

**Sermon preached by Mr. Michael Bittenbender
at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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THE BEATITUDES (6)

Matthew 5:1-12

Here we are again, moving right along in this series on the beatitudes. This week we are looking at the 6th beatitude. Last week we looked at mercy, showing mercy, delighting in showing mercy. This week we look at the heart of man.

The Scripture we will be looking at is the one we have been looking at each time in this series, Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1-12. Let us give our reverent attention to the reading of God's holy word.

Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1-12:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them.

He said:

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

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

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

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The next principle, character trait, that Jesus calls us to is purity of heart. The beatitudes are not a list of suggestions. They are not to be looked at as multiple choice questions, choose two and do them. They aren't a “circle all that apply”. They all apply. They are all, each and every one of them, to be demonstrated by everyone claiming to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

I preface this particularly here because this 6th beatitude has far-reaching implications for our lives in ways that might not be immediately obvious. Now that is not to say that we have to do some exegetical jujitsu moves to understand this, but when we dig just a little bit deeper the applications grow.

We can't talk about purity without talking about the purification process. The purity of different metals dramatically increases or decreases its worth. For gold, the process for refining helps us get to as pure gold as we can get. Pure gold is desirable and the choice metal for many jewelers. The two gold refining methods most commonly employed to derive pure gold are the Miller process and the Wohlwill process. The Miller process uses gaseous chlorine to extract impurities when gold is at melting point; impurities separate into a layer on the surface of the molten purified gold. The Miller process is rapid and simple, but it produces gold of only about 99.5 percent purity. The Wohlwill process increases purity to about 99.99 percent by electrolysis. In this process, a casting of impure gold is lowered into an electrolyte solution of hydrochloric acid and gold chloride. Under the influence of an electric current, the gold migrates to a negatively charged electrode (cathode), where it is restored to a highly pure metallic state, leaving the impurities as a separate solution or residue. Now, if any of that didn't make sense or seemed confusing, I am sure Tee Townsley will be able to explain it to you in simpler terms. The Miller process involves melting the gold and allowing the impurities to separate from the gold. The impurities are seen and able to be removed when they are on the surface.

Now apparently Canada is really good at making pure gold. In fact, they have even made a gold coin and named it the Big Maple Leaf. This coin, weighing 220 pounds, has the denomination of \$1 million dollars, and is a record setting 99.999 percent pure. Six of these coins were made. The original is in an Ottawa facility. The coin attracts a lot of attention, the value as of March 2017 according to Wikipedia is \$4 million U. S. dollars. The coins have attracted so much attention that one was even stolen from a museum in Berlin back in 2017. The coin has not been recovered. People are fascinated with the idea of purity.

The word used for pure here in Matthew chapter 5 is *katharos*. It is used 28 times in the New Testament. The definitions given are physically clean, pure, purified by fire, or like a vine cleansed by pruning and so fitted to bear fruit. In a levitical sense, it means the use of which is not forbidden or imparts no uncleanness. Ethically, it means free from corrupt desire, from sin and guilt, free from every admixture or what is false. Blameless, innocent, unstained with the guilt of anything.

Often on certain food items you may read "100% pure ..." There was a little boy once who was reading an advertisement for Simpson's cocoa powder and asked his mother, "Mom, what does '100% pure' mean?"

"It means completely clean, with nothing bad in it."

Later, as she knelt by him as he prayed before going to bed, she heard him say the words, "Dear God, please help me to be like Simpson's cocoa powder."

“Son! She whispered, but he kept going.

“Make me 100% pure, completely clean with nothing bad in me.”

The faith of children can be rejuvenating to the heart. Let us each cry out to God to make us like Simpson’s cocoa powder, 100% pure with nothing bad in us.

Now Jesus throughout His ministry stresses and calls His followers to examine their hearts. The heart is the focal point for many Scripture passages and the focal point of what God is after. The word heart is used 532 times in the NIV. The Greek word here is *kardia*, where we get cardio and is used 160 times in the New Testament. The heart is at the depths of our emotions, feelings, thoughts, desires, motives, etc. It denotes the center of all physical and spiritual life. I read a definition that said it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes and endeavors. It is out of the heart that the mouth speaks, as Jesus tells the Pharisees. The Bible also tells us to guard our heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” The importance of our heart cannot be overstated. God wants our hearts.

The popular interpretation of this passage, according to John Stott, is to regard purity of the heart as an expression of inward purity, the equality of those who have been cleansed from moral, as opposed to ceremonial, defilement. The Old Testament, Levitical law, is filled with ceremonial laws that talk about what makes someone clean or unclean. Some of the more well-known laws relate to eating clean and unclean food. Laws regarding the cleaning of a person from uncleanness take up many chapters in the book of Leviticus. These pretty much entirely had to do with outward expressions or actions. Jesus gets in hot water with the Pharisees when the Pharisees see Jesus eating without washing. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and often points out that it is what is in one’s heart that matters. In Luke chapter 14, Jesus gives six woes to the Pharisees and starts off by saying, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.” Jesus is pointing out that they are not concerned with their inward purity and cleanliness, only outside.

