

## **Be-Attitudes: “Be Humble”**

### **Matthew 5:3 – May 9, 2010, Mother’s Day**

<sup>3</sup>*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Sometimes it is easier to understand something by its opposite. I think that may be true for this beatitude. I’ve been trying to think of what the opposite of “poor in spirit” is, and I think it might be a sense of entitlement – believing that both heaven and earth owe you something. “Entitlement.” This legal term has almost become a curse word. Many feel that our culture has fostered a sense of entitlement, a narcissistic lifestyle that makes me the center of the universe. Parents, educators, employers, counselors and pastors have all heard our fair share of complaints from people who feel they are owed special privileges. The language of blame, complaint and grievance is heard far too often instead of “Please,” “Thank you,” and “I’m sorry.” “I deserve it,” the entitled person says, if it is the best school, a grand home, preferential treatment, or the good life. “I deserve it, and if you don’t give it to me, I’ll kick the door down and take it!”

Two years ago, UVA student George Huguely was arrested for public intoxication and resisting arrest. According to the New York Times the arresting officer said: “He was by far the most rude, most hateful and most combative college kid I ever dealt with.” But George comes from one of the most prominent families of prominent Chevy Chase, Maryland. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, attended the best schools, had a family vacation home in Palm Beach, was a star athlete and dated one of the most impressive and attractive girls at UVA. But last week George kicked down his ex-girlfriend’s door and brutally killed her.

There is certainly more going on with George Huguely than narcissistic entitlement gone very bad, but that is at least part of what has gone on. And our whole country is reeling. George possesses so much of what our culture values. But his life is now in utter ruins.

Jesus’ beatitudes are not just sweetsy, nice sayings or pious platitudes. They are counter-cultural attacks on some of the assumptions of our unredeemed way of life. Our culture says, “Blessed are the entitled, even if they are rude, crude and kick the door down, for theirs is the Kingdom of Thingdom.” But counter-cultural Jesus says, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

In Luke’s Gospel, he translates this beatitude, *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God”* (Luke 6:20). Actually, the same Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament for physical poverty and spiritual poverty. Jesus gives us a two-fer challenge with this beatitude. To live in the kingdom of heaven we must not consider ourselves to be entitled to either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of thingdom!

Newspaper cartoon characters, Frank and Ernest are sitting on their proverbial park bench, philosophizing with their friend, the miser. Frank says to the miser: “Ernest says the three keys to a happy life are health, home and friends. I say they are eating, drinking and sleeping. What do you say?” And the miser responds: “Getting it, counting it and keeping it!”

But Jesus says, Blessed, happy are those who are poor in spirit, those who are aware of their utter dependency on God, those who are humble. Blessed are those who realize their own helplessness, their inadequacy, their desperate need to trust God. Because to do that is to be willing to do the will of God. *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Only a humble person can genuinely pray that prayer. Only one poor in spirit can be so desperate for God that they will do the kingdom of heaven’s will on earth.

This is a fitting be-attitude to look at on Mother’s Day! I have never known a good mother who did not feel inadequate to the responsibility. Most of us would say that our mothers have been models of humility and service, doing those thankless jobs without any sense of entitlement. I saw an interesting bumper sticker this week advertising a tattoo parlor: “The Ink House – Tattoos Your Mother Would Love.” Most of us have already been tattooed by our mothers’ humble service. Our lives bare the heart-shaped tattoo of “Mother, Poor in Spirit.” “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!”

Blessed are those who realize that to be human is to be profoundly needy. We bring nothing into this world, and we take nothing out. Blessed are those who hear (the) what the Spirit is saying to the church in Jesus’ message to the Church of Laodecia in Revelation 3: <sup>17</sup>*For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* Blessed are those who hear the word of the prophet Isaiah: <sup>15</sup>*For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.* (Ch. 57)

To humbly move outside of ourselves is to move close to the kingdom of heaven! Our grandson, Jack, had a fine Easter! He was lovingly carried to worship – not only to be shown off in his Easter outfit, but to connect with others outside himself and his immediate family. And it was on Easter that Jack for the first time started following another person with his eyes. At lunch Jack followed the waiter with his eyes. Certainly he is growing in awareness and self-differentiation. But he is also growing in spirit – moving outside of himself, and seeing the humble service of others. Can’t you tell that Jack went to church on Easter!

Someone has wisely said spiritual formation is a lot like the growth of wheat: the more we mature, the more we bow down. The more of God’s grace, love and holiness we see, the less of ourselves we focus on. The more entitled we see that God is for all our praise and honor, the less entitled we see that we are for anyone’s praise and honor. The more we bend down to open up the door of our life to the knocking Jesus, the less we kick down the door to the things we think we are owed. For blessed are the humble!

There is a great deal of truth in that classic story of the frog that decided to seek a warmer climate for the winter. At first he could think of no fit way to go south. Then he contrived a way. He found a piece of string and convinced the two wild geese who were his friends to hold each end of the string in their mouths while he held onto it. So off they flew, he

feeling especially important and smart! But pride goes before a fall, and there is no blessing to those who think themselves too entitled and elevated above others! A neighbor frog, whom he especially looked down on, yelled up: "Who thought of that?" And the flying frog could not contain his pride. He cupped his hands and yelled: "I diiiiiiiid!" Splat!

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Blessed are those who acknowledge God Almighty as the one who empowers us to mount up with the wings as eagles, or fly with the geese! Blessed are those who know that it is by grace that we are saved, not by our works or our entitlements!

Prayer:

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling.  
Naked, come to thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.