

Happiness Through Purity

Matthew 5:8

Pastor John Miller

I'm going to read Matthew 5:3-8, and I want you to follow with me. I want to get a running start reviewing our Beatitudes.

Starting in verse 3, Jesus said,

"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 meek,

For they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

For they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,

For they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

For they shall see God."

I believe that this sixth Beatitude that is found in verse 8 is perhaps the best known and most loved of all the Beatitudes. I think there are two main reasons why this Beatitude is so loved and so well known. Number one, it tells of man's deepest longing. The deepest longing is to have a pure heart. Whenever I meditate on this Beatitude, it puts a desire in me to be pure of heart. That's everyone's desire: to have a pure heart. Number two, it promises the highest possibility: "they shall see God." So my desire is to have a pure heart, and my greatest possibility is that one day I will see God face-to-face. That's why we love this Beatitude. This Beatitude tells us how to get 20-20 spiritual vision.

There is a parallel to this Beatitude. It's found in Matthew 6:22-23. Jesus said, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is

darkness, how great is that darkness!”

This statement that Jesus made is kind of confusing in some ways when you read it. “What do you mean ‘your eye is good’ or ‘your eye is bad’?” What Jesus is saying is He’s talking about a single focus on God. If your eye—not your physical eye, but your passion, your desires, your focus in life—is on God, then your body will be full of light. You’ll have the joy of the Lord, the peace of the Lord, the happiness of the Lord, the light of the Lord. I believe there is nothing more important for us than to have a God-focused, a God-centered life.

Then He says “if your eye is bad” means if your focus is divided; it’s practicing hypocrisy or duplicity. If you’re trying to look at the world and you’re trying to look at God at the same time, then there is going to be darkness in your life. This Beatitude talks about for those who focus their eyes on God, one day they will see God and what a blessing that is.

Do you know that what delights you will direct you? Whatever delights you actually influences your life. Did you ever notice, too, that what we really want to do, we do? Sometimes we’ll be invited to someone’s house, and we say, “Sorry, we can’t come.” What we really mean is that we don’t want to come. (If you’ve invited me over, this has nothing to do with that. I just realized what I was saying.) But we have done that; let’s be honest. “No, I’m sorry. We can’t make it.” You don’t want to make it, or you could if you really wanted to. My point is that we do what we want to do. So if we really want to focus on God, if we really want to have a pure heart, we can have a pure heart.

If life is to be rich and meaningful, then our joys must be the highest possible. And Jesus tells us that man’s highest joy is seeing God, and the only ones who see God are those who are “pure in heart.”

In this eighth verse, there are three things I want to point out. Number one, it is the heart that is to be pure. What is it that is to be pure? Notice verse 8: “Blessed are the pure in heart.” When Jesus uses the words “in heart,” He is indicating a kind of heart purity. This is seen, if you back up to verse 3, in “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Now we have “in heart.” First you have “in spirit,” so the poverty is not material poverty; it’s not in finances where there is poverty. It’s in the spirit that we are poor. So it’s a spiritual poverty or bankruptcy before God.

Now you come to verse 8. Where are they pure? In their heart. Jesus is not talking about the outward, ceremonial purity, like that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was contrasting that with an inner purity. Remember in Matthew 5:20 of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “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.” In the mind of the Jew, there was no one more righteous than a scribe or a Pharisee. They were devout to the Jewish religion.

“So how could I be more holy than a religious person?” The answer is that their religion was external. It was all outward; it wasn’t an inward reality. In Matthew 23, we have a series of what

we call “the woes” that Jesus pronounced upon the religious community. He said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence....Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.”

The last few days, my wife has had a busy week and she’s been gone, so feel sorry for me; my wife hasn’t been here to feed me. So I’ve been doing the bachelor thing for a few days. I was looking at the sink yesterday, and I use the same bowl all day long that I eat out of. But I do rinse out the inside. This can be breakfast, lunch and dinner—same spoon, same bowl. It just makes life simple for me.

