



A PURIFYING PROMISE

SERIES: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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Matthew 5:8

Sixth Message

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Perspective is critical in life. Consider this letter, written by a college student to her parents:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I just thought I'd drop you a note to clue you in on my plans. I've fallen in love with a guy named Jim. He quit high school after the eleventh grade to get married. About a year ago, he got a divorce. We've been going steady for two months and plan to get married in the fall. Until then, I've decided to move into his apartment (I think I might be pregnant). At any rate, I dropped out of school last week, although I'd like to finish college sometime in the future.

On the next page, she continued:

Mom and Dad, I just want you to know that everything I've written so far in this letter is false. NONE of it is true. But Mom and Dad, it *is* true that I got a C in French and flunked Math. It is true that I'm going to need more money for my tuition payments.

This young woman understood the importance of perspective. Even critical matters, if they are viewed from a certain vantage point, may seem unimportant. As C. S. Lewis said, "Seeing depends on where you stand."

Sight is one of the greatest gifts granted to man. Our friend Gus Marwih is a good reminder of this. Gus was losing his sight to glaucoma, but recent surgery has restored his vision and he is rejoicing over that. But there is a "seeing" that surpasses even this faculty. Someone once bluntly said to Helen Keller, "Isn't it terrible to be blind?" She responded, "Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes, and see nothing."

There is a reality all around us that does not register on our retinas. But in a materialistic world like ours, the only things that seem to matter are those that can be detected with the five senses. As the comedian Flip Wilson used to say, "What you see is what you get." There is, however, another realm of reality, one that is more actual, factual, and more substantial than anything we can see, touch, hear, taste, or smell. That realm is the focus of our thoughts this morning as we examine the sixth beatitude of Jesus, from the gospel of Matthew,

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt 5:8, NASB)

I must admit that I approached my study in this beatitude with some trepidation. It didn't help when I read

Martyn Lloyd-Jones' paraphrase: "Blessed are those who are pure, not only on the surface, but at the center of their being and at the source of every activity." As I pondered the depth of this heart requirement, it troubled me even more, because I had to admit that my heart is the source of my problems. Jeremiah's words kept coming back to me, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick."

Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." He later told his disciples: "Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean...For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, and adultery."

All we need to do is look into our hearts to see the darkness and the mixed motives that so often accompany even our best efforts. Ivan Turgenev, the 19th century Russian novelist, said: "I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like. But I do know what the heart of a good man is like. And it is terrible."

But we also know from the gospels that Jesus was the sinner's friend. Our Lord sided with losers. Those who were closest to him certainly did not have the cleanest track records. So there must be more to a pure heart than moral purity.

What does it mean, then, to be "pure in heart?" The purity that Jesus is referring to is being clean in the sense of not being mixed with anything else. William Barclay wrote that the Greek word for "pure" was used at times of clear water; of metals without alloy; of grain that had been winnowed (freed from the mixture of other particles), and of unmixed feelings.

In the context of the other beatitudes, purity of heart seems to refer in some sense to our relationships. One scholar defines the pure in heart as the "single-minded, who are free from the divided self." In this case, the pure heart is the single heart. It prepares the way for the single eye, which Jesus makes reference to in the next chapter.

More precisely, the primary reference here is to sincerity. As Psalm 24 declares, the person with "clean hands and a pure heart" is one "who does not lift his soul to what is false (an idol) and does not swear deceitfully." In their relationship with God and man, the pure in heart are free from falsehood; so they are "the utterly

sincere" (JBP). Their whole lives, both public and private, are transparent before God and men. Their very hearts, including their thoughts and motives, are pure, unmixed with anything devious, ulterior, or base. Hypocrisy and deceit are abhorrent to them; they are without guile. The thought is represented in the words "singleness" and "sincerity." It holds the idea of being without guile, being sincere and honest in motive.

The word *sincere* is actually a Latin word, meaning "without wax." The term means "sun tested." The ancients fired their fine porcelain in kilns, and sometimes in the process of firing, cracks appeared in the finished product. Dishonest merchants smeared wax over these cracks and tried to pass them off as flawless porcelain. That worked—unless the pieces were held up to the light of the sun. Honest merchants would declare their wares to be *sine cera*—"without wax."

