

# The Sermon on the Mount

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”  
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”  
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

## **Blessed Are The Pure In Heart**

**July 7th, 2024**

**Matthew 5:8**

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Good morning, Redeemer! It is good to be in the house of the Lord this morning. If you have a Bible with you, would you please open it now to Matthew 5:8. We are continuing to slowly but surely work our way through the Sermon on the Mount. As we work our way through the beatitudes here are the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, we are gaining an expanding and unfolding picture of what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus.

There is a logical progression within the beatitudes that we have been discovering each week. Last week, I highlighted how we start by recognizing our lowliness, by understanding our absolute poverty of spirit; that we cannot possibly hope to earn salvation on our own. We recognize our need, and we experience the emotional counterpart. We see our sinfulness and our weakness, and we mourn over it. We know what it is to cry out, ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me? And now that see and experience this true view of ourselves, we are not dismayed or distracted by insults and offences. No one can say anything too bad about me when I realize how far short, I have fallen. This true understanding of who we are leads to hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for a consuming desire to be right with God and to be rid of sin. God satisfies those desires, and he increases our appetite, making us more and more like Christ and increasing our capacity for joy and satisfaction in him. All of this contributes to recognizing

our need for God's mercy and an outward extension of that same mercy to others. We forgive because we have been forgiven. This morning, once again, this progression leads to the next beatitude: blessed are the pure in heart.

Hopefully you have your Bible's open to Matthew 5. Notice the progression as we read from verse 1.

Hear now the Word of the Lord,

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:1-8 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

We have spent the last five weeks unpacking the progression of thought within this list of blessings. There is an internal logic to the beatitudes that, when properly understood, brings incredible life to these blessings. The foundation of understanding our miserable state; our desperate need and experiencing the Godly grief that mourns over it, fuels every subsequent beatitude. Purity in heart, for example, is inherently tied to mourning our sin and the desire to be redeemed. If we do not see our impurity, we cannot long for purity.

To help us understand how this beatitude expands our understanding and appreciation of Christ I want to ask three questions this morning. What does it mean to pure in heart? What does it mean to see God? And, finally, how can we be made pure?

The first question we need to tackle then is:

## What Does It Mean To Be Pure In Heart?

There are three aspects of what it means to be pure in heart. The first is that:

### 1. It means focusing on inward realities.

Sometimes we are tempted to think that this goes with out saying. Unfortunately, we naturally, and often subconsciously, approach purity in this way. We have a natural tendency to try and manufacture a pure heart through outward efforts and through religious activities. You might say we try to “fake it till we make it”.

This is exactly what the Pharisees were doing. They tried to appear pure to all those around them. They participated in all the ritual cleansing rights. They tried to work from the outside in and Jesus called them on it, quite brutally too. In Matthew 23 Jesus says:

“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. <sup>28</sup> So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:27-28 ESV)

We like to make fun of the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and the false religion, yet we suffer from the same problems. We have a natural tendency to become legalistic in our faith. We tend to reverse the order. We try to work from OUTSIDE IN when Jesus clearly says we need to change from INSIDE OUT.

I am not saying that our actions don't matter and that we should simply be passive in trying to be pure before God. That would be go from one ditch right into the other. No. What I am saying is that it is a matter of EMPHASIS and FOCUS.

Are you focusing on external appearances? Are you writing extensive notes during the sermon so that people around you might think you are holy? Are you spending ten minutes arranging your Journal, Bible, highlighter, and Coffee just right so that you can post about your devotional time on Instagram? Are you taking communion when you know you shouldn't be because you are concerned about what others think?

That is what we are talking about. Being pure in heart is not about focusing on outward appearances of righteousness and holiness. It is about inward realities. It is about the heart.

In Matthew 10, the Pharisees confront Jesus over the fact that his disciples did not follow their traditions about washing their hands. Jesus rebukes them for their hypocrisy and then goes on to say in verse 18:

“But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.” (Matthew 10:18-20 ESV)

For out of the heart comes evil thoughts. That’s the problem. This is why we can’t become pure in heart by TRYING HARDER. We cannot change our own heart by simply DOING MORE GOOD THINGS. We cannot work from the OUTSIDE IN.

Imagine you are renovating your house. You start with demolition. You tear down some drywall and you realize that your walls have mold in them. The studs are moldy and rotten. Rather than spending the money and the time to replace them and remove all the mold. You simply put on new drywall and carry on. You put on a nice fresh coat of paint, buy some nice brand-new furniture, and everything looks great. You pat yourself on the back for how nice your house looks. You invite all your friends to come over and celebrate your beautiful home.

