

Blessed Purity (Matthew 5:8)

I want to go back in history a little as we start. Dwight Lyman Moody, or D.L. Moody, was born in 1837. He was saved by God's grace in 1855 and lived through the U.S. civil war. In those years he was most known for his Sunday School work, so much so that Mr. Abraham Lincoln, a guy maybe you've heard of, he heard of Moody and visited his church while president. But Moody was more interested in meeting 2 non-Americans in 1867, C.H. Spurgeon and George Muller, when D.L. visited England. Both encouraged the American in his work, though his theology and methodology differed in some ways from theirs (and from my own). But all agree Moody became one of the most influential American evangelists of the 19th century or ever, speaking to audiences that some estimated were over 100 million in his life.

He being dead still speaks today. We have his voice in a rare recording from before the turn of the century. We don't have recordings of Mr. Lincoln or Mr. Spurgeon, but this man who heard their voices, we get to hear his voice today for our Scripture reading! The beatitudes we've been studying in Mt 5 Sunday nights (and communion Sunday mornings) were one of his favorite passages. I want to let Moody's voice from the late 1800s read today's text.

<PLAY CLIP>

It's a rare blessing to hear one from the 1800s read the text we're studying. But the greater blessing is his, because he has seen God now in way none of us have, and he sees him right now. He read 'blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God,' and he sees God now and is blessed unimaginably. Psalm 73:1 says *'Truly God is good...to those who are pure in heart.'*

In Matthew 5, v. 8, Jesus shows God's goodness and blessing in seeing God from purified hearts. And I don't think we should view this narrowly as only seeing God in the afterlife, i.e., 'they shall see God *after they die*,' that's true, but as Jesus taught on His kingdom there's often a great future and a present foretaste [blind hymnist's 'foretaste of glory divine']. v. 3 ends with 'theirs *is* the kingdom,' present tense, it's a present tense possession now. Jesus taught later in this sermon we're to *seek first His kingdom* and to pray *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (6:10, 6:33). I seek first the kingdom daily, or should more than daily food and drink and clothing, it even comes before *give us this day our daily bread*. I'm to seek first Christ's kingdom, His Kingly rule in my life, His will being done in this life. I seek *to see it more on earth now as it is in heaven* (and it will be perfectly when I get there). Kingdom realities are to begin in this life, even v, 8, seeing God..

Jesus later explained it like this: *'He who believes in Me...He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me'* (12:44-45 NASB). This is the seeing of faith, in this life we can see God, even the glory of God, as we see Jesus and believe in Him. John's gospel begins by saying *'No one has ever seen God* [in context, God the Father in all His glory, but then it says]...*God, who is at the Father's side* [that's God the Son], *He has made Him known ... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory ...'* (1:18, 14 ESV). No man can see God the Father in His glory in this life and alive, but Jesus is the way to see Him, the truth, and the life, we can get to the Father through Him. That's John 14:6, but don't miss the next verse where He says about God the Father: *'From now on you do know Him and have seen Him...* [we see God now; how?] *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'* (v. 7-9)

Those are just a few familiar verses where Jesus talked about seeing God to help us see in the context of what Jesus taught in Mt 5:8 *'they will see God.'* There's a future aspect to seeing God, but there's also a *'from now on'* sense in which we see God the Father through God the Son by the eyes of faith. In today's study let's zoom in to look at the details in v. 8 up close and personal and then zoom out, like a wide-angle view for its big picture in all Scripture

I have some visuals from my Israel trip to help us visualize the setting/scene

SLIDE - CAPERNAUM SYNAGOGUE

Matthew 4:13-17 (ESV) *And leaving Nazareth [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum by the sea ... From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

SLIDE - SEA OF GALILEE

Matthew 4:18 *"While walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers ... And he said to them, 'Follow me...'"*

SLIDE - DECAPOLIS RUINS

v. 25 *"And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis..."* [we visited one of the cities of Decapolis on our trip]

SLIDE - TRADITIONAL SITE OF MT. OF BEATITUDES

Matthew 5:1-2 *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are ...*

SLIDE - SNAPSHOT OF SCENE FROM BEN HUR MOVIE?

Those are visuals of the immediate setting, let's zoom in now to look at v. 8.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. When you see through a zoom lens, you magnify and focus on individual details, and the first word really is not just the first thing you notice about the picture, it's the frame of the picture. *Blessed* frames all of v. 3-10, from beginning to end it bookends or borders the whole, and v. 10 ends the same way the first one does: *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. So from start to finish, the beatitudes are images of what people look like that the kingdom of heaven belongs to. We might say *the blessed person* is the album with 8 different portraits of what that 1 person looks like. Not 8 different people who go to heaven, but 8 different snapshots of the same blessed person. For some of our kids we have albums with different pictures as they grow, they may look a little different but it's the same child in different ages, stages, hair, clothes, hair, front, side, etc.

