

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: How To Be Blessed and Poor

Transcribed Message
September 17, 2017
Matthew 5:3

I received an email this past week that I wanted to pass along to you and actually I need to tell you ahead of time that the person who sent me the email asked me not to share it with anybody. They asked me to keep it strictly and highly confidential. They thought it could have a negative impact on me and evidently on them as well. I felt that I should share it with you. In this email, they directed me to a website and that website is www.getfilthyrichnow.com. I don't know how many of those videos I've watched. I don't know how many of those booklets I've read on how to get filthy rich right now but they haven't worked. None of them have worked. You know I didn't watch those and you know I didn't read those, but even if I had they wouldn't have worked, would they? Does anybody here have a reoccurring dream where they find a bag of money in the ditch along by the road? Any of you guys ever? I haven't either, but a friend of mine told me about that one time. I just wanted to see if that was true of you guys.

We look at that idea of getting rich, getting filthy rich right now. We look around in a world that seems pretty intent on making that one of the major goals of life. It reminds me of the actress who said, "I've been rich and I've been poor and believe me, rich is better." And then along comes Jesus. Along comes Jesus and He says blessed are the poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

So we're turning to Matthew 5 this morning and we are in the second of our studies of the Sermon on the Mount. We're in the first on what we call the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes. The word "Beatitudes" simply is the word for blessing. That's what we're looking at here. We're looking at something that many of us are familiar with. These blessings. We want to look at the first one this morning. We want to see that true spirituality begins with a deep understanding of just how dependent I am on God or how God-dependent I am. God isn't just to be viewed as a crutch for us. We don't view God

as a crutch. We view God as absolutely everything that we need. We will elaborate on that a little bit more as we go.

Let's review quickly what we looked at last time in introducing the Sermon on the Mount. We said this is one of the most powerful sermons ever preached. As I looked at that in reviewing, I thought that could've been said after every sermon Jesus preached. Every time He spoke, somebody certainly said that's the most powerful sermon I've ever heard. That was always true because Jesus, being the Son of God, spoke with great authority and great power. In this case, there may be some significance to saying that because this is His first message that we have recorded in the Gospels. As we said, this is kind of an inaugural address. This is the first time that the gospel writers give us an extended discourse of Jesus's teaching. Matthew is going to do that three different times in his gospel. He is going to do it in 5, 6 and 7, the group of chapters we're looking at. He is going to do it later on in chapter 13 when Jesus transitions to teaching in parables. He begins speaking in parables because the nation had rejected Him. The religious leaders had in fact ascribed to His works as being the various works of Satan himself. In chapter 13 what happens? Jesus begins teaching parables in mysterious kinds of ways that not everyone understood. Then when you get to the end of the book in chapters 24 and 25, you have Matthew giving us what's called the Olivet Discourse that looks ahead to future events. So this is Jesus's first message.

The second thing we said it touches on timely and very challenging topics. This touches on timely and challenging topics. This is where we live life. When we work our way through the Sermon on the Mount, we're going to hit stuff really every Sunday that just is describing where we live life every day. As you remember that list of topics that we looked at last week, we noted all of the different things that Jesus is going to deal with. As you look over that list as I did, there might be some Sundays I don't want to be here and hear necessarily what Jesus has to say about one of those things. I hope you won't judge me for that because that's in Matthew 7, when you're not supposed to judge other people. Those are the things that make up life. Those are the challenges we face. How is it that we're to walk through and deal with these things? Jesus is going to touch on those.

Then lastly, we talked about the fact that all through the Sermon on the Mount, and you could say literally through the life of Christ, He just hates superficial religion. He just takes it head-on. That's why Jesus was so disruptive with the religious leaders of His time because if they were anything at all, they were superficial in their religion. What does that mean, to be superficial in religion? I would think of it as your understanding of God and the things of God are really on the periphery of your life. It's just kind of out there a little bit, at arms-length. It is all about what happens maybe here on a Sunday or in other isolated parts of your life, but it certainly isn't all of your life. That's superficial religion. Superficial religion is very concerned about what other people think, about what other people see. It is very concerned about acting in a certain way, putting on a good front. All of that Jesus just takes head-on. He disrupts people and that I think He is going to disrupt us as well.

