

A Sunday School teacher asked his class of youngsters, “If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, **would that get me into Heaven?**”

“No!” all the children answered.

“If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, **would that get me into Heaven?**”

Again, the answer was, “No!”

“Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my wife, **would that get me into Heaven?**”

Again, they all answered, “No!”

“Well,” he continued, “**then how can I get into Heaven?**”

A five-year-old boy shouted out, “You gotta be dead!”

You know, I think we can all understand what this youngster was saying – unless by the Rapture, we have to leave this world by death in order to live on in the next – that makes sense, but what he said also rings true about the life of a Christian in the here and now. In order to truly live the Christian life – *we gotta die* – die to self-centeredness, die to selfishness, die to self-righteousness – saying “yes” to God rather than saying “yes” to ourselves. As we live in the kingdom of God and grow in Christ, in the process – and it is a process, we die to self – or said another way, *it’s more of God and less of us*.

That’s the goal – more of God and less of us as we live in this troubled world and interact with others – and for Jesus, who is our guide, it all starts with the heart. A change of heart is the necessary first step in a change of life. That guiding principle of Jesus was at the core of His teaching – it starts at the heart, and it served as the centerpiece of His *Sermon on the Mount*.

Last Sunday, we began our study through this sermon – the Lord’s first recorded sermon, and if you remember, this sermon comes on the heels of the words proclaimed by both John the Baptist and Jesus: “**Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”

They were preaching repentance to a people who were feeling helpless and hopeless over their inability to keep up with a legalistic system that had been imposed upon them by the Jewish religious leaders. These people thought they had little to no chance to enter God’s kingdom – they would miss out because they couldn’t cross all the “T’s” and dot all the “I’s” as they had been told – but here comes Jesus talking about the kingdom – and these people who hiked up the hill were all ears, and they had questions on their minds, such as: “**Where is this**

kingdom?” “How do I get in it?” “What do I got to do?” “How good do I have to be?”

So, to set the tone for His sermon where He answers these questions in a way no one could ever imagine, Jesus begins with what we call the *Beatitudes* – or we might say “*the attitudes that ought to be*” – meaning this is all about character, and in review from last week, He begins with the statement, “***Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***” In other words, when it comes to entering the kingdom, people first need to realize that they are outside the kingdom and cannot get in on their own.

Apart from God, people need to recognize that they are spiritually destitute – cowering beggars who got nothing to offer God when it comes to their own righteousness. Blessed – spiritually content with God’s favor, are those who finally understand they can’t bring anything to the table but filthy rags, and therefore, they must depend solely upon the grace and the mercy of the King to enter into His kingdom.

Jesus then said, “***Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted***” – and when making the connection with the first Beatitude, and they are all connected, Jesus is saying, “Blessed – spiritually content, are those who see their sin the way God sees their sin. They are heart-broken over the weight of it, and they have come to the place of repentance – for its then that God’s complete forgiveness brings comfort. That’s good news – this is all good news – it’s radical news to a people who thought they were shut out.

Now, going with the flow, Jesus adds to His list and says, “***Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.***” If you recall, I said I like the word “*meek*” instead of “*gentle*” although it’s the same Greek word – “*Blessed are the meek*” and it paints the picture of breaking a powerful wild horse, where in the process, it gives up its will and its independence and it yields to its master. Likewise, those who recognize they are spiritually destitute – who grieve over their sinful condition, in meekness, they must give up their will and humbly submit to the will of their loving King.

Jesus continues and says, “***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied,***” which ultimately says to me: Blessed – spiritually content with God’s favor, are those in the kingdom of God who have a passion to *be* what they *see* in their King – who want to be more like Jesus, and

nothing else will satisfy them. In a world, where people hunger and thirst for all the wrong things, blessed are those who have an appetite for the things of God.

Last Sunday, we stopped with *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”* where it seems that Jesus shifted His focus a bit to others who are around us. The merciful – those who are full of mercy – those who understand they are the recipients of the King’s abundant mercy – they find it only fitting to give what they have received to others.

