

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Taught by Bruce Bickel

Session: May 18, 2012

Father, we are just honored to be the presence of one another. Father, we are a family. We've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and it's not because of any of our achievements; it's because of the things that you privilege us with because of the atonement work of Christ. Father, we just humbly pray that you would remove all of the frustrations of this week—the fears, the anxieties that we have in life in general—that for these few moments, that your Holy Spirit would just descend upon us and fulfill his job description to guide us into all truth. Set us free from all the expectations and falsehoods of thought that we have concerning you and your nature and your character, and just gives us a clear mind of who you are. We don't ask for answers this day, Lord, we just humbly pray that you would give us a clear vision of who you are, that we might see you as you really are, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We're continuing our study on the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus' first staff meeting that he had with his disciples. He came to them and basically did not give them a strategic plan, basically said, “This is the kind of person you're going to become.” In so doing, he begins to talk about the character and the witness of the children of the kingdom of God. In other words, this is what it takes to become a kingdom citizen, and these are the characteristics of a kingdom citizen, and this is the witness of a kingdom citizen. The whole issue is the kingdom of God.

You've got to understand the book of Matthew is primarily written to a Jewish audience, and so the major theme is going to be the kingdom of God. Consequently, that's why you see the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven so often referred to in the book of Matthew. It's because it's to a Jewish audience.

The book of Matthew, as we understand, is not in chronological order like Luke or Mark. It's really just a compilation of the events in Jesus' life. He puts it together to fit into the Jewish theme of the kingdom of God because he's the King of the Jews, the Messiah, so it is not a chronologically written book as Luke and Mark are.

As we come to our understanding of the Beatitudes, which is the preamble to the Sermon on the Mount, he begins to introduce us to eight character qualities of the kingdom citizen, the first of which we looked at several weeks ago, was blessed are the poor in spirit. As we remember that, that basically helps us understand our spiritual bankruptcy. It basically teaches us that we have no spiritual resources that will cause God to do anything. The person who comes to that realization comes to the realization that I'm really a spiritual beggar. There's nothing that I have that is going to appease God's wrath against me because of my sin. When a person comes to that realization, they are blessed.

Remember the word “blessed” means happy in spite of circumstances. It means you find yourself in a situation which you cannot control externally, but you come to some realization internally that I'm a spiritual pauper, that I'm a spiritual beggar, have no spiritual resources, and Lord, would you fill me with all the resources of your own life. That's how one enters into the kingdom of heaven. It's by understanding what it means to be poor in spirit. That's an offense to the world because the world always says you need to think well of yourself. The most thing that we can think of ourselves most well would be to be poor in spirit because that's the moment that we're filled with the person and work of Christ.

As we come to our second Beatitude, we look at, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4). These eight Beatitudes are... basically you can arrange them in four sets of two. Blessed are the poor in spirit and blessed are those who mourn really go together, as we'll see the

next ones as we work through this in our future studies.

The first of these two is a series of blessings that Christ pronounced upon those who were poor in spirit, those who when they realize, as we saw a description of those who've been awakened to the sense of their own nothingness and their own emptiness, now he transitions from this sense of poor in spirit to mourning. That's easy to follow because we begin to realize that mourning follows so closely to poor in spirit that it's really poor in spirit's companion; in other words, the natural consequence of a person who see themselves in reality. That's what poor in spirit does. It's not seeing yourself the way the world sees you; it's seeing yourself the way that God sees you. He sees you as an empty vessel who wants to fill you.

So you look at other New Testament verses that really talk about the concept of being filled We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from ourselves. That's another description of poor in spirit. His life is the treasure, our life is the vessel, and the whole purpose is to show that he's the source of power for our lives. That's poor in spirit.

You're going to see the emphasis of poor in spirit numerous times referred in other phrases and another languages in the New Testament, but the concept is always the same. It's that his life is the treasure, we're the vessel, and the whole reason is to put his life on display. When somebody sees themselves in reality, the natural consequence of that is they're going to mourn over the condition that they are in. That's why we have this as the second one. It fits so closely together.

Mourning is really referred to as sort of something that is much more than just bereavement or loss or affliction. It really has to do with the mourning over our sinful condition. Look at it logically, brothers. It's like this, "I realize that I'm totally empty. I have no resources of my own. And Lord, would you come and fill me with your life."

