

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

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Date: 31 March 2016

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- [0 : 0 0] We shall turn now for a short while to the chapter that we read in the New Testament and the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, and we can read again verse 8.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- I'm sure you'll all realise that the words that we have before us form part of the Sermon on the Mount.
- Some of your Bibles will have that title in the margin. One of the greatest theologians of recent years, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, wrote a book that many of you may have read.
- And those of you who have read anything written by Martin Lloyd-Jones will realise that when he handles a subject, he handles it in a very detailed way.
- [1 : 1 9] And certainly, for somebody like myself, when I read what Martin Lloyd-Jones has written, or what has been written down from what he has said, he has a very forensic way of analysing the Scriptures.
- And he goes into it in great detail. And there is a book that contains a series of sermons that he preached, I think, on this topic.
- And with regard to the Israel, this is what he says. Undoubtedly, this is one of the greatest utterances to be found anywhere in the realms of Holy Scripture, which is a very major statement, if you like.
- And he follows that with these words. Anyone who realises even something of the meaning of the words can approach them only with a sense of awe and of complete inadequacy.
- Which, when I read these words, I thought to myself, well, you're always taking a chance when you try and speak publicly on these words.
- [2 : 4 6] But then at the same time, there's so much in the words of the Lord that you realise that you can say a lot, perhaps, because there is a lot to be said.
- And even if the little that you say is a little, it is still worth saying. And I remember when I was in college, one of the lecturers was the late Professor Douglas Macmillan.
- And he said to us on more than one occasion, he said, Remember, he said, even a dwarf can see far when he's standing on the shoulders of a giant. So, we've always got to remember that when we belittle ourselves, when we read the Scripture and say, well, there's a truth here that's beyond me.
- Or there's a truth here that's perhaps difficult for us to understand. But it still merits study and attention.
- And as somebody else said to myself as a young Christian, I'm just as related to the Holy Spirit as Calvin was. Meaning that if we depend on the Holy Spirit to open the Word of God to us, then we can glean from it what the Lord intends us to gain for ourselves.
- [4 : 2 1] So, looking at this verse, we remember that it comes in a context, it comes as part of a sermon, if you like.

Well, it's called a sermon, but I'm sure it's not like a sermon that we've ever sat through. And the major part of his congregation are people who need to hear what he has to say.

And what he has to say is really a challenge to the accepted behaviour of his own day. And the behaviour that he's challenging really has to do with their religious life, which is, for the main part, focused on how they behave outwardly, with little regard given to the inner man, or what's going on between themselves and God within their heart.

And Jesus wants those who are hearing this message to understand that a true religious life between man and God has to do with the inner man, not how men see, but what God sees.

So we need to bear that in mind as we think of this verse. And I'm not belittling the verse in any way. I'm not saying that the verse is not a verse that challenges us.

[6 : 03] The more we look at it, the more we think about it, we tend to shun away from it because of the demands that it's making.

One of the commentaries that I have on the bookshelf has subtitled his commentary, the Sermon on the Mount, but the subtitle he gives to it is the character of the disciple.

And he gives it that subtitle for a reason because what Jesus has to say is a challenge to how we behave and how we behave not only with regard to others, but how we behave before God as those who understand who God is and what we are as his creatures, living in dependence upon.

So there are three things we can say or try to say about this verse. And as I said, if I'm going to compare myself to Martin Lloyd-Jones, well, he probably would say far more in his introduction than I would in a sermon.

But there are three things that I want us to think about and I'm sure you can meditate on this for yourself and enhance what you hear with your own thoughts.

[7 : 38] The first thing is that we have to understand what he does not mean by the pure in heart.

And I suppose that's an obvious place to start, but we must never overlook the obvious. And we must never undertake the obvious because sometimes we bypass it and when we do bypass it, we miss out significant aspects to what is meant to be understood.

So when we're thinking of the pure in heart, we need to understand what Jesus does not mean by that description. But then we have to try and understand what is meant by the pure in heart.

And perhaps that's the hardest part, having to look at this and think of it as a series of statements which we might think is descriptive of a whole host of different people.

But in reality, it's a description of one person who has this or these characteristics. And they have these characteristics because they are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 03] So what is it that we can think of a person whose pure in heart is? And then thirdly, what is meant by we shall see God?

And again, perhaps that itself is something when we read it, first reading, we think, well, there's something that matters because I'm told from the scripture that God is invisible.