So let's jump in and look at the Beatitudes themselves. I want to do two things. I want to first of all speak a little bit about all of them as a group. We'll just take them altogether and as you read through the opening verses of chapter 5, there are nine different times where Jesus says something about blessing. Blessed are. Blessed are. Blessed are. Nine different times. It's possible that there are only eight Beatitudes per se. we'll deal with that when we get a little farther along because one of them seems to bring this group to a close. The ninth one almost repeats what the eighth said. So we'll talk about that, but here are at least eight or nine times that Jesus talks about blessing.

Look at the structure of each one of these Beatitudes for just a minute. As you look at the structure of each one of them, the first thing that we notice is there is an ascription at the beginning of every one of them. The ascription is exactly the same each time. Jesus says something about being blessed. Blessed are the poor in spirit and all the way through that list. There are two words in the New Testament that are translated in our English Bible with the word "blessed". There is the word from which we get the word "eulogy". In Ephesians chapter 1 verse 3 Paul says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant grace and mercy, has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens." what is that word there doing? It is really ascribing praise. It's a word "blessed" that ascribes worship and in this case to the only one who's deserving of that and that is God. So you have that word

“eulogy” that we get from that word and that’s an idea of praise. The word that Jesus uses here is the word *makar* and it means happiness. Here it happens to be a form of that word. We could easily translate every one of these opening ascriptions with the word happiness or happy. Happy are these people.

One of the problems that we have when we hear the word happy is we probably all have a whole bunch of different ideas maybe about what that even constitutes, almost like saying the word “love” in our language. We have certain things that we immediately think love is, at least in the context of our culture and our worldview. It’s the same thing here. When you hear the word happy, a lot of people immediately think of things that are very subjective, things having to do with their life circumstance. Why wouldn't you, because there are life circumstances that definitely elevate our happiness. There are certain things that can happen to us in a very subjective sense that relate to our feelings more than almost anything else. So when we do that, the world offers their own definition of happiness. I want us to see that when Jesus uses this word, He has something entirely different in mind. When Jesus talks about happiness, He's talking about God's favor on our lives. Blessed is the person because God's favor is on their life, because they are in a right relationship with God, because they understand how it is that God sees us as His children.

Go back to the book of Numbers. I think this is a great example of a blessing that was spoken by Moses to Aaron. Listen to what the Lord said to Moses: “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying that you shall bless the people of Israel. You shall say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.” That is known as one of the great benedictions. That's known as one of the great blessings in the Bible. He's speaking a word of blessing upon God's people and what was he doing in that? He was saying I want you people to know the favor of God is on you. I want you to know because of your relationship to Him, God sees you in a special way. That is what Jesus is talking about here. He is talking about people who are in that kind of relationship with God.

So go from the ascription to the description secondly. What do you see in the description? In each case after the blessing Jesus describes somebody. Again, this

morning it's those who are poor in spirit. Next time, Lord willing, it is going to be those who are mourning. Then it is going to be those who are meek, and those who hunger, and then those who are merciful, and those who are pure, and then those who are the peacemakers. He is going to go all the way through to the persecuted. So there's an ascription of blessing because of the favor of God on us. Then there's a description of what that looks like.

And then lastly, there is a promise. There's an outcome. There is a consequence. If this is true, then this is going to follow. Notice how each of the outcomes fits the blessing. The poor are going to inherit. The hungry are going to be filled. You work your way through and in each case there is something specific to that because of who you are, this is how you're to act. Because of who you are and how you act, there's an outcome of blessing in your life that Jesus describes for us.

The characteristics is what I want you to see next. Again there are three things here that are true of each one of these, and I think it will be helpful to us as we work our way through to see how this works out in each of these different cases. The first thing that is pretty obvious to see is that these are paradoxes. The Beatitudes, if they're anything, are paradoxes. Thomas Watson said they're sacred paradoxes. They're sacred paradoxes. Most people would say an opposite cannot exist with its opposite. How could it be that you could have these two things coexist together? The very first one that we look at this morning. He's talking about somebody who's poor somehow being rich. Those two things do not generally in our worldview go together. You can't be both poor and rich in terms of how it is that we usually view life and its circumstances. You can't say that you're in the midst of mourning and sorrow and be joyful. Those things don't fit together. Persecution causes me to be miserable in our usual frame of mind and thinking. Persecution leads to misery, not to blessing. And yet, Jesus turns each one of these on its head and we have an unexpected opposite in the midst of these paradoxes.