You and I both know that scenario is headed for disaster. The problem remains. It was not fixed. The mold will grow. The house will weaken and collapse. We cannot focus on the outside when the problem is on the INSIDE, when it is in our HEARTS. It is right there in the beatitude after all, blessed are the pure IN HEART.

Being pure in heart means focusing on inward realities. And:

**2. It means to have a heart that is undivided in love for God.**

The term “pure” in the Bible has a lot of different connotations and meanings. A significant part of being pure in the Bible has to do with cleanliness and being undefiled. James talks about religion that is PURE and UNDEFILED, about keeping oneself UNSTAINED from the world. So, that is definitely in view in Jesus’ mind here. There is also an important aspect of emphasis and focus that is included in the notion of being pure. In Psalm 86:11 David prays for a united heart towards God, and in Psalm 24:3-4 we read:

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?  
 And who shall stand in his holy place?  
<sup>4</sup>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. (Psalm 24:3-4 ESV)

He who does not lift up his soul to what is false. Those who are pure in heart cannot have two masters. Neither can they swear deceitfully. They cannot be actors or pretenders. They can’t be hypocrites. I love the way John Stott says this:

“So, the pure in heart are ‘the utterly sincere’. Their whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and men. Their very heart—including their thoughts and motives—is pure, unmixed with anything devious, ulterior or base.”<sup>1</sup>

Their very heart is unmixed. I love that language. It is undivided. It is not stained and defiled by base and sinful passions. It is not divided, it is not mixed, in its love and allegiance. Martin Llyod-Jones compliments this idea by adding that:

“To be pure in heart, in other words, means to keep ‘the first and great commandment’, which is that ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.’”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott and John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 49.

<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Second edition. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 116.

Putting all this together then, if we try to define what it means to be pure in heart in a single sentence, I think we could say:

Being pure in heart means having a heart, soul, and mind, that are wholly undivided in love for God.

This single sentence is obviously not exhaustive. There is much, much more that you could say about what it means to be pure in heart. Entire books have been dedicated to the subject. Being pure in heart is a significant theme throughout the Bible. We will never exhaust the depths of these ideas; however, it is helpful to have a working and succinct definition of an idea as a tool to help understand it and explain it to others.

Being pure in heart means having a heart, soul, and mind, that are wholly undivided in love for God.

When this happens, when we are wholly united in our love for God, then we love his word, we obey his commands, and we live for him and not for ourselves. It transforms us from the INSIDE OUT.

But it leaves us with a question: Is that us? Are we wholly united in love for God? Or do we serve two masters? Calvin famously said that our hearts are idol factories. I know that is abundantly true for myself. One of my personality quirks, some might say a flaw but I beg to differ, is that when I get into a new hobby or interest, I get REALLY into it. It becomes a consuming passion in my life. In March 2020 I started to become interested in the stock market. I had kept hearing about it on the news and I wondered if it would be a good way to save money more efficiently. Well, that quickly lead to me consuming HOURS and HOURS of podcast about the stock market. I spent every second I could consuming content about stocks. I listened to podcasts while I worked, while I drove, while I did the dishes. I watched YouTube videos, I read blogs. It was a consuming thought in my mind. And I have done the same thing with every hobby I have ever had; boardgames, disc golf, you name it.

D. A. Carson phrases the question so well: “What do you think about when your mind slips into neutral?”<sup>3</sup>

I love that language “when your mind slips into neutral.” Because that’s what happens, right? When the pressure is off, when we are not being forced or demanded to think about a particular subject, we slip into neutral. And sometimes, if we are being honest, we do when we should be focusing. I know I am not the only one who has daydreamed in the middle of a sermon or a meeting. The question is: What are you thinking about in those moments? What is it that has captivated your mind?

For me, that’s where my mind goes: whatever hobby I am currently into. That’s what I think about whenever my mind slips into neutral. What we think about in those moments reveals a lot about our priorities and our interests. It reveals a lot about what our heart truly desires.

So, what are you thinking about? Are you daydreaming about your next round of golf? Are you thinking about what is going to happen next in your tv show or book? Are you counting down the minutes until you can be playing video games? Are you thinking about work and all that you have to do? The things that occupy our mind reveal a lot about the nature of our heart. If we are not careful, if we are not intentional, these things become idols. They compete with God for our attention, time, energy, and money. They divide our hearts.

Being pure in heart means being UNDIVIDED in love for God. And it means having a heart that is UNSTAINED. That is the third thing it means to be pure in heart.

### **3. It means to guard our hearts from impurities.**

Our hearts are prone to wander. We sing that because it is true. It is who we are. We have broken compasses. We wander. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately SICK. Because of the fall, we have an indwelling sin that is waging war against us. Our sinful nature is seeking to destroy us and is in all out war against the Holy Spirit within us.

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 26.