And yet, here in this statement, Christ is saying that we shall see the one who is invisible. And we need to understand what he means by that. Well, what is it not, first of all?

What do we believe it not to mean? We know that John, the apostle, just for example, sees that there is no patient who can see that they are without sin.

If we see, John sees, we are without sin, we are deluding ourselves. We are deceiving ourselves. And he goes further than that.

[10 : 30] He says the truth is not in us. But then the same person, when you read on in that epistle, he tells us that this person who is without sin, has sin, or that person who is without sin, or who is deluded in thinking that he is without sin, is somebody who is a sinner.

and that sinner, is someone who can speak of himself as being without sin, because of his relationship with Christ Jesus, because he is born of God.

In chapter 5 of 1 John, we read, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father, whoever has been born of him.

By this we know that we love the children of God and obey his commandments. So this is the law of God, that we keep his commandments. And so on. And he describes to us the relationship that exists between a believer and the heavenly Father.

And that relationship, which Christ himself speaks of in the Gospel of John, tells us that this person who is born of God is somebody who does not sin.

[12 : 11] And that's not a contradiction, it's just an explanation of what what Jesus is teaching here in Matthew's Gospel.

And we find it again in Luke's Gospel. He is teaching us the only way that we can speak of ourselves as being without sin is when we think of ourselves in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith.

That's the key to what Jesus is saying here. We must remember that the world in which Jesus lived and the people that he taught at that particular time were a people who were very dependent upon their own lives being the means by which they achieved a relationship with God by which they were comfortable.

A relationship where they were in some way making God someone who was obliged to them. They were self-righteous and their righteousness they considered to be adequate.

And their righteousness was something as far as they were concerned that it was laudable and commendable and in fact they considered it sufficient to be pleasing to God.

[13 : 48] And that was the mindset that affected so many that appeared before the Lord Jesus Christ. They were governed by a religion of works.

And again and again when Jesus confronts some in there you'll find the same question asked and the question if you think of it is a question which any one of us would ask what must I do to be saved or in the case of the rich young ruler he has fulfilled all of these commands what else can I do?

The mind was so taken up with the idea that salvation was by works and that God in some way was going to be made a God who would receive them on the basis of what it is that they had accomplished.

And Jesus' response again and again when he confronts individuals when he confronts Pharisees or groups or religious leaders his response is the same he challenges their thinking because he wants them not to be satisfied with their own works but to understand that their own works will never satisfy you must he said or you shall be as perfect as your father in heaven is perfect and you may think that's a mindset that belongs in the days of Jesus but it is a mindset that is human and it is an instinct that is ongoing that is repeated in the experience of I believe everyone who is a child of Adam who is a descendant of Adam you measure yourself against standards that you claim from society or that you yourself feel comfortable with so that you can easily attain to them you can pardon the analogy if I was going to compete in a sports event let's say the hijab

I would make sure if I was going to jump that the bar would be at a level that I could get over if I was going to set the bar at a height that I was going to attempt I would make sure that it would be something that I could manage spiritually many people have the same attitude their religion is a religion of achievement and their achievements are measured against usually against others and usually they are lesser sort of others they are people who are lawbreakers they are people who are in some way easily beaten as far as the standard that is set and Jesus is saying look that is not my standard that is not the way you should think when you are talking about the pure in heart you have to understand that what

[17 : 37] Jesus is understanding by it is not those who have in some way accomplished a way of life that is satisfactory in the sight of God you remember when Samuel was sent by God to choose a king when Saul had gone away from the Lord he was directed to the house of David he went you measured up all of David's brothers there each one would come and he would tie them up and he would say oh well he looks alright he fits the bill he's okay but the Lord made known to him that it was simple the

Lord sees not as man sees the Lord looks on the heart not on the outward appearance and it's a simple message it's a simple lesson Jesus himself later on in his gospel in Matthew's gospel chapter 23 he deals with Pharisees who the description that he gives of them they're not they don't find it difficult to understand what he has to say because he's quite scathing in his consideration of this people and the way they think or to you scribes and Pharisees says hypocrites for you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness so you also outwardly appear righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness we want to you scribes and