Why is that? Because all we have to do is go back to what we talked about earlier, because Jesus is in the business of upending the world's values. Jesus is in the business of upending the world's values. Last week we talked about even as I said this morning Jesus turning our world upside down. You know that in Acts 17: 6 it talks about

the Christians in Thessalonica and they were accused of turning the world upside down. The leaders in Thessalonica said we've got to watch out for these people because everywhere they go they turn the world upside down. Well, here's the picture that you should have of that. God creates. Man corrupts. And then God redeems. God creates the world is as it is supposed to be. Man corrupts and the world is turned upside down. Jesus comes and what does He do? He turns the world right side up. From the vantage point of the world, they're looking at it and seeing it as upside down. The truth of the matter is the redeeming work of God in our life is in effect turning the world right back to where it was supposed to be. But that's what Jesus does. Jesus's values are not the values of the world. What his followers value are not to be the values of the world. What is it that the world values? What does the world promote?

Certainly the world promotes power. I don't know if you saw this story this week. It was a fascinating story about a woman in Washington DC in the midst of power. She was called the social gatekeeper of DC for decades. Her name was Sally Quinn. She happened to be married to the guy who owned the Washington Post. She was a big time social gatekeeper in DC. and it came out recently that she was heavily into the occult, so much so that she would call upon certain people who had occultic interests and powers to do things to certain people she didn't like. It's an amazing story. This is a woman who was in power in DC for a long time. Everybody wanted to be in the circle that she brought together. What was it that the world valued? All of those things – power, prestige, money, influence, reputation. Name it. Pleasure. All of it is out there. Those are the things that the world is pursuing. So when you get to the Beatitudes and you work your way through the Sermon on the Mount, you'd better get ready because Jesus is going to turn this all upside down. When you look through Jesus's list of what it is that we're supposed to value, there isn't anything about sophistication, there isn't anything about superior intelligence, there isn't anything about pleasure. None of them make the list. He starts off and says blessed are the poor in spirit. We have this idea of Jesus upending values.

Then notice all of this is going to be based on the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. We've already sung about the Holy Spirit and the work that we need of the Spirit in our life. That's what the Beatitudes are. They are a description for us of the life of

Christ. That's what we said the Sermon on the Mount is going to be and how Jesus lived life. It's how Jesus lived life. Jesus always lived obedient to the Father. Jesus walked every moment of every day in absolute submission to the Holy Spirit. That's why we look at His life with wonder and amazement and awe because it all reflects a spirit-controlled life absolutely pleasing to the Father. That causes us to say if we're going to follow these Beatitudes in our life, it all begins with the relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Then as the Holy Spirit of God indwells us at that moment of faith and then continues to empower us as we submit our will and our desires to His, then this is the life that gets produced. The life of the Spirit.

So let's take that background and let's jump in to the first beatitude. Here we go. The first and the foundational one, and that's the way we need to think of this. That's the way we need to remember this. It is not only the first one, but it's laying the foundation. We're going to see why it lays the foundation as we go through this first beatitude, because it starts off and tells us blessed are the poor in spirit. Now here's the interesting thing. As you know, the Gospels give us differing accounts of the life of Christ. We mentioned that last week. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – they all have a little different snapshot, a little different picture, a different purpose. Matthew is presenting Jesus as King. As Matthew does that, he is going to tell us blessed are the poor in spirit. Luke is coming at it from a little different vantage point. The Sermon on the Mount in Luke is not the Sermon on the Mount. It's the sermon on the plains. I think that's kind of fascinating that in Matthew's account of this, Jesus was on a mountain. I told you last week Jesus taught this material oftentimes. This wasn't the only time He taught these truths. He taught these truths all through His life. In Luke's account, Luke remembers Jesus teaching some of these things and He was on the plain. Luke says blessed are the poor. He doesn't go on to say what Matthew did. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

We need to start by asking first of all what question? Who are the poor? Who are the poor? Who is in view here? If the poor get a blessing, I want to know who those poor are. What does that look like? What does that mean? What is Jesus referring to? I want to say a couple things that is not. The first thing it's not is this is not material poverty. We know that because Matthew tells us blessed are the poor in spirit. The goal of life is not to be broke. Even though if you have teenagers, you kind of feel like that's

the goal of their life is to see if they can break you. There is all a lot of money going out the door. But the goal of life isn't to be broke. It's not a virtue to be poor. The Bible says a lot about the poor and says a lot about the rich. It says it's hard for a rich man to get into heaven because his dependency is so often on material things. There is a blessing the Bible talks about of poverty. But when Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit, He is not commending a life of material poverty to us per se. If that were the case, what should we not do? We should not help the poor then, right? Because we'd be taking a blessing from them rather than having them receive one. If it's a blessing to be materially poor, then we should leave the poor materially poor because that's what Jesus would be saying. But He's not saying that.