The moment you come to that realization, you realize that the most offensive thing you have in your life is your sinful condition before a holy God, and so blessed are those who mourn comes right after we see the inscription of blessed are those who are poor in spirit.

One of my favorite Puritan writers describes mourning as this. Now mourning is not bereavement of the loss of a loved one. Certainly there's great sorrow, there's great bereavement. We're not talking about that kind of mourning. We're talking about the mourning of recognizing my spiritual depravity. It realizes that I'm totally depraved.

Now total depravity doesn't mean that you're as depraved as you can be because we can always become more depraved. But what it means is this. Every part of my being has been affected by sin, and I mourn over that. I just realize that I've been totally infested, I've been totally affected by, I've totally been controlled by the sinful nature that I have as a result of my birth. It's you mourn over that condition. That's an anomaly to the world because the world's going to say, "Well how can you be blessed if you're mourning over your condition of your sin." We need work our way through this.

One of my favorite Puritan writers says this about mourning, "It is mourning over the felt destitution of our spiritual state." That follows, brothers, right after understanding I have no spiritual resources. Now this is one of the most positive things that you and I can discover about ourselves because it's at that time when the Holy Spirit begins to fill you and you realize that you're in need of a Savior. That's why this is so positive. People will take a look at these two verses, "blessed are the poor in spirit and blessed are those who mourn," and say, "Oh, that's really defeatism." But no, it really isn't. It's really victory. It's really victory because there's victory in Christ Jesus. It's the realization that now there is a Savior who can replace all of that, that he's died for me. I've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. And so

this is a couple of verses that are, in my mind, some of the most victorious things we can ever experience, but we've got to understand it correctly.

It is mourning over the felt destitution of our spiritual state and over the iniquities that have separated us from God, mourning over the very morality in which we have boasted, and the self-righteousness in which we have trusted, sorrow for rebellion against God, and hostility to his will. And such mourning always goes side by side with consciousness of being poor in spirit. You see, one leads to the other. That's why we look at these as little companions. One and two fit together, three and four fit together, five and six fit together, and seven and eight fit together. You'll see that as we work our way through this.

Mourning can be really understood as the emotional counterpart of poverty in spirit. It's when I recognize my total inability and my emptiness. All of a sudden, I realize why is it that way, and it's because of my total depravity. That's contrary to what the world says.

Bill: A number of years ago, you preached on this, it goes to Isaiah 6:1-5, as an illustration of this whole aspect of man's condition of mourning.

Yes, we'll get to that in a moment. I have it on my list. {LAUGHTER} Thanks for the reminder. Bill's a great end-man.

It's obvious that Jesus is not speaking about every kind of mourning. He's not talking about physical or social mourning. He's talking about our spiritual mourning. The mourning to which he's referring to is strictly of a spiritual nature.

We need to realize this. What we're studying here, friends, is really a problem for the unregenerate world. Logically, they would say, "If a person is blessed, how can they mourn? And if they're mourning, how can they be blessed?" You see, that's an anomaly to the world. But the more we understand and ponder this understanding of what it means to be mourning and be blessed by that, the more we begin to understand, "blessed are they who mourn" is a complete variance with the world's logic. The world's logic says you've got to be happy, you've got to be sweet, you've got to be upbeat and all of that. Well this is one of the most upbeat things we're going to see because we're going to see when you recognize and admit your sinfulness, what's the consequence of that? You're blessed. What more do you want?

One of the principles of biblical interpretation is this. There's a privilege that goes along with a contingency. There's a privilege that goes along with a contingency. There's a contingency that happens in a person life, and the result of that is a blessing. Now there's a contingency here, and that is this. Blessed are those who mourn. Now the contingency is are you recognizing your sinfulness. The blessing is what? You'll be comforted.

Now let me just give you an illustration of what I mean by this. Let's go to John 14:13. Now here is a principle of biblical interpretation we need to understand. There's a blessing associated with a required contingency. Now notice this in John 14:13, ¹³"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." There's a contingency and there's a privilege. The privilege is based upon a contingency. The contingency is this, "that you're praying in my name." The blessing is, "I will do it." That's the privilege, "I will do it, if you're praying in my name."

