**SERMON MATTHEW 5 BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART March 14, 2021**

This morning, let’s continue our study of the Beatitudes in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. In these sayings Jesus gives us guidelines for living the Christian life. Thus, taking time to study each beatitude during Lent hopefully helps us answers the questions: “Who is Jesus Christ to me? What is my relationship to Him? What must I do to grow closer to Him?” Listen again to these insightful words of Jesus as recorded in the fifth chapter of Matthew, the first twelve verses.

Read Matthew 5:1-12

So far we have studied the first five beatitudes: 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 after righteousness, for they will be filled; and blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Now let’s look at the next one found in verse 8: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” The *Message* paraphrases it this way: “You’re blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.”

The Greek word used here for pure implies being “clean, pure, unsoiled and not dirty;” being unpolluted with a hint that what is pure was not always pure, but has been purified, cleansed, washed out, and hung out to dry. The Greeks used the word to refer to refined metals such as gold, silver and iron, with the impurities removed. Thus, to say that a heart is pure indicates that is has been emptied of what was unclean, purged of what no longer belongs.

This beatitude builds on the Old Testament image of the heart. It describes both an inner purity and a singleness of mind. In the Bible the heart is used to refer to a person’s will, their choices and motive in life. To Jesus’ listeners, the heart was thought of as the seat of the character of a person: the origin of desires, affections, thoughts, reasoning, imagination, conscience, intentions, purpose, and faith. Thus, the heart represented the total inner person.

Proverbs 4:23 states: “Above all else, guard your heart; for life flows from it.” To the Hebrew mind, the heart was the freeway interchange where all emotions and prejudices and wisdom converge. It was a switch house that receives freight cars loaded with moods, ideas, emotions, and convictions and puts them on the right track. So, to be pure in heart means that the decisions one makes, the desires one has, the thoughts one has are untarnished by sin. Thus, from the pure heart comes only good things, acts of love and mercy, desires for righteousness and justice, decisions that please God.

Now what’s in our heart is influenced by the books we read, the TV shows and movies we watch, what we read on the internet, the people we hang out with, our desires and our thoughts. In a sense, we are what we think. There’s a saying that goes like this: “Watch your thoughts, they become words; watch your words, they become actions; watch your actions, they become habits; watch your habits, they become your character; and watch your character, it becomes your destiny.” The author of this statement must have been familiar the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 23:7 – “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” Our thoughts reflect who we really are.

Thus, the good person brings forth good things out of the good stored up in their heart while the evil person exhibits bad behavior from the evil stored up in their heart. In the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders asked Jesus why His disciples did not wash their hands before eating. To which, Jesus responded: “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him unclean, but it’s what comes out of his mouth that makes him unclean.” And these evil things come from the heart.

Have you ever wondered how a worm gets inside an apple? You might think that it burrows its way in from the outside. But scientists have discovered that it comes from the inside. An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats its way out. Sin, like a worm, begins in the heart and works its way out through a person’s thoughts, words and actions. Now it is impossible to have a pure heart on our own. In order to have such a heart, we must have a repentant spirit. Thus, we need to go to God as King David did in Psalm 51 and ask: “Create in me a clean heart, O Lord.”

In this beatitude, the heart represents the center of the spiritual life. If the fruit of the tree is bad, you don’t try to fix the fruit; you treat the roots. And if a person’s actions are evil, it’s not enough to change habits; you have to go deeper. You have to go to the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart. That’s why the state of the heart is so critical. When someone barks at you, do you bark back or bite your tongue? Your response depends on the state of your heart. When your schedule is too tight or your to-do-list is too long, do you lose your cool or keep it? When you are offered a morsel of gossip marinated in slander, do you turn it down or pass it on? Do you see a homeless person at an intersection as a burden on society or as an opportunity for God? All these decisions depend on the state of your heart. The state of your heart dictates whether you harbor a grudge or give grace, seek self-pity or seek Christ, show hatred or love to others.

The point is that it is what’s inside a person that counts. When God was selecting David as the second king of Israel, He told the prophet Samuel not to be fooled by how a person looks. God said that He does not look at the outward appearance as we do; He looks directly at the heart. God knows us at the very core of our being. He works best from the inside out. When God measures a person, He puts the tape around their heart not their head.

The greatest example of a pure heart is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Himself. As Christians, we are called to imitate Him. Philippians 2:5 states: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” Jesus had a humble heart. If He abides in us, pride will never dominate our lives. Jesus had a loving heart. If He dwells within us, hatred and bitterness will never rule us. Jesus had a forgiving and understanding heart. If He lives within us, mercy will temper our relationships with our fellow human beings. But most of all, Jesus’ ultimate desire was to do His Father’s will. Thus, for us obedience to God’s will is essential to being Christ-like.