Secondly, this is not a matter of self-image. This is not a matter of being poor in spirit as if to say to us that what we should be doing is that we should be constantly in a state of mental or emotional self-depreciation. Nobody likes me. Everybody hates me. I think I'll go eat some worms. We go around telling people how nothing we are and just how much of a loser we are all day long. We may do that on occasion just to have fun with each other, but that's not what Jesus is commending to us. He is not commending that we beat ourselves down and have a low self-image and a low view of ourselves. In fact, we could get to the point we're kind of proud of the fact that we have such a low self-image. We don't want to do that either. This is what? This is talking about spiritual poverty. This is talking about spiritual bankruptcy.

There are two words in the New Testament that are translated again just as we saw with blessed as we see here with poor. The first word is a word that speaks of someone who is barely making it. They're living day to day and paycheck to paycheck. now that we have redefined that in America. I read just this week 80% of Americans when asked how much money is left when the month is nearly gone, 80% said they live from paycheck to paycheck, that there's nothing left when they get to the end of the paycheck and there's still more month to go. So now again, we have redefined that compared to most of the world because we still have a lot of stuff. It wouldn't speak to our being necessarily in poverty but that's the word that Jesus uses here. **Word?** He is talking about somebody who's really living day-to-day. Remember the widow in Luke 21 and she came into the temple and she had two copper coins, less than pennies. She

gave them both. Jesus said He'd never seen anybody give as much as that widow lady. All those guys were over there playing with their money and putting it into the coffer. That's the word Jesus uses for that widow. **Word?**

The second word that we see in the New Testament is *ptochos* and it's almost a word that is getting something of the sound of what this word is going to indicate to us. It's utter destitution. There is no means of support. You're absolutely, totally dependent on somebody else for the very means to stay alive. It was a word that was always connected with being a beggar, somebody who was despised. An outcast of society would have fallen under this description. This person that Jesus is describing for us is the person that none of us want to be in terms of how the world looks at the affairs of life. This is not the place that most of us would readily want to go. The world says be assertive. The world says be self-sufficient. The world says push and shove and do whatever you have to do, but your goal is to get to the top. Jesus comes along and He says the greatest place of blessing is to be in a place of absolute, spiritual destitution. The best place to be is to be in a place of spiritual bankruptcy. Most people spend their entire life doing everything they can to never get anywhere near this place and yet Jesus commends this very place to us. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

I mentioned in the opening in our big idea for today that Christianity is not a crutch. In fact, Christianity is more than a crutch. It is absolutely everything. Think about that for a minute. When the world says, as it often does, I don't need that. That is just a crutch. If you need it, fine. If that works for you, good. You probably are a weak, wimpy person anyway. Yet if you see somebody with a pair of crutches and they've got a broken ankle or broken leg, we don't go up and kick the crutch out from under them. We don't say, "Come on, you wimp! Why do you need those crutches?" Of course not. Because we acknowledge the fact that they need them. They're in a place of desperation if you will. Physically they have to have them to get around. This is what Jesus is saying to us. He's saying unless and until you see yourself before God in a place of absolute, spiritual destitution you're not going to get this blessing that He ascribes and describes. That's the beginning point of it all. The reason people see Christianity as a crutch is because they don't think they need God's help in anything. They've got it covered. They can handle it. Whatever life throws at them, they'll take it

on. Jesus says to adopt that position is to miss out on this first and most foundational of blessings. As we're going to see, it's going to impact everything after this.

So let's look at how to be blessed and poor. I want to just take a couple of minutes and speak to this matter of how to be blessed and poor by just showing you some Biblical examples. I guess the first one that I can go to is the last book of the Bible revelation. When Jesus is speaking to the churches, what He says to the church at Laodicea is this: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." Then listen. This is Jesus's indictment of the church at Laodicea. "...not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked." That is Jesus's description of the church at Laodicea. They thought they had it all together. Jesus says you don't have any idea of where you are in terms of your need for Me.