You know, you would never think of just rinsing the outside of the bowl. You at least want to rinse the inside of the bowl. (You guys are going to think twice about coming to eat at my house. You’re going to think, Did Pastor Miller wash this, or did Kristi wash this?)

Jesus said, “Woe unto you....For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” So they had their robes and phylacteries and prayer shawls. They had all the ostentatious show, but their hearts were far from God. So Jesus was speaking about an inward purity.

Some people believe that Jesus was quoting or drawing from Psalm 24:3-4. The psalmist said, “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.” This is what God looks at.

Now this is not to say that the outward is not important, but God looks not as men look; God looks at the heart. We’re so worried about having everything right on the outside, but God is looking at the inside; He looks at the heart.

Psalm 73:1, a psalm of Asaph, says, “Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.” I love that. Then Psalm 51:6 was written after David had committed adultery and murdered Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, and was repenting before the Lord. David cried, “Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.” So Jesus is speaking of a depth of purity not found in religious rites nor in outward ordinances.

When the Bible uses the word “heart” or “the heart,” it is a term used more than 900 times in the Old and New Testaments. Almost always it is used figuratively for the center of man’s being, his personality. It refers to your mind, emotions and will. He’s not talking about the physical organ in the human body; He’s talking about your mind and your thoughts, your feelings and your emotions and your volition or your will. So it’s the real you. When the Bible talks about loving God “with all your heart,” it’s saying to love God with all of your being—with your mind, your emotions and your will and to walk in obedience. So when Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” He’s talking about being pure in our minds, our emotions and in our will. It’s the totality

of our being, what we think, what we feel and how we act. Jesus is saying, "Blessed are the pure on the inside."

Now remember that these are called "Be-attitudes." They're not called "Do-attitudes." Our actions result from our thoughts. When we sow a thought, we reap an act. When we sow an act, we reap a habit. When we sow a habit, we reap a character. When we sow a character, we reap a destiny. It all starts with my thoughts: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Then it involves my feelings and my emotions and then my volition, my will. Am I walking in obedience to God and to His Word? So God looks at our hearts, who we really are.

When God looks at your heart, what does He see? In Jeremiah 17:9, the Bible tells us that apart from salvation, apart from regeneration, apart from being born again, the non-Christian heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

From time to time I hear people say, "This person is not a Christian, but they have a really good heart." I understand what you mean by that, but the Bible says that the heart is "deceitful...and desperately wicked." Jesus said that from our hearts come evil thoughts. So God knows that apart from salvation, left to ourselves, the natural heart is bent on sin and rebellion against God. Only God knows the heart, and only God can give you a clean or pure heart. The great Martyn Lloyd-Jones paraphrased this Beatitude as, "Blessed are those who are pure not only on the surface but in the center of their being and at the source of every activity."

So ask yourself, "Do I have a clean or pure heart?"

The second thing I want to say about this Beatitude is I want to ask, "What does Jesus mean by 'pure'?" We know that when He is talking about the heart, He is talking about my thoughts, my attitudes and my actions. But what does He mean by "pure"? If the "pure in heart" are blessed, I need to know what He means.

First of all, He doesn't mean without-sin pure or perfect. Only God is perfectly holy and pure. God always has been, and God always will be holy. The chief attribute by which God has revealed Himself in the Bible is His holiness. If God is anything, it is holy. It means He is set apart from all sin and totally righteous. Isaiah cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory" or "majesty."

The word "pure" that Jesus is using here has two, basic meanings. First it means "clean." It was used of soiled clothes that had been washed. Only God can wash us and cleanse the soil and stain of sin. God not only sees and knows our hearts, but God loves us and can wash us and cleanse us. Again, in Psalm 51:7, when David was repentant, he said, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Then verse 10 says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." When the sinner is born again, they get a clean heart. In 1 John 1:7, it says, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin."

I remember when I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior and I was born again, I actually felt

clean on the inside. I not only felt that a weight had been lifted off, but I felt clean inside, because God had given me a bath; He washed me in the blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins.

