

12.13.20
Purity – Having the Heart of Christ
Matthew 5:8

This morning we continue our look at Jesus' teachings as found in Matthew 5.

If you have your outline please take it out and have your Bibles ready to look up passage as they come up. I think when a passage is thrown out it is always best to look at it in context to get the flow of thought of the author. And of course we know the author of all the Bible is God.

Let's begin with our passage, **Matthew 5:8**, "**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**" Keep this passage in mind as we move forward this morning.

If you remember last summer, when we had started back up, we celebrated Christmas in the summer. As we had started a look at the Gospel of Matthew, we went into a lot of teaching around the birth of Christ. So, we celebrated Christmas in the summer.

This morning, as we near Christmas and as we have experienced some snow, I wanted to flip us over from Christmas to the desert.



Imagine for a moment you're in this place and you have been in this place for days. All you have seen is sand and rock. For miles you have walked and every time you crest a hill all you can see is more sand and rock. Your hope begins to fade. You see mirages in the distance but they disappear as you near them. You get a bit delirious from the lack of water and the relentless sun. There isn't even a cool place to hide from the sun.

But then one day, you top a sandy hill and this comes into view.



By this time you have seen so many mirages and you know your head is a bit fuzzy so you really don't trust what your eyes are seeing. But as you get nearer and nearer, what you are seeing doesn't disappear. You begin to get excited and your step quickens. The thought of a cool drink of water fills your mind and you can't wait to not only get a drink but dive into the water.

But what would happen if, when you finally got up to the water it looked like this.



The water was so full of minerals, so full of salt that you couldn't drink it. As a source of life it just was no good. This was the case with the Israelite people and Moses as they went out into the desert, the wilderness of Shur. Read with me this account.

Exodus 15:22-25, “Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah (which means bitter). So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.”

The people were having this desert experience. They had been in the desert with only the water they carried which must have been very little. They saw they oasis in the desert and they became excited but when they tried the water, it was no good.

You can imagine their disappointment and even their discouragement. They were hoping for some life giving substance but instead all they

found was another mirage. It looked good from a distance but on closer inspection it was foul.

Switch gears with me for a second and lets take a look at some religious people who looked good from a distance but on closer inspection, their hearts were bad and what they were putting out was not life giving water but something that was foul and bitter.

Let's look at some scriptures.

Matthew 5:20, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of God."

I believe Jesus is saying two things here. First, your righteousness requires something more than the good works that can be done through the flesh. It requires Jesus. It requires the forgiving, cleansing work of the righteous blood of Jesus. We are made righteous inwardly in our spirit only by the blood of Jesus.

Second, I believe the righteousness Jesus is saying that must surpass the scribes and Pharisees is Spirit led. It is pure and flows from the pure Holy Spirit inside of us.

Of course the religious leaders of Jesus' day, the Pharisees and scribes didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit yet, not very many did. But they also didn't have a very good connection with God if they had one at all.

As you know, in Jesus' life He had a lot of challenges with the religious leaders, the leaders of Judaism. They had taken something sacred and corrupted it by only going through the motions of religion. Jesus said they honor with their lips but their hearts were far from God.

In Matthew 23, Jesus goes through what is entitled eight woes. Eight times Jesus says woe to you scribes and Pharisees who were the

religious leaders. You can read through them all in Matthew 23 but for where we are this morning lets just take a brief look at three. Look with me.

Matthew 23:23-28, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white washed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

A scathing rebuke of the religious leaders wouldn't you agree? They were going through the motions but inwardly, they were not really all they promoted themselves to be.

If you want to understand God's definition of what a hypocrite is, you will find plenty of definitions in this chapter of Matthew. Jesus had no patience for them because He knew they were not helping people connect to God but they were actually helping people slip into eternal damnation.

Now to tie this back into the thought of an oasis. On the surface these religious people externally appeared to have everything needed to give people the life saving and healing relationship with the God of the universe. But it was only a mirage.

The streams of water they were putting out was bitter and worse, it actually led the people away from a healing, blessed relationship with God.

As I read through this, and as I saw where God was taking this teaching on being pure in heart and being a person of mercy I was convicted.

As we go back and follow the line of Jesus' teachings as found in Matthew 5, I think we can make a case for the flow of Jesus thought about being pure in heart. Look with me.

Matthew 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

After saying blessed are those who hunger for righteousness for they shall be satisfied and blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy, Jesus now talks about how blessed the pure in heart are.

As I have been praying and thinking about this, I think the flow of what Jesus is saying here is I am going to satisfy your hunger for righteousness by filling you up with Myself. And as I am allowed to operate in and through your life, this is what it looks like. You are going to be a merciful person and your mercy is going to flow from a pure heart.