Remember in Luke 18 in the account that Jesus gives of the two guys that are praying. One is the religious leader and he's praying in big flowery words evidently and making a big scene. He wants everybody to see him. He actually looks over at this other guy who is destitute and poor and a beggar of sorts, and he says, God, I am so grateful I'm not like that guy over there. God, thank You for blessing me in all the ways that You do, and I know You look at me and You see how wonderful I am and I'm so grateful for that. Jesus is observing this and seeing this other man who will not even lift his eyes to the heavens because he is so humble in his heart and in his spirit. He is so poor in spirit that he acknowledges that he brings nothing that God would see that would be commendable. Jesus points that he's the guy that you want to be like. Not the guy over here who everybody thinks has it all together.

Just go through Scripture. Abraham said I am but dust. Moses said Lord who am I. I can't do any of this. David in Psalm 51— God, you don't want sacrifices and offerings. What do you want? A broken and contrite heart. Job said God now I see and I despise myself. Isaiah said woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips. John the Baptist said I am not worthy to unlace this man's sandals. He must increase but I must decrease. Paul the Pharisee was so boastful and so proud of all that he had accomplished before

God until he got saved. Then he said that is like a pile of rubbish to me. There's nothing there that I need in that past life.

So what then is poverty of spirit? It is a sense of our own weaknesses. It is a sense of our own dependency on God, our helplessness before God. It is a sense of our unworthiness, if you will. It is all of those things that Jesus is commending to us when He says blessed are you if you're poor in spirit. So that leaves us then with one thing. How do we get it? How do we arrive at that place where our attitude and our life and our world reflects this first beatitude... blessed are the poor in spirit. Jesus in effect says that there are two possible postures before God.

There are two possible postures before God. One is a heart of pride. One is a proud heart, a proud spirit. The other is to be in place of humility and humbleness before God. In one, we're very full of ourselves. We're very confident of our self, of our abilities, of what we can do. In the other one, there's absolutely a sense of our poverty, of our brokenness before God. Jesus begins the Beatitudes and He begins this message with what the Bible teaches from cover to cover. God resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble. If you want to take away from this first beatitude that's what Jesus is capturing. Do you know what is often said of the book of James? It is often said of the book of James that it's the epistle that reflects the sermon on the Mount. James mirrors many of the things that Jesus says in this teaching, not the least of which is right here. God resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble. Why would we want to take a position that we know God is going to resist, that He's told us He's going to resist? So how do we get there?

Let me suggest three things. First we have to begin by accepting and agreeing with God's estimation of ourselves. That's where it starts. What is that estimation? What does God say about us? He says that there's nothing that we can do to commend ourselves to Him and to His grace. There's not one thing that we can do to earn merit or favor in our own efforts or in our own works. That's why the apostle Paul says in Romans 12 and in verse 3: "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." Don't think more highly of yourself than you should think. Think about what God's estimation is of

us. Agree with Augustus Toplady when he said in that hymn: “Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to the cross I cling.” If you're bringing to God all of your self-efforts and all of your works, and all of the things that you think commend you to Him and cause Him to have a greater favor towards you, then you're going to totally miss out on this blessing. Because it says to us there isn't anything that we can do to commend ourselves to God. Jesus wants us to adopt not an attitude of riches and say God here's the stuff I'm bringing you, but in fact come to God with an open hand and say God, I have nothing in myself to commend myself to You. It is only through what Christ has done for me on the cross. So we see ourselves in debt to sin. We see ourselves as bankrupt before God. A debt that we can't possibly pay.

Secondly keep the focus on Christ. We begin by accepting God's estimation of ourselves and secondly keep our focus on Christ. I read last month a book called Marching Off the Map and if you're an educator, you need to read this book. It is the most fascinating description of the age in which we're living and the young people and children that are growing up in our time that I have ever read. It was absolutely engaging because I was sitting and reading a description of the world around me that I had never quite thought of in this way. The idea of marching off the map has to do with we have a map and we've been following this map forever, but the map isn't giving us the results we need anymore. Somebody's got to march off the map and create a new trail. But that's for another time. He talks about the fact that everything has changed in our world. Primarily one of the drivers of that change has to do with technology. The most common posture of people is looking down at our phones. I don't care where you are or what you're doing. Everything is that way. He points out a number of very interesting things as to what that looks like and what that means as we relate, share and engage.

