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The Beatitudes: Part 3

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

Scripture: Matthew 5:8

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Sermon on the Mount, Purity, Heart

Matthew 5:8 (ESV) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Introduction

We were created to gaze at glory. We were made to behold beauty. Humans were designed to delight in mighty and marvelous things. We find ourselves drawn to fiercest and the finest. We will travel around the world to be near the biggest and to behold the best.

FIFA World Cup

Right now, **the biggest event** happening is the FIFA World Cup. FIFA disclosed this week that it has sold 3 million tickets¹ to travelers who have flocked to Qatar to fill eight stadiums as they watch teams from 32 nations compete for the Cup, while an estimated one billion people having been watching from home.² That's almost one seventh the population of entire world watching the world's best footballers compete for the most highly esteemed award in football! We will travel the world or tune out TV's to watch the biggest and best events!

The Milky Way

We cannot stop gazing at glorious things. Have any of you the last couple of nights found yourself staring up at the beautifully bright, full moon? There are luminescent glories that fill the skies above us.

I'll will never forget the first time I saw the Milky



¹ Source: <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/qatar2022/news/fifa-world-cup-tm-attendance-figures-stand-at-94-after-first-round-of-group> accessed 9 December 2022.

² Source: <https://worldsoccertalk.com/2022/05/04/how-many-people-watch-the-world-cup/> accessed 9 December 2022.

Way with my own eyes in the night sky. My father and I were driving across this country and we stopped for the night in a remote section of dark Montana forest. I turned off the truck and stepped outside to stretch my legs. Even though the woods around us were pitch-black and there were no streetlights to be seen, I was stunned by a kind of brightness emanating from above. I looked up and saw what I instinctively knew was the Milky Way. I'd see pictures of it before and watched projections of it in the planetarium, but I never before seen with my own eyes. What I beheld was breathtakingly beautiful. Psalm 19 came to mind, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." We were created to gaze at glory.

The Grand Canyon

God made mankind to marvel at magnificent and majestic things, whether they be high or low. How many of us have stood at the edge of the Grand Canyon and marveled at that one mile-deep, 18 mile wide, 277 mile long scar in the earth's crust? About 5 million people make their way to marvel at this great wonder each year.



Our Purpose: to Gaze at the Glory of God

We were created to gaze at glory, made to marvel at majesty, and built to behold beauty. But all of the world's greatest wonders cannot even begin to compare to the glory of God himself.

God is the most glorious being who has ever or will ever exist. His great glory is beyond imagination and our ability to behold. All of humanity's yearnings for the wonderful, the majestic, the mighty, and the glorious are simply expressions of our hard-wired yearning to worship God. God created us to gaze at his glory, marvel at his majesty, to joyfully behold his beauty, and worship his wonder. *We were made to worship Him face to face.*

The Privilege

Long ago we enjoyed this sweet privilege. We know from the beginning of The Book, that mankind was created to see the face of God, for this was the great privilege of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve enjoyed face to face communion with God. They walked together in the cool of the evening.

The Problem

Yet, something terrible happened. Something came between man and God. Something has blurred our vision of him and kept us from gazing at his glory. Something has blinded us from beholding his beauty. All of humanity has spiritual cataracts. It is as if there is a thick, dark veil lying over our hearts³ that prevents us from fully delighting in the greatness of his glory. That veil is sin. Sin has blinded our eyes and kept us from seeing God.

³ 2 Corinthians 3:15; 4:3-4.

Adam and Eve sinned and lost the privilege of being in the presence of God. He cast them out from his presence so that they could no longer see his face. Thus, sin entered and mankind exited the presence of God. Sin is what separates mankind from the face of God. Sin is our primary problem. Isaiah has said it most clearly.

Isaiah 59:2 (ESV) ...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you...

We were created to see his face, but our sin has caused his face to be hidden from us.

The Promise

But God made a promise. He was not content to allow us to remain separated from him forever. He made a promise to send someone to restore the privilege of once again being able to see him face to face. God promised to send a redeemer to atone for our sin. And he always keeps his promises. So ever since the fall of mankind from his presence, God has been on a mission to recover what we lost. And he will most certainly accomplish what he purposes to do. He gives us a glimpse of this at the end of the book. If we read the last chapter of The Book, we discover that once again man can see God. When He renew the kingdom,

Revelation 22:3-4 (ESV) No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face...

The greatest blessing of being admitted into the kingdom of heaven, is the great pleasure of seeing God face to face. This is that for which we were made. We were created to behold God's beauty, to see his glorious face. This is why God sent Jesus. This is what God sent His holy Son to accomplish. God sent Jesus to atone for sin so that man could once again see Him face to face.

