

# NICK GUY & THE POOR & KNOW IT AFFAIR

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**THEME:** What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

**NOTES:** Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5 through 7 provides us with solid, practical guidelines for Christian living. It is one of the most widely quoted sections of Scripture, but it also is one of the most widely misunderstood or misapplied sections as well.

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus presents the first of what have been called the Beatitudes. Here, Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God." For us to understand what this promise means to us and how we can attain it, it's important to know specifically what Jesus meant by each key word.

**BLESSED:** The word "Blessed" is how we translate the Greek word *Makarios*. It means happy, fortunate and blissful.

There is something important to realize about applying this word. The kind of happiness, blissfulness or contentment Jesus is speaking of is the kind that cannot be found in external things. True blessedness, true happiness is within our hearts and is not affected by the circumstances of life. It is inward and not dependent on outward circumstances.

**POOR:** The Greek word for "Poor" used in Matthew 5:3 does not merely describe someone who has little money or resources, but rather someone who cowers, cringes and shrinks back, understanding they're own poverty. It doesn't just imply simple poverty, but total destitution.

**WHY WOULD THE POOR BE HAPPY?:** This certainly seems strange, perhaps even contradictory. Jesus said that these cowering, totally destitute people are blessed, or happy. How can anyone in such a miserable condition be happy? Is there virtue in destitution?

Certainly when one is in need they are more inclined to look to God. But, the Bible is filled stories of godly men and women who had wealth and still had a heart toward God. Job was a godly man who had great wealth. As was Abraham. Even the New Testament tells us of people of wealth who were followers of Christ:

Joseph of Arimathea, mentioned in Matthew 27:56-61;

and a Roman centurion, mentioned in Luke 7:5;

Philemon, who the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to, was a man of means.

Lydia, from Acts 16:13-15, and Cornelius, from Acts 10.

**IN SPIRIT:** Matthew 5:3 appears paradoxical until we notice two important words in the verse.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:3 seems to be saying that if you want to be happy you must be totally destitute. But Jesus didn't say "Blessed are the poor," He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The total destitution Jesus is speaking of is spiritual, not merely physical.

The poor in spirit are those who recognize their total spiritual destitution and complete need for God. They are spiritual beggars. This is the kind of person spoken of in Isaiah 66:2 which reads: "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

This is the person who is "brokenhearted" and "crushed in spirit" spoken of in Psalm 34:18.

**CONCLUSION:** The happiness Jesus promised in Matthew 5:3 was not for people who are poor financially. It has nothing to do with money at all. He was speaking of those who, in humility, recognize their spiritual poverty.

But how does recognizing our spiritual poverty make us happy? It would seem that such a thing would make us sad.

The happiness doesn't come from recognizing our helplessness. Being in need is not a virtue, nor does humility make us worthy of the Kingdom of God. But being in need and being humble leads us *to* God, and it's God who has the power to deliver us and give us the Kingdom.

Through the work of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died on our behalf for our sins, we have our sins forgiven. We go from spiritual poverty to spiritual wealth as God graciously and mercifully gives us salvation and allows us to share in the unsearchable riches of Christ.

To be poor in spirit doesn't mean we have to give up all we have, but, by being poor in spirit, we realize the fleeting value of all we have. We are content with it, or without it, as long as we have the Kingdom of God.

**RESOURCES:** John MacAurhtur's New Testament Commentary; R.C. Sproul's "Essential Truths of the Christian Faith."