The question is do we really understand what it means to pray in his name. The word "name" associated theologically means the total description of God in all of his glory, his attributes, his nature and his character qualities. In other words, when you use the name of God, you're saying, "This is the totality of

your almightiness, of the superlative authority that you are. I'm evoking all of that." It's not just picking off, "Oh, I'm going to talk to you because you're loving. I'm going to talk to you because you're compassionate." You're basically saying the word "name" encompasses every description that God is revealed in the Scripture. That's why it's so important that we be careful when we say the name of God.

The question here is am I praying in God's name? In other words, it literally means this. The prayer that I am praying is absolutely consistent with the totality of all of God's attributes, his nature, his glory and his character. It's absolutely consistent with who he is. That's what it means to pray in his name. It doesn't mean you put the little appendage at the end of a prayer and say, "I pray this in Jesus' name," and therefore you're saying you become a heavenly gopher—you go for this and you go for that. That's not what it means at all. It's saying that the prayer that I'm praying right now, the words that I just said, as a reflection of the overflow of my heart, are exactly consistent with who you are in all of your nature, all of your glory, all of your attributes and all of your description. It's consistent with who you are. "Now when you pray like that, I'll do it." Literally it means this. The prayer that I just prayed is exactly the same prayer that Jesus would have prayed if he were in my shoes at this time in my life. That's what it means. That's what it means to pray in Jesus' name. How flippantly we treat that. We just say, "Lord, we're going to have a good golf game. We pray in Jesus name, give me a hole in one." We just flippantly treat...what he's really saying guys is look, there's a contingency to the privilege. The privilege is I'm going to do it, he says. But the contingency is this, "You've got to pray in my name. It's got to be consistent with me."

What does that say about our prayer life? What's one of the most important things we could do before we enter into a season of prayer? Understand God's nature. Understand who God is. Understand his character, his attributes. That's why it's so important, friends, that you and I understand the 28 attributes of God. That's why we spent three years studying that, so that you would have an understanding of the God of biblical revelation, not the god of human imagination. Often times, when we pray, we isolate one of the character qualities of God and say, "God, I know you're compassionate. Have mercy on me." There's nothing wrong with that. But we need to understand that his mercy is also holy. His mercy is also righteous. So is my prayer consistent with the totality of the revelation of God's word to us? You see, that's what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

Ted: I guess just two quick thoughts. First, I'm just struck this morning by the...Bruce Bickel, what is his teaching? I mean, why is it so significant? It's significant because you deal with the ultimate realities of things. The attributes of God, the attributes of man. I'm rambling here, I apologize. But it's, I just, as versus what we do. I mean, you're very heavy on what the reality is. Now that's the first one. The second thing is that you said that the contingency is we pray exactly consistent with who God is. I mean, I agree with that, but I'm lost. I am never going to even get close to exactly consistent with who God is in my [UNCLEAR]...

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Ted: Amen, brother. Thank you. [UNCLEAR]...

That's what it...right there. You just described being poor in spirit. I don't have it. I don't have it. What do we do? We trust Christ. That's all we can do, guys. You do the best you can and you trust Christ with the rest. What Ted just described was a person who's poor in spirit, saying...you see, humility is this. It's seeing that which is perfect and realizing I can't achieve it. Ted just described humility because he's saying, "I see what is perfect, the absolute character and nature of God, but I can't achieve that." That's poor in spirit. That's humility. You see, that's when you say, "God, you've just got help me. You've got to be the resources to that."

Bill: *Why do you say we have to do the best we can?*

What do you want to say?

Bill: *I reminded of, in Luke 17, Jesus talked about a servant [UNCLEAR] told him to do. At the end he said, the servant has to say, "I'm an unprofitable servant."*

Well you can say that after you do the best you can, "I'm an unprofitable servant." Yes, so we need to do the best we can. That's our responsibility. There is a responsibility to the Christian life, and that is that we need to be responsible and fulfill what's expected of us. That's obedience. We need to do the best we can, but realize there's no profit in it. The profit is given to us through what? Through the merits of the person and work of Christ. We achieve nothing by our best efforts. So yes, we need to work our tails off. But we realize there's no merit in it. We're not gaining any kudos with God by what we do. We're doing it out of a love response in obedience because we love Christ.