Therefore, Jesus taught his disciples how this could be done. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sat before his disciples⁴ and taught them saying,

Matthew 5:8 (ESV) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Optional Review

As we have already seen through the previous weeks in the Sermon on the Mount, the blessings of which Jesus speaks are the blessings that belong to those who have entered the kingdom of heaven. These blessings about which Jesus is preaching are the blessings that

⁴ Matthew 5:1-2.

belong to Christians and he is here describing the character of the Christian who is in the kingdom of heaven.

We have also seen that there is a progression to this sermon. The Christian, the one who has entered the kingdom of heaven, is one who first, is **poor in spirit**. This means that the person realizes that they possess no righteousness of their own. They are spiritually bankrupt, never trusting in their own deeds as a means of establishing their own righteousness.

Second, the Christian is one who **mourns** their own sin. They hate their sin and are grieved over its presence in them. Third, the Christian is one who is **meek**, or humble before the Lord. Because they know they have no righteousness and they do have lots of sin, they are completely humbled before the Lord.

Fourth, their response then is to **hunger and thirst for righteousness**. The Christian knows that what they most need is righteousness and thus they look to God to provide it. The sweet promise is given that those who so hunger for righteousness *"shall be satisfied."*

Fifth, we see one of the effects of righteousness. The first fruit of the righteousness of God in the life of the Christian is **mercy**. Christians are merciful, because they have received mercy and will receive mercy at the last day. Sixth, the second fruit of righteousness is where we arrive today (v.8). The second fruit of righteousness in the life of the believer is **purity**.

Matthew 5:8 (ESV) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Jesus is Concerned About the Heart

From this statement we understand that Jesus is primarily concerned about the heart. Jesus emphasizes the heart repeatedly throughout his teaching ministry. This is to be contrasted over against the Pharisees who never mention the heart and were always more concerned with the outer than with the inner.

Matthew 23:27-28 (ESV) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Jesus is more concerned with the inward disposition of the heart than he is with the outward appearance of the man. The same is true of God, who said to Samuel, *"the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart"* (1 Sam. 16:7). It is not that the outward is unimportant, but rather that which is outward flows from that which is inward. Thus, the heart is of utmost importance to Jesus.

What is the Heart?

This begs the question, What is the heart? The heart is the center of the self and the center of the problem. The word *heart* here is the Greek word *kardia*, which you will recognize in our word cardiac. It refers to the physical organ that pumps blood throughout our body. However, this is not the primary meaning of the word in how it is most often used in the Bible.

The Source & Center of Personality

In biblical contexts the word most often refers to the source and center of a person's psychological life⁵, which includes the mind, will, and emotions. 'Heart' refers to the deepest essence of one's personality. It represents the core and totality of who a person is in the center of their soul. Simply put it represents the whole of one's being. Thus, Jesus explains the greatest commandment by saying,

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

By this Jesus means all of you. The 'heart' is shorthand for the "whole being," both physical and spiritual, material and immaterial. Here in the depths of the self, Jesus in this sixth blessing says, purity is to reside.

The Seat of the Problem

But this is seat of the problem. The heart is the center of mankind's greatest problem. The stunning truth of God's word is that it is from our hearts that our deepest problem begins. As God said about the Israelites,

Hebrews 3:10 (ESV) "They always go astray in their heart..."⁶

He also spoke through the prophet Jeremiah saying,

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick."

There is a desperate sickness, called sin, that resides in the heart of every human being. Not one single human being is immune from this sickness.

Proverbs 20:9 (ESV) Who can say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin"?

The expected answer is, "No one." No one can say they have no sin. In fact, the Bible teaches us that anyone who says they have no sin "is a liar and the truth is not in them."⁷ In Paul's letter

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 320.

⁶ Psalm 95:10.

⁷ 1 John 1:10.

to the Romans (in chapter 3), he quotes at least nine different passages of Scripture to prove that every single human being has this problem. No one is free from this heart problem.

Heart, Not the Head Nor Hands

Isn't it interesting that Jesus did not say, "Blessed are the pure in head..." or "Blessed are the pure in hands..." as if we could think or work our way out of this problem. But rather he said, "**Blessed are the pure in heart.**" Why is that? Because from the heart flow the thoughts of the head and the actions of the hands. Sin is so pernicious because it has penetrated down into the very deepest core of each one of us. Jesus is so concerned about the heart for from it flow all thoughts and actions.

Matthew 15:19-20 (ESV) "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."