If you are like me, sometimes, when you run across a new teaching from God's word like this one, or as you are reminded of certain Christ-like characteristics that you know you should operate in, you do your best to try and do just that. Like this teaching on being merciful.

I think we all agree that we should be merciful. Circumstances occur that give you the chance to allow mercy to work in and through your life so you try it out.

Someone does something that you disagree with, someone attacks you or takes advantage of you. After the initial emotion wears off you decide you should be merciful and forgive that person. Mentally this is what you do and you even follow through with some words of forgiveness but emotionally you don't really let it go. You begin to harbor ill will towards that person and it changes the relationship you have with them. Your forgiveness wasn't pure.

Your exchange goes something like this. I forgive you but I need you to know how much you hurt me. You rejected me in some way and even though I forgive you, you need to know how painful it was for me. You want the person to know and enter into the pain you are feeling.

I ask you, is this pure forgiveness? When we say I forgive you but...and then we add our own feelings to it or we make excuses or try to justify our behavior. Again I ask, do you think this is the pure of heart Jesus was talking about here? This is just one example of mercy not working in a pure way.

With Michal or with others I can operate in mercy with my words but in my heart am I pure? Am I really forgiving her or that person from my heart and not making it conditional. Am I really entering into the fullness of mercy with a pure heart? I have really been challenged with by this passage about the pure in heart.

Certainly we know the purity of heart Jesus is talking about here encompasses many things. Our morality, our honesty, how we approach God and many other things that we should consider.

But sandwiched in between these two verses,

Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons (and daughters) of God.”

Jesus talks about being pure in heart. I have to think Jesus is talking about being pure in our ways of being merciful and in our ways of being a peacemaker which we will look at next week.

I am thrilled that God has us on this track of self-examination for a couple reasons.

First,

- 1. It is always good to be examined in light of God’s holiness and purity.**

In this world it is easy for us to get pulled along with the world and even into a sense of self-righteousness. By self-righteousness I mean, I believe I am doing better than most. I am operating mostly in the things God wants me to.

But when we examine ourselves by ourselves or by someone else, then we are missing the mark. It is only when we examine ourselves by the standard of Christ Himself that we see we need help. We see that we are lacking and in this case lacking in operating in mercy in a pure way and this sends us back to the beginning of this teaching from Jesus.

The second reason I believe God has us on this track of self-examination is because of what is happening in the world around us.

- 2. There is a psychological battle happening around us. People are falling into a couple of different patterns.**
 - a. Anger**
 - b. Hopelessness**
 - c. Poor me**

People are getting tired of COVID, tired of the restrictions, tired of the anxiety surrounding getting it or not. They are tired of politics and they are just getting plain tired and it is showing up in these ways.

Underneath the surface there are angry, hopeless or operating in the poor me syndrome.

But that is not the case with us is it? We know we are blessed. Even if we begin to experience these symptoms we have the healing for them because we know the Healer. We come to Him and all of our anxieties and anger is removed and replaced with His love and His peace.

I believe God is taking us through these teachings of Jesus because He is preparing us for an influx of people. As 2020 draws to an end and the new year comes and as we begin to see COVID cases begin to diminish I believe we are going to see not only a resurgence of church attendance but I believe we are going to see an influx of new people.

But these new people, like the Israelites in the desert, they are going to be looking for that fresh drink of pure, life giving water.

But here's the deal. They are going to come to us with residue of their anger, their hopelessness and their poor me syndromes. They are going to have the dirt of the world on them. In other words, they are going to be a mess.

They are going to be a mess because it is messy out there isn't it?

Are you going to be ready? As an individual, as a church body? Are we going to be ready? Is mercy already operating in and through you in a pure way?

Jesus said this in **John 7:38**, **“They who believe in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From their innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”**

Church,

3. We have the great opportunity to be the oasis in the desert of life. We have the opportunity to allow the rivers of life giving water to flow out of us.

Remember the story about the Israelites and Moses in the desert. They came to the water and the water was bitter. What occurred? Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.” Guess what? The pattern never changes.

The people knew they were lacking. They were grieving over it. Moses stepped in and called out to the Lord and the Lord instructed him to do something that would make the bitter water sweet.

Again, the pattern never changes... A blessed person is...

Vs. 3 Poverty stricken in spirit. They know they are lacking

Vs. 4 Grieving over their sin and condition and the sin and condition of the world

Vs. 5 They are meek and open to teachings from Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit

And here is the payoff. **Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.** In Moses’ case, the people saw the power of God working. The same is true in our lives when we follow this pattern. The power of God begins working in our hearts and creates a mercy that is pure and life giving.

This is where we want to be isn’t it. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. God at work in their lives.

Let’s pray.