Now, I did this review because these *Beatitudes* are connected, they are progressive in nature, they flow, and being mindful of this – let’s just go with the flow and pick up right where we left off. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 5** and we will begin with **verse 8** where Jesus says,

**“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”**

I think of all the *Beatitudes* – there are more comments about this one than any of the others because this one is so deep and so wide in scope – it encompasses just about everything we are and everything we do for it involves the **heart** – biblically referring to the inner person – the thinking part of us that also influences our will and our emotions. This is where Jesus goes – to the inside of us – to our very core – to the heart.

Now, I don’t know about you, but at first glance for me – those words **“pure in heart”** sound unreachable and unrealistic, but if Jesus said it here, to a people just like you and me, after talking about the blessing of God’s abundant mercy, then maybe there is more to this than first meets the eye.

**So, what does *pure in heart* mean?** In the Greek, the word for **pure** is *“katharos”* and it has two basic meanings. First, it means *“to be cleansed”* – like washing dirty clothing until their clean – and the second meaning for **pure** speaks of being *“unmixed”* – as in uncontaminated – like refined gold that has no impurities – it’s called *“pure gold”* – and when putting these two meanings together – *clean* and *unmixed*, in the context of our character – what Jesus seems to be saying is something like this:

*Blessed – spiritually content with God’s favor, are those whose hearts are washed clean by the mercy of God and whose hearts are undivided in their devotion to Him and whose character is sincere before Him.*

Up on a hill, speaking to a people who desired the kingdom, these words from Jesus – “*pure in heart*” would cause His listeners to be honest with themselves and to be honest with God. These words would cause people to take a deep dive into their own lives – to examine the sincerity of their own hearts and the integrity of their character.

Someone once said, “*Character is what you are when no one is looking.*” I like that, but the truth of the matter is – someone is looking, and it’s God who sees you just as you are – all of you – up and down, inside and out.

*A couple had just purchased a new boat, but they were having some serious problems it. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn’t get their 22-foot boat going. It was very sluggish no matter which way they turned, no matter how much power was applied.*

*After about an hour of trying to make it go, they finally got it to a nearby marina, hoping someone there could tell them what was wrong. A thorough check on the topside of the boat revealed that everything was in perfect working condition. The engine ran fine, the out-drive went up and down, and the propeller was the correct size and pitch.*

*Then, one of the marina guys jumped in the water to check underneath, and then he came up choking on the water because he was laughing so hard, for under the boat, still strapped in place, was the trailer.*

Listen, if you got a trailer secretly strapped underneath your boat so to speak, if what is seen above the water is not the same under the water, if the way you look public is not the way you are in private – rest assured God sees it – God sees your sincerity and your integrity, He sees the genuineness of your character, He sees your heart – and for the pure in heart – if you notice in the verse, Jesus says **they shall see God** for themselves.

Now, just for clarification, Jesus is not talking about physically seeing God, but rather this speaks of living in the presence of God – where the pure in heart realize that God is with them, they hear what He has to say, they know what is on His heart, and they see where He is working.

In a nutshell, this is describing our intimacy with God, and I think we all desire intimacy with Him, but there are those times when we may wonder where God is and why He hasn’t spoken to us or shown us His plans. If you have wondered that,

then take a moment to consider the condition of your heart. Perhaps you need to pray as David did in **Psalm 51**:

***“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit.”***

So, in our next verse, Jesus moves from intimacy with God to harmony with others. In **verse 9**, Jesus continues and says,

**“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”**

Blessed are those who work for and do the things that make for peace. Blessed are the **peacemakers** – those who try to relieve tension instead of adding fuel to the fire so to speak. Blessed are the *peacemakers* not the *peace takers*.