Sinful thoughts, sinful words, and sinful actions all have one source: the heart. If the heart is sinful, then so will be thoughts, words, and actions. Again, Jesus is not talking about physical, blood-pumping muscle. He is talking about the bottom of our being. This is why Jesus is so concerned about the heart. The outward direction of a person is set by inward affection. That for which the heart yearns, the mind and body moves toward. A person does sinful things because the actions flow from sinful heart. Sinful words flow from a sinful heart. Sinful thoughts flow from a sinful heart. We are sinners from the very depths of our being.

Thus, our greatest need is a pure heart. Mankind's deepest need is a pure and righteous transformation in the heart. Outward conformity is not enough. There must be an inward transformation. External education will never be enough to overcome an inward disposition toward sin. Only a transformed heart will yield transformed thoughts. It is fallacy and fiction to believe that outward actions can be reformed if there is not first an inward transformation of the heart. So the heart is the center and source of our personality.

What is Purity?

The next question is what does it mean to be pure in heart? What is this purity? The word is *katharos* (καθαρός) and means "to be clean [in the eyes of God];"⁸ "undivided"⁹ or undiluted. This second meaning would be understood, for example, in the case of "pure gold" as in gold that is undiluted. It is undivided by the presence of any other metals (i.e. not mixed with any other metal); being of one substance. We see both of these meanings in Psalm 24 which is most likely the theological back drop of this beatitude.

Psalms 24:3-6 (ESV) ³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 535.

⁹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 116.

And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Standing in the “holy place” means standing before the presence of God. Seeing the face of God is the desire of those seek him. Those who seek him know that they must be clean and pure. Such people yearn to “ascend the hill of the LORD.” This is the idea expressed by Jesus in Matthew 5 as “seeing God.” Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord God? ***“He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”*** He who has a pure heart will most certainly have clean hands. This is why in the sermon on the mount Jesus emphasizes the purity of heart, for from the heart flow the actions of the hands. Thus, cleanness outwardly and inwardly is not optional for those who would seek the face of God.

Also, in this psalm we see two examples of the notion of being undivided. This is expressed by the notion that ***“he does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”*** In the man who is pure in heart, there is no division in *worship* and there is no division in *word*. First, he worships one God, the true God, and does worship what is false. His worship is undivided. Second, his words are also undivided. His speech is one since ***“he does not swear deceitfully.”*** This means that he speaks one truth. His speech is not divided. He does not say one thing and mean another. He does not speak out of both sides of his mouth. His message is one. What he says he means.

The Blessed Gift of Purity

Notice also that this psalm speaks of ***“blessing,”*** which is what we find in the beatitudes. What is the blessing mentioned here in this psalm? The blessing is that the one spoken of ***“receives righteousness from God.”*** Here we see God’s amazing grace. ***God gives the very righteousness that he requires.*** He gives his own righteousness to those who seek him! The blessing given to those who seek him is that he provides the purity necessarily to see his face!

This is in essence the grand and glorious promise of the New Covenant¹⁰ which was fulfilled in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus! God knows our deepest problem is in our hearts. Thus, he promised to give us new ones.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (ESV) ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of

¹⁰ See Jeremiah 31:31.

flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

What God Does

The gift of a new heart comes only from God the Father by receiving the Holy Spirit through faith that was purchased by the work of the Jesus the Son. Recall what we remind ourselves of every time we share the Lord's Table. We remember the words of Jesus, who said, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*"¹¹ Jesus purchased, by the shedding of his holy, sinless blood at Calvary, the right to pour out the Holy Spirit on all who have faith in him. This is what Jesus did on the day of Pentecost. *Jesus poured out then and continues to pour out today, His Holy Spirit into the hearts of all who, through faith in him, cry out to him for forgiveness of sins and the gift of a clean heart.* Peter says,

Acts 15:9 (ESV) "...God made no distinction between [Jews] and [Gentiles], having cleaned their hearts by faith."

Cleansing of the heart comes by faith in Jesus. Receiving a new heart comes through faith in Jesus who gives his Holy Spirit. That is the beginning of the work of sanctification.

What We Christians Do

God, by his grace, begins the work of holiness within us and then he calls us to cooperate with him in that same work. Christians are then called to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit by also cleaning up our hearts.

Hebrews 12:14 (ESV) Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Holiness is not optional. Purity of heart is a necessity for anyone who wishes to see the Lord. *He who has nothing of holiness, will have nothing of the kingdom of heaven.* God begins this holy work through the regeneration of heart. God, through Jesus and our faith in Jesus, gives the new heart. But then, we are called to engage that new heart by seeking holiness and pursuing purity. Christians are called to exercise habits of holiness. We are to cultivate purity by putting away and turning from all sin as we seek purity.

