

Matthew 5:8

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Introduction

English Standard Version Chapter 5

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

The Beatitudes

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

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

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Memorizing the beatitudes

I hope that by the time we finish our study on the beatitudes that you'll have made some headway in memorizing verses 1-12, especially considering how much time we've spent reading and contemplating this text together. In fact, today I'd like to challenge you to memorize verses 1-12 if you haven't already. Take some time during your lunch hour every day and practice memorizing these verses. Maybe review them before you go to bed at night, and I'll bet that within 1-2 weeks you will have memorized this text.

Memorization can be difficult

The complaint I often hear when it comes to Scripture memorization is also the same complaint I've had myself, that is, the assertion that I just don't have a good memory, and I certainly agree that this can be a very frustrating reality. However, there is always a good purpose behind God's use of our ordinary means, the hard work that is often necessary when memorizing Scripture causes us to meditate longer and harder on God's word than we might otherwise do if memorization were to easy.

Memorization roots biblical truth into our minds

This often means that we end up looking longer and thinking more deeply on the text in front of us, we become more intimately acquainted with it. Almost all of the biblical texts I've strived to memorize linger in my mind to this day, I may not remember the verse, or verses, as I did before, but I have a history with that particular text because I lingered there for so long. The hard-fought struggle of memorizing that passage ingrained within me a deeper acquaintance with the meaning of the passage, and while I may no longer have the text memorized as I did before, the meaning has likely forever been impressed upon my mind. And so I hope these beatitudes would be impressed upon your minds, in order that they might have a lasting impact on your life as well.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy

Last week we looked at the concept of mercy and how we as Christians desperately rely upon it, we looked at how we love God *because* of his mercy toward us, and we learned that we are expected to be merciful in the same way God has been merciful to us.

Destroying legalism

This week we turn our attention to verse 8 of chapter 5 in Matthew's gospel, where we read,

English Standard Version Chapter 5

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

This particular passage, I think, really gets at the heart of one of the things Jesus sought to accomplish in his sermon on the mount, which was to obliterate any kind of works salvation. You see, the context or the setting in which these words are given to us is during an incredibly legalistic, religious time period. The religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees, had a strong appearance of religiosity, and had heaped strict oral traditions upon themselves and their fellow Israelites. These traditions were in addition to God law. You could say they had bound the human conscience to practices beyond what the Scriptures taught.

In Mark's gospel account starting in verse 3 of chapter seven we are given an example of these such laws. We read,

English Standard Version Chapter 7

3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, 4 and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)

In large part the Pharisees had not arbitrarily added their own traditions to God's law, no, rather in their minds they had merely expanded upon them. Because in the OT there was much instruction given by Moses regarding ritual purity with regard to such things as those with leprosy and those who had come in contact with dead bodies, or in regard to certain bodily discharges. In the OT, particularly in Leviticus, there are many instructions given in regard to cleanness, or how the Jewish people were to remain ritually clean, so the Pharisees were particularly concerned with cleanness. We find a good example of this in Leviticus 22 starting in verse 1,

English Standard Version Chapter 22

22 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the LORD. 3 Say to them, 'If any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD. 4 None of the offspring of Aaron who has a leprous disease or a discharge may eat of the holy things until he is clean. Whoever touches anything that is unclean through contact with the dead or a man who has had an emission of semen, 5 and whoever touches a swarming thing by which he may be made unclean or a person from whom he may take uncleanness, whatever his uncleanness may be— 6 the person who touches such a thing shall be unclean until the evening and shall not eat of the holy things unless he has bathed his body in water. 7 When the sun goes down he shall be clean, and afterward he may eat of the holy things, because they are his food. 8 He shall not eat what dies of itself or is torn by beasts, and so make himself unclean by it: I am the LORD.' 9 They shall therefore keep my charge, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby when they profane it: I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

Adding to God's law and binding consciences

So what many of the Pharisees had done was essentially add oral traditions to God's word, and on the surface their motives can even appear noble (and their traditions would have seemed most noble to the common person of Israel), but we must first see that they do not have the right to bind the consciences of God's people with laws that do not come explicitly from his inspired word. They do not have the right to add to what God has spoken through his holy prophets and thereby bind the people's consciences to those traditions.

