

Matthew 5:8  
The Necessity of Heart Holiness  
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We are today continuing our study of the Beatitudes, which are the opening words of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes are Christ's description of the truly blessed person. And, of course, the truly blessed person is the person who is truly a member of God's covenant people, the person who is truly born again, the person who is truly saved from his sins.

The beatitudes are not a "how to" book. They are not a set of instructions, saying "Do this and this and this, and you will become a Christian." They are more like a bird watcher's book. The bird watcher sees a bird. He observes that the bird has a red patch on its forehead, black and white plumage, and a pale yellow abdomen. The bird watcher then consults his bird watcher's book, and there he learns that the only bird which fits that description is the yellow-bellied sapsucker. Similarly, someone observes that a certain person is merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker. If that people watcher would then consult the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, he would there learn that a person of that description has the marks of a genuine Christian.

The Sermon on the Mount doesn't tell us how to become a Christian, but it does tell us what we will be like if we genuinely

are a Christian. We can't make ourselves into that sort of person: the merciful person, the pure person, the peaceable person. We can no more do that than can the leopard change his spots or the Ethiopian change his skin. The only one who can make us into that sort of person is Jesus Christ. So the Christian message is not, Make yourself into a better person. The Christian message is, Go to Jesus, trust Him alone for your salvation, and He will make you into a better person. And the key to progress in this radical life transformation is staying close to Jesus: worshipping Jesus with God's people on the Lord's Day, speaking to Jesus through daily prayer, meditating upon the Bible through which Jesus speaks to us, renewing one's covenant commitment to Jesus through the Lord's Supper, and so on.

So the beatitudes describe the Christian, who is the truly blessed person. And, as I've said week after week, these beatitudes have a definite order to them. The beatitudes first describe a descent down into the valley of the confession of spiritual emptiness and then an ascent up onto the mountain of the experience of spiritual fullness. The emptiness descent is a hungering and thirsting after righteousness which is described in beatitudes one, two and three. The fullness ascent is a spiritual filling which is described in beatitudes five, six and seven. The beatitude in the middle, beatitude four, the transition beatitude, appropriately says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." First the Christian descends down to a confession of spiritual emptiness, and then he ascends up to an experience of spiritual fullness.

Now, I have so far simply reviewed for you what I have already told you in previous sermons about the logical progression that is in these beatitudes, but let me also share with you a new point this Lord's Day. There is also a symmetry between the descending emptiness beatitudes and the ascending fullness beatitudes.

The first descending beatitude is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And the first ascending beatitude is, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." There is a parallelism there because Christ in Matthew 18 compares God's forgiving our sins to the mercy of a king who forgives a servant a great financial debt which the servant himself could never repay. Blessed are the spiritually poor, those who recognize their spiritual poverty apart from the riches of Christ, because God in Christ forgives the spiritual indebtedness of their guilt. God mercifully forgives their spiritual debt, but He does not stop there. He also spiritually enriches them by making them heirs of the kingdom of heaven. The poor in spirit receive God's mercy and come to possess the riches of the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

The second descending beatitude is, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." And the second ascending beatitude is "Blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God." Again, there is a symmetry. Why is the blessed person sorrowful? Because he recognizes his spiritual defilement. But God comforts him by making him pure in heart.

And the greatest comfort of all is the promise that he will one day see God. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God."

The third descending beatitude is, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." And the third ascending beatitude is, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." Again, there is symmetry, because in order to be a peacemaker, a person needs that humility and gentleness that comes with meekness. Also, the peacemakers are the sons of God. And if we are sons of God, then we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, and we shall indeed inherit the earth. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."

Now I want to examine in some detail today the sixth beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." I want to look at the where of the sixth beatitude, the what of the sixth beatitude, and the why of the sixth beatitude.

First, the **where** of the sixth beatitude, the locus of the spiritual transformation described in the sixth beatitude, which is, of course, the heart. This is very important. The reference to the heart here implies that the spiritual transformation referred to in the sixth beatitude is a complete inward transformation.

It is a complete inward transformation as opposed to merely an outward transformation. Christianity is not just about outward ethical conduct and external good behavior. It goes deeper than

that. It goes to the very heart of the matter. That is important because if good behavior is not rooted in the heart, it is hypocritical and shallow and superficial.

Do you remember Eddie Haskell on the 1950s television show "Leave It to Beaver"? Eddie Haskell was a real scoundrel who was always up to no good, and yet around Mr. and Mrs. Cleaver, the Beaver's parents, he was always on his best behavior, smiling and using the most polite language and the most pleasant voice. Like Eddie Haskell, we can meet other's expectations regarding our conduct when that is to our advantage, even when that conduct is not at all consistent with our true inner character. The purity spoken of in the sixth beatitude is something much more substantial and genuine than the good behavior of an Eddie Haskell.

It is also something more substantial and genuine than the righteousness that was characteristic of the Pharisees. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will say,

20 "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20

Jesus is there saying that the righteousness of the Pharisees which emphasized only external conformity to the law was not an adequate indication that a person is truly a born again member of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus elsewhere compares the Pharisees to someone who is careful to wash the outside of a

cup but neglects to wash the inside of the cup. What does it matter if the outside of a cup is clean if the inside is covered with filth? Who would want to drink from such a cup? Jesus also compares the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs, which are beautiful outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. They were fastidiously particular about keeping the outward details of the law in order to receive the praise of men, but they neglected the weightier matters of the law, such as justice, mercy and faith. In contrast to this, Jesus teaches that the truly blessed person is pure inwardly and not just outwardly.

