

## Matthew 5:8

### The Pure in Heart

**Introduction:** The Sermon on the Mount is not teaching us how to get into the kingdom - the Bible makes it clear that entrance to God's kingdom is only through grace - by the sacrificial work of Jesus. The sermon is also not teaching us how we stay in the kingdom. Rather it is a description of the character and conduct of those who already belong to the kingdom. The Sermon is not a call to repentance, though that may be involved at times, it is a description of the expression and evidences of true repentance.

The audience is the disciple of Jesus.

The sermon describes the life that necessarily results from genuine salvation. What God is doing, and wants to continue in us; what he is making us into by the work of his Spirit and grace upon us.

So the purpose of this sermon, I believe, is for God to work his kingdom characteristics, his kingdom virtues in us, so that we can achieve the human flourishing that God intends for us, and properly represent him and his Kingdom to the watching world.

Jesus begins his sermon by painting a picture of what the state of true God centered human flourishing looks like; what true well being looks like in the kingdom of God. The beatitudes, like the rest of wisdom literature in scripture, are an implicit invitation to consider what the best way of being in the world is and to pursue it. Jesus' claim is that True flourishing is a life that is lived in light of the eternal kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus claims is here now, and at work through him.

But as I warned before this is topsy turvy, upside down, counter-cultural stuff that Jesus is bringing to us and that is because his kingdom is like no other.

We pick up this morning in the 6th beatitude.

#### **1. Flourishing are the Pure in Heart for they shall see God.**

##### **1. What does it mean to be pure in heart?**

1. The Bible speaks of many places of purity of heart, but there is one specific passage that connects purity of heart with the vision of God and no doubt the Jews knew exactly what passage Jesus was referring to when he said these words.

2. **Psalm 24 reads, “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. They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.”**
3. To the Jew, there was no greater aspiration, no greater goal for humanity than to behold the face of Yahweh, to see God, to stand in his presence. David, said he would rather be a door keeper in God’s house, than any prosperity power, or wealth that the world offered.
4. In Jewish understanding it was the one who was “pure” according to the Law of Moses that could enter the temple and the presence of Yahweh (according to Psalm 24). So the Jews made it their goal, to keep up this ritual purity, with washings, cleansing, sacrifice and so on... with the aim of one day beholding Yahweh.
5. But Jesus is going to shake things up as he always does. Jesus does not say, those who have been ceremonially cleansed according to the law of Moses shall see God, or that those who practice or keep the law of Moses shall see God. He says, the pure in heart, shall see God.

## **2. What does it mean?**

1. When we think of purity, we often associate it with sexual purity and moral terms, terms like holiness, or maybe being free from sin, and guilt. The term pure, really means to be whole, undivided, unclouded, clear, single focused. So the morality of your “purity” would really depend on the object of devotion.
2. In Jewish understanding the heart is literally the human center, the home of personal feeling, will and thinking. The heart is the core of who you are. Heart, will and mind, are all covered by the biblical term heart. You could translate this - Flourishing are those who are clear at the center; all in, totally devoted, for they shall see God.
  1. ***“Purity of heart then means a complete and single-minded devotion to God that is rooted in the heart but expresses itself in everything we do” - Peter Leithart***

3. I believe that what Jesus is getting after here is what we would call religiosity. Having a shell of righteousness but the inside is filled with selfishness, pride, greed, and jealousy.
  1. See the highly religious people of Israel had been concerning themselves with only an outward righteousness, as we discussed last week. A righteousness that was concerned about keeping the rules, staying ceremonially pure, fasting, praying, but forfeiting mercy, justice, righteousness, love of the orphan, the widow, the foreigner, and the poor.
  2. Jesus isn't actually saying anything new. God said this all throughout the law and the prophets - **"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" - Amos 5:21-24**
  3. See the people of Israel are claiming, through their "worship," we're with you God, we're committed to you, we care about you, and the things that you care about. And God says, NO, You don't. You're not devoted to me because if you were, there would be a flood of righteousness and justice. Love of God will always express itself in love of Neighbor.
  4. This beatitude follows perfectly after hungering for righteousness and being merciful. These two characteristics are done not as tasks to be fulfilled or checks in the box, but because that is the kind of people that we are because we have been radically changed by the grace of God.
  5. Again we have to be really careful in this sermon and the Beatitudes here, to think or to say, what God cares about is the heart, or the "spiritual" so don't worry about the work, or the practice.. As I mentioned last week the Pharisees are hypocrites because they are not unified in heart and action. They actually do the right things, but they are not the right kind of people because their hearts are wrong (They are doing it for praise and recognition, not because they are like God or care about the things God cares about). In behavior they are