1 Peter 2:11 tells us:

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” (1 Peter 2:11 ESV)

There is sin within us that is trying to destroy us and there is sin outside that is trying to destroy us. Later in Peter’s letter he warns Christians to be alert and watchful because the Devil prowls like a lion seeking to devour us. The world is constantly trying to drag us down and take us away from Christ. The devil is trying to DISTRACT and DAZZLE us away from following Jesus. So, we must guard our hearts.

We need to monitor our input. We need to think long and hard about what content we consume. Are we watching shows and movies that promote Christian values and ideas. Are we listening to music or podcasts that increase our desire for Christ? Are we reading books that highlight themes of redemption, love, and good triumphing over evil? Are we allowing impurities into our hearts and minds under the guise of entertainment and humour?

I love the way Proverbs 7 talks about this idea. In this chapter, Solomon is counselling his son about the dangers and consequences of adultery. He warns him to stay away from the adulteress and in verses 24-25 he says this: Listen to this well:

“And now, O sons, listen to me,  
and be attentive to the words of my mouth.  
<sup>25</sup> Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;  
do not stray into her paths” (Proverbs 7:24-25 ESV)

Do not stray into her paths. Earlier in the passage he warns about going down the road by her house. Listen friends, that is GOLD. This is wonderful advice. The best way to guard your heart against impurities is to STAY CLEAR.

Don’t put the fence on the edge of the cliff!

Don’t go by her house. If you struggle with alcoholism don’t drive by the bar on your way home. If you struggle with gambling don’t download betting apps. Have someone keep you accountable



for the apps that are on your phone. If you struggle with pornography don't go on websites that lead to disaster. If there are certain sites that stir up temptations and sinful desires within you, even if there is a chance they will, **AVOID THEM AT ALL COSTS**. Do not go by her house.

This applies to all sin, all impurity. If you want to guard your heart, if you want to keep it pure, then be intentional. Create boundaries, create limits that are far back from the edge of the cliff. Do not overestimate your ability to withstand temptation. Do not go by her house!

A heart that is pure is a heart that is unstained. It is a heart that is undivided. It is a heart that is focused on inward realities. And it is a heart that will see God. Which leads us to our next question:

## What Does It Mean To See God?

There is one answer to this question which has both present and future implications. The answer to what it means to see God is that:

### **1. It means to be welcomed into his presence then.**

There is a future promise of being welcomed into the presence of God FOREVER. You see, the greatest consequence of the fall was that we are not able to see God. This is one of the major themes throughout the Bible. The story of the Bible is a story of how God made a way for mankind to re-enter his presence; to see him once again. Psalm 24, which we have already read asks the pivotal question. I want to read it again to make sure we understand the point.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

<sup>4</sup>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. (Psalm 24:3-4 ESV)

Because of our sin, because of our IMPURE hearts, we cannot enter into God's presence. The whole Old Testament sacrificial system was a way of communicating that very truth. We need

cleansing from our sin. We need to be purified. One of the primary purposes of the temple worship, of all the ceremonial laws recorded in the Old Testament, was to demonstrate how thoroughly we need to be cleansed. It was to point to the one who would come who will have clean hands and a pure heart.

The sacrificial system and the ceremonial law point to Jesus Christ. He is the one who was tempted in every way yet was without sin. He is the once for all sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world. He is the one who makes a way for people to enter God's presence once again. Jesus makes a way for the dwelling place of God to be with man once again. He makes a way for us to see God.

Are you seeing that this morning? Are you seeing how GOOD this news is?

THIS IS IT! THIS IS THE BEST NEWS THERE IS! This is the answer to our GREATEST problem! This is the solution to our GREATEST NEED! Those who are pure in heart will SEE GOD! THERE IS NOTHING BETTER THAN THAT!

There will be no more death! There will be no more crying! There will be no more sickness! THERE WILL BE GOD! We will be WITH HIM! I cannot possibly overstate how awesome, how spectacular, this news is! THIS IS IT!

We just talked about all the places our mind goes when we slip into neutral. All the things in life we daydream about. We dream about playing sports, and going on vacation, and whatever else we enjoy doing. ARE YOU KIDDING ME? How can any of that POSSIBLY compare to what Jesus is promising here?

Friends, our dreams are far too small.

Our dreams are far too small.

God has so much more for you than mere pleasure and entertainment. God has promised you EVERYTHING you could ever want and EVERYTHING you could ever need! He has promised the complete and utter satisfaction in his presence! He has welcomed us HOME!

There is a promise of his perfect presence THEN and there is a promise of more of his presence NOW. That is the present aspect of what it means to see God.

