

**Russell Kelfer**

# **Though He Was Rich, He Became Poor**

**529-B**

**Series: The Beatitudes**



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

# Though He Was Rich, He Became Poor

The setting was not in an amphitheater filled with the scholars and religious leaders of His day. Instead, He was seated on a rock on the side of a hill with a gathering of men and women some of whom were homeless, sick, or disabled. Many were “plain folks” with no religious credentials at all. Still others were those who were considered authorities in the law, yet they had never seen God’s word taught as this man taught it, nor had it ever been spoken with such authority.

He began with a statement that must have literally blown the lid off their preconceived notions of this kingdom He had come to establish. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus said, “*Oh what bliss for the man or the woman who is poor in spirit.*” It is interesting to note that at this juncture, Jesus wasn’t talking to them about what they needed to do for God. He was talking to them about what God was going to do for them. He wasn’t talking about external behavior, but about internal attitudes. Thus, His message was more abstract in nature and required a level of application that had to come from within. Being poor in spirit, He was saying, is not an activity. It is the reflection of a life and that life must be supernatural. You can’t fake it. You can’t work to produce it and you can’t imitate it.

It cannot be understood by the natural mind. It is somewhat abstract and because, in fact it is exactly the opposite of what the natural mind would devise, we seem to need someone or some thing to make it more visible to us, lest we each conjure up our own image of what it means and begin to use *that* image as our pattern. God understands *and* He has provided a solution.

We have a perfect pattern. His name is Jesus. We read in II Corinthians these words,

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

(II Corinthians 8:9 NKJV)

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We need look no further. *Though He was rich, He became poor.* Why? For *our* sakes. For what purpose? That through the process of His taking on our spiritual poverty, we might actually become the heirs of His spiritual riches. Could He be asking us to do what He did? Yes. But didn't it cost Him His life? Yes. Didn't it mean the ultimate in humiliation? Yes. Then, once more, *why did He do such a thing?* Oh, yes, *for our sakes.* *We almost forget, don't we?*

Our goal for this lesson is to look at Jesus and learn simply from watching Him what it means to be poor in spirit. For the moment, we will begin by looking at Philippians 2. This is a passage we know so well that clearly defines the steps He took to becoming poor for our sakes.

### THE CALL (Philippians 2:1-5)

In verses 1-4, Paul issues a call to selflessness and humility within the body of Christ, and in verse 5 he makes this dramatic statement:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

(Philippians 2:5)

Paul says that if we want to illuminate what it means to be *poor in spirit*, we need to turn on the projector of the Word and flash on the screen a lifelike portrait of Jesus Christ. He says, "This is it. This is what it means to be *poor in spirit*. Be what He was. Do what He did. Then you will have it."

Paul then proceeds in outline fashion to show us the progressive poverty of spirit we see only in Jesus Christ. He writes, "*Let this mind be in you.*" The word "let" here means "to allow". It isn't something you go out and do. *It is something you allow to be done in you.* "*Let this mind...*" The word "mind" means "internal thoughts". He is saying, "Let your internal thoughts be transformed into this frame of reference." We need to find out what that frame of reference is.

He is clearly saying that the mindset that Jesus had on earth needs to be our mindset. In other words, the Spirit of God is now resident in you by virtue of the fact that you have received Jesus Christ into your heart. Therefore, you literally have His supernatural ability to think, be and become. He is in you. He *is* you. You are in Him. This is image by *derivation*, not image by *imitation*.

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Look at it this way: Jim is an artist. He draws and paints people, flowers and landscapes. So let's assume that Jim calls you and says, "*I want to paint your portrait.*" You go to Jim and pose for him for a week. Jim paints your picture and it looks *just like you*. After your friends look at that picture, they run up to you and hug you and say, "What a beautiful portrait. It is just like you."

