

**Introduction:**

- A. Illus.: Did you ever see the movie, *Get Low*? It's about this old hermit named Felix Bush. He lives out in the hills and people are scared of him. Heard stories about him. Then one day he drives his buckboard into town and heads to the little church. He walks in and the pastor is there. Bush sits uneasily in a pew and Pastor Horton, nervous himself because of the stories he's heard, perches across from him on another pew. "*What's on your mind, sir?*" the pastor asks.

*"Bout time for me to get low,"* says Bush.

*"Get what?"*

*"Down to business."* And Bush reaches into his overalls a drops a balled-up wad of money on the pew. "*Need a funeral,*" he says.

The pastor looks up from the money. "*For who?*"

*"Me."*

What we find out is that Mr. Bush wants his funeral *before* he dies because he needs to square accounts. So *before* he dies, he wants to *get low*—perhaps to get the hard part of dying taken care of.

- B. The first sermon recorded in the NT was preached by John the Baptist. Matt 3:1-2, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*" He preached it every time he had a few people to listen. Again and again. Then, when John was put in prison, Jesus began to preach exactly the same sermon, "throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues": "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*" I'm sure the words changed, but the outline was always the same. Pt.1: Repent. Pt. 2: for the kingdom of heaven has come near. *Get low to get blessed.*
- C. Repentance has two parts. The first is to confess our sins. Matthew says that's what people did who came out to be baptized by John: "*confessing their sins.*" The other part of

repentance is doing life differently. Luke says that when the crowd asked John the Baptist, “*What should we do then?*” he told people to share with the poor. He told tax collectors to be honest and soldiers to be fair and content with their pay. **Confess your sins and reorient your life in order to be prepared for life in the kingdom of heaven.**

- D. Matthew tells us in ch.4 that Jesus began to choose his disciples, even while being followed by larger and larger crowds. Then, **Mt 5:1-2...** So what sermon do you *think* we’re going to hear? Pt.1: *Repent*. Pt. 2: *for the kingdom of heaven has come near*. **Get low to get blessed**. What they actually heard started this way: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” Eight times, “*Blessed are.*” Eight times, a lowly posture. Eight times, the extravagant blessing. But it was the same sermon.

**I. TO FOLLOW JESUS WE MUST TRUST THAT YOU ALWAYS GET LOW TO GET BLESSED**

- A. Indulge me for a moment in an analogy. Remember how in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan has characters who personify qualities. Christian’s friend, Hopeful, or the dubious character, Mr. Money-Love. “*I’d like to bring out Mr. Repentance.*” You look for him and here come *eight* people, all wearing jerseys that say, **Team Repentance**. “*Who are you guys?*” I ask. “*I’m Mr. Poor-in-spirit,*” the first one says quietly. “*I’m mournful,*” says the sad-eyed one. “*I’m Miss Meek.*” “*I’m Hungry-for-Righteousness,*” says the thin man. “*Madame Mercy. Brother Pure-in-Heart. Ms. Peacemaker. Mr. Persecuted,*” says the bandaged one. Repentance, it seems, plays several positions. **Repentance is a team of lowly attitudes. This passage doesn’t describe eight kinds of people. It describes one kind of heart.**
- B. The surprise here, of course, is that each of these lowly teammates of repentance are matched with an

extraordinary blessing. Now here is a critical point: **that doesn't make sense**. In the Bible a lowly spirit is the outcome of being aware of our sin. To be poor in spirit is simply to be honest about ourselves, but it doesn't make us good. Yet you'd think, from the blessing, that these are ideal. Imagine someone applying for citizenship who tells the immigration officer, *"Honestly, I have to tell you, I'm a low life. I have been a criminal and rebel all my life,"* and the immigration officer claps her hands, grins and stamps the paper, *"Great!"* she says, *"You're just the kind of person we want in our country!"*

- C. There is this big disconnect between each of these. *"Poor in spirit"* way over here and *"kingdom of heaven"* way over there, and never the twain shall meet. How do these people over here get these blessings up here? Illus.: That scene I described in the movie, *Get Low*, continues. When Mr. Bush says he needs a funeral, the pastor says, *"For who?"*

*"Me."*

*"For you?"*

It turns out that one reason Mr. Bush wants to attend his own funeral is to find out what stories people will tell about him, particularly the story that has haunted him for decades. But Pastor Horton doesn't bite. He says, *"What matters is when you come to the end of your life you're ready for the next one. Have you made peace with God, sir?"*

Bush looks at him a long moment, then says, *"I paid."*

The pastor doesn't know what he means, but he looks at the wad of money and then back at Bush, and says, *"Well, Mr. Bush, you can't buy forgiveness. It's free. But you do have to ask for it."*

And that is often the hardest part about getting low, as Mr. Bush learns. Getting low enough to ask for forgiveness And there—right there—that's where Jesus stands. **In that**

**vast gap between getting low and getting blessed stands Jesus our Savior.** There is where we need Jesus to forgive and to re-create us from the inside out, to move us from our own funeral to the kingdom of everlasting life.