Jesus is also here teaching that this inner purity involves the whole inner person. Jesus didn't say, Blessed are those with pure thoughts, or, Blessed are those with pure feelings, or, Blessed are those with pure intentions. Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, and the heart is the center and source of the whole inner life. Jesus is not satisfied with an inner purity that is limited to the mind; that is, limited to learning doctrine and Bible facts as a strictly academic and intellectual pursuit. Jesus is not satisfied with an inner purity that is limited to the emotions, such as in the person whose main motivation for going to church is to have a good emotional experience. Jesus is not satisfied with an inner purity that is limited to the will, such as in the person who wills to do good works but has little interest in Bible doctrine or worship. Jesus wants more than that. He wants heart purity because the heart is the totality of our inner being. He wants an inner purity that involves our mind, our emotions, our will, even the totality of our inner life.

Spiritual transformation that goes to our very heart is necessary because the heart is the root of our problem as sinners. Jeremiah the prophet said,

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

Jeremiah 17:9

Jesus said,

19 "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

Matthew 15

Humanity's problem is not in the environment. Adam was in paradise, an ideal environment, when he rebelled against God and fell into sin. Humanity's problem is not a lack of education. A person can receive years of academic training and become a clever devil and a knowledgeable scoundrel. The problem is our heart, and that is why the emphasis of new covenant salvation is upon writing the law of God not on tablets of stone but on the human heart.

The where of the fifth commandment is the heart, and the **what** of the fifth commandment is holiness or purity. Now what does it mean to be pure in heart? It means to have a heart that is undefiled by sin and thus devoted to God single-mindedly and sincerely.

The root idea of the word here translated "pure" is the ceremonial purity required by the old Mosaic law. Under the Mosaic law, a person could, for example, touch a dead animal, and become ceremonially unclean. As long as a person remained ceremonially unclean, he could not enter the temple or participate in worship. He had to go through a cleansing ritual that in some way involved the shedding of blood in order to become once again ceremonially clean. The message behind these ceremonies was that sin defiles us and separates us from God, but the sacrificial blood of Jesus cleanses away our sin and restores us into fellowship with God. These old ceremonial laws about outward ceremonial purity were lessons about inward moral purity. This is the heart purity that David prayed for in Psalm 51:10:

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The first characteristic of a pure or clean heart is that it has been cleansed from the defilement that causes spiritual separation from God. Its second characteristic is that it has been cleansed not only from the defilement but from the sin that caused the defilement. And a heart that is cleansed from sin is single-minded and sincere.

Of course, in this life, we are freed only from the lordship of sin. We will not be totally freed from indwelling sin and its inner influence until the next life when we will be made perfect in holiness. Still deliverance from the lordship of sin is very significant. Sin no longer dominates our lives, no longer lords it

over us Jesus, not sin, is now the lord of our lives. This deliverance results even in this life in a new single-mindedness and sincerity. We are no longer double-minded people with divided loyalties. We are no longer limping between two opinions. We have obeyed the admonition found in James 4:8:

8 ... Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Instead of being double-minded, we are single-minded in our devotion to Christ. And with this single-mindedness, this undivided loyalty, comes the ability to be sincere, to think, act and speak without hypocrisy.

So the pure in heart are those who have been cleansed from sin and its defilement with the result that they are in fellowship with God and devoted to God single-mindedly and sincerely.

That brings us to our third point. The where of the sixth beatitude is the heart; the what is holiness, and the **why** is the heavenly vision. The reason the pure in heart are blessed is because they will see God, which is the greatest of all possible blessings.

This, of course, is talking ultimately about heaven. Does that mean that when we get to heaven, we will be able to look directly upon God? I don't think so. 1 Timothy 6:15-16 speaks of God as

"the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see ..."

In Exodus 33, Moses said to God, "Please show me your glory." And God answered Moses,

"You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." ... "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

If no one can look directly upon God and live, then what does did Jesus mean when He said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"? I think He was referring to our seeing God as revealed through His own Person.

John 1:18

18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

John 14:9

9 Jesus said to him, "... He who has seen Me has seen the Father; ..."

There are special telescope lens which allow a person to look upon the bright sun. These lens both reveal and conceal. They reveal the sun by magnifying its image, but they also conceal its

brightness so a person can look directly at the sun without damaging his eyes. That is what Jesus does in revealing God to us. Jesus is fully human, and therefore we as creaturely humans can look upon Jesus and live. Jesus also is fully God, and so He can reveal God to us through the filter of His humanity. He reveals God to us through His humanity so that we can look upon God and live.

The Beatific Vision, as it is called, does have a reference to the here and now, even though we now look as through a mirror darkly and live by faith and not by sight. 2 Corinthians 3:18, referring to the present work of the Holy Spirit says,

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Yet this promise about seeing God, as I have already said, refers ultimately to that coming day when we will be made perfect in holiness. We read about that day in Ephesians 5:25-27:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,  
26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,  
27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Jesus is today working on making His people pure in heart, and one day He will complete that work totally and perfectly. He will finish what He has started.

Beloved, let me close with this thought. Only those who are holy and without blemish will have the privilege of seeing God in heaven. Hebrews 12:14 says,

14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

Revelation 21:27 says regarding the heavenly Jerusalem:

27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, ... but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

If you hope one day to see God, you must look to Jesus for salvation. He alone can make you pure in heart. He alone can enable you to see God.