The word “pure” as Jesus used it in the context of Matthew 5, more likely has the second meaning. It first means to be washed or cleansed, but the second meaning means to be pure in the sense of “unmixed.” It was used of wheat that had been winnowed. It had no chaff; it was pure wheat. It was used of milk or wine that was unadulterated; it had been filtered. And it was used of metals that had no alloy. We would think of pure gold or pure silver or pure iron. It had no alloys and was pure and genuine. So it not only meant washed and cleansed—and that happens when you are born again—but it also means that your motives have no ulterior aspect to them.

So the idea, I believe, is that we are sincere. It means that we have inner integrity. We have no duplicity or hypocrisy. The “pure in heart” are free from falsehood in their relations both with God and with man.

The word “sincere” comes from the Latin word “sincerae.” It literally means “without wax.” The reason is that in the Greek world, there were great sculpturers and they made pottery. Whenever you were creating a sculpture, if you accidentally knocked off an ear or a nose, you would mix wax with the stone powder and then you would patch your statue with a wax nose or ear. So if you bought a beautiful statue and put it on your patio, you had your guests over, it was a hot, summer day, then you look over and see the nose running down its face. You would say, “It’s not sincere. It has wax.” So the word has morphed into the idea of having ulterior motives. It’s not genuine. It’s not authentic.

Then we also speak of people having duplicity. They “speak out of both sides of their mouth.” We use the word “hypocrisy.” In fact, the word “hypocrisy” comes from the word “hypokrite,” which is what they called the Greek actors on the stage. When the actors would get on the stage in the theater, they would put a mask over their face. It was a mask on a little stick, and they would hold it over their face. When they would change characters, they would hold a different mask over their face. So the word “hypokrite” would literally mean “to speak from under a mask.”

So we use the word “hypocrite,” meaning they are putting on a show. It’s phony. They are wearing a mask. They’re not real. When Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” He’s saying, “Blessed are those who don’t wear a mask, those who aren’t hypocrites, those who don’t practice duplicity.” They are genuine, authentic and real. What you see is what you get. They’re the real deal. And Jesus was talking about this coming from our hearts and that we would have integrity.

The “pure in heart” are free from falsehood in their relations both with God and with man. I want you to get that. A person who is pure in their heart is open, honest and genuine toward God and toward people.

I believe these Beatitudes are progressive and unfolding. Verse 3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." These Beatitudes started with poverty of spirit. That leads to, in verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn." I see my spiritual bankruptcy and I mourn over my condition. Next it leads, in verse 5, to meekness: I am broken, submitted and surrendered in obedience to God. Then in verse 6, it leads to hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and then God fills my life. Then, and only then, verse 7, I am able to be merciful to others. Because God has shown me mercy, I am to dispense mercy. Then I am pure in my heart. That means that I am sincere and honest before God and before others. I don't have any ulterior motives. The "pure in heart" are free from falsehood in their relationship to God and others.

John Stott says, "Their whole life in public and private is transparent." I like that. "Transparency before God and men. They are very hard, including their thoughts, and their motives are pure. Unmixed, without anything devious, or ulterior or base. Hypocrisy and deceit are abhorrent to them. They are without guile."

Now you may be saying, "John, John. No way, Jose!" But Jesus wouldn't say, "Blessed are the pure in heart," if it were not possible. No one is perfect. We'll never be perfect, without sin, but we should sin less and less and less as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A little note I want to make: these Beatitudes introduce the Sermon on the Mount. When you get to chapter 6 of Matthew 5, there are three areas of our Christian life that Jesus warns us to be "pure in heart" in. The first is how you give; secondly, how you pray; and thirdly, when you fast. Don't be like the hypocrites, who like to pray standing on the corner of the street. Jesus tells us why they do it: so that they can be heard by men. Jesus said, "When you pray, go into your room..."—or "closet"—"...and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father, Who is in the secret place; and your Father, Who sees in secret, will reward you openly."