James 4:8 (ESV) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Isn't this your heart's desire? Do you want to draw near to God? Don't you want to see the Lord? This is the highest desire embedded within the heart of every Christian; to see God face to face. This was Moses' highest desire. This was the one request from God for which Moses pleaded. *Moses said, "Please show me your glory"* (Exodus 33:18). Moses wanted to see

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 11:25.

God. He wanted to gaze at his great glory. This desire resides within the spiritual DNA of the Christian. We yearn to stand before him and see that glorious smile on his gracious face, as we hear him say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant."*¹² Do you hear the sweet promise of Jesus, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God!"* The apostle John explains that the hope of that sweet vision is one of the most significant motivations to pursue purity.

1 John 3:2-3 (ESV) ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

The one who hopes in seeing God is the one who purifies himself of sin. He who yearns to see God yearns to be like God. Since God is pure those who wish to see will also yearn to be pure and so it is that the work of purifying one's life is carried out. Purity is embraced to the degree that hope of seeing him is maintained. "The one who hopes in seeing God is the one who purifies himself of sin."

How Should We Respond?

How should we respond to this truth? Jesus says, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God?"* How do we hear the voice of Jesus in these words? There are two possible responses? If you are not yet a Christian, then you ought to put your whole faith in Jesus and cry out to him for forgiveness of your sins and the gift of a new heart by receiving the Holy Spirit. Stop resisting Him and receive Him. Surrender to Him.

If you are a Christian, then keep purifying your heart. Put away all sin. Let go of it. Sin never delivers, it only enslaves. Turn away from all known sin. Cleanse your hearts by believing that obeying Jesus is better than disobeying. Repent, confess your sins, and receive the grace of his forgiveness and cleansing.

How Can We See God?

How shall we see him? Is this blessing only for the future and not at all for the here and now? Can we Christians see God in any sense today? One of the hallmarks of Jesus' teaching is that he said the kingdom of heaven has come.¹³ We know that it has not fully come, but it has come in some measure. With the coming of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven has broken into this world. Thus, we would expect that to some small degree we ought to be able to see God now. As Paul said, *"We see now very dimly, but hereafter we will see him face to face."*¹⁴ So how do we see God today.

We See God in Jesus

¹² Matthew 25:21, 23.

¹³ Matthew 12:28; Luke 10:9.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

We can see God by looking to Jesus? Jesus said to his disciples,

John 14:9 (ESV) "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."¹⁵

He also said,

John 14:7 (ESV) "If you have known me, then you have known my Father also."

If you yearn to see the glory of God, then set your heart to behold the person of Jesus. If Jesus is speaking the truth, then to know Jesus truly is to know God the Father also. Jesus so boldly said, "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30). This kind of talk got him killed. But since he was speaking the truth, death could not keep its grip on him. Since Jesus was raised from the dead, we can be confident that he was telling the truth. To see Jesus is to see God.

We See God in Scripture

We see God in Scripture. We can see God through what he has revealed about himself through his word. God's word tells us that Jesus is the fullest and final revelation of God's own character.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV) Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...

Since what can be accurately known about Jesus can be found only in the word of God, that is, in the Bible, then, anyone who would know Jesus truly, must make a habit of reading God's word. If you want to see God, then look regularly in his word.

We See God When We Seek to See Him

A few weeks ago I invited you to pray that God's kingdom would come among us. Since then I have seen evidence that God is at work among us. I want to share three examples.

1. Three weeks ago I received an incredible email from one who wrote, "I received spiritual healing during your prayer at the end of the sermon. I had been in a spiritual rut for years. I lost my zeal for the Lord. I stopped reading the Bible. But in your prayer I felt the Lord touch me and brighten my countenance. It was like he anointed me with fullness of joy. Now, I'm reading the Bible every day. I have not felt this way 12 years."
2. Two weeks ago someone came to me after the service in tears saying, "The Lord is doing a work in me." Given the tears I wasn't exactly sure of the nature of the work, but she quickly added, "It is hard, but it is good."

¹⁵ See also John 12:45.

3. In another message I received this week someone wrote, "The message on mercy was amazing. God was speaking through you to me. As a result, as soon as the service was over I immediately reached out with an apology to someone with whom I needed to reconcile."

In these instances, and more that could be shared, I see God. I see God at work among us and I believe there is more work to be done. I believe we should keep praying that His kingdom would come among us. I believe that we should keep praying the eyes will be opened and hearts transformed.

Conclusion

Let these words of Jesus give you unshakable hope. Cling to this promise in faith. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" Set the eyes of your heart on the hope of seeing God face to face. Allow the Lord to change you from the inside out. Let the light of glory of Christ transform your heart. Keep your eyes on Jesus and you will see the face of God.