I want to read you something from our local church covenant that particularly pertains to this. Within the second paragraph of the preface it says the following,

"The church covenant is a written summary of biblical practice that a church agrees should be the basis of its accountability. **The covenant allows for freedom of conscience in areas**

where the Bible is not definite in its guidance.” (URC Member Covenant)

Secondly, the oral traditions of the Pharisees served only to create the appearance of honoring God, and were used to maintain power over the people of Israel. And Jesus confronts the Pharisees on these two points back in Mark chapter 7, continuing in verse 5,

English Standard Version Chapter 7

5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” 6 And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“ ‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
7 in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

We must have both clean hands and a pure heart

While God is certainly teaching his people in Leviticus the importance of cleanness, there’s an underlying assumption that this ritual cleanness would be accompanied by a genuine heart of love toward God. That this ritual cleanness would be motivated by a pure heart. That is, a heart that is innocent, or guiltless before God. A heart that does not merely seek to honor God with its lips, or a heart that worships God in vain, but rather a heart that loves God.

The purpose of ritual cleanness

God’s instructions for ritual cleanness, in fact, was so that the Israelites might understand their need for holiness to stand in the presence of God, their need for holiness at the heart. Time and time again God uses throughout the OT and NT external things to point us to the internal things. All of life is to be a parable of God to us. It’s why Jesus so easily and readily used the natural world to communicate spiritual truth. It’s important for us to understand that the natural world was created in such a way so as to communicate the truth about God to us. The created world is so analagous to the spiritual world it’s as plain as the nose on our face. We recall Jesus’ use of a mustard seed to describe kingdom of heaven, or how Jesus teaches us that “the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown in the sea and gathered fish of every kind.” (Matthew 13:47)

Jesus undercuts legalism

So when Jesus says, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” he’s completely undercutting the legalism of their day. He’s telling his disciples that what God requires is far more than ritual cleanness, he requires a pure heart, not just clean hands. God requires so much more than just external conformity to his law. Turn with me to Psalm 24 and listen to

what David writes,

English Standard Version Psalm 24

24 A PSALM OF DAVID.

1 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,

2 for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

4 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.

5 He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah

The necessity of a pure heart

Who is it that will ascend the hill of the Lord? Who is it that will stand in God's holy presence? It's the person who possesses both clean hands and a pure heart. A person who possesses not only external obedience to God's law but one who has a pure heart, which is as I've said already, a heart that is innocent or guiltless before God. The Greek word used in Matthew 5:8 for the word pure literally means, guiltless, innocent or ritually clean, so not only are our actions to be in accordance with God's law but are our hearts as well. It's why Jesus says of the Pharisees, "this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

God creates a clean heart in us

And turn with me also to Psalm 51 and look at verse 10 where David cries,

English Standard Version Psalm 51

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

This is the infamous Psalm which records David's cry of repentance after his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, and he asks that God would create in him a clean heart. The word clean here in the Hebrews literally means morally clean, or being free from moral *impurity*. So based upon this text how do we come to possess a pure heart? We ask for one, we ask God out of our humble estate that he would create in us pure heart. We cannot create in ourselves a clean

heart, it has to be given us, it has to be wrought in us by God's Spirit.

Necessity of being born again

It's just as Jesus describes it to the Pharisee Nicodemus in John's gospel. Turn with me to John chapter 3 starting in verse 1. I want you to see something here,

English Standard Version Chapter 3

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Do you notice the language here? Look at what Jesus says here in verse 3, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot **see the kingdom of God.**" Do you remember what Jesus said back in Matthew 5:8? "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they **shall see God.**" The language is virtually synonymous, in fact, it's instructive. To see the kingdom of God is to see God, and one cannot see the kingdom of God unless one is born again, or unless one is given a pure heart. Do you see the connection here? This is a sovereign work of God in man, this is a spiritual heart transplant, and it's this heart transplant that permits us to see God and his kingdom. This is why Jesus says "**blessed** are the pure in heart", because when you are born again you are permitted to ascend God's holy hill, you are permitted to stand in his holy presence, and even more, his Holy Spirit lives in you. You have the very presence of God dwelling within you, and one day you will see him face to face.