## **2. It means to experience his presence more vividly now.**

There is a future perfect fulfillment of God's presence to come and there is a partial increase here and now. As Lloyd-Jones helpfully says:

“As with all the other Beatitudes, the promise is partly fulfilled here and now. In a sense there is a vision of God even while we are in this world. Christian people can see God in a sense that nobody else can. The Christian can see God in nature, whereas the non-Christian cannot. The Christian sees God in the events of history. There is a vision possible to the eye of faith that no-one else has. But there is a seeing also in the sense of knowing Him, a sense of feeling He is near, and enjoying His presence.”<sup>4</sup>

There is an opening of our eyes in a spiritual sense to see God when we are pure in heart. There is an ability to see God's hand at work. We look out at nature and see God's beauty and Glory. We look at events in our lives and see God working in it in a way we didn't see before. We look at other people and see God's image in them more clearly. And we experience and enjoy his presence more vividly. I love that word vividly.

Because, if you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit is within you. God's presence is a constant reality for the Christian. We know that. However, we are talking about the difference between knowing in our minds, knowing intellectually, and knowing with our whole being, with KNOWING, experiencing and enjoy God's presence. I could hold up a deflated soccer ball and you would say yes that is a soccer ball. It is truly a soccer ball. I can kick it. It won't go very far but I can kick it. But it is not FULL. It is not what it could be.

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<sup>4</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Second edition. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 118.

So many Christians are like that. They are deflated in their faith. They are not experiencing Christ as they could be. So many of us do not have a VIVID experience of the presence of God in our lives. We have tasted it. We may have been to conferences or retreats where we felt it. But then we lost it. We may have had a sweet season of feeling it but it goes again. When our hearts are divided or when our hearts are stained by sin and impurity then we do not and cannot experience God's presence as fully and vividly as we are able. When we are holding on to sin, when we are holding on to grudges, when our affections are divided, we limit our ability to see and know God.

But when we are wholly united in our desire and love for God, when we are guarding our hearts against impurity, when we are pure in heart, we can experience God in amazing, life-giving, soul-refreshing, VIVID ways now. And we will experience the perfect, awesome, fullness of his presence in the age to come.

That is the promise for those who are pure in heart. And that, of course, leaves us with our final question:

## **How Can I Become Pure In Heart?**

We have just discussed the unbelievable reward that is promised to those who are pure in heart. The blessing for the pure in heart is the answer to our greatest need and the fulfilment of our deepest desire. And with this wonderful reward, we have talked about what it means to be pure in heart. It means to have a heart that is unstained and wholly undivided in love for God.

The problem is that this whole thing. The becoming pure in heart; gaining an undivided heart towards God and receiving the outcome of that heart is completely impossible on our own. Jesus diagnosed our hearts in Matthew 10. They produce evil. They are desperately sick. We cannot do this on our own.

But God, once again. But God.

But God has made a way. He has sent his son to live the perfect life; to have clean hands and a pure heart. He sent Jesus to die on the cross in our place, to pay the penalty for our sin. Jesus took our sin upon himself, and as Gary demonstrated, he offers his righteousness as a covering over us. There is a free gift of God's grace and mercy that is offered to you. There is a way to be pure in heart. James 4 says:

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:8-10 ESV)

Draw near to God and he WILL draw near to you. That is the offer before you today. Come. Humble yourselves. See your need. Draw near. It is a free gift. All you have to do is come. Come and receive the gift of God's grace and mercy, receive the blessing of salvation, the promise that you will SEE GOD, receive this gift through faith in Jesus.

You can be made pure in heart, you can see God, you can enjoy the blessing of his presence forevermore, by his grace. And, if you are in Christ, if you have already come and tasted of God's grace and mercy available to you at the cross, the offer is the same. Come. Draw Near. Cleanse your hands you sinner, purify your hearts you double minded.

When God appears on the last day, we shall be like him because we will see him as he is. This is our promised destination which we clearly seen in 1 John 3:2-3:

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

It is through our HOPE in him who IS PURE that we are purified. Listen to how D. A. Carson captures this idea:

“the Christian purifies himself now because pure is what he will ultimately be. His present efforts are consistent with his future hope.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 27.

His present efforts. Notice that. We are not passive in this journey. Purity in heart does not simply happen to us. Yes, it was begun by the Holy Spirit, and it is empowered by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Yes, AND, we work together with the Spirit, making every effort to cultivate a pure heart.

We take captive every thought. We guard our hearts against impurities. We pay attention to where our mind wanders and the things we dream about. We confess that those dreams are simply not good enough and we ask, we long, we crave that God would captivate our hearts; that we might understand the INCOMPREHENSIBLE GREATNESS of his presence; that we would be fixed upon it and desire it above all things.

As we lean wholly upon God's grace, as we fix our eyes upon God, as we pursue him with an undivided heart, as we draw near to God, he will draw near to us.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

Let's pray together.