You see, the reason we work so hard is because we love him. Look at John 14, while we're there, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Do the best you can. That's responsibility. Why do you do it? It's because you love him. You don't do it to earn merit. You don't do it to get your merit badge. You do it as an expression of love. You do the absolute best you can because you're saying, "Father, I love you. Even in my frailties, even in my weakness, I know by best efforts are as filthy rags. But I'm still going to demonstrate to you within my own capabilities the fact that I love you and I'm going to trust you with the rest."

Audience Member: *He also says in in John 14 we're not doing our best on our own; he does not leave us an orphans.*

That's right. He comes and lives with us.

Audience Member: *So we're guided [UNCLEAR].*

I think the important thing is the balance. Bill brings up a good point. There's no merit in doing our best. We do need to understand that. But that doesn't remove our trying to do our best. We do that through the grace of God. You see, we're saved by grace, but we're also maintained by grace

Audience Member: *In all this realization is repentance and contrition assumed?*

Is repentance and contrition assumed?

Audience Member: *Yes, after you're mournful and realize you're a sinner everything else, does that automatically mean you repent for all the things that are causing you mourn.*

Only you can answer that. I can't answer that for you. What we're going to see is blessed is the person who is poor in spirit realizes they have no spiritual resources. That's the person who's blessed. The next person who's blessed is the one who realizes their sinfulness. Now the natural consequence of your sinfulness is what? Repentance.

Audience Member: *Right. That's what I was trying to say. Is it automatic or is it assumed.*

It's not automatic. No, it's a responsibility. You and I have a responsibility to respond to the grace of God through repentance. Its repentance and faith. The Gospel contains six elements—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. That is one of our

human responsibilities. So yes, hopefully as a result of understanding the mourning of our sin, we will repent of that.

Let me just take you to the illustration that Bill mentioned. Let's go to Isaiah 6. Now this is the prophet Isaiah's vision of the Lord when he began to see God clearly. One of the things Ted alluded to, which I want to emphasize, when we deal with reality, with the reality of who God is and the reality of who I am, that has tremendous personal implications. There are going to be severe consequences and implications of our understanding that. Hopefully that's what we're going to respond to as we go through this.

This is just not to get us knowledge of biblical data. It's really to impact and change and refine our own lives and transform us into becoming kingdom citizens. That's the purpose of the Beatitudes. That's why these eight Beatitudes are so practically oriented. They're really dealing with present reality. This is who you are in your nothingness, and as a result of this, you're going to mourn over your nothingness because you realize that your life is an offense to God. Now it's when you come to those realizations the tremendous privilege of this, you're going to be the one who's going to be happy in spite of circumstances. There's an application in one's life that this has tremendous implications in, to what we're doing.

Remember learning does not lead to knowledge. Learning should lead to living, and living should lead to loving. The whole purpose of this, these Beatitudes, are to say you've got to see yourself in reality. When you do that, the implications are you're going to understand contrary to the system of the world what it means to be happy in spite of circumstances. In other words, who do you believe, guys? Do you believe what God says about himself and about you, or do you believe what the world says about you? You see, that's the battleground for us. Be honest. That's the real battleground. Do I really choose to believe what God says about me, or do I believe what the world says about me? That's the battleground.

You and I have to come to grips with saying, "I'm going to be transformed by the renewing of my mind and not conform myself to the system of this world. Bottom line of all these Beatitudes is who do I believe. Do I believe what God says about me? I'm empty, I have no spiritual resources, and my life is an offense to him? Do I really believe that? Or do I say, "Now wait a minute. You grew up in a pretty good little home. You're a pretty good little guy." Or do you believe what the world says? You've got the right education, you've got the right job, all those things. You see, that's the real battleground. So Jesus is really dealing with tremendous reality here, and the first two realities are how do you see God and how do you see yourself. That's the response.

Here's a great illustration for us, as Bill alluded to. Look at Isaiah 6, "¹In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' ⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵And I said..." I'm a good guy. {LAUGHTER} I was born in a Christian home. He says, "⁵'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'"

Now a couple of insights we need to gather from that. Notice what he saw and how he describes God, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne." Here he had a clear vision of who God is in all of his glory, of all of his majesty, and his response is this—here's how the angels and the seraphim were saluting God, they were saying this, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." That's what we would call the trihagion, the three times holy.

