

I Can't, but He Can

by Dick Woodward

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our limitations and trusting in God's power to work through us as His disciples.

Duration: 23:05

Scripture: Exodus 3:7-9, Matthew 5:3-6

Topics: "Beatitudes"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a humble and dependent attitude towards God. He uses the example of Moses, who was chosen by God to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The speaker highlights that Moses' background as a slave and his time in the desert taught him that it is not about what he can do, but about what God can do. The speaker encourages the audience to adopt a similar attitude of being 'poor in spirit' and recognizing their own limitations, while trusting in God's power to bring about deliverance. The sermon references Exodus 3:7-9, where God assures Moses that He has seen the affliction of His people and will deliver them.

Transcript

Have you ever reached a place in your life where you have not been able to accomplish what you wanted to? And you had to come to the place where you said, I cannot? That is a hard lesson to learn, but it is one that we must learn every day and in many ways spiritually. Our teacher will help explain why we must realize that we cannot, but God can. Listen carefully as today we cover the first beautiful attitude that our Lord requires His disciples to have.

And seeing the multitudes, he went up on a mountain, and when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This is the way the Sermon on the Mount begins.

In our first study we looked at the context in which the Sermon on the Mount was given. In our second study we considered an overview of the content of what we call the Sermon on the Mount. And we have seen by looking at the context and the content of this great teaching that it was not really a sermon, it was more like a spiritual retreat.

The purpose of that retreat was that Jesus was trying to show some of his disciples how they could be part of his solution to all the problems the people had at the bottom of the mountain. Those multitudes with

every kind of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual illness or sickness imaginable. We considered in our first two sessions that all the teaching we call the Sermon on the Mount was given in sight of that multitude.

In a sense for the benefit of that multitude, because Jesus withdrew from the multitude of people with problems with some of his disciples to teach them how they could be recruited, trained, deputized, and disciplined to be the agents of his solution and his answer. As Jesus will say later on, they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world like a city built on a hill that cannot be hidden and like a candle on a candlestick. We said in our last studies that as we overviewed the content of what he taught, he began with attitudes, eight beautiful attitudes that would make these people his disciples, the salt of the earth, and the light of the world, his answer, his solution to the problems of the world.

As many scholars see this teaching, the attitudes are the teaching. The attitudes are the sermon. All the rest of Matthew 5, 6, and 7 are application of the teaching.

If you have turned your Bible to Matthew chapter 5, you realize as we read again the opening statement which tells us when Jesus saw the multitudes with all their problems, he opened his mouth and taught his disciples. And as Jesus begins to teach his disciples about the attitudes, the mindset that will make them his solution and his answer, the first of these three beautiful attitudes is this, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What is his first attitude? Jesus says we have to have if we are going to be his solution, his answer, the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

Some scholars have translated it and interpreted it as broken in spirit. They believe that what Jesus meant was that people need to be completely broken of their self-will and selfish desires when he talked about the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They interpret Jesus saying, I want you to see me as king and I want you to see yourselves as a subject of my kingdom and I want you to be absolutely broken from your will and broken to my will so that you will do the will of your king.

You will serve the king whose subject you are. Some interpret the meaning of poor in spirit that way. Other Bible scholars say that being poor in spirit is humility.

Humility is a very evasive thing. Just about the time you think you're humble, you're probably not. You've heard the story about the church that gave the pastor an award for humility, but then took it back because he wore it every day.

Is it possible that this poor in spirit attitude does have to do with humility because it has to do with what you think about yourself? What is your attitude towards yourself? And what is your attitude towards your Lord, towards your king? Both are being brought into focus here. There are so many stories in the scriptures of so many men of God, but there's a story about one in particular, the apostle Peter, who had to learn three lessons in his lifetime. He had to learn, first of all, that he was nobody.

Then he had to learn that he was somebody. And then he had the joy of learning what God can do with somebody who has learned that he is nobody. From the time Peter met Jesus until he denied Jesus three times and went out into the darkness and wept bitterly, Peter was learning that first lesson, that he was nobody.

Now when the Lord appeared to Peter after the resurrection, it was said to confirm him, affirm him, and assure him that because he had learned he was nobody, now he was somebody that God could actually

use. On the day of Pentecost, the church and the whole world discovered that third lesson through the life of Peter. What does the experience of Peter on the day of Pentecost teach us? It teaches us what God can do with somebody who has truly learned that he's nobody.

Why did the Holy Spirit come upon the believers through Peter and not John, for instance, who loved the Lord so much? Why not James? Why not Thomas? Why not Nathanael, who was so holy? Why Peter? I believe the Holy Spirit broke out on the day of Pentecost through Peter because Peter had learned the first attitude that makes us usable. Peter was poor in spirit. He was poor in spirit when he ran out into the darkness that night, wept bitterly because he was so sorry he had denied the Lord three times.

But listen, at that very moment, Peter was beginning to realize he was truly a nobody. Back in the Old Testament book of Exodus, there is another illustration of what it means to be poor in spirit. I love the story of Moses, the calling and the commissioning of Moses, who lived 120 years on this earth, as it is reported to us in the early chapters of Exodus.