How few of us live one life and live it out in the open! We are tempted to wear a different mask and play a different role according to what the occasion demands. This is not reality, but play-acting, which is the essence of hypocrisy. Some people weave around themselves such a tissue of lies that they can no longer tell which part of them is real and which is make-believe. Alone among men, Jesus Christ was absolutely pure in heart. He was utterly guileless.

There is story told about some American soldiers during the Korean War who rented a house and hired a local boy to do their housekeeping and cooking. It was common for soldiers to get that kind of set-up for easy-come, easy-go, easy-pay.

The little Korean fellow they hired had an unbelievably positive attitude. He was always smiling. So the soldiers played one trick after another on him. They nailed his shoes to the floor. He'd get up, pull out the nails with pliers, slip on the shoes, and maintain his excellent spirit. They put grease on the stove handles, and he would wipe each one off, smiling and singing his way through the day. They balanced buckets of water over the door, and he'd get drenched. But he would dry off and never fuss, time after time.

Finally, they became so ashamed of themselves they called him in one day and said, "We want you to know that we're never going to trick you again. Thank you for having such an outstanding attitude." He asked, "You means, no more nail shoes to floor?" "No more." "You means, no more sticky on stove knobs?" "No more." "You means, no more water buckets on door?" "No more." "Okay then, no more spit in soup!" he responded with a smile.

It is easy to do that, isn't it? On the outside we appear one way, but on the inside, we are spitting in the soup.

That is why Jesus had such a hard time with the Pharisees. He was forever trying to get these men who were so obsessed with external, ceremonial purity to look inside themselves. He told them on one occasion: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you

hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

"Hypocrisy" is the word which Jesus used to characterize this display. In classical Greek, the *hupocritos* was first an orator, then an actor. In the ancient Greek dramas, an actor would place a large, grinning mask in front of his face and quote his comedy lines. Then at an appropriate place he would take a frowning, sad mask and quote his tragic lines, and the audience would respond appropriately. So the actor was called a *hupocritos*—one who wears a mask. Figuratively, the word came to be applied to anybody who treats the world as a stage on which he plays a part. Such a one lays aside his true identity and assumes a false one. He is no longer himself, but he is in disguise, impersonating someone else. He wears a mask.

Now in the theater, of course, there is no harm or deceit involved in actors playing their parts; it is an accepted convention. The audience know they are watching a drama; they are not taken in by it. The trouble with the religious hypocrite, however, is that he deliberately sets out to deceive people. He is like an actor in that he is pretending (so that what the audience sees is not the real person but a part, a mask, a disguise), yet he is quite unlike the actor in this respect: he takes some legitimate religious practice and turns it into what it was never meant to be, namely a piece of make-believe, a theatrical display before an audience.

A hypocrite is a one who is outwardly correct but inwardly corrupt. The Pharisees taught decency, but their hearts were defiled. Their rules could not correct the state of their own hearts, nor could they correct others.

Charles Spurgeon said: "It is not our littleness that hinders Christ; but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ; it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back His hand."

This is clearly evident in John 9, in the incident in which Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth. The Pharisees became upset by this, because Jesus had broken one of their rules by healing on the Sabbath. Later on in the story, Jesus reveals the message which the miracle represented. He said: "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains." The distinction in the story

is not between those who were blind and those who could see, but between those who knew they were blind and those who claimed they could see.

It is significant that the man in that story was *born* blind, and he is a *beggar*. He is representative of all of us, because in a very real sense we are all blind from birth; and we are all beggars, unable to free ourselves from our predicament. We sin because we are sinful. "The one spiritual disease," G.K. Chesterton wrote, "is thinking that one is quite well." For this reason Jesus reserved his harshest words for people would not admit that there was something basically wrong with them, those who still believed that there was something good about them that God ought to accept. Amazingly, it was the clergy of Jesus' day who could not see their own need.

That is why Jesus began these beatitudes by saying: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Blessed are those who realize that they have nothing within themselves that commends them to God. So the first step to clear sight is a plea for help, an acknowledgment of moral destitution.

