is the foundational truth upon which to build as the Beatitudes continue - you cannot be filled until you are emptied. We also talked about how incredibly countercultural this is (and was) as we are naturally are self-reliant, self-centered etc and taught to believe in ourselves. The good news is we can be honest and God blessed those who acknowledge their need of him

+ ...For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

Kingdom of Heaven is a concept that Matthew uses right through his gospel. It's a now and not yet thing (see v3 and v10 for the 'now' aspect and then v4-9 for the future, not yet, aspect). It's a practical and daily thing, but also, because of the cross, a forever thing. Matthew has already described aspects of this kingdom in 4v17 - showing the broken-ness of the world being turned on its head as Jesus gives us glimpses of what's to come - healing the sick etc.

We also noted that right through the scriptures this idea can be seen - focusing in on a few key characters (eg Abraham Gen 18v27, Moses Ex 4v13, Gideon Judg 6v15, Isaiah 6v5 and Peter after he's reinstated after the resurrection).

We finished though by noting the issue for (many of) us is not so much intermittent feelings of poverty of spirit, but a continual grasp of that as a fact. We're naturally proud and our hearts seek to follow self, we want to be king etc.

How can we keep that sense of poverty of Spirit? We noted at this point the way the Sermon on the Mount works with Jesus setting the bar so high (ch 5) that we fail and ch6 showing us our dependency on our Father who loves to answer prayers and provide. The danger though is that when confronted with the depth of our sin, or our dependence - rather than turning back to him, pride and sin hardens us so we turn our backs on him . At the T-junction we turn the wrong way - sin and our dependency ought to humble us, but rather it hardens us. As we recognize these things, lets be a church that finds ourselves again and again at 5v3 - acknowledging our poverty of Spirit and our need of him.

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Some questions to start you off...

Why does Jesus start with this aspect do you think?

What does it mean to be blessed? How does the world define blessing?
Have a look at Psalm 34 (v18) what does this add to our understanding of the verse?
What is the Kingdom of Heaven - do you feel like you're a part of that kingdom? Why / why not?

How can we help one another / be helped to remember the importance of poverty of Spirit?
How can we help to not be hardened, but rather humbled by recognizing the depths of our sin (ch 5) and the reality of our dependency (ch 6)?