One of the great American pastors, D.L. Moody, used to say that the 120-year lifetime was divided up into three periods of 40 years each. In each of these 40 years that Moses lived, he learned a lesson. In the first 40 years that Moses lived, he learned this lesson, Moses, you're nobody.

It took him 40 years to learn that. The second 40 years of his life, Moses learned this lesson, Moses, you're somebody. And in the third 40 years of Moses' life, when he was the human agent of that great deliverance of the people of God out of the slavery and bondage of Egypt, Moses learned what God can do with somebody who has learned that he is nobody.

Another way of overviewing the life of Moses would be to say that in the first 40 years of his life, he earned his real education in life. At the end of his first 40 years, or sometime during the first 40 years, Moses discovered that he was one of those Hebrews. He was an Egyptian prince because of the unusual circumstances of his birth.

Moses was adopted by that Egyptian princess who pulled him out of that little basket that had been covered with pitch and floated down the Nile because Pharaoh had issued a decree that none of the Hebrew male children would be permitted to survive the birth experience. And in desperation, his parents, because they saw what a beautiful child he was, put baby Moses in that little basket and floated it down the Nile. It happened to be in the providence of God, of course, that the Egyptian princess was bathing in the river with her servant girls.

One of them spotted this little basket floating down the river, and when they took the top off, the baby cried, and that touched the heart of this Egyptian princess. And so she drew him out of the basket, and that's how he got his name Moses, which means to be drawn out. She took the child, adopted the child, to be like a son to her, and that meant this man Moses was raised in the palace of a Pharaoh.

His sister, who was following this little basket down the river and saw what happened, and offered her services to the Egyptian princess and said, I'll be glad to get a Hebrew woman to nurse that baby, the princess thought that would be a good idea. So his sister got Moses's mother to nurse him. Some scholars I've read suggest this is the providence of God.

One Puritan scholar put it this way. God arranged that because God knew that a gram of mother was worth a kilogram of Pharaoh, and God wanted his mother to nurture him. Perhaps it was his mother who

actually told him he was Hebrew.

Anyway, at the end of the first forty years of his life, he knows he is a Hebrew, and he knows he was born a slave. Moses got his next great education in life during the second forty years of his life. It says he went out and looked upon the burdens of his Hebrew brethren, knowing now that they are his brothers.

When he saw their burdens, he saw the problem, and he wanted to do something. So he killed an Egyptian, apparently a high ranking Egyptian. That's when God shows up and says, now Moses, that's not the way to be a deliverer.

I know you want to do something for those people. I know you want to deliver them from their bondage, and now you're going to be the nation's most wanted criminal. Everyone will know that you, Moses, are a murderer.

You never should have tried to help the Israelites by murdering someone. That's no way to get the job done, Moses. Let's go to seminary for about forty years, Moses, and think about this.

So then Moses flees to the backside of the desert. There Moses got his second education in life. You might call it the Bachelor of Divinity degree.

He spent forty years in this seminary that God arranged for him on the backside of the desert. It was at the end of those forty years in the desert that Moses graduated from that seminary, and God was the commencement speaker. Moses saw a burning bush that was not being consumed by fire.

Acacia bushes in the wilderness would occasionally burst into flame because of the intense heat of that desert, but they would be consumed in about five seconds. Moses saw an Acacia bush burst into flame, but it was not consumed. Verse 3 of Exodus chapter 3 says, Moses decided to turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush was not consumed, and the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, and then the Lord spoke to him out of the bush.

This is symbolic. Moses had turned aside for forty years, and God saw that he turned aside to pray about the deliverance of the children of Israel from their suffering. Now when God appears to Moses at the burning bush, and it is like the commencement of Moses from that seminary, God speaks to him.

What God says to Moses at the burning bush focuses for us what it means to be poor in spirit. What God said to Moses at the burning bush was something like this in summary. Moses, you have seen the problem, and that is commendable.

Many people never even see the problem, and you want to do something about it, and that is commendable. A lot of people, they don't even care. You have compassion.

That's beautiful, and you want to do something to help these people, and that is wonderful. But Moses, the important thing is not the fact that you see the problem. It's not the fact that you even care.

It's not the fact that you want to even do something. The important thing here is this. I have surely seen the affliction of my people in Egypt.

I have heard their cry, and I know by empathy, by compassion their sorrows, and I have come down to deliver them. I have come down to do something. That is what's important.

This can all be found in Exodus chapter 3 verses 7 through 9. Then at this point, Moses might have said something like, well, then I'll go back to my sheep. I'm glad to know that you, God, have everything under control, but at that point, God says something else. Now therefore behold the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me, and I have seen the oppression.

Come now, Moses, therefore, and I will send thee to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my children out of Egypt. When God spoke to Moses from the bush, what he was saying to him was this, Moses, you're not the deliverer of these people. You can't deliver anyone.

You had 40 years of failure just to prove that. The thing you need to learn, Moses, is that I can. Dick Woodward calls this a spiritual secret.