Now you are probably thinking: “That’s a tall order.” Yes, it is, and it would be impossible if we had to measure up to Jesus by our own strength and with our own natural heart. But remember what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

A mechanic was removing the cylinder head from the motor of a motorcycle when he spotted a well-known heart surgeon in his shop. The surgeon was waiting for the service manager to come take a look at his bike when the mechanic called out: “Hey, Doc, can I ask you a question?” The surgeon, a bit surprised, walked over to where the mechanic was working on the motorcycle. The mechanic asked: “So, Doc, look at this engine. I open its heart, take the valves out, fix’em, put’em back in, and when I finish, it works like new. So how come I get such a small salary and you get the big bucks, when you and I are doing basically the same work.” The surgeon paused, smiled, leaned over and whispered to the mechanic: “Try doing it with the engine running.” The point is – God can fix our heart with the engine running!

So the message of this beatitude is: “You can change your life by changing your heart, because nothing short of a change of heart will bring about a pure heart.” And right here in the Beatitudes, Jesus gives us a step-by-step approach for changing our heart. In his book *The Applause* *of Heaven*, Max Lucado described the Beatitudes as a step-by-step description of how God builds the believer’s heart. The first step is to admit our poverty: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” God’s blessing is not received by those who think they can earn it, but by those who admit they don’t deserve it. The second step is sorrow: “Blessed are those who mourn.” Joy comes to those who are sincerely sorry for their sin, and repent of their disobedience towards God. Sorrow is followed by meekness. The meek are those who are willing to be used by God; to be His hands and feet to reach out to a world that is in desperate need today of the love and hope that only God can give.

The result of the first three steps is hunger; suddenly your life is changing! You admit your sin and you are saved. You confess your weakness and you receive strength. You say you are sorry and you find forgiveness. Finally, things are changing in your life for the positive; life now has meaning and you want more. Then comes mercy. The more you receive, the more you give. You find it easier to care for others because you now realize that God cares and loves you.

Thus, for the first time in your life, you will find a permanent joy, a joy that is not dependent on the people or what’s happening around you; a joy deep down inside you. It is a joy that only God can give; a joy that no one can take away from you. It is a joy that comes from your changed heart.

And this joy and opportunity to have a pure heart is made possible because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus provided the possibility of purity by His death on the cross. The righteousness and the purity of God are given to all who confess their sins and receive Jesus into their hearts. The happiness of a pure heart is twofold: not only a proper relationship with others but the possibility of a personal relationship with the Lord. As the beatitude promises: “For they shall see God.” The gates of Eden swing open once more. Because of Jesus, God and humanity walk together once more.

Jesus says that to be pure in heart or motive is to have unhindered access to God. The background of this beatitude is from the throne room of a Mideastern monarch. A king was always safely guarded from attack from an enemy. Only those of unquestioned loyalty to the king were ever granted the privilege of entering the throne room. For us today, this beatitude is referring to experiencing God in our daily lives before we meet Him in heaven. Jesus is declaring that we can experience the real presence of God in the here and now if we are utterly devoted to God. God has two dwelling places: one in heaven, and the other in a meek and thankful heart. With a pure heart, we can see and experience God in the people, events and the world around us.

Here Jesus promises that the pure in heart will see God; they will have heavenly eyesight. Of course, many of us have physical limitations to our eyesight, especially as we grow older; I know that when I was in college, I had 20-20 vision, but now I have to wear glasses to drive and read. But even with perfect eyesight, we often fail to see many things because we are biased, prejudiced, have a negative attitude, or worrying about a project or problem. In addition, we fail to see God in the people, events and beauty around us because we are too pre-occupied with other things and our busy schedule; our thoughts and motives are not pure; or we are not really looking for God. It is only when we are right with God that we begin to experience His presence and see His hands at work in our life.

In his book *The Applause of Heaven*, Max Lucado shares a legend about the Taj Mahal in India. The favorite wife of the emperor died. Devastated, he resolved to honor her by constructing a temple that would serve as her tomb. Her coffin was placed in the center of a large parcel of land, and construction of the temple began around it. No expense would be spared to make her final resting place magnificent.

But as the weeks turned into months, the emperor’s grief was surpassed by his passion for the project. Focusing on the construction, he no longer mourned her absence. One day while walking from one side of the construction site to the other, his leg bumped against a wooden box. The emperor brushed the dust off his leg and ordered the workers to throw the box out not realizing that he had ordered the disposal of his wife’s coffin; now forgotten, hidden beneath layers of dust. The one the temple was intended to honor was forgotten, but the temple was erected anyway.

Is this story true or just a legend; who knows? The point is what do you see this morning? How is your eyesight? Do you look at things through the world’s eyes or God’s eyes? Do you see a church building? Or do you see an empty cross and realize that your Savior came to live among us and die for our sins, promising grace, mercy and eternal life to all who believe in and follow Him? Do you see a building and say “what a church?” Or do you see Jesus and say “what a Savior?” Do we see God in the things and people around us? Or is our vision obstructed by the impurities in our life? What hinders you from growing closer to the Lord? As you listen to the closing hymn, give God those things that are holding you back from truly experiencing Him in your daily life. Let your heart be pure! Amen