Now you notice there are 28 attributes of God, but the only one that is described three times is this one. You don't see God is love, love, love; God is mercy, mercy, mercy; God is just, just, just; God is sovereign, sovereign, sovereign. Yes he is. I'm not belittling that. But there's something that we have to look at the whole issue of repetition here. Three times he is described as holy. That means that God's love is holy. That means his justice is holy. That means his compassion is holy. That means his sovereignty is holy. Everything really falls under, if you would, the concept of the holiness of God. That's why we need to understand in the Gospel, it starts off with the holiness of God, not the needs of man. You start teaching just like Isaiah saw, how do I see God clearly.

When we present the Gospel of Christ, you've got to, first of all, give people an image of who God is, not talking about their needs. The needs will be a result of understanding God clearly. Blessed are the poor in spirit. I'm in need. Blessed are those who mourn. I'm in need. You see, that's a consequence of seeing God clearly.

The first thing we see here is that God is described three times as holy. Now that does not mean that it is the most important of all of his attributes, but I do believe it a summary of all of his attributes. You have to look at God's justice as what? Holy. God's mercy is.

***Audience Members:** Holy.*

God's righteousness is. Holy. You see, that's what Isaiah saw, and that's what the seraphim, the worshiping angels around him were saluting and honoring him by saying, "Holy, holy, holy." That's a summary description. It's called the trihagion—the three times holy. It's a very important insight for us.

***Coop:** To your point about holy, holy, holy, there's always a concern about the TV churches that just take off on some undenominational oversight hymn, but when you listen to the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," it's that repetition that you're talking about is in the structure of the hymn, whereas they have these TV hymns and the local pastors has come up with the some hymns, it isn't within that dynamic of referring to holy, holy, holy. It's all over the [UNCLEAR].*

Amen. That's the first way he sees God and how the seraphim are describing him as holy, holy, holy. Now notice his response, to seeing God clearly, seeing God in reality, his response is, the first thing he looks at is he sees himself, and he says, "Woe is me!" Guys, that's the implications and the reality of what we're studying these Beatitudes. When you see God for who he is, the next thing you see is you mourn over your own condition. This is a description of mourning. I see God who he really is; my response to seeing God clearly is I see my own condition, and woe is me is his response.

Notice what he says about himself, "For I am lost." Now that's rather definitive. Blessed are the poor in spirit. I'm a spiritual beggar. That means I am lost. I'm lost, but there's one who will come to save.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, what does hagion mean?*

Holy. It's the Greek word for holy—trihagion. It means holy.

***Audience Member:** I think it's interesting before Isaiah even has his response, the seraphim's response, in terms of the wings, the six wings—two over the eyes really representing the fact that they couldn't hardly handle the holiness of God. It was so awesome to them that they couldn't bear to...they had to cover their eyes.*

That's a great insight. That's absolutely correct, and how cheaply we treat the holiness of God. Notice,

there in his presence, and its so glorious, beyond our human comprehension, that they can't even see it, can't even stand it and survive it. That's why when Moses said, "I want to see you," what was his response? You can't see me and live. I'm going to let you see the back side. You can't see me and live. Because of his holiness.

Then Isaiah says, looks at himself and says, "Woe is me for I am lost." Notice how he describes himself, "For I am a man of unclean lips." What does that remind you of? Something in the New Testament. Jesus said in Luke. Luke 12:33, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." What Isaiah is describing is his heart. He's saying, "My heart is lost. My heart is filthy. My heart is unclean. The evidence of that is this—you listen to my words. I'm a man of unclean lips. The very things that I talk about, the very things that I think about, are unclean compared to the majesty and holiness of God." You see, he's describing his own heart condition. That's what it means to be poor in spirit. That's what it means to be mourning. I mourn over the fact that my heart is depraved, and what comes out of my heart are the expressions of my mouth, and that reveals my uncleanness. It reveals the fact that I'm lost.

But then there's one other thing I want you to see. Notice next what he says, "And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." He says this, "Not only am I unclean, but my whole nation is unclean." What does that say to us practically about how we view ourselves? When was the last time you repented of being an American? Not because of your birth, but because of the condition of our country? Do you realize that not only are we lost, but who else is lost? Our country. And he says, "Not only am I lost, am I unclean, but I live in a group of people who are unclean."

