

VISIO



DIVINA

*The Wisdom Contemplative Vision*

## THE POOR

*The Gospel of Thomas Logion 54*

Beatitude 4

In one of its variations, we are already familiar with this saying of Yeshua from the canonical Gospels. Yeshua was born into poverty. He was one of the “little one” (the small, the forgotten, the invisible and unknown multitudes of this earth who are poor). He was little known in his own time, living at the margins of Roman (and perhaps also in Jewish) society. He knew the plight of the poor because he had lived it. The little ones of earth who are invisible to the powerful, struggle to live at all. They are always perched on the knife-edge between meager poverty and financial ruin.

I have never been truly poor in that terrifying way, but I have lived among the poor, and have allowed myself to enter the experience of those who know poverty in a profound way. Over the last years I have spent time among the poorest people in Ethiopia. I have also visited others like them elsewhere on the earth. Because I have maintained contact over an extended period of time with people who are poor, I have come to know their plight, their fears and anxieties on a day-to-day basis. Some that I know cannot buy a new shirt for a year because they have no financial resources. Some go barefooted because they cannot buy shoes unless I intervene. Some have no assurance of enough food to sustain them, unless someone can help. When I hear about it, it is an anguish for me. And when I help, I know it is a drop in the bucket of poverty. The suffering among the poor of the earth is unimaginable.

And yet Yeshua calls them “blessed.” It is an astounding statement, given that he also knew poverty at that level and knew its suffering personally. How can

being poor be a state of blessedness? It seems to be an oxymoron, magical thinking, or even on the edge of some delusional insanity. But is it? Yeshua knows that poverty (at least for some) can create a kind of gratefulness for everything that is good. It often opens and sensitizes the soul. For most it does not create hostility and anger but a form of loving-kindness for the plight of others and often a willingness to share whatever little one has with others which is astonishing. I have experienced this over and over again. Could this be what Yeshua is referring to? Is this his state of blessedness? I think, in part, it is.

However Yeshua knows something that takes the meaning of this saying out of the context of earth itself and puts it into the context of the cosmos and eternity. Beyond this short life-time is a realm that treasures our experience (and our suffering) here. In the context of the Realm of the Heavens, the poor, the little ones of earth, the forgotten and the unknown are citizens of a “Kingdom” in which, he says, they shall reign.

This is so different from the reality on earth that one must have a certain level of faith about this to say it, but Yeshua apparently does, and he says it with certitude: The Realm of Heaven belongs to these people. There they are both heirs and sovereign. It is hard to see and believe it here, but Yeshua sees it there. Dare we believe him? If we dare, it would it makes a difference to the way we live and treat others now? We might even allow ourselves to become poor for the sake of others on this planet and at this moment in time and space, not because we long for reward, but because love has brought us to this same state of blessedness, which though hard to speak about, may be experienced here and now.

## Reflections on Image and Text:

## A Place for Notes and Journaling:

1. *This is often called one of the “hard sayings” of Yeshua, and is typical of some of the startling statements that Yeshua made throughout his teaching. What do you think about it? How might you interpret this saying? Is there another way to approach it that is different from this reflection?*
2. *Most modern Americans (even those with modest means) do not truly know this difficult state. However, most of the people on this earth (and that have lived here in the past) have known exactly what it means to be poor—truly poor and at the margins. It is not an easy place to be. It is a hand-to-mouth existence and is in its own way terrifying. Have you ever been truly poor, or known poverty? Describe that experience.*
3. *Have you ever been “invisible” and simply overlooked because someone did not see you as powerful enough to be paid attention to? How did that experience make you feel?*
4. *What has been your interaction with poor people the little ones of earth? How have you experienced them?*
5. *What would it be like for the unknown masses of earth to truly inherit a realm (unknown perhaps to them) where even though materially poor they reign in sovereignty? What might that realm become as a result?*
6. *Why would God give this realm to them? What do you think it means that Yeshua says it is **already** theirs?*
7. *How might an understanding of Yeshua’s statement change the way you relate to the people of the earth? What is your own responsibility to the poor?*
8. *Do the images help you to imagine this? What do you see in them that guides you?*

—This reflection, text and its illumination have been provided by Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman as a means for reflection and contemplative prayer  
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# LECTIO DIVINA

*The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text*

Yeshua says

**Y**ou poor are blessed,  
for the realm of heaven  
is already yours.

—Logion 54  
*The Gospel of Thomas : Wisdom of the Twin*  
—translated by Lynn C. Bauman

*Contemplating*  
**THE ILLUMINATIONS**



