

AM Matthew 4:23-5:12

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Preacher: Rev Jonathan Watson

- [0 : 0 0] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew's Gospel for our Bible reading. We've been looking at this passage for the last number of times I've visited with you.
- And I want to continue in the next section, the opening section of the sermon that the Lord Jesus preached on the mountain.
- And we'll begin our reading in chapter 4 from verse 23. This account of the display of his great power is so very important.
- Because it shows us the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the special nature of the time in God's purposes.
- That saw him come into this world. Nothing like this had been seen before. And nothing like this has been seen since.
- [1 : 0 9] This was the inauguration. The bringing into being of the kingdom of God. Matthew 4 verse 23.
- And he went throughout all Galilee. Teaching in their synagogues. And proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. And healing every disease and every affliction among the people.
- So his fame spread throughout all Syria. And they brought him all the sick. Those afflicted with various diseases and pains.
- Those oppressed by demons. Epileptics and paralytics. And he healed them.
- And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis. And from Jerusalem and Judea. And from beyond the Jordan.
- [2 : 1 4] Seeing the crowds. He went up on the mountain. And when he sat down. His disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth. And taught them saying.
- Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn. For they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they shall be satisfied.
- Blessed are the merciful. For they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart. For they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers.
- For they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- [3 : 1 7] Blessed are you. Blessed are you. When others revile you. And persecute you. And utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
- Rejoice and be glad. For your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- May God bless this reading of his word to us. Let us bow again in prayer. And please turn with me in your Bibles to the passage that we read together.
- And I want to focus our attention this morning on verses 8 to 12 of Matthew chapter 5. Let's read these verses again to keep them fresh in our minds.

Blessed are the pure in heart. For they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers. For they shall be called sons of God.

[4 : 22] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you. Blessed are you. When others revile you.

And persecute you. And utter all kinds of evil against you. Falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad. For your reward is great in heaven.

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. We've been looking through the Beatitudes. These statements of blessing which the Lord made to this vast multitude who were following him.

And drew near him as he went up on the mountain and sat down and opened his mouth to preach. And one of the things that I've said before is that you cannot pick and choose which of these Beatitudes you want to follow.

Or you want to pray about or adopt into your life. The Beatitudes come as a whole single package.

[5 : 33] They are not a series of optional extras that you can choose to reject the other. One Beatitude. One statement of blessing flows into the next.

They are connected together. There is a logical order in which they come. So for example, the poor in spirit mourn for their sins.

And as a result, they are marked by meekness. They know the truth about themselves.

They know what they are truly like in the presence of God. And such men and women hunger and thirst for righteousness.

And they receive it. And since they have been filled only because of the Lord's mercy, they have become in turn full of mercy towards others.

[6 : 44] And then in Matthew chapter 5 verses 8 to 12, three further words of blessing follow. And these are addressed to the pure in heart, to the peacemakers, and to the persecuted.

And these Beatitudes are also part of the same sequence. And they belong to this beautiful, detailed picture that the Lord Jesus Christ is giving us of what a mature disciple, citizen of his kingdom looks like.

So as we become pure in heart, we see God. But the God that we see is the God of peace, who through the blood of the cross makes peace.

To see who he is is to have a desire to bring others into this peace of God that we ourselves have experienced.

And therefore, the pure in heart become peacemakers. But what do they discover? Well, like the Lord Jesus Christ, who was pure in heart and a peacemaker, they are persecuted.

[8 : 18] And yet, they can rejoice even in persecution. Because Jesus says, this puts them into the same category as the prophets of God who were persecuted for the same reasons before them.

So let's begin with the first that we're going to look at this morning. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Verse 8 of chapter 5.

Now at first glance, Jesus seems to be thinking here about those whose hearts are morally pure, clean in the sight of God.

God. And there can be no doubt that the Lord's words have Ezekiel's prophecy in the background where the prophet Ezekiel declares God's word to the ancient nation of Israel which had gone astray from God.

The God who had redeemed them out of Egypt. And in Ezekiel chapter 36 and verses 25 and 26, God through his prophet makes this promise. He says, I will sprinkle clean water on you.

[9 : 47] And that's really the gospel, isn't it? We are sinners just like those Old Testament people of God, the Israelites. We've turned our backs upon the God who made us and who has done so many things for us.

And yet this God in his grace says, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart. It's one thing to have the law of God but it's another thing to have a heart that wants to keep the law of God and be obedient to it.

And in God's saving grace he not only gives us his word to show us how we must live, what we're to believe, how we're to live in the light of that belief but he also gives us a heart that actually believes and the heart that wants to obey his law.

And this is the promise that God gave through his prophet Ezekiel. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you.

[11 : 11] So the Lord's words here blessed are the pure in heart would have sparked an echo off in the mind of those who were listening and who were familiar with their Bibles with their Old Testament scriptures.

And yet this purity of which the Old Testament speaks in many places is not just Ezekiel is not only a matter of cleanliness although it does involve cleanliness but it's also a matter of the commitment of the heart and the will to the Lord.