Now Jesus doesn't mean to literally get in your closet. Some of you have closets that have to be cleaned before you can get in. If you opened the closet door, there would be an avalanche. But Jesus is talking about in the area of your heart. Shut out what others think and talk to God. Too many times, our prayers are to impress people. We're really not praying to talk to God; we're praying to impress people. I want them to know how spiritual I am. So I use King James English: "Thou most holy God, Who dwellest in the heavens. We come before Thee, O God our Father." You don't talk like that in normal conversation. If you run into your friend at the mall, you don't say, "How art thou?" So why do we pray like that?

"Well, King James is more spiritual."

"No, it's not." Just talk to God. Be honest with God. Be sincere with God. Just cry out "deep unto deep" to the Lord. And don't do it for an ostentatious show to be seen of men.

By the way, that's not forbidding public prayer. I've run into people who say, "You're not

supposed to pray in public. That's what this Scripture condemns." No; it condemns the motive behind your prayers. You're praying to be seen of people.

Then, secondly, Jesus said that not only when you pray, but when you give your tithe or your money gifts to the Lord, don't do it to be seen of men. He said, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." So when you pray, go in your closet. When you give, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Now that doesn't mean literally that I have to fake my hand when the offering plate comes by. I have to do it real quick, so my hand doesn't see me. No. He's saying not to blow a trumpet. Don't tell everybody how much you're giving. Don't fan your bills before you drop them in the offering plate. "There's one, there's two, there's three. Praise God! Hallelujah!"

Sadly, some churches placate to this. They make a spectacle of people who give, and they proclaim them. That's not right. When you give to God, only God needs to know. And only God is looking at your heart when you give.

Then Jesus said when you're fasting before God, don't do it to be seen by people. Do it in your heart. Do it as unto the Lord. I suggest that when you are fasting, don't go to the church potluck. You walk around downcast looking at everybody as they're eating and say, "Wow, that looks good."

"Aren't you going to get something?"

"No; I'm fasting."

"Wow! Can I touch you? You're awesome."

Stay home if you're fasting!

"What good would that do? No one would know how spiritual I am."

The whole thing is about your motive. Why are you doing it? Are you doing it to be seen of men or of God? Ask yourself, "Is my heart pure?" Why did you come to church today? Because you want to love God, seek Him, worship God and hear His Word? Or do you want to impress people or let people know how holy you are?

To be "pure in heart" is to have an undivided love for God. Psalm 86:11 says, "Unite my heart to fear Your name." "Unite my heart" means a unified heart, a single eye, a pure heart. It also speaks of an unmixed motive in my dealing with man.

Jesus was pure in heart. Jesus was perfectly pure in His heart. Everybody He dealt with, everything He did came out of a pure heart.

I want you to notice, thirdly and lastly, in verse 8, the promise to the pure in heart. "For they..."—and again, it's emphatic, so it's "they, and they only"—"...shall see God." Isn't that

beautiful? “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Now in what sense do the pure in heart see God? There are three ways in which we see God. Number one, we see God by faith the moment we are born again. Our eyes are opened. When you get saved, God not only takes your heart of stone out and gives you a new heart—it's called the New Covenant—but He also opens your eyes. Then you see God in the trees, in the hills, in the sky, in the flowers, in your children, in all things. You have a life of faith, and you see the hand of God.

That's why in Hebrews 11:27 it says that Moses, “By faith...endured as seeing Him Who is invisible.” I love that. It gave him the strength to live through his difficulties, because he had eyes on God. He could see God. You can see God in your marriage. You can see God on your job. You can see God in all of life through the eyes of faith.

Secondly, we see God more clearly as we suffer, as we study the Scriptures and as we surrender to God in our lives. So this is progressive: the moment I am born again, my eyes are opened to see God. But as I read the Bible, I see God more clearly. As I surrender to God, I see Him more clearly. God allows sorrow or suffering or bereavement or loss or pain or disappointment. It drives me to the foot of God, and I see His face. I like what the writer of Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan, said. He said, “In times of affliction we most commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God.” How true that is.

I know that in my life, the sorrows that have come to me and the heartache and the disappointments and the bereavement and the loss and the pain have caused me to see God more clearly and to seek the Lord. It causes us to see and to understand Him.