I like how Charles Swindoll explains this passage. He says,

*“A peacemaker seeks resolutions to arguments and debates. A peacemaker works hard to keep offenses from festering into fractured relationships. A peacemaker’s words generate light but not heat. **Proverbs 15:1** says, “**A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**”*

*It is important to note, however, that being a peacemaker does not amount to being a passive person who lies down like a doormat and lets people walk all over them. The kind of peacemaking referred to here is active, not passive. Peacemakers are engaged in a ministry of reconciliation and restoration, entering troubled waters to help bring calm. In this way, they model in this life the ministry of Jesus, the Son of God, who came preaching peace and reconciliation to those willing to hear.”*

Now to piggyback on what Swindoll said, notice that Jesus said **“blessed are the peacemakers”** – not the *peace lovers* and what I mean by that is this:

Sometimes, for the sake of our own peace, we are reluctant to stand in the middle when we called and compelled to do so, and by doing nothing, we can actually make a matter worse.

Listen, it’s really hard to stand in the middle, but that’s what a person who is filled with God’s peace does. In humility – and that’s super important, in humility, they

stand in the middle to help bring peace, just like Jesus did between a Holy God and sinful man. He's called the "*Prince of Peace*" for a reason – His ministry was a ministry of reconciliation, and those in the kingdom who minister in this way, they shall be called sons and daughters of God.

As Christians, we should seek to bring peace between people who are at odds with one another, but not only that, we should seek to bring peace between God and those who are at odds with Him, and we do that by sharing the good news of the Gospel. Those who have experienced the peace of God, can bring the message of peace to man.

Okay, we've come to the conclusion of these *Beatitudes* where Jesus explains that in this upside-down world, there is a cost for doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right reason. Beginning with **verse 10**, Jesus says this,

**<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. <sup>12</sup> "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

This is the blessing that no one really wants. In this progressive list of *Beatitudes*, this is the last one which suggests, to some, that this could also be a kind of a test. If you notice, it's definitely the longest, probably the hardest because we all want to be liked, it's the only one with a command, it's the only one with an explanation, it's the only one repeated twice, and it's the only one that switches the tense of pronouns from "*those*" to "*you*."

So, these words might be surprising to some, because if you realize you are spiritually destitute and dependent upon God, you grieve over your sin leading to repentance, you are humbly yielded to the will of God, you have an appetite for the things of God, you are showing mercy to others, pure in heart, seeking peace – one might expect that everyone would be more than happy to see you, ready to greet you with open arms, but here Jesus says,

*"Oh no, if you live a life of righteousness – a life that is different from this world, if you are My friend and you follow Me, if you stick out like a sore thumb, then you can expect to catch some flack. People will insult you, harass you – they will speak evil of you and they will say false things about you – it's going to happen, and it's all because of Me."*

Now please take note, this persecution that Jesus describes comes because you live the way God wants you to live – this is not because you did something stupid or sinful. That’s totally on you.

What Jesus is describing here are those who have taken a stand for righteousness, they are doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right reason, but in this world, there will be consequences for it – and we see this today.

When someone stands up for Christ – identifies themselves as a follower of Jesus, all kinds of people will come out of the woodwork to attack. You can claim to follow anyone else, but if you name the name of Jesus – the attacks will come from everywhere, to include your own family. You will be called *narrow-minded*, *shallow*, *brain-washed*, *outdated*, *bigoted*, and even *hateful* all because you call yourself a Christian.

It's going to happen to us, but Jesus says to us **“rejoice and be glad”** because the kingdom of heaven belongs to the righteous – that is, God is on our side, even when the world is not, and He also adds that those who endure persecution for the sake of righteousness are in really good company.

*The late Dr. Billy Graham spoke about of a friend of his who went through the Depression in the 1920s, losing a job, a fortune, a wife, and a home. But he was a believer in Jesus Christ, and he tenaciously held to his faith even though he was naturally depressed and cast down by his circumstances.*

*One day in the midst of his depression, he stopped to watch some men doing stonework on a huge church in the city. One was busy chiseling a triangular piece of stone. “What are you going to do with that?” he asked. The workman stopped and pointed to a little opening near the top of the spire.*

*“See that little opening up there near the spire?” he said. “Well, I’m shaping this down here so that it will fit in up there.” The friend said that tears filled his eyes as he walked away from the workman, for it seemed that God had spoken to him personally through the workman telling him that God was shaping him for heaven through his ordeal.*

That’s what these *Beatitudes* are all about – God is shaping our character so we are more like the King and fit for His kingdom.

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