Your response? "Gee, thanks, but I didn't do anything, I just stood there. Jim painted it. I didn't do anything." You say, "Oh, you mean Jim painted it?" "Yes, he is the one to be congratulated", you reply. "All I did was stand there." This is an example of us as recipients of the mind of Christ. We don't imitate God and say, "Jesus did that, I'll do that." Rather we have His image by *derivation*. He does the painting. We just stand there. That is what it means when Scripture says that we are to

...put on the new man which was created according to God,  
in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:24 NKJV)

*We allow Him to superimpose His spirit and His mind in us.*

An interesting point here is that the mind of Christ was to be operative in the new nature of every believer including everyone who read the book of Philippians, everyone at Philippi and everyone in your church or your home or your country or this world. You may say, "This mindset would be much easier for John than Peter." That may be true. It would be much easier for some of you than for others. But nonetheless, there are no boundaries to differentiate based on personality or intelligence or background. Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are those who are naturally humble." Humility is an act of the will. He said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*" These are those who *become* poor in spirit by allowing God to superimpose His divine nature on their fleshly nature, no matter what their personality might have been before. By the same token, we are not to look at Jesus and say, "Well, that was Jesus, but I can't have that mindset." We are to recognize the *same power that raised Christ from the dead* now resides in us as we read in Romans 8:11.

If we are to summarize the call, then, it is this: the attitude which is described by viewing Jesus' life is God's divine expectation for the believer. That is what He expects of you and of me. It is the foundation upon which everything else is built. Which brings us to:

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THE REALITY (Philippians 2:6)

who (Jesus) being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. (Philippians 2:6 NKJV)

We need to underline two words: “form” and “robbery”. Jesus Christ never misunderstood for a moment who He was. Many of us do. He was the *Creator* of the heavens and earth. He knew that. He was the *sustainer* of all of life. He knew that. He was the *only begotten of the Father*. He knew that. He was *God the Son*. He knew that. He owned the *heavens*. He owned the *clock*. He owned the *future*. He knew that. It was this clear vision of the Father and His mission and who He was that gave Him the calm faith to perfectly obey and do the will of God. That is where the power came from.

Verse 6 goes on to say *being in the form of God*. The word “form” here does not mean physical likeness, it means essence of character. It means that Jesus was, in essence, God in character and nature. The outer expression reveals the inner nature. In John 14, Jesus was confronted by Philip. He said, “Lord if you will just show us the Father, I will be satisfied.” Jesus looked at him and said, “Philip, have you been with Me such a long time and you haven’t seen the Father? If you have seen Me you have seen the Father.”

Paul then went on to say that *Jesus thought it not robbery to be equal with God*. The word “equal” comes from the word “*isos*” which means to be “in equality with, but necessarily the same as”. It means that, in essence of being, Jesus Christ was, in His deity, the same as His Father. Scripture says *He thought it not robbery*. The word “thought” is a word that means judgment based upon facts. It is not an idle wish, it is accurate information leading to a conclusion. He knew clearly that it was not robbery to be equal with God. The word “robbery” comes from the Greek word “*harpagmos*”. It has two meanings. In this sense, it literally means a prize, something to be clutched and retained, something to be grasped and held onto. Williams translates the passage this way:

His equality with God was not a thing to be selfishly grasped. (Philippians 2:6 Williams)

Jesus knew for a fact that His possession of equality with God was something He couldn’t hold onto. If need be, He would have to give it up if we were to be saved. Because of who He was, He could only become what He needed to become by giving up what He had.

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Your position and mine in Jesus Christ is just as clear. We are literally the King's children. We read:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (power and authority) to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: (John 1:12 NKJV)

For you are all sons (children) of God through faith in Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:26 NKJV)

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! (I John 3:1 NIV)

The Spirit Himself testifies (bears witness) with our spirit that we are the children of God: (Romans 8:16 NASB)

and if (we are) children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; (Romans 8:17a NKJV)

Until we realize who we are and what we have, we are in no position to give it up or lay it aside. You and I are, believe it or not, the children of the King. We have access to the throne. We own the keys to the castle. We have the rights someday to reign so that even angels will bow before our feet. Herein also lies the cause and the case for a positive self-image.