Stripped of good works

The necessity of a pure heart strips us of all our good works. We cannot earn our salvation, we cannot earn God's favor, no, God must have mercy on us. We must be born from above. Our salvation is all of grace, not of our own doing, but a gift of God. As John MacArthur puts it, "Jesus systematically dismantles any external approach to enter God's kingdom."

What is a pure heart?

Now we've talked a lot about the necessity of a pure heart so far, but we haven't looked at what exactly it means to have a pure heart. Well, when Jesus speaks of a pure heart what he's getting at, in a practical sense, is the motives of a man's heart, and whether or not those motives are pure. The Greek word translated 'heart' here in verse 8 is καρδία (kardia), which is where we get the English word cardio from. Now, of course, Jesus isn't speaking here of man's physical or biological heart. What the Greek word kardia means here is simply the mind, or as one dictionary definition reads, it's "the locus of a person's thoughts (mind), volition, emotions, and knowledge from right and wrong."

So in essence the requirements of God's law boil down to a pure heart, a heart that has pure or guiltless motives before God, driving the actions of the person. And it's why when Jesus

frequently encounters opposition, particularly from the religious leaders, he immediately exposes their hearts. He exposes their wicked intentions that are otherwise often covered up by the shiny veneer of outward conformity to God's law.

In Matthew 9:1-4 we read,

English Standard Version Chapter 9

9 And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. 2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." 3 And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

It's also why Jesus teaches just a little while later in Matthew chapter 5 in verses 27-28 this,

English Standard Version Chapter 5

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus' sermon on the mount spends a lot of time speaking to the importance of man's motives, to the importance of man's heart.

Exposing motives

Jesus really gets at the problem in Matthew 23:25-28 when he says,

English Standard Version Chapter 23

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

27 "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.

28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

What's interesting here is that the same Greek word translated clean here is the same word translated pure back in Matthew 5:8. So when Jesus speaks of cleaning the inside of the cup he's speaking of the state of their hearts, their impure motives, which he describes here are self-indulgence and greed. Their cup looks squeaky clean on the outside but on the inside they're full of dead people's bones and uncleanness.

I think the lesson here for us is clear. We ought not be like the religious leaders of Jesus' day who gave everyone the perception that they were pious and holy, yet were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Instead let us clean the inside of the cup so that the outside might be genuinely clean also. Let our clean hands be evidence of our pure hearts, and let us root out

every secret area of hypocrisy in our lives, whether it be lying on our taxes, or having inappropriate thoughts toward those who are not our spouse - let us be rid of such things. Because such things are not becoming of God's people.

Jesus later says this in Matthew 12:33-35,

English Standard Version Chapter 12

33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Loving God with all of our heart and mind

There's good reason that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart. It's because we cannot love him apart from a pure heart. We cannot love him by empty works, or mere conformity to his law. If our obedience does not issue from a pure heart then our works are as filthy rags. Listen to what Paul says in his letter to the Romans in chapter 6:17-18,

English Standard Version Chapter 6

17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Let us be obedient from the heart. Let our works come from a pure heart, a heart that loves God. The promise is great for those who have a pure heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Closing

And let's close by looking back at Psalm 24 one last time, specifically at verses 3-6 again,

English Standard Version Psalm 24

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

4 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.

5 He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah

Take notice what it says in verse 5, "He will receive blessing from the Lord". "He who has clean hands and a pure heart" will receive blessing from the Lord. Incredibly reminiscent of what we read back in Matthew isn't it? And look at the second half of verse 5, "He will *receive* blessing from the LORD and **righteousness** from the God of his salvation." What is the blessing he is speaking of here? It's righteousness from God! This is imputation here. This is what happens when we are given a new heart, when we are born again, we receive the righteousness of God, and more specifically, the righteousness of Christ! This is how God provides salvation. Oh, how we are blessed!

And finally verse 6, "Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob." The mark of God's people is that they seek him, so may we be a people who seek after God with our whole heart. Let us lay aside every sin that so easily entangles and run to Christ. Let us pray.

Prayer