

### **Poor in spirit--Matthew 5:3**

The question before us is to understand what Jesus meant. We must interpret it from Jesus' point of view, not ours, or anyone else's. To be 'poor in spirit' means to have a humble spirit. It is not about money, it is about attitude. The Bible that Jesus had was the Old Testament, and that is where we should look for the definition of the phrase.

Isaiah 66:1-2 – Thus says Jehovah: "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build for me? And where is the place of my rest? For all these things my hand has made, and all those things exist," says Jehovah. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word."

Jehovah identifies himself as the Creator of everything, and then says what kind of person He wants. The word 'poor' is allied to 'contrite', but the fundamental requirement is to tremble at the Word of God. A person who 'trembles' like this is acknowledging that this Word exercises objective authority over him.

Psalm 34:18 goes in the same direction: "Jehovah is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit". Psalm 51:17 also: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, you will not despise". And Isaiah 57:15 also: "Thus says the High and Lofty One, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones". And this matches 2 Chronicles 16:9: "The eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him". God is looking for whom He can bless. This is what is also found in James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5 and Proverbs 3:34: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble".

Now then, Jesus said the Kingdom of God belongs to such people. If the Kingdom is theirs, they are part of that kingdom. No one enters the Kingdom without having a humble spirit, but not everyone who has a humble spirit enters the Kingdom, not necessarily. We must remember that no benefit from the shed blood of the Lamb of God is automatic—everything is potential. God's promises need to be appropriated, but on the way the preconditions have to be met. God's part is guaranteed, but not ours; there are levels of appropriation. Remember the parable of the sower, or of the soils; the seeds that fell into the good soil produced at different levels—100%, 60%, 30%.

Consider Matthew 18:3—"Assuredly I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of the heavens." But why would Jesus have used a little child as a model? Well, they are literalists, they truly believe, they are dependent and teachable—we also have to understand that we are dependent on God, being open to His teachings; we must genuinely believe in His Word, taking that word literally (respecting the norms of language), knowing that this word is to be obeyed. And as we do so we will find that we are being blessed.

But how would all this work for an Indian lost in the jungle, who has never heard of Jesus, a God who loves us, but who sets standards of conduct—never, nothing. Consider Acts 10:34-35; this is the case of the centurion Cornelius. After hearing his explanation, Peter declared: "Really, I comprehend that God is not One to show partiality, but in every ethnic nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him." Cornelius lived up to the light that he had, and God performed a miracle to give him more light. The same thing happened to the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-39) – he lived up to the light that he had, and God performed a miracle to give him more light.

It is true that both Cornelius and the Ethiopian had some access to the Bible, which the Indian would not have. But everyone is born with a conscience, and everyone has the light of creation, Romans 1:20. There are cases in the annals of modern missions where God worked a miracle to bring more light to someone who was living up to the little light that he had. Our God is just. Jehovah's eyes roam the entire earth, seeing each ethnic group and the people who make it up, and He reaches out to anyone who is deserving it.