“righteous” but inwardly they are not - they lack what God cares about. The inward person must match the outward person or it is not truly righteousness or virtue.

4. God is not necessarily asking us to do more tasks, more acts of righteousness (though often that is exactly what is called for), God is first and foremost calling us to become righteous people. As Nicolai and I have been emphasizing, it's not doing, but a way of being, God's way of being, that this sermon calls us to.
  1. This single hearted devotion then is to be the primary object of our attention. Jesus is here (and elsewhere in the Gospels) telling us not to make a show of our purity, not to advertise our holiness to those around us. Rather than obsessing about how we are perceived by others (which our culture is obsessed with) we are to strive for a deep correspondence between our motivations, thoughts, and convictions and the self that we present to the world around us. Jesus says, our righteousness must surpass the righteousness of the Scribes and pharisees, and that is because it is a holistic righteousness, both heart and actions.
  2. **A searching question is who are we when no one is around? Are we selective in those we love, forgive, show mercy to. Are we selective in our righteousness and Justice that we deal out. This is all evidence of a divided heart.**
  3. What God forms and fashions as his new creation are sincere people... The pure in heart are those without mixed motives. They do not do things because there is something in it for them. They don't do the right thing because people are looking, and it will boost their popularity or people's view of them. They do it because that's the kind of people they are being remade into -those who reflect the image of God.
  4. God wants to make us into WHOLE people. God wants to make us into people of Character. God wants to make us into people who actually do mercy, justice, righteousness, peacemaking, kindness, service, feeding, helping, caring, healing, truthfulness, because that's the kind of people we are, the people we have become, because of God's own Spirit and character at work in us.

5. Wholeness of person or singular devotion is one of the key ideas, if not THE key idea to this whole sermon of Jesus. “The disciple is the one who's dedication to God is total, single. Jesus will later contrast doing righteous deeds either to be seen by men or by God. He will contrast laying up foolish, destroyable treasure on earth rather than imperishable treasure in heaven. All of this speaks to the necessity of single devotion. Jesus says, where your treasure is that is where your heart, or the true you is.
  6. This at least means that followers of Jesus must see to it then that we stay in solidarity with Jesus.. we must keep at the practice of inward and outward devotion to Jesus, repenting when we find ourselves only going through the motions or examining our hearts when our actions are not lining up with what we say we believe...(Scripture, and community) We need to pray along with the Psalmist “**Unite my heart to fear your name**”
2. **So how do we practice this purity of heart, how do we work towards a solidarity?**
1. Let me say again, that we are talking about character, what God is doing in his people, not what we are doing to become God's people. There is of course a part we play, practices, habits that will work towards solidarity.
  2. I think purity of heart comes back to the promise of this Beatitude - the Vision of God. Many times, though we are christians and are subscribed to scripture, fellowship, even a “christian” way of life, we are really living with a small view of God, a pithy view of the kingdom.. I mean how many of would say, that the thing that we are living for, what get's us up in the morning is the Kingdom of God, the hope of Glory, and the Beatific vision?? Yet we are living for something... something gives us drive and purpose.
  3. *“To be human is to desire “the kingdom,” some version of the kingdom, which is the aim of our request. Every one of us is on a kind of Arthurian quest for “the Holy Grail” that hoped for, longed for, dreamed of picture of the good life - the realm of human flourishing- that we pursue without ceasing. Implicitly and tacitly of the kingdom that pull us to get up in the morning and suit up for the quest” - James K.A. Smith, Desiring the kingdom*