In Job 42:5, Job says, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.” Job went through all this sorrow and all this suffering, all this hurt and all this pain and he said, “I've heard about You, but now I see You.”

So don't run from your sorrows; embrace your sorrows. Find God in your sorrows. The sweetest joys of life are the fruit of sorrows. That's how God develops your character; He makes you more like Christ, and you'll see God more perfectly.

Thirdly, and lastly, this is how we see God—and I believe this is the primary meaning of Jesus' words “for they shall see God.” Jesus is actually saying that when we go to heaven in eternity, we will see God. What a great prospect that is. Think about this: right now, as a Christian, you will one day actually see God. What a glorious hope! The cool thing about getting old as a Christian is that every day is one day closer to seeing the face of God. What's so bad about that?

The Bible says in 1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” You're going to see God someday. In Revelation 22:4, it says, “They shall see His face.”

I've had many near-death experiences, but one that was really full-on, bona fide was when I thought I was going to die when I was kidnapped years ago at gunpoint. I was in L.A. and I got kidnapped in a car. They held me and a few other of my pastor friends in a car with guns. We had two captors, and they held guns to our heads. They stuck the gun in our backs and said, "We're gonna kill you! We're gonna blow your brains out! We're gonna shoot you!" They lined us up execution style to shoot us, but then they drove off. For about an hour and a half, we were in a car with guns to our heads. I believed that I was going to die. But God gave me peace and grace because at that moment, all I could think about was, I'm going to die. I'm going to be looking in the face of Jesus. I actually believed that. Now I didn't want them to pull the trigger because of that, but I was thinking about my wife and my kids. My little girls were crying when I left and said, "Daddy, don't leave!" I didn't want them to be without a dad. But I knew that I would instantly see the face of Jesus Christ. That's a blessed hope!

Do you know that one day you are going to reach out and touch Him on the face? The One who loves you, bought you and sought you and saved you by His grace. One day we will see God perfectly. No more sorrow, no more pain, no more sin, no more Satan. Right now, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 13, that "We see in a mirror dimly, but then face-to-face" when we get to heaven. Faith will turn to sight. We will actually see the one who saved us by His grace. That's a great prospect. But only those who are "pure in heart" will see the face of God.

So my question is, "Will you go to heaven and see God?" Only those who are "pure in heart" will go to heaven and see God. And only God can give you a pure heart.

You ask, "Well, Pastor John, what do I need to do to get a pure heart? Here's what you need to do: Number one, you have to admit that your heart is sinful and needs to be cleansed. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." The Bible says, "There is no one righteous. No, not one." You have to admit that your heart is sinful. You've lied or you've stolen or you've had pride. Do you know that a proud heart is an abomination to God? The Bible says, "The proud God knows afar off." You can't see God when there's pride in your heart. And what you need to do, if you want God to cleanse your heart, is admit that your heart needs cleansing.

Secondly, you need to turn from your sins. It's called "repentance." It's the Greek word "metanoia." It means to change your mind. So you change your mind and decide you're going to turn. And then with your emotions, you say, "I'm sorry." With your will—that's your heart—you trust in the Savior. When I say "trust," that means that you reach out by faith with your hand and you believe in, you receive and you put your faith in what Jesus did for you on the Cross.

The Bible says that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus died on the Cross to take your sin. When Jesus was put on the Cross, He was sinless. He was pure. But your sin and my sin were placed upon the Son of God, and He paid the penalty for our sins. "The wages of sin is death," so He died your death. He was buried, and then three days later, "up from the grave He arose." Jesus conquered sin and death and the grave. Then he ascended up to

heaven, and He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father and is exalted on high. He lives to save; "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

I believe there are some reading this who need to have their heart forgiven. You need to have your heart cleansed. You've been playing hypocrisy and duplicity. You lack integrity. You've been running from God; your heart is far from God. Your heart is hardened. Maybe it has unforgiveness or hatred or bitterness or lust or greed. God can take that out of your heart and give you a brand-new heart. The only way that can happen is if you turn to and trust Jesus today as your Savior.

I want to give you an opportunity to get a clean heart.