The world says that a positive self-image is what you see when you look in the mirror and say, "I am good." The problem is in reality, none of us can honestly look in the mirror and say that. The Word, on the other hand, says that a positive self-image is what you see when you look at Jesus Christ and say, "He is God." For you see, that is what God sees when He looks at you. Jesus knew who He was, but He didn't clutch at it and hold onto it. The Scripture says remember,

...though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

(II Corinthians 8:9 NASB)

### THE COST (Philippians 2:7)

This is where Jesus was coming from. He knew who He was and He called us to do likewise, as it says "*He made Himself of no reputation.*" The word "reputation" here is the Greek word "*keno*" which means "to empty or measure as useless". It means He made Himself relatively insignificant. The Phillips translation says, "*He stripped Himself of every advantage.*" Another translator says, "*He emptied Himself.*" One writer paraphrases it thus, "*He did not cling to His rights as God, but laid them aside.*" Another

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says *“He did not snatch at equality with God but made Himself nothing.”* Still another says *“He stripped Himself of all privileges and rightful dignity.”*

I'd like to ask you to consider two ramifications of what Christ did because they apply to us in the same fashion.

1- He became vulnerable to failure. He left the security of the throne for the battlefield of the throng because He trusted the Father and He wanted to do the Father's will. In Jesus Christ, God was willing to become a fool, a failure. He placed Himself in a position to be spit on, laughed at, gambled over. You may say, *“How degrading to God.”* I believe that is why more of us as believers do not succeed in spiritual things. We are unwilling to become vulnerable to what the world considers failure. God was not afraid to fail by man's standards. He knew who He was and He emptied Himself. It was through His *“failure”* that we found life.

2- He was willing to become totally dependent on somebody else and not to be His own boss. Never in 33 years did Jesus Christ breathe a breath or make a move on His own. You may say, *“How humiliating for God.”* We read:

Then Jesus answered and said to them, *“Most surely, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”* (John 5:19 NKJV)

*I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.* (John 5:30 NKJV)

Then Jesus said to them, *“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.”* (John 8:28 NKJV)

Jesus went on to say *“As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you.”* This literally means that you and I can do as much without Jesus as He can do without the Father, which is *NOTHING*. Remember John 3:

And they came to John and said to him, *“Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”*

John answered and said, *“A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.”* (John 3:26,27 NKJV)



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“He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30)

This is a good verse to memorize.

I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5 NKJV)

There you have it. We can do as much without Jesus as He could do without the Father, which is nothing. So Jesus Christ had to be willing to become *totally dependent* on the Father for 33 years. That meant two things:

1- He had to be willing to be vulnerable to failure.

2- He had to be willing to give up His own rights to His own life.

He had to become totally dependent. He did not lay aside His deity, He laid aside the expressions of His deity. He was still God. But you will remember that as an expression of deity, the natural prerogative of deity is that in whatever situation deity is in, it deserves to be glorified. Jesus laid aside that prerogative while on planet earth. He, instead, assumed only the prerogative to serve, only to once again, at a later time, take up His rightful position in the heavenlies.

### THE MEANS (Philippians 2:7)

To accomplish this, Jesus became a servant. He was God and He wasn't ashamed of it. However, He didn't clutch at His rights as God, but instead stripped Himself of His royal garments and clothed Himself with the garments of a slave. The word “*servant*” here is the same word that Paul uses when he says, “Paul, a *bond slave* of Jesus Christ.” A bond slave, remember, is a slave by choice. A bond slave has no possessions, no rights and no authority.

Let's turn to John 13. This is a familiar passage. The Scripture says that Jesus, just before the feast of the Passover, knew that His hour had come. Supper was over. The devil had put it in Judas' heart to betray Jesus. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come from God and went to God, got up from supper and laid aside His garments. Here is a beautiful picture of God leaving His royalty in heaven. This is Philippians 2 in living color.

He laid aside His garments and took upon Himself the garment of a slave. He girded Himself and poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' dirty feet, and wiped them

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with a towel. Simon Peter then said, “*Lord, You don’t know what You are doing. Why would You wash my feet?*” Jesus answered and said, “*What I do now you don’t understand. You will in time to come.*” Peter said, “*You will never wash my feet.*” Jesus answered, “*If I wash thee not, thou has no part of Me.*” Then of course, Peter said, “*Give me a bath.*” Jesus said, “*You missed the point.*” Let’s look at this passage,

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?”

You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.

For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Most surely, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

(John 13:12-17 KJV)

The world isn’t looking for arrogant kings, it is looking for available servants. God, then, is looking for men who will humble themselves. He is looking for Christians with dirty hands and warm hearts who are willing to reach out.