- D. The beatitudes get their name from that opening word, *blessed*. *Beatus* in Latin. In English, we just don't have a word that does this Greek word justice. Some translate it *happy*, but that puts the weight on our feeling, and the fact is, we're *blessed* whether we feel it or not. **Through his grace, Jesus Christ transforms our position in life from being cursed to being blessed.** We are born cursed to sin and separation from God in this life and forever. Through Jesus we can be *re-born* to a condition of righteousness and loving fellowship with God in this life and forever. Remember the prodigal son trudging home, the victim of his own arrogance and folly, rehearsing his "I'm not worthy," speech, only to see his father running to meet him, and then finding himself the honored guest at a feast just for coming home alive. *That's 'blessed.'* Or the thief on the cross who said to Jesus, "*Remember me when you come into your kingdom,*" and Jesus replied, "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*" *That's blessed. That's the blessing when we get low.*

## II. THANKS TO JESUS CHRIST, WHEN WE GET LOW WE GET BLESSED

- A. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" When we're told that we're sinful it is human nature to scrounge around in our lives looking for every bit of righteousness we can find, like people digging for quarters in the couch cushions. But look as we might, there just isn't any. We hold up what we thought were good deeds and see what God saw all along—filthy rags. We discover that we have nothing to trade with God. We're broke! Paupers! We stand at God's gate with empty pockets. So we trudge penniless into Jesus' rescue mission

and the doors open to a palace, a banquet, and the welcome of God. We're washed and fed, and given the keys to God's front door.

- B. *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* This is about people mourning over their sin; not grieving in general. Mourning is part of repentance. **James 4:8-10...** And how does God respond? **Is. 61** says that Jesus came *"to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."* God's comfort for those grieving their sin is not just a hug. It is a festival, a homecoming for the dead brought back to life! *Crown of beauty. Oil of joy. Garment of praise. The comfort of the kingdom!*
- C. *"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."* The meek are people who don't pull rank, who live low. I'm sure there have been times when you, like me, have been thoroughly humiliated by your sin. In that moment we are properly meek. In that moment, at least, we are in no mood to throw our weight around. When God sees that in us he puts us in his will; he assigns our inheritance. *"I think when I make the new heavens and earth, I'll put all those meek people in charge. Those are the kind of people I can trust to run my kingdom."*
- D. *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."* Facing our sin makes us hungry to be good. *"Oh Lord, I am starving for righteousness in my life, and I can't find so much as a morsel in me. But I am so sick of sin. I want so much to be good."* And Jesus our Savior says, *"Then I will fill you with my righteousness from the inside, like after Thanksgiving dinner."* Jesus' Holy Spirit makes us righteous on the inside and then our outward behavior grows righteous—the very thing we hungered to be.

- E. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Self-righteous people cannot be merciful. They don't have it in them. In fact, try to be merciful to someone who has really hurt you, and you'll have a window to your own heart. The only way I can position myself to give mercy is by facing how deeply indebted I am myself to the Lord's mercy. Showing mercy doesn't minimize the hurt or the sin done against us but we see ourselves in the mirror of the sinner who hurt us. We see that we are nothing but the pot calling the kettle black. It is not our *nobility* that gives rise to mercy. It is our lowliness. And when we bow to give mercy, God's mercy floods into our lives like a bath.
- F. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." This isn't referring to the innocence of children. It is about the outcome of repentance. Repentance is how we haul the trash out of our souls and scrub the filth off the windows of our hearts. We do it with Jesus, who brings the bleach of his blood. From pure hearts we can see and enjoy God's holiness and grace, his love for us and presence so near. We see Jesus, and in him we see God.
- G. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God." Given this repentance context, I think this speaks of making peace with those who are hardest for us to live with. Repentance roots out our jealousy and combativeness. In **James 4:1-3**, the same chapter I quoted earlier, he tells us the blunt truth about our conflicts with one another... So that's what Jesus means when he says, *"Blessed are the peacemakers."* When God sees us Surrendering control and coveting to make peace, he honors us as his sons and daughters. The sense is not just that we are recognized as his kids, but as his family heirs. Like a sign over a store that says, "Thompson and Sons." God is the great Peacemaker and when we bow low to make peace with others we are in business with the Father.

- H. *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Vv.12,13* that follow are an expansion on this... Repentant people are not well-received in this world. People who get low to get blessed upset the world’s applectart. In the supreme irony, people who embrace inner poverty, meekness, righteousness, mercy, pure hearts and self-sacrificing peace are the most dangerous people around. To Satan, such people explode his proud, self-centered, God-hating system. But on the other side of the coming Great War of Satan’s defeat, a great reward awaits those persecuted for righteousness. And even now, we have the peace and presence of Jesus. Matthew’s last words of Jesus are, *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

### III. HOW DO WE LIVE LIKE THIS? HOW DO WE EMBODY THIS KIND OF REPENTANT LIFESTYLE?

- A. First, we do it together. This kind of thinking and living is a community effort. This is why we have a church, so we can together with Jesus Christ, get low to get blessed.
- B. Secondly, when we face just how difficult true righteousness is, we live our lives getting low—over and over again. And from that posture, Jesus changes us.
- C. Finally, we work out these aspects of the lowly life through prayer. We bow our hearts humbly before Jesus and take stock of our day, of the conflict or the pressure, the sin or the sorrow. And we run our life through the sieve of these words. That’s why we’re going to memorize them—so you can pray them readily anytime. Getting low is an ongoing work of the heart.

*“What’s on your mind, sir?”* the pastor asked.

And the weary, lonely man replied *“Bout time for me to get low.”*