

Kingdom Attitudes

PART 6 • MATTHEW 5:8 • Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Baxter T. Exum (#1657)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is good to see all of you this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we are glad that you are here, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online, and we would also give the reminder that the elements for the Lord's Supper are available on the table in the entryway. We also have a weekly bulletin on the wall right inside the front door, with news and prayer concerns, and our contact information is on there as well.

We are here this morning to worship God and to preach the good news that Jesus died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey that good news by turning to God in obedient faith, turning away from sin, and then demonstrating our trust in God through our obedience to his command to be baptized, immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins.

Our first example this week comes to us from John Rowe, in Phoenix, Arizona. John says that,

Victor was baptized this evening. My wife asked me to take some things to Goodwill, which I don't enjoy doing. I went there with an attitude but decided to make something of it. Victor met me at the drop off door where he helped me unload a piece of furniture out of my minivan. I asked him, "How are you and the Lord doing?" He said, "We're good." "I'd like to know how good," was my reply, "Can we visit and have a little Bible study?" That's what we did this evening, and in the end, Victor said, "I see that I'm missing something...I haven't obeyed the gospel." He got up and grabbed his clothes and said, "I'm ready!" To God be the glory!

That is so good! And John is a great example of what it means to know that the world is lost and to be concerned enough to actually do something about it.

By far the best news for us today, though, is that Silas Eacret was baptized this week, this past Wednesday evening! They borrowed the neighbor's pool and got it done. So, welcome to the family, Silas. And congrats to the whole Eacret family. Silas, you have chosen your parents well. But we share all of this to illustrate what obeying the gospel really is. If you are interested in learning more, please get in touch.

This morning, let's be turning once again to Matthew 5 as we return to our series of lessons on the "Beatitudes" or "Kingdom Attitudes," as found in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has just started preaching that **"the**

kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and he starts this particular sermon with a series of eight statements where he uses a word that we translate into English as *“blessed”* or *“happy.”* And we’ve been working through these over the past several weeks...

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” And then last week...

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

Today, we continue with the sixth beatitude (in Matthew 5:8), where Jesus says, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* Once again, very easy to memorize, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* And, as our custom has been, I’d like for us to note the blessing itself, and then we will close by looking at the reward.

I. **First of all, then, let’s focus in on the BLESSING itself, as Jesus says, “BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART.”**

As I understand it, the word *“pure”* as Jesus uses it here, has two primary meanings, and both are very closely related. On one hand, to be pure is to be clean – to be clean as opposed to dirty, uncontaminated. I might purify something by washing it. In the ancient world, the word was used to refer to dirty clothing that had been washed. We value purity in terms of our food being clean (and not dirty), don’t we? Maybe you noticed a major bacon recall announced this week, up in Shawano County (just northwest of Green Bay). As I understand it, there wasn’t any evidence of contamination, but several batches made it through without actually being inspected, and so there was something of an “unknown” in that situation; so, to be safe, they issued a recall. This is concerning! Usually it’s lettuce that takes you out in a food recall. Usually bacon is the safe and healthy choice! But, we value purity. First of all, then, we have purity in terms of being clean as opposed to dirty. And then, on the other hand, the word translated here as *“pure”* also refers to a substance being pure as opposed to being mixed with something – pure gold as opposed to gold mixed with something else, grain or flour that has been carefully sifted and separated from any impurities, milk or wine that are not mixed or diluted or watered down. As I was preparing for today’s lesson, I ran across someone who said that “If you put a spoonful of wine in a barrel full of sewage you get sewage. If you put a spoonful of sewage in a barrel full of wine, you still get sewage.” Very interesting! We value purity.

And this is why I have some pure maple syrup up here, made in Wisconsin (up in Peshtigo). Peshtigo is an important part of my childhood. Instead of going to Disney World, we went to places like the fire museum in Peshtigo. Many people don’t realize that the Peshtigo Fire happened the same day as the Great Chicago Fire (back in 1871, I believe), but the Peshtigo Fire killed five times as many people as the Chicago Fire, burning 1.2 million acres. But, this is from Peshtigo. When we travel, we like to bring gifts from Wisconsin when we can, and we have found that syrup travels well. Cheese is awesome, but syrup is a bit easier to transport thousands of miles. Next Sunday after worship, I hope to head out toward Colorado on my way to Washington. I am prepared with gifts for several preachers along the way. Galatians 6:6 says that *“the one who is taught the word is to*

share all good things with the one who teaches." This right here is one of those **"good things."** But the point is: We appreciate purity. First of all, I am hoping this syrup is clean, as opposed to being dirty. But secondly, I am also hoping that it is pure, as opposed to being mixed with something. There may be a place for high fructose corn syrup in this world, but this is not the place. We value purity. We want pure water to drink, we want pure air to breathe, we want pure food to eat.