But the bottom line is it is an absolutely self-absorbed culture. That's not like news but it's being demonstrated in ways that we've not seen before because a lot of it is having to do with technology. We're living in this narcissistic age on steroids. This is narcissism on steroids. We're just completely self-absorbed. This statistic I do not even believe because I just think it's got to be underreported, but it said that there are 1 million selfies posted a day. That can't possibly be true because I know people who post

almost that many by themselves so it's got to be more than 1 million. Don't misunderstand me on this point, because I'm not trying to guilt you. Social media was not built to promote and display poverty of spirit. Social media has become almost by definition a display of our surplus. We want everybody to see not that we have poverty of spirit. We would never want to pursue that. We don't want the world to think of us as in any way being destitute, in any way being in a category that Jesus described as a beggar. We want the world to look at us as abundant, as surplus. To be proud is to be self-focused. To be humble is to be Christ-focused.

Do you know what you won't find in the Bible? In any of those places where the people of God say something about their desperate need before God, whether Abraham, Moses or Job. Do you know what God never does any of those cases? He never comes along and pumps up their self-image. There's no you're amazing. You are incredible. Your best life is coming because of who you are and what you've got inside you. Of course, you can do it. God never does that. Do you know what He does? He basically says you're right. That's a good place to be because that place I can come to and I can bless you in ways that you never thought. I could be the mouth that gives you the words that you don't know if you can speak. I can be the hands that they feel so weak and powerless that are not sure they can accomplish the task that is ahead. I can fill you with the energy and the power of My Spirit that will enable you to be bold in the midst of a time of fear and anxiety. That's what He does in those cases. We don't need God speaking words of self-esteem into our life. We need God directing us as He always does through His Son.

With that, I close because this is the last point. Since we're people of the book, every day when we're opening that book we're asking God, we're praying daily for God to keep me poor in myself but mighty in my reliance on You. I would add to our prayer as we open God's Word every day, say God, here I am. I want to be a person of the book. I want You to speak Your truth into my life today and I want to hear from You today and I want to walk with You today. God, as I do that, I want to ask that You would keep me poor in myself today and keep me mighty in my reliance on You. That is what God would do as we read that Word. Jesus has promised to those who are poor in spirit that they will inherit the kingdom of heaven. For their's is – present tense! Present

tense. Now. Later, yes, and to a greater degree, but right now theirs is the kingdom of God, which is to say they are walking in an awareness of the Lordship of Christ in their life and all of the blessings that that brings. It is a part of their experience day to day. My friend, true spirituality begins with a deep understanding of just how God-dependent I am. God isn't just a crutch to me. He's everything.

So what do we take away? No matter how long you've been a Christian, no matter how long you have walked with God, never get over the fact that God loves you, that God forgave you, and that God's greatest desire and joy is to think of spending eternity with us as He brings glory to Himself and to His name forever and ever. That comes to us all by God's grace. That's why we can come as Toplady said: "Nothing in my hands do I bring but simply to the cross I do cling". As we have said a 100 times, when we gather around the cross, it is just a level field. Nobody has a leg up on anybody. Nobody has done anything to commend themselves to God above somebody else. It's all the same. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death on all of us, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. That's the place where we want to be, a place of acknowledging God. We're not looking for religious people. We are not looking for good people to populate heaven. God is looking for broken people. He is looking for humble people, for people who understand that salvation is by grace through faith and that not of ourselves. It's the gift of God, not of works, lest any of us should boast. That's incredibly humbling and that's where God wants us to be.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for these opening words from our Lord. Father, our prayer is going to be that You will seal these truths to our heart, that we will walk with You in humbleness of heart. Father, how easy it is to become prideful in our own spirit and sufficiency, and yet how necessary it is for us to humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God. God, when we do that, You have said that You will lift us up. Father, I pray this morning if there's someone here who has been maybe pursuing You by good works, or maybe there's somebody here that's really not had any interest in You at all that, Father, Your Spirit would speak these words of encouragement into their heart and their life. I pray that they would see the grace of God and the work of Christ on the cross and the desire that You have to be in a relationship with them and all of

that being available to us by what You have provided. We pray that the work of Your Spirit would be strong in their life even this morning. In Jesus's name, amen.