Guys, we need to take seriously praying for our country. Now I'm no prophet. Please understand I'm no prophet. This is just an observation that I sometimes think about, and you have the complete privilege of rejecting this. But as I understand the role of the Holy Spirit, which is to guide us into all truth and to call attention to the person and work of Christ, I don't see much work of the Holy Spirit in America.

Now I'm no prophet, but if you nail me to the wall and say what does that mean, I would say I think the Holy Spirit has removed himself from the United States of America. I don't see it going on. Look at his job description. His job description is not to produce enthusiasm. You've got a lot of that. But that may be worth nothing. You see, his whole role is to do this, according to John 13, is to call attention to the person and work of Christ and to guide people into all truth. When that happens, the reality is there are changed lives. I don't see that going on in our country. Again, all I'm saying is I just don't see the evidence of the Holy Spirit being in the United States. Look at the church in China, what's going on. You see wonderful things in other parts of the world.

I'm not the Holy Spirit, so understand what I'm saying. This is just my observation. But I'm trying to take it seriously because that has implications to me and what I do. That means that it's motivating more to preach more the truth of God and the person and work of Christ because that's the role of the Holy Spirit. I want the Holy Spirit to descend upon our country. But the only way that's going to happen is by preaching the truth. It's by preaching the person and work of Christ. It's preaching Christ and Him crucified. It's not causing enthusiasm and starting new ministries. It's the very basic thing that the Holy Spirit does, and that is to guide people unto the understanding of the saving knowledge of the person and work of Christ and call attention to Jesus, not himself.

Significant: *But isn't Christ as close to us as the preached Word? And if you're teaching us in the Word of God, isn't the spirit of Christ with us?*

Oh yes. I'm saying nationalistically. Personally, yes, and localities, he is certainly in the remnant. In the remnant, that's going to be obvious. Hopefully we're part of that. I'm not saying that with pride. All I'm saying is that my observation is this. When I look at the whole U. S. of A., nationalistically, I don't see

the movement of the Holy Spirit. I see it in localities and certain situations, in certain groups, but I don't see it nationalistically. As he is saying, I live in a country of unclean lips. He's bringing in the totality of his whole nationhood, in his whole nation here, and that's what I'm just trying to do, to make that application. Do you understand that?

Audience Members: *Yes.*

I mean, this is really critical for us to understand. This is what mourning is. It's seeing yourself in reality, and it flows right from being poor in spirit. Jesus is saying this, "The person who sees that about themselves is the person who's going to be happy in spite of circumstances," because when you get to that point, what are you going to do? What's the reality implication of your life? You're going to turn to Christ. You're going to say, "Lord, save me! Save me! I can't do it! I can't do it!"

Go to Isaiah 1. Notice this—here is mourning, brothers. Guys, please understand my heart. I know I'm doing a lousy job of this, but this is one of the most positive things we can ever discover, is come to the reality of my sinfulness. Because you know this—Christ came to what? Save you. Take away the sin of the world. He came to do that. You've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The reason you're blessed is because, as we'll see next week, the unconditional surrender that we have in the blood of Christ who atoned for us and gives us absolute forgiveness—unqualified forgiveness—because of the accomplishments of Christ. That's why we understand that we're blessed. We'll talk about that side of it next week.

Audience Member: *Do you think God is involved in individuals versus nations, or does he have the same concern?*

Yes. Yes, he's involved in individuals and nations. He's involved in both. The new covenant, whereas the old covenant was strictly dealing with one nation as the witness for the kingdom, he now deals with individuals as a witness for the kingdom. But there is national involvement in all of that because the individuals form a nation. So it's a both/and.

Let me take you to Isaiah 1:18, another illustration of seeing ourselves in reality—poor in spirit and mourning. Look at verse 18, "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." He's describing himself in terms of the culture of how they darkened the color of a garment. He's basically saying, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are like crimson, they shall become like wool."

Scarlet in the culture of the biblical times, you get that deep red color, you had to double dip it. Literally scarlet means double dipped. You take a piece of cloth, an animal skin, a hide from a goat or a sheep, and you want to make that a red color, you dip it into the berries that would be the color to make it red. You let it dry and then you dip it in a second time to get a darker color. He's basically telling us, you and I are double-dipped sinners. Our first sin is we were dipped in the consequences of the sins of Adam and Eve. We're sinful by birth, as we saw with David in Psalm 51, "I was conceived in sin in my mother's womb." First of all, we're sinners by birth. Secondly, we're sinners by choice. We're double-dipped sinners.