Just as a baby comes into the world naked with no accomplishments and no resources, with nothing to give, just poor, needy, dependent, v. 3 says that's where this blessed spiritual life begins: *when we see we are poor spiritually*. It's when we see we're that way in spiritual terms that we enter the kingdom. Then from another angle, v. 4 has a picture of the same child repenting from sin. Then from another view, v. 5 presents that person growing in meekness. In v. 6 there's a portrait of the child of God growing by eating and drinking, when their hunger and thirst for righteousness is satisfied in Christ's Word. Then in v. 7 there's a snapshot of the same child showing mercy to another. And as we come to v. 8, what we see is that same child is able to see God.

Jesus is not talking about just *some* Christians in these verses, or just *super*-Christians, He's giving a vision of all His followers, all kingdom citizens, all who inherit heaven and the new earth in v. 5, all who received God's mercy in v. 7. It's all Christians in v. 9 who are called sons of God, not just special Christians. And v. 8 isn't just some believers who see God, all will see God. This passage isn't for a few elite believers, it's evidences in all true believers

Joel Beeke calls the beatitudes the 'birth marks of those who are born again.' They're spiritual inward realities that will show in the life of believers, and they're also areas believers need to grow in. *Blessed* has the idea of supreme happiness, not a superficial happiness or circumstance-based gladness, not a silliness or giddiness, but a supreme happiness based on the blessed favor of God in our life, that we are a child of God as v. 9 says. Do you have a birth mark of happiness as God's child that others can see? It's a joy transcending the sadness of life because of God's comfort at end of v. 4. It's happiness not dependent on this world, as it's looking forward to a new world (end of v. 5)

It's a joyful satisfaction in Jesus in v. 6. Are you satisfied, supremely happy in Him, and can others see that you serve the Lord with gladness? If not, do you hunger and thirst for it, as v. 6 also says? We have an opportunity in the Lord's Table, in its visible symbols of what satisfies hunger and thirst, bread and drink, to crave and pray for this blessed happiness to be more visible in us, to meditate on the mercy we've received in the gospel (like the end of v. 7), and as v. 8 says, to purify our hearts to see and savor God more with joy

[2 Tim 1:5 NAS: *'the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart...'*]

So with that in mind let's pursue the blessedness in v. 8 of *'the pure in heart, for they will see God.'* Lloyd-Jones said it's 'undoubtedly one of the greatest utterances to be found anywhere ... Anyone who realizes even something of the meaning of the words...can approach them only with a sense of awe and of complete inadequacy ... [in v. 8] we are face to face with one of the most magnificent, and yet one of the most solemnizing and searching, statements which can be found anywhere in Scripture. It is, of course, the very essence of the Christian position and the Christian teaching. *'Blessed are the pure in heart...[Jesus] undoubtedly put his emphasis here because of the Pharisees'*¹

Look at v. 20 to see why: *'I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'*

3x chapter 6 mentions doing righteous acts *to be seen by others* (v. 1, 5, 16). The Pharisee's righteousness and religion was all external. It looked pure by what man sees, the outward appearance, but God always looks at the heart. They got in good with Israel's kingdom, but they couldn't get into heaven's. They thought they were ok if they didn't commit the act of murder, as v. 21 says, but in v. 22 Jesus says there's a murder of the heart also, sinful anger. The end of v. 22 explains even hateful hurtful words make us deserve hell. That's the bad news and why we need good news, a heart-purifying Savior.

In v. 23-24 then Jesus explains that when our heart isn't right with a brother or sister our worship isn't right, and we need to go and seek to be reconciled and make right wrongs with fellow worshippers, then come back to worship (their worship then was by sacrifice, in communion the sacrifice of Christ is remembered, but the principle still applies: right worship needs pure hearts)

Ps 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 ... God**"*

All the same key words and concepts from Matthew 5:8 are there in Psalm 24: *blessed -> blessing ... pure in heart -> a pure heart ... see God -> seek the face of God*. The next verse in Psalm 24 says "*Look up...*" (v. 7 NIV). If our heart is pure we're blessed and can look up and see the King of glory. In that psalm, the pure heart is linked with clean hands and holy worship. The pure in heart in Ps 24 doesn't lift up his soul or heart to what's false/impure. Not a perfect heart, a pure heart seeking God's face in private then in public.