And Jesus isn’t the first person throughout Scripture to pick up this theme of inward vs. outward purity. Psalm 24:3-4 says, “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.” David identifies that it is something within us, our heart, that God seeks and those who have a pure heart shall see God in His holy place.

Back to gold refinement. When the process for purification begins, there is nothing about the gold’s agency that allows it to be purified. Something, someone outside of the gold puts it through the process, as the gold heats and begins to melt, the outside is identifiable as impure. The process changes the inside, leaving the outside impure, where the impurities may be removed. We don’t start with the outside in the hope to change the inner parts. We are the same way. As our hearts are turned towards God, the way we live becomes transparent, honest, and pure. The outward actions of our lives reflect the inside.

Jesus uses the word “heart” here strategically. Imagine for a moment that He had said something along the lines of “Blessed are those who are ceremonial clean, or who only speak wholesomely, or are pure in action.” This falls in line with how the Pharisees operated, but Jesus time and time again challenges this modus operandi. It isn’t enough to just modify our actions. The Ten Commandments, particularly the latter ones, say 5-10, are rather action focused. “Don’t do this.” As you might remember from my series on the Ten Commandments, Jesus expounds upon them to affect the heart. Don’t commit adultery is the 7th commandment, yet Jesus goes after the heart and says even if you look lustfully at a woman you have broken this commandment. Jesus identifies the heart as the spring of truth in our lives and if our heart is corrupt we will not see God. If all we do is after our actions we are missing the point. Spurgeon points out that your language should be chaste, yet, if your heart is reveling in foul imaginations, you stand before God not according to your words but according to your desires.

Our hearts, from our beginning, are impure. Our hearts are inclined to follow our sinful nature. It takes a divine act for our hearts to be regenerated. It takes an act of the Holy Spirit for our hearts to be turned to God. Prior to this act, our hearts are impure. The pure in heart can see, but when covetousness and other sinful acts and desires get into the heart, it makes the eyes dim or blind. Our greed for money clouds our ability to see clearly. Covetous people, for example, only look for gain and see everything as a transaction, seeking to profit. They have no ability to see straight nor see that their ends do not justify the means. Wrong actions, whatever the motive, are still wrong, and an impure heart will struggle to see that.

Those with an impure heart are blind. Our sinful nature corrupts, distorts, and bends our hearts away from God and blinds us. Those with impure hearts are blind to their need for a Savior. They are blind to their need for sacrificial, substitutionary atonement. Those with impure hearts are blind to God, to all that He has done for us. They are blind to selfless sacrificial living to which we are called. Those with impure hearts are blinded by their sinfulness and unable to see their wrongs. Those that are blind see no need for God and are blinded from the truth. Who has ever questioned the character of Jesus except men who are blind to the truth. It is true that unrepentant or unconverted men have or can acknowledge the beauty and purity of Christ’s life, but, as Sturgeon exclaims, the pure in heart are enamored with it.

Those with a pure heart, having been acted upon by the Holy Spirit, realize their poverty of spirit, mourn for their condition, meekly approaching God, seeking Him, hungering and thirsting for Him, have been shown mercy and show mercy to others, now are called to a purity of heart. John Stott says, “The person with ‘clean hands and a pure heart’ (v.4) is one ‘who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.’ This is a person whose relations with both God and other people are free from falsehood.”

The promise here is that “they will see God.” It has been noted that some kings throughout history were rather reclusive, living in seclusion, with only people close to the court able to have access to the king whenever they wanted. Oftentimes, in order to see the king and in so doing draw close to him that you may have his ear, one would need to plot, plan or perhaps use backchannel influences to get an audience with the king. That is not the case with God.

No one can ever scheme or connive their way to see God. There is no conditioning, threatening, back stabbing your way to God. The way is for simple-minded man to humbly approach God, seeking Him, acknowledging our sinful state and our guilt, confessing our sins and pleading with Him to forgive us for Jesus' sake, whose death on the cross atones for our sins. That is the man who sees God.

Spurgeon points out there are three ways to see God – in nature, in Scripture, and in God's church. Regarding nature, Spurgeon writes, once one gets the heart right, God can be seen everywhere. To an impure heart, God cannot be seen anywhere, but to a pure heart God is to be seen everywhere. Regarding Scripture, the pure in heart see God on every page of this blessed book. As they read it devoutly and prayerfully, they bless the Lord that He has been pleased so graciously to reveal Himself to them by His Spirit. Regarding the church, he notes that the impure of heart cannot see God there at all. To them, the church of God is nothing but a conglomeration of divided sects. Unclean hearts see little or nothing good among God's people, but the pure in heart see God in His church and rejoice to see Him there.

If our hearts are impure, we will not see God. We will not see a need for God, we will not see His love, His grace, His protection, His healing or His provision in our lives. Our impure hearts lead us into a blindness that we cannot get out of. Only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit are our hearts inclined towards God. With a pure heart we see God in everything. We see that it is God who carries us through tough times, that blesses us and provides for us beyond our imagination. With pure hearts we ask to see God, humbly, as a sinner, seeking forgiveness, approaching a Father who delights in loving us. Let us each pray out asking God not to be like Simpson's Cocoa, but without anything bad in us.