I don’t mean this disrespectfully, but I look at video clips of presidents, prime ministers and senators as they visit foreign countries, or make trips to the inner cities of this nation. They pick the children up and hug them. They eat the same food the poor folks eat. They walk out into the fields they work in. They are trying desperately to identify with the common man, but somehow unconsciously they come across with a political motivation.

Contrast that with Jesus Christ in that upper room and you will see the difference between the way we reach out as Christians and the way Jesus would. He really cared. He got involved. He took upon Himself the lowest possible form of servitude. So we ask the question, “How do we become a servant?”

### THE PROCESS (Philippians 2:8)

He humbled Himself and became *obedient unto death*. I don’t think you can separate humility from obedience. You can’t truly be obedient without humbling yourself. I don’t believe that you

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can separate the two. Jesus became obedient, meaning nothing was too hard. He humbled Himself, meaning nothing was too menial.

What does this mean? Go back now to Philippians 2:1-4. These verses tell us that we are “*not to do anything through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, to each esteem others as better than themselves.*” This is the prelude to the passage we are dealing with. What it says is that we are to do nothing from self-seeking motives, but lower ourselves to a position of importance that is lower than everyone else. This means that if you have a need and your neighbor has a need, you do what is most vital and most important. You meet your neighbor’s need. You do this not because God is going to give you a merit badge for it, but because your neighbor is more important than you are. To understand this is humility. To do this is obedience. *To both understand it and do it is to become poor in spirit.*

Jesus was obedient *unto* death. I think it is important to understand that the passage does not say that Jesus was obedient *to* death. He mastered death. That is why we read:

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?  
(I Corinthians 15:55)

Death is dead because Jesus mastered death, but He was obedient up to and including the point of death. There were no limits to His obedience. Most of us are obedient unto something, but it isn’t usually unto death.

So what was the result? He died. He could have built a kingdom that would have altered the political climate of the world, but He died. He could have built a religious system of good works and good deeds that would have satisfied man’s need to be worthy, but He died. He could have been a cohesive influence on the world’s social and economic ills, but He died. Having become vulnerable to failure by man’s standards, He failed, but out of the rubbish heap of failure came the reality of success. He gave up everything on earth for everything in heaven. He gave up everything in time for everything in eternity. That is what happens when you and I lay aside our reputation, humble ourselves and obey. We have to die.

When was the last time you died? I thought about that and I was terribly convicted about the fact that basically that is what living is all about - dying. That is what a husband is supposed

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to do for his wife, die. He is supposed to die to his own selfish ambitions, his own selfish priorities and his temporal goals. This is what a wife is supposed to do for her husband. That is what parents do for their children. That is what we are to do for one another. That is what believers are to do for a lost world. We are supposed to die. When there comes a conflict or a choice, what would be best for us gives way to what the needs are of the people around us. We are supposed to die. The things you want most in life may not happen so that the things God wants in your life can. You die.

If the body of Christ at large or we as individuals were functioning this way, laying aside our robes of royalty so to speak, stripping ourselves of our rights as children of the King, humbling ourselves obediently to the point of death to meet one another's needs, the entire atmosphere in our churches would be different. The entire atmosphere in our homes would be different. The entire atmosphere in the world today would be different. Whatever needs we became aware of would be met. But we are too busy counting the cost. So the world sees us clad in garments of religious verbiage. We want to ride into history on a steed, not on a donkey. We want to etch our mark as men and women who live like kings, not as ones who wash each other's feet. But Jesus didn't. He died.

### THE TRIUMPH, THE VICTORY (Philippians 2:9-11)

Because He died, it says, "*wherefore God hath highly exalted Him.*" The word "highly exalted" means to raise to supreme majesty. *He lifted Him up to where He was before.* God glorified Him. God has given Him a name. In the Greek there is the definite article which means "The Name." Wuest capitalizes it to read, "and God has given Him back The Name." This means that Jesus has once again assumed all of the qualities and all of the essence of God as God. He traded His crown for a cross, His robe for rags, His glory for the gory reality of human suffering only to return to the Father where there awaited Him once again His crown, His robes, and His glory.