What happens when you understand, when you mourn over being a double-dipped sinner? You are blessed because you then begin to be introduced into the grace of God through the Gospel of Christ and understanding his unmerited forgiveness called grace and mercy and he forgives you. That's why you're made white as wool, white as snow. Because that stain of being a double-dipped sinner has been removed through the grace of God. And now, all of a sudden, you see, through his forgiveness, you've

been cleansed. Isaiah is describing himself here, and then he even affirms that more when he sees God clearly. The implications of this are terrific.

Bill: *I think that verse [UNCLEAR] because it describes [UNCLEAR]...*

The invitation is God is saying to mankind, to persons, “Come, let’s you and I reason together. Let’s first of all talk about your condition. Do you realize you’re a double-dipped sinner? Now until we deal with that, we really can’t have a conversation.” The invitation here is from God dealing with us.

Years, ago, I think there was a thing by Campus Crusade that says, “I found it.” Remember that? Twenty-five years ago. I found it. Saw a bumper sticker in every church in America, “I found it.” I saw one in a church parking lot that was scratched out and it had, “He found me.” That’s more consistent, isn’t it? Who does the invitation to you to have a discussion? It’s not me asking him to talk about me; he’s saying, “Hey, let me talk about you, and I want you to understand this. You’re a double-dipped sinner. But you can be made white a snow through the cleansing blood of the person and work of Christ.” That’s what we’ll see next week as to why the person who mourns over that will be blessed.

Brian: *One thing about this here, too, is if you look what he says, twice now, I mean, how [UNCLEAR] he gets in this statement of how he’s just declaring truth, and really, this is, it should be a reminder and a calling for us to stand up and share the truth [UNCLEAR]. We so often try to water it down or be politically correct, and I think we need to be more like Isaiah where we scream it out, “Here’s what God is saying,” because we have this revelation, and we just need to be more bold and declare it.*

That’s true. Now understand this—Isaiah was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and what did he do? He just did what Brian said. He proclaimed truth, even truth about himself. When you and I are under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, what should we be doing? Proclaiming truth. That’s the only way you can evaluate ministry, brothers. You can’t evaluate any ministry, regardless of its activity, based upon results of people. The only thing you can evaluate ministry is this. Was truth proclaimed? That’s the only thing that’s going to produce any spiritual consequences of any value, eternally. So don’t base it on numbers or response of people. You’ve got to look at yourself afterward and say, “Did our program that we offered under the name of this ministry, did it really proclaim truth?” That’s the only evaluative that we have that will produce eternal results. He’s under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and he speaks truth. I trust that as we teach, as we pray, as we share the Gospel of Christ, we will always be under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The indication of that is how truthful am I about what I’m saying.

Audience Member: *To your point about China and Asia and your concerns of this country, amongst the 20-year olds, my kids’ ages, they operate in that ether of the texting and all of that sort of stuff. I would only submit the evidence of change in North Africa with Facebook and all of that sort of stuff. The future of those 20-year olds, and the 20-year olds of faith that I talk to in this country, absolutely believe that missionaries will come out of China and Africa and redeem this [UNCLEAR].*

Well that’s true. There’s a lot of missionaries being sent to the United States from other countries because they view us as the third world country, spiritually. Do you realize the USA is the world’s largest third world country spiritually, population wise? That’s why they’re sending missionaries to us.

Well guys, listen. We’ll touch next week, we want to see the privilege that we have of mourning over our sins, and that is this. You’ll be blessed. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Next week, we want to look at how is that we’re comforted by the grace of God. This becomes so wonderful. Just pray that the Lord will be pleased to help us understand the magnificence of his comfort through the atoning work and the blood of Christ. That’s what we’ll talk about next week. Let’s pray.

Father, the reality of what you're teaching us, I have to admit is very mind boggling. It's really tough for us to grasp because, first of all, it's an affront to our human nature. We like to think that we are okay, when really, you are the only one who can make us okay. Father, we just pray that as we preach and touch the person and work of Christ, that there will be more than enough of Jesus just to make us look good, but enough to make us good, and may that be so for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!