[none of our hearts are perfect, but by grace they can be purified]

If you flip forward to chapter 23 Jesus uses a vivid visual of outward purity. If there was a Pharisee version of this beatitude, it would be *blessed are the outwardly clean, who are pious and pure externally, for they shall see God*. But look at Matt. 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!* [i.e., you can't see God without a pure heart like 5:8] *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.*

[the most religious people need purified hearts from the inside out]

Watson paints the picture: 'beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside ... with all sorts of impurity ... like a rotten post overlaid with fine paint. They were like a gold chimney--but within nothing but soot...[but if a Christian's] *body* is the temple of the Holy Spirit...the *heart* is the holy of holies! Oh take heed of defiling the room where God chiefly dwells!...we must not rest in *outward* purity. Morality is not sufficient. A swine may be washed--yet a swine still. Morality does but wash a man, grace changes a man. Morality may shine in the world [but] differs as much from purity as a pebble differs from the diamond. Morality is but strewing flowers on a dead corpse.'¹²

Only a Puritan can write like that! But it's the inward character that counts. D.L. Moody used to say, "If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself." Pharisees [though] lived for reputation, not character.³ *'they loved the approval of man rather than the approval of God'* (Jn 12:43). You can go back to Mt 5, but consider where you love man's praise not God

[our heart loving man's praise shows our heart/motives aren't pure]

In Matt. 5:27, Jesus explains this heart issue also applies to adultery. It's not just the act, v. 28 says: *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

It's all about the heart. The context of *pure in heart* includes pure thoughts.

Temptation is common to man but Jesus speaks of continual looking lusting intention. Heart adultery can take place in the emotions and on the internet. It starts inwardly, but what does Jesus say to do when it enslaves outwardly, when the heart affects the body? Look at v. 29: *If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.*³⁰ *And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

Biblical counselor Jay Adam calls this the principle of radical amputation. If cable TV often causes sin, it's not too radical to cut off service to apply the words of Jesus. I've counseled young men if your smartphone causes sin in this area, applying v. 29 may mean get rid of it and get a phone that only can do calls or texts but can't do videos/internet. If computers cause sin, it's not too radical to cut off access at times when you're tempted or to radically restrict access, like with Covenant Eyes software. Job 31:1 says "*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.*" In v. 9-11 Job talks of the marriage-destroying nature of this sin that burns like the very fire of hell

The next message I give Sunday evening I want to spend more time on the application of purity in a sexually impure world, and I've been asked at our men's conference this month to talk on how the gospel gives power for this battle, which is a temptation on some level for most men and many women. But for today I just want to say a couple things I'll develop more in that time

- if you struggle, not just internal battles with lust but indulging lust actively and continually, and it's getting worse, let me urge you with the words of Jesus to take radical measures and also to seek out help
- you're not alone in that fight, but if you fight it alone you're like a soldier trying to take on the armies of the Islamic State of Iraq alone. You need other trusted soldiers, wise and godly veterans to help you
- the pastor-shepherds you see up front for prayer after the service I think have all helped and are helping people in this area and others, but a struggler needs to seek out that help (you can't do it for others)
- at our resource table in lobby--*Help! I Want to Change* (15 copies)

'Many have tried to change but have experienced a continuing cycle of failure. Dan, a young man in his early twenties has been fighting the temptation of pornography and self-gratification ever since he became a Christian when he was in his mid-teens. He sometimes goes days or weeks without giving in When he fails, he confesses his sin to God, but the feelings of defeat and hopelessness linger...'⁴

There is much hope and help for change with the gospel and God's people. I recommend the book *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* and men can join many soldiers at our men's conference in 3 weeks. 2 Timothy 2:4 says "*No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier ...*"²² Now ***flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.***"

To have a Mt 5:8 pure heart, flee sin with fellow pure-hearted fighters. But I want us to see for today's study in Mt 5:8 that purity starts in the heart, and we need grace-empowered heart change with radical measures like v. 29-30. When eyes in v. 29 are blinded by lust, it keeps us from seeing God in v. 8. When a lustful log is in your eye, you can't see to help others either (7:3-5). As long as sin is where we seek pleasure, we won't see God as our treasure.