The background I think for this statement lies in one of the Psalms and if you turn over to Psalm 24 and keep that Psalm in mind you will see there that in that Psalm especially verses 4 to 6 we're told in answer to the question who can go into the hill of the Lord who can dwell in God's holy place and the answer is this 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 he will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation such is the generation of those who seek him who seek the face of the God of Jacob we can't help but think that this is also the background to the Lord's statement in

Matthew chapter 5 and verse 8 those who may stand in the Lord's holy presence are those who have clean hands and a pure heart but it also says that such who have clean hands and a pure heart have not lifted up their souls to what is false now that is clearly a reference in context to idolatry they have not lifted up their hearts their souls to a false God you remember the great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and God says you shall have no other gods besides me I am the Lord who redeemed you I alone am to be worshipped the person who is able to go into God's holy hill and to dwell in

God's presence is yes somebody who has clean hands and a pure heart but is also somebody who is totally committed to this God and to what this God has said in his word about how he is to be worshipped so the impurity involved here is the impurity of compromise the Old Testament Israelites never totally removed the Lord from their minds or from their worship but they compromised what God had said and they added into what God had said and they worshipped other gods and they bowed down to idols and even some of these idols they called the Lord and said we're worshipping the Lord by worshipping this idol like at the time of the golden calf in the days of Moses but the person who has clean hands and a pure heart is totally committed to the

[15 : 36] Lord there is no room in his heart for the worship of other things so the impure heart is not simply unclean it is undecided it is divided it's like the picture that James in the New Testament paints when he describes the double minded man in James chapter 1 verse 8 and 4 verse 8 as well who is unstable in all his ways trouble with that kind of person is that his heart is divided he's got a double mind he's got a foot in both camps so we must not only be morally clean clean hands but we have to have a pure heart that is united in the fear and worship and love and service of the

Lord purity of heart then is really to want one thing one thing to be one in heart is to be uncompromisingly dedicated to Jesus Christ and as we were trying to say to the children earlier this is the only way that you or I are going to see God he is a great saviour he is a great lord but great things can be completely obscured by small things and insignificant things if those small things and insignificant things are brought close to our eyes the issue therefore is not how important something is in itself but how closely we fix our gaze upon it we see that this world has nothing to compare to Jesus

Christ and all that he offers to us when we hold this world and its contents too near when we're tempted to take our eyes off the Lord Jesus Christ when we're preoccupied with the things of this life then we no longer see Christ and his glory so clearly and the value of this world grows out of all proportion and that will lead to stumbling and to falling and to compromise and not knowing the blessedness this happiness that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks about in Matthew chapter 5 so the Lord's teaching here provides us with a simple test of the strength of our

Christian lives ask yourself this morning how clearly how clearly do we see God in all his glory do we see him as clearly as we used to see him maybe when we first became Christians when we first trusted the Lord when in our need we called upon his name and he came and saved us hearts were full of Christ we couldn't take our eyes off him the world was nothing to us is that how it is today or has he become obscure and is he far distant instead of looking through the right end of the telescope by faith we've turned it round and he's so small and far away are we pure in heart and then the next beatitude says blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of

God now follow the Lord's line of argument or logic here God is described in scripture as the God of peace and as such God himself made peace for us through his son Jesus Christ by Christ's death God has reconciled us to himself so making peace is part of God's gracious character now those who have become members of God's family share in God's likeness they have the family likeness peace and therefore the sons of the God of peace will themselves be peacemakers now like many of the other beatitudes this one has been rested and wrenched out of its context many many times so it's important to say that

[21 : 09] Jesus here isn't speaking about the mere cessation of war or hostilities between warring nations he is speaking about the ending of hostilities between man and God this is the peace which the Lord Jesus Christ came to establish now the Old Testament word for peace is the Hebrew word shalom and that word shalom is a very rich word and conveys the ideas of wholeness and health and well being shalom could almost be translated as salvation so those who make peace are those who earnestly seek the shalom the salvation of their fellow men and women now hidden logically in what the Lord

Jesus says about peacemakers is a recurrent thought throughout the whole of the New Testament you cannot be a Christian without seeking the salvation of your fellow men and women in other words evangelism spreading the good news about Jesus Christ and the peace of God in him is not an option but it is something which every member of every fellowship of Christian people is expected to show an interest in evangelism is part and parcel of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ well how can this be drawn out from what Jesus says here well very simply those who make peace are called sons of God since all Christians are sons of God all Christians are expected to share in the work of peacemaking that doesn't mean that we're all equally gifted or talented in all aspects of personal evangelism but it does we all share in the responsibility of living lives and speaking words that contribute in their own little way to the salvation of other people you remember how Paul at the beginning of

Romans chapter 1 speaks about being under an obligation or being a debtor what was this debt what was this obligation that he lived under it was to make Christ and his gospel known he was a debtor both to his own people the Jews but also to the Gentiles and that's a good way for us to think of ourselves we owe a debt we have an obligation obligation and when we're walking with the Lord in the light of his word we have a willingness to share that obligation with those around us we have experienced the peace of God and as we enjoy that peace of God so we will want others to come and share it with us I think there's another dimension to the peacemaking work or activities of the children of God and that is this the sons of