James writes in the third chapter of his letter that the wisdom from God is first "pure" (the same word). It is real, authentic, sincere. In our innermost being, we must be real, honest and transparent before God. James also says that such wisdom is "without hypocrisy." The man who is wise in this sense is genuine; he is the same on the inside as he professes to be on the outside. His whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and man. Sincerity is what makes our lives powerful and influential. Everything else springs from this quality.

Many years ago, when my wife and I were living in Long Beach, the newspaper ran a story about a man who went into a local fast food restaurant to buy chicken. Inadvertently, the store manager handed him the box in which he had placed the day's profits instead of the box of chicken. It seemed the manager used a chicken box to camouflage the nightly deposit. The fellow took the box, and he and his companion drove away. When they arrived at the park, they opened the box and discovered the money. That would be a vulnerable moment for anyone! But this man got into his car, returned to the restaurant, and gave the money to the manager. As you can imagine, the manager was ecstatic. This man probably had saved him his job. He exclaimed, "Stick around! I want to call the newspaper and have them take your picture. You are the most honest man I have ever met." But the man refused. When asked why, he replied, "Well, I'm married, and the woman I'm with is not my wife." On the surface, we can look honest and sincere (we would give back the dime in the phone booth!), but underneath is the real test. People are looking for a demonstration, not an explanation.

The Lord wants us to be free, to live our lives out in the open. He wants us to have nothing to hide, no repu-

tation to defend, and nothing to preserve about ourselves. Everywhere today, people are crying out that they need to "be themselves." But they go about it the wrong way. We are taught that the way to be "me" is to think about myself—"my" advantage, "my" efforts, "my" rights—and to defend and demand them. But Scripture says that there is another way: it is to not be afraid to look at the evil in your heart and in your life, because you have another basis on which you can receive the acceptance and approval of God. It is a gift to you! It comes by faith, by continually accepting anew the gift of righteousness, of already being pleasing to God, and on that basis serving him out of a heart of gratitude for what you already have.

One of the great privileges of being an elder is praying for individuals in this congregation. Recently, we prayed for someone who has been ill for some time. This woman shared with us a tragic tale of difficulties and pain. Just when we were about to pray for her, she felt compelled to go deeper, and she laid bare her life to us. At that moment, all of us were taken to the cross of Christ. We felt plunged in his blood; we felt his cleansing bath. God was in that room. Though we could not see him, we knew he was there. It was our privilege, as his emissaries, to say to this woman, "You are clean. You are forgiven."

That is the promise of Jesus to each one of us. If we come clean, if we are open and sincere, we will "see God."

Some time back, *Leadership* magazine carried an unsigned article by a pastor who confessed to years of bondage to pornography of the grossest kind. He related what finally released him and enabled him to confess his sins. It is confirmation of what we are saying. This man ran across a book by Francois Mauriac, a Catholic French novelist, entitled *What I Believe*. In the book, the author concluded that there was one powerful reason to seek purity, the one Christ gave in this beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is this promise that the pure will see God that empowers us to share our struggle in our battle against lust. This pastor wrote:

The thought hit me like a bell rung in a dark, silent hall. So far, none of the scary, negative arguments against lust had succeeded in keeping me from it . . . But here was a description of what I was missing by continuing to harbor lust: I was limiting my intimacy with God. The love he offers is so transcendent and possessing that it requires our faculties to be purified and cleansed before we can possibly contain it. Could he, in fact, substitute another thirst and another hunger for the one I had never filled? Would living water somehow quench lust? That was the gamble of faith.

In reality, it is no gamble, because we cannot lose when we turn to God. The way to fight lust is to feed faith with the precious and magnificent promise that the pure in heart will see, face to face, the all-satisfying

God of glory.

Let us therefore purify our hearts. Let us open up and confess to God the things that we have never before confessed, and then ask him whom he might want us to confess them to. If we will do this, if we will live one life, and live it out in the open, the unequivocal promise of Jesus is that we will see God. The thing that is holding us back from that is fearing that if we confess, we will never see God! But the truth of the matter is this: the thing that is hindering our intimacy with God is our inability to confess those things. May God grant us the courage, and the grace, to confess, so that all of us may experience the glorious promise of Jesus,

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

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