Look at chapter 6, v. 21: ***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***²² "*The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,*"²³ *but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness ...* [v. 24 adds] *No one can serve two masters ...*

That principle isn't limited to impurity that comes through our eyes, it says it can be the impurity of loving money, or really anything competing with God in our hearts. A pure heart prays '*give me an undivided heart,*' Ps 86:11 and God answers that prayer in Ezek 11:19 '*I will give...an undivided heart.*' God promises us new covenant believers pure hearts in Ezek 36:25: '*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart*' (NIV)

Has He given you that new heart with new desires? Have you come to Jesus for His cleansing power, are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? If not, I would urge you to come to Him today in repentant faith asking Him to wash away all your impurities by His blood, to purify your heart and make it new. James 4 explains repentant faith: '*Submit yourselves...to God...Cleanse your hands...purify your hearts...Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you*' (v. 7-10). If you need help to, we can pray with you up front after.

Applications for believers as we pray and prepare for Communion:

There's 2 ordinances Christ gave His church, baptism and the Lord's Table, or Communion. Both symbolize the cleansing of sin. Baptism as a believer should be the first ordinance and step of obedience we can also discuss after

The water of baptism visualizes the cleansing of the body, an outward show of what's taken place inwardly when Christ cleansed your heart in salvation once for all. The cup of communion also symbolizes the ongoing purifying relational forgiveness of sin in the New Covenant, as Jesus explained. Some call these sacraments but there's no sacred saving value in physical ritual, in fact partaking communion in an unworthy manner with impure unrepentant hearts has sober warnings in 1 Cor. 11: you're eating and drinking judgment if you don't discern the body rightly or if you're treating holy things lightly. If you're not sure if you have a right understanding of all this, or not sure if you're in right relationship with God or His people, it may not be right for you to partake today, but talk to God in this time about it (or others after). There may be sin between you and God you can make right before eating.

[there may be things to make right with a believer after, Mt 5:24]

Watson: 'Until the heart is pure, all our...religious duties are polluted ... *A filthy hand defiles the purest water*. An impure heart defiles all religious duties ... A pure stream running through muddy ground, is polluted ... so, the holiest duties running through an impure heart, are polluted.'⁵

[But] There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins;

And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains ...

The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;

And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away ...

[last stanza not in hymnal] I believe Thou hast prepared, unworthy though I be,

For me a blood bought free reward, a golden harp for me!⁶ [i.e., a Rev 15:2 worshipper]

Heaven itself is described as being made of *pure gold* in Rev 21 (same Grk word as *pure* in Mt 5:8) with us in *pure robes* in Rev 19 (also same word). Jesus died to purify a bride (Eph 5:25-26, Titus 2:14, same root word *pure*). He purifies us by the washing of the Word and prayer, confession (1 Jn 1:9)

Watson is helpful once more in giving applications for purifying hearts:⁷

1. 'Often look into the word' (Ps 119:140, Jn 15:3, 17:17). He says Scripture is not only a mirror to show us spots on our soul, it's a sink to wash them off [Ps 119:9, 1 Pet 1:22 '*having purified your souls by obedience to the truth*']

2. Trust in Christ. He calls faith 'a soul-cleansing grace' (Acts 15:9: '*having purified their hearts through faith*'). 'We do not willingly injure those friends who we believe, love us...Faith will remove mountains...of pride, lust, envy'

3. We need the Spirit to purify unholy impure hearts. He is the *Holy Spirit*.

4. 'If you would be pure, walk with those who are pure' [2 Tim 2:22, Ps 1:1]

5. 'Wait at the posts of wisdom's doors. Reverence the Word preached.'

[1 Pet 2:2 '*long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow...*']

6. 'Pray for heart purity.' [Ps 51:10 "*create in me a pure heart, O God*" NIV)

Paul says about communion '*let a man first examine himself, and then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats, eats and drinks judgment if he does not discern the body rightly.*' A self-examination includes the body around us. Christ's physical body isn't on the plate but His spiritual body is here in His church, the body of Christ. As we commune with Christ in our communion time, examine yourself in prayer and ask Him to reveal sin you have toward Christ or His body of believers to repent or resolve as you can.

Paul also said as often as we do this in remembrance of Christ, we proclaim His death until He comes. Remembering His return should have a purifying effect: *we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure* (1 Jn 3:2-3 NASB). Fixing on that hope purifies and fulfills ultimately '*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*' After I pray, the men will gather in the back while we sing. Make it a prayer

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;
Try me, O Saviour, know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from ev'ry sin and set me free.
I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill Thy Word and make me pure within.
Fill me with fire where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.⁸

¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1:106, 108.

² Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, Wildside Press, p. 172-74.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 85.

⁴ Jim Newheiser, *Help! I Want to Change*, Day One Publications, p. 7.

⁵ Watson, p. 189-90.

⁶ William Cowper, "There is a Fountain."

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194-197, 203-204.

⁸ J. Edwin Orr, "Search Me, O God."