4. Missiologist, Michael Goheen, says, The Church of the west often fails to live up to it's high calling because it is hamstrung by, *"A low spiritual state of the church, a lukewarm love for Christ, a sickly worldliness, and a lack of vital prayer. The reason? Self-satisfaction that comes from comfort, compromise with capitalism, and accommodation to the consumeristic spirit of our age"* - Michael Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*

1. I know, because I am just like you, that there are a hundred different identities and narratives vying for our loyalty, our heart, our devotion, our desire. And Like C.S. Lewis would say, we are far too easily pleased. We settle for comfort when God offers us infinite joy. But let me put it simply, none of the voices behind these identities and narratives have the power to give you life, to fulfill you, they did not live or die for you. Jesus alone, created you, knows what will fulfill you, has the power to give it to you, and lived and died so you could receive it. But it's not enough to give Jesus a piece of your person, or a place in your heart. He must have the whole thing, and I believe that we must continually offer it to him - renewing our vows to him, as it were, weekly, daily, sometimes hour by hour. A divided heart will never bring us into the flourishing that God has for us. God wants us to engage and wants to engage with the whole person. God wants to flood our every facet with his person and power.

1. The whole subject reminds me of one of my favorite C.S Lewis essays, *Is Christianity Hard or Easy?*

2. Lewis likens religious people to moralists who are constantly trying to figure out a way to have their cake and eat it too. To "live for God", in order to get blessing, or "fire insurance", but still have some left over to use on themselves. By the way, he says this is the most miserable way to do Christianity and in the end it will probably make you worse off, because you'll feel that people owe you, or that God owes you.. you'll never flourish.

3. *"The Christian way is different: harder and easier. "Christ says, "Give me all of you!!! I don't want so much of your time, so much of your talents and money, and so much of your work. I want YOU!!! ALL OF YOU!! I have not come to torment or frustrate the natural man or woman, but to KILL IT! No half*

*measures will do. I don't want to only prune a branch here and a branch there; rather I want the whole tree out! Hand it over to me, the whole outfit, all of your desires, all of your wants and wishes and dreams. Turn them ALL over to me, give yourself to me and I will make of you a new self---in my image. Give me yourself and in exchange I will give you Myself. My will, shall become your will. My heart, shall become your heart."*

### **3. The Promise - They shall see God**

1. Throughout Christian history this has been called the Beatific Vision - To see God. It is seen to be the summit of all things, the greatest experience beyond anything in the universe.. To behold the face of Almighty God....As the Psalmist says, **"In your presence there is fulness of joy and at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore."** - **Psalm 16:11** Eye has not seen, ear has not hear, nor has it entered into the imagination - the things that God has prepared for those who love him, that the sufferings of this life cannot be compared to the far exceeding eternal weight of glory that awaits us. We will see him who we were created for, and we shall experience the fulness of life that we have all longed for.

**Conclusion:** *"What Jesus teaches in the sayings collected in the Sermon on the Mount is not a complete regulation of the life of the disciples, and it is not intended to be; rather, what is taught here is symptoms, signs, examples of what it means when the kingdom of God breaks into the world which is still under sin, death, and the devil. You yourselves should be signs of the coming kingdom of God, signs that something has already happened."* -Joachim Jeremias

What if we actually lived as signs of the kingdom? What if we actually put into practice, in our hearts, in our homes, at our work, around our neighbors, in our politics the upside down kingdom of God?

Jesus, the master, says this is the way of true flourishing. Will we believe him and take him at his word? Will we repent of our self-reliant, proud, assertive self justifying, unmerciful, half-hearted ways and take his yoke upon us, his kingdom mission and learn from him? Will we give him all of us? An undivided devotion? I pray we will.