Well, Jesus also values purity; in fact, he gives a blessing on those who are **"pure."** And yet, if Jesus had simply said, **"Blessed are the pure,"** most people could have very easily agreed with that. We might even imagine the Pharisees saying "Amen" to this, "Yes, we love purity! We give God one out of every ten leaves on our mint plants, we only walk so far on the Sabbath," and so on. However, let's notice how Jesus continues, **"Blessed are the pure in HEART."** And this is where it gets a bit more challenging! Most of us can do a pretty job looking like decent people for a few hours on Sunday morning. And sure, it is obviously good to be pure when we are together, but Jesus emphasizes purity of **"heart."**

Today, when we talk about the heart, we are usually referring to the heart as being the center of our emotions. And so, we might talk about following our heart as opposed to following our mind. But that's not the way they thought of the heart back in Jesus' time. Back then, the heart was considered the core of a person's being. Jesus, then, is talking about being pure through and through, on the inside as well as on the outside.

We must be pure, then, in terms of being morally clean, instead of being dirty. But we must also be pure in terms of having an undivided devotion and commitment to God. In terms of the heart being morally pure (as opposed to being dirty), we think of Jesus' warning in Matthew 15:19, where he says, **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."** The heart, then, can be impure in terms of being contaminated with filth. This is why, by the way, it is not safe to "follow our heart." As God warns through the prophet Jeremiah (in Jeremiah 17:9), **"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"** A while back, we were studying with a guy who was making some awesome progress toward giving up a particular sin in his life. He could see the need for repentance, but when he talked to family about it, they told him not to make a change until he "felt it in his heart." No! The heart can be impure; the heart is deceitful, God says. So, if we are faced with a decision between following God or following our heart, let's go with God. The heart, then, can be impure in terms of being contaminated with sin.

But the heart can also be impure in terms of being divided. We think of James' warning in James 4:8, **"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."** In this passage, the issue with their hearts is that they were **"double-minded,"** their loyalty was divided between God and the world. Or, we might think of the prophet's message to King Asa back in 1 Chronicles 16:9, when he said, **"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."** God is looking for hearts that are not only morally pure, but also focused, undivided.

But the emphasis here is on the heart. This is more than just looking pure on the outside, but this is being pure and committed on the inside, all the way through. Unfortunately, there is a difference. Unfortunately, the outside and the inside don't always match, as they should. We think of Jesus condemning the Pharisees in Matthew 15:7-9, **"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"** Or, we might think of Jesus' warning to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27-28, **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside**

appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. It's possible, then, to appear on the outside as if we are pure, while at the same time our hearts are actually far away from God, while our hearts are full of nastiness (like a grave).

This is why Jesus will continue emphasizing the heart throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Later in Matthew 5, he emphasizes not just keeping the externals of the Law of Moses, but honoring God from the heart. We don't just avoid murdering our neighbor, but we avoid angry thoughts and words as well. We don't just avoid committing adultery with our neighbor, but we must beware of lust (the lingering look) as well. Jesus is talking, here, about purity of heart.

When the heart is contaminated, all of us is contaminated. Some of you know that my dad had some pretty major heart surgery several years ago. What you might not know is that about a year later he got a recall notice on his heart surgery. It's kind of a hassle when they recall your car or your microwave or your bacon, but I believe this was a notice sent out by the manufacturer of the heart-lung bypass machine. If I remember correctly, one of those machines was missing a filter of some kind. So, as your chest is open on the operating table, this machine is blowing unfiltered exhaust over the patient. And that is apparently not good! As I remember it, the notice said to keep an eye out for several symptoms that might show up several months to a year after the surgery. This illustrates the danger of having an impure heart literally. But Jesus, of course, is far more concerned our spiritual hearts, ***"Blessed are the pure in heart."***

II. This leads us to the **REWARD**, ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD."***

What a blessing! Of course, we do have several passages indicating that we CANNOT see God. You might be thinking of that time after the golden calf incident, where Moses (in Exodus 33) asks God to lead the people, and Moses says to God, ***"I pray You, show me Your glory!"*** And God responds by saying, ***"I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."*** But the Lord God said, ***"You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"*** God then has Moses hide in a crack in the side of the mountain, and God passes by, allowing Moses to see his backside, ***"He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land. He hideth my life in the depths of his love, and covers me there with his hand."*** Or, we think of Paul praising God (in 1 Timothy 6:15-16) as ***"...the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen."*** There is a sense in which we cannot see God and live.