This is the way it is for us. You compare in your own mind the difference between Calvary and Philippians 2:9-11. At Calvary, He had no reputation. He had on a crown of thorns. They gambled for His robes. With regard to His glory, they mocked and laughed as they said,

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Are you the Son of God? Why don't you come down? You saved others, why don't you save yourself?

(Matthew 27:42 paraphrased)

But the rest of this passage goes on to say that now He has been returned to His glory and given The Name. Then one day at the sight of The Name, the essence of God, every knee will bow. One day, every tongue will confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I believe God is speaking to us through His Word. He is calling us to the throne room. There, we look around and see His majesty, His glory, His power. He says to you and to me, "My child, this is all yours. Everything that is Mine is yours. You are My son. You are My daughter. The day is coming, My child, when you will rule and reign with Me. You will be clothed in My robes of righteousness. Even the angels will fall at your feet." We can just hear the Father's voice as He says, "Come closer My child." As you come closer, the Father reaches down and says, "Now give me your robes of royalty. Hand me your crown. Give me your scepter. You won't be needing those for a while. Put these on instead." Instead, He gives us the rags of a slave. He gives us a towel. We ask, "What is this Lord?" He answers, "It is to wash the feet of others."

The Father looks at us and says, "Child, one day you *will* reign, but today I am sending you on a mission. I want you to go out into the kingdom that is ours, not as a king, but as a slave. Your mission is to empty yourself. Humble yourself. Do what you are told. Your title will be "servant of man". By serving man, you will be a servant of God. I want you to wash their spiritual feet. I want you to put salve on their spiritual eyes. I want you to strengthen their weak spiritual knees. If they are hungry, feed them. If they are naked, clothe them. If they are in prison, visit them. When you do this to the least of these, you will be doing it unto Me." That is what it means to be "*poor in spirit*."

You can hear the Father conclude, "Oh My child, don't forget the crown, the robes and the scepter. They will be waiting for you when you return. In the meantime, you can live as the King lived when He lived on earth. When you come back to heaven, you will be surrounded by gold, silver and precious stones, and all of those spiritual treasures that you have laid up here while serving on earth will await you. And as you cast those treasures at My feet on that day, you will understand My child, that having

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become *poor in spirit*, having given up this for that, the *kingdom of heaven will literally be yours.*”

God has called us to His throne,  
He has a message to share.  
Surely, it's our glory time,  
And our rewards are there.

But He's giving out no glory,  
He's taking away our crown,  
And saying, “Come My child,  
I want you to stoop down.

“Down to the depths of My kingdom,  
I can take care of the heights.  
Down to where My people live,  
Into the darkest of nights.

“Into their hurts, their grief and their pain,  
Into their deepest need,  
Into the bondage of servitude  
So the ones you serve can be freed.

“You will return to your mansion,  
Your crown will be here when it's done.  
Then you'll be ready to wear it, My child,  
For you will have lived like My Son.”

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For Further Study and Application

1- Commit to memory this week II Corinthians 8:9. Personalize it. Pray it back to God as your personal promise to claim.

2- Read Philippians 2:1-11 over and over in your time alone with God. Try to grasp a picture of what Jesus laid aside to come to earth to die for our sins. Ask God to draw a parallel in your heart between the process He went through and the life He wants to live through us.

3- What do you think it means when Paul says: "*Let this mind be in you*"? Can you think of what it means when you ask someone to assume a certain mindset before they begin a project or enter into an agreement? Why is the word "*let*" so important to the passage?

4- What does it mean that Jesus was "in the form of God"? How could He have been equal with the Father but not the same as the Father? What did Paul mean when he said, "*He thought it not robbery*"? How can we have that mindset when we are not equal with God?

5- Jesus made Himself of "*no reputation*". What do you think that means? Is that something we are called to do? If so, give some practical illustrations of times in your life when you would be called on to do that.

6- What do you think it means to be totally dependent? Can you think of someone you know who is totally dependent on someone else for their very existence? Can you imagine God in the flesh being that dependent, not even able to speak a word without the Father speaking it through Him?

7- Can you think of four ways you can die this week? Do you practice dying daily? Reflect on Luke 9:23. How can you die for your family, for your employer, for those you are seeking to minister to? Ask God for the grace to die so you can really begin to live.

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