I cannot, but he can. I wonder, have you learned that spiritual secret yet? Especially if you're a believer and you want to be part of the Lord's solution, part of the Lord's answer. If you want to be part of the ministry that Jesus Christ wants to have in this world, if you want to lead other people to Christ, if you want to lead people to the faith, have you realized yet that you cannot do that? Only God can do that.

Miracle of miracles. Have you realized this good news, this exciting news? He can do that through you and through me. He can do that through people like you and through people like me if we will but realize the difference between our part and his part.

That's what it means to be poor in spirit. Many years ago when I began my ministry, I was very shy. A little old lady asked the pastor of the church where I had come on staff if I were retarded because I was so shy that I looked down at the floor if you asked me my name.

One of the first things they asked me to do when I joined that church was to visit a couple. My wife and I were to have dinner with this couple. The woman had come to Christ through somebody who had led her to faith but the husband was not a believer.

He was a naval officer and had graduated from a big university. We were to have dinner with them and I was to lead him to Christ. That was the purpose of the dinner.

When we arrived at their home, my wife and his wife were out in the kitchen fixing the dinner and the two of us men were in the living room talking. In those days, because of my shyness, I thought I had an inferiority complex but I found out studying psychology there was nothing complex about it at all. I was just plain inferior.

But with this inferiority and this shyness, I used to get migraine headaches. While we were talking, I got a migraine headache. I began to perspire and I was sick to my stomach and in the middle of our conversation he asked me, do you feel alright? I said, I think I'm about to have a stroke.

Then he said, here lie down on the couch. I'll get you a cold cloth for your head. So he got me a cold cloth for my head and here I am supposed to be leading him to Christ.

Well, I got so sick we had to leave before we even had dinner. The next day he had lunch with some naval officers who were believers. He told them about this man who had come to his house and had something he wanted to tell him.

But he was so scared and so shy about it that he almost had a stroke right there in his living room. He asked these other Christian naval officers, do you know what it was that he wanted to tell me? One of them said, yes, I know what he wanted to tell you. And he told him and led him to Christ right there at lunch in the officer's mess.

That man is now an elder in the church doing fine in the faith. He was led to faith but not by me because I felt so shy and I was so inferior. I thought it was a matter of matching my wits with him and he had been to a big university.

I wonder if you feel that way when you think about being part of the solution of Jesus, part of the answer of Jesus in the lives of people who need Jesus. What I had to learn in order to function as a human being walking with Christ, much less a minister, is what it means to be poor in spirit. It's the first attitude Jesus said we have to learn if we are going to really be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

What it really amounts to and what we have to learn is this, I cannot but he can. I cannot lead anyone to faith. I cannot put faith in anyone's heart.

I cannot put faith in anyone's heart. I cannot cause the new birth to happen. I cannot make a new creature out of anyone, make old things pass away, make all things become new.

I cannot do any of that. I cannot do that in somebody else's life and do you know what? You can't either. If you are an achiever and I was not, that's an understatement, but if you are an achiever it may be harder for you to learn this than it was for the likes of me because I was not an achiever.

I had to learn it. I could not function until I learned it, but you know what? We all have to learn this. The reason why so many people will come before the Lord according to Matthew 7, the last chapter in this Sermon on the Mount, and say, Lord, Lord, many wonderful works, that is what we did.

And the Lord is going to say, worker of iniquity, I never knew you. The reason for that is people who are achievers and who can do many things do what they want, but it is not necessarily what God wants. It's not supernatural.

It's not the supernatural work of God in somebody else's life through them as the instrument or the agent of that supernatural work. So the first attitude Jesus says that we must have and that we must learn if we're going to be his solution, if we're going to be his answer is this, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In other words, blessed are the people like Peter and Moses who learned that they are nobody and then that they are somebody because of what he has done and what God can do with somebody who has learned that he is nobody.

They say the third lesson Moses had to learn about becoming an agent of God to bring deliverance from Pharaoh and slavery is this, it's not what I can do, but what God can do. Moses did become the human agent of that great deliverance, but why was he used as the agent or the instrument of that great deliverance? It is because he was born a slave and he had that backside of the desert seminary experience where what he really learned was this, it's not what I can do, it's what God can do. That is what it means to be poor in spirit and you see this is the first of the eight beautiful attitudes that we have to learn if we're going to be part of his answer, if we're going to be part of his solution.

You see as we gather on the mountaintop with Jesus and attend this first Christian retreat, he is trying to recruit us and he is trying to train us so we can be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus

says this is the first thing you and I have to learn if we're going to be part of his solution and part of his answer. You have to learn you cannot, but he can.

Have you learned that yet? Will you say to him today as you consider the things he wants you to do for him today, Heavenly Father, I cannot, but I believe you can. God bless you until next time. Our teacher will continue to teach us in the Sermon on the Mount, giving us lessons that will encourage and challenge us to become effective disciples.

But the first step is to have the right attitude, to be poor in spirit, realizing that we cannot, but God can. With that attitude we ask you to plan to join us next time as we continue to study through the Sermon on the Mount. May the hope that we find in God encourage you to continue to follow Jesus Christ.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28300.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dick-woodward/i-cant-but-he-can/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net