And yet, we also know that some people were allowed to see at least some form of God. This past Wednesday, we studied Hagar in Genesis 16, and we learned that after interacting with the angel (who seems to morph into a some form of God), Hagar says, ***"You are a God who sees. Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"*** We think of Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6:6 where he is completely overwhelmed and says that ***"...my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."*** Or, we think of Jesus' statement to Philip in John 14:9 where he says that ***"He who has seen Me has seen the Father."*** There is some sense in which we can see God. But I would suggest two aspects of this statement. What does Jesus mean when he says that the pure in heart will see God? I would suggest two possibilities. First of all, I might think of this as having an appointment to see God. And this what I mean: Back in Exodus 10:28-29 (after the ninth plague), Pharaoh says to Moses, ***"Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!"*** And Moses says, ***"You are right; I shall***

never see your face again! I don't think these two are talking about literally seeing each other's faces from a distance, but the reference is clearly to a face-to-face type meeting, having a conversation. I think of calling my clinic for an appointment. If I say, "Can I see Dr. So-and-So," I'm not asking to see my doctor across the parking lot or with my face pressed up against the window (that's a bit creepy), but I am asking for an appointment, I am asking for a face-to-face meeting. In the same way, there is a sense in which we **"see God"** when we come to him in prayer. We have a relationship that those with impure hearts do not have. Seeing God, then, is a blessing reserved for those who are pure in heart. We might think of what King David writes in Psalm 27:7-9,

***Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice,
And be gracious to me and answer me.
When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You,
"Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."
Do not hide Your face from me,
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;
You have been my help;
Do not abandon me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation!***

In this passage, **"seeing God"** is described as a privilege reserved for those who cry out to God in faith. So, this is the first possibility – not seeing God literally, but having access to God, approaching God in prayer.

The other possibility here also involves having an appointment (or access) to God, but in the future. There is a time coming when those who are pure in heart will see God literally. This is what Job is assured of in Job 22:25-27, when he says,

***As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.
Even after my skin is destroyed,
Yet from my flesh I shall see God;
Whom I myself shall behold,
And whom my eyes will see and not another.
My heart faints within me!***

Job is almost overwhelmed, isn't he? Even in his suffering, he knows that he will someday **"see God."** The apostle John has the same assurance in 1 John 3:2-3, when he says, ***"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."*** And I hope we notice how John anticipates this blessing for those who are **"pure."** John was listening back in Matthew 5:8! There is a time coming when those who are **"pure in heart"** will **"see God."**

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this blessing, I'd like to wrap it up by asking: What do we actually do to make sure we have a clean heart? And I would make several very practical suggestions, based on God's word.

First of all, it seems to me we need to realize (through Scripture) that God actually sees our hearts. Do we see why this is a necessary first step? If I think I can hide stuff from God, there's really no need for purity. If I think I can fake it, I may never see a need for my heart to be truly pure. But we can't really fake it, can we? No! The word of God has a way of cutting right through us. In Hebrews 4:12-13, the inspired author says, ***"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."*** When we read God's word, we have a choice to make: We can believe and obey, or we can ignore it and move on. But what we cannot do is fool God into thinking we are pure when we are not. First of all, then, we have to realize that God sees.

Secondly, once we understand that God sees right through us, it now only makes sense that we would turn to God for help. And for many, this may start with prayer. We think of Cornelius, a devout man who prayed to God continually, whose prayers and alms had ascended as a memorial before God. When Cornelius prayed, God sent someone to preach the gospel. We could say the same thing for Saul in Acts 9, a man who saw the impurity of his own heart before the Lord and spent three days without food, praying to God the whole time. In response, God sends Ananias with the message, ***"Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name"*** (Acts 22:16). So, when we turn to God for help, it only makes sense to do whatever it is he requires us to do. For those outside of Christ? Believe the message, turn away from sin, confess Jesus as being the Christ the Son of God, and submit to him in baptism. We have several references in scripture to baptism being associated with purity or cleansing. We think of Hebrews 10:22, ***"Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*** Or, we might think of Titus 3:5-6, ***"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."*** Obviously, a reference to baptism. So, knowing that God sees our hearts, we turn to him for help, and we do what he commands us to do in Scripture.

But then the next step continues for a lifetime, as we constantly strain and struggle to keep our hearts pure. We might think of 2 Timothy 2:22, written by Paul to the young preacher Timothy, where he says, ***"Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."*** Or, as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:1, ***"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*** Keep up the struggle! At the moment of baptism, our sins are forgiven, our hearts are purified. But that's when the battle really starts. My encouragement to all of us here today is: Don't give up. When temptation comes, never stop pushing back against it. Keep up the struggle!

I'd like to close this morning with a Psalm that we sang together several times in the year or two leading up to the pandemic – Psalm 24:1-5, written by King David,

***The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it.
For He has founded it upon the seas
And established it upon the rivers.
Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
And who may stand in His holy place?***

***He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood
And has not sworn deceitfully.
He shall receive a blessing from the LORD
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.***

Or, as Jesus says, ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”***

Before we continue with the Lord’s Supper, let’s close our study by going to God in prayer:

***Be gracious to us, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out our transgressions.
Wash us thoroughly from our iniquity
And cleanse us from our sin.
We know our transgressions,
And our sins are ever before us.
Against You, You only, we have sinned
We have done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.***

***Create in all of us a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within us.***

We come to you in the name of Jesus, our faithful and merciful High Priest. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com