God will seek peace not only in the world out there that others might enjoy and come into the peace experience that we ourselves share but we want to encourage peace and harmony within and among the fellowship of God's people it's part of a minister's vows when he is installed in a church he promises to keep the peace of the church and that's an easier thing to vow than to actually uphold and keep and it's sad to say that many churches are destroyed because the members or leaders don't live up to their obligation and responsibility precisely here to keep the peace of the church the apostle

Paul has two beautiful word pictures that help us to fulfill this aspect of peacemaking and one of them is found in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 15 where Paul writes let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and the picture there is of peace acting like a referee in a sport in a game when something happens to threaten the unity of the body peace stands up and blows his whistle and rules that that action or that attitude is out of line and has no part in the game now Paul doesn't mean that when we're to feel peace deep down or he doesn't say that this is something that you always have to experience but what he is saying is that you have an obligation and responsibility whether you feel the peace or not feel the peace you have an awareness in your mind you have an understanding that peace must rule and govern our relationships within the fellowship of believers and that we will subordinate our own priorities our will our position our natural desires in the interests of keeping the shalom the peace the well being the blessing of the fellowship and then in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 3

[28 : 11] Paul uses another word picture and in that passage in the context there he's urging the Christians in Ephesus to practice humility and gentleness and patience and forbearance and then he adds these words be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace that's a beautiful picture peace is like a bond I remember reading in Sinclair Ferguson of an illustration that he quotes from the Puritan author John Owen and his illustration helps us to understand this second word picture of peace being like a bond that keeps Christian people together within fellowships imagine a man collecting wood for his fireplace he finds a good supply of branches but there are varied shapes and sizes some are long and thin and others are short and thick some are straight others are twisted but he binds them all together with a rope and in one bundle he is easily able to carry them back to his house and so it is in the church what a varied bunch of people we are how will

Christ carry us home he ties us together with a bond of peace cut that bond and you cut the cord that Christ himself has tied so can we honestly say to ourselves that we have faithfully sought the peace of Christ's church blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God and then finally and very quickly blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven and then you notice he switches from those to you and he makes it very personal those who are listening blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you now you mightn't think that the statements of blessing would end on such a note persecution really can we be blessed when persecuted for righteousness sake on account of Jesus you would think the opposite would be the case that men and women who are poor in spirit and who mourn for their sin and who live lives of gracious meekness and who long for

God's righteousness and who show mercy to others and who are pure in heart and who seek peace between God and man you would expect that such people would be welcomed with open arms by the world after all such men and women are what the world truly needs today but the world in which we live thinks that it will welcome Christian people with open arms until until it meets a real genuine Christian somebody who is fully committed to the Lord Jesus Christ you see the world is in rebellion against God and Jesus said that if the world persecuted him then they would also persecute his followers you find that in

John chapter 15 in verse 20 he told them if the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you John chapter 15 verse 18 do you see why Christians are persecuted here the verse says because of the sake of righteousness because of their loyalty and commitment to Jesus Christ you see real loyalty to Jesus Christ creates friction in the hearts of those who only pay Jesus lip service loyalty does something to their consciences and that leaves them with only two alternatives one they repent and follow the Lord Jesus the Christian whom they have seen whose life and whose words bring conviction of sin leads them to repentance and they want to follow

Jesus or if that doesn't happen then they kind of double down and they become aggressive in their opposition to that Christian they try to silence his voice silence his witness and testimony often their only way of silencing Christ is by silencing Christ's servants in the world and persecution whether it be subtle which probably most of us here have experienced but it could also be very direct and unsubtle will be the result and so at the beginning of the Christian life we need to grasp the reality of persecution it's a very real thing a very real thing we're going to be opposed that opposition can take many different forms but if we're aware that being a

[34 : 58] Christian following the Lord Jesus will mean opposition and persecution for his sake then that will save us from being discouraged and disillusioned when that opposition comes instead we will remember what Jesus the great persecuted one said rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you persecution for the sake of Christ is one of the ways that the Lord assures us comforts us convinces us that we are his children and that we're in a long line of faithful followers of the

Lord Jesus Christ the prophets were treated in exactly the same way and they were men of God whose God's spirit came upon them and they proclaimed God's word but were the people to whom they proclaimed that word happy to hear it no they wanted to continue in their sin and rebellion against God and so they shut the prophet down many of them were persecuted think of Jeremiah think of Isaiah Isaiah according to biblical tradition was sawn in two because he was a servant who brought the Lord's message to his people ours yours is the kingdom of God if you are being persecuted for

Christ's sake for righteousness sake on account of belonging to Jesus so this then is the life of divine blessing do we know it are we experiencing it are we enjoying it blessed blessed blessed blessed blessed blessed blessed rejoice and be glad you know people think going to church is depressing and yet here we are in church this morning and we've been told this is the way to true happiness this is what the

Lord Jesus wants you to experience in him he wants you to go from this place rejoicing and being glad because you know that he's given you the kingdom and that you stand in great company with the prophets whom God chose to bring his word to his people may God bless his word to us let us pray heavenly father