Pharisees hypocrites for you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous saying if we had lived in the days of our fathers we would have not taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets thus you witness against yourselves that you are the sons of those who have murdered the prophets and so on Jesus wants us to understand that the pure in heart are not those who demonstrate outwardly that purity by their actions by their seemingly good works by their attainment to righteousness which they are satisfied with but which overlooks the fact that God is holy and God requires holiness without which you cannot see the Lord and Christ wants us to understand that when we begin to think about these words we must discard any emotion that we have that the purity of heart which he is speaking of is not evidenced by by outer performance and external realities which we which we look at with a closeness which seems to suggest that we can estimate what's going on in a person's heart or mind by seeing what they do outwardly so what is

Christ speaking of well if we are Christians we are not I don't believe that any one of us can say that we are not concerned at the impurity of our own heart if we read through the prophecy of Jeremiah for example Jeremiah's confession of his own heart of what it's like is a confession that we can readily identify with since the heart of man is desperately wicked who can move it and he has it desperately seek and any person who's a Christian would say that because they have discovered the nature of man as it were and the confession of such sin in the heart is not really a confession that goes against what

Christ is saying because we said at the outset we quoted Martin Lloyd Jones when Martin Lloyd Jones handles the subject he went into great detail but one thing he says is that when we're asking the question what is the heart of man of which he speaks that we need to understand that the heart means the whole being of man that it means not just the emotional side to man that it means the mind it means the spirit it means I suppose it does include emotions in it but it means really it's more than just intellectual and we need to understand that what

[23 : 54] Christ is challenging really is a challenge to the way that we behave from the inside out not just our actions but what motivates our actions not just our words but what lies behind our words because we're very adept at seeing the right things at the right times we know what's expected of us we know what will please and what will not please I go to the school occasionally and I was asking the children I was asked to deal with heroism as a topic and I asked the children who are your heroes and one person said God and the other person said Jesus and they said the right things to the minister because they knew the minister was asking the questions but I wasn't really wanting to find out the kind of answers that was acceptable

I wanted to find out who were the kind of people that they admired who were the kind of people that they looked up to and sometimes you see when we asked a question of that nature we do a wee wee thinking bit of thinking beforehand and say well what answer is this person wanting now Jesus is saying to us that the pure in heart are those who are not in any way going to do a double take or to do something that would in some way twist the truth they are honest they are people who are free of hypocrisy or at least they would desire to be and some of the commentators they focus on this word pure and normally when we use the word pure they say it implies something that is free from impurity something that's free from pollution something that is free from corruption if you have pure water it means that the water is clean there is no additive there is no nothing has been added to it or nothing has come into it some way take away from its wholesome properties and that's the way we usually think about pure but there's a positive side to it as well as the negative side that the purity is seen in the passions what a passion is as much as what a passion is not if

I say to you as a Christian you are pure that means as a Christian you do not do this and you're not found in that place and you're not your thinking is free from any kind of deviant thinking and you're saying well that's what this passage is talking about no it's talking about more than that it's talking about your relationship with God it's talking about your relationship with others because of your relationship with God and it's a broader understanding if you like of this word pure and it's a very positive understanding of what you are left left to us of what he has said was also somebody was very encouraging and his description of the

Christian as far as fulfilling this picture that Christ is giving to us is that that person is influenced by the Holy Spirit and the influence of the Holy Spirit with regard to what they are in the presence of God the holiness of God is something that makes them aware of sin makes them aware of the ugliness of sin makes them aware of the ways in which sin permeates every activity in which we engage sin now that's not something that's a negative it's a positive because there are many people in this world who are happy to go and do what they're doing without one moment considering the consequences of their actions without one moment considering the consequences for themselves let alone others and you as a

Christian because of the fact that you are pure in heart in the sense that you understand the damage that sin has done in your life the potential for damage that is still there the understanding that you have of the offense that it causes God the understanding that you have of the way that it impacts upon your life as a Christian how much when sin takes over when sin takes our feet away from us our testimony our witness is affected all of these things now you may think that's a terrible thing it's a difficult thing to live with but if you think of it in the terms in which it is found here that the pure in heart are blessed then you can understand it as something that's really worth worth having and being part of Christ means to be understood in that way when we think of the different ways that that the scripture on occasion on occasion the scripture reminds us of for example the nature of the

[31 : 03] Christian or the character of the Christian we mentioned it before Paul in this epistle to the Ephesians he he reminds the Christian of how they ought to behave slaves he says obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling with a sincere heart as you would Christ not by the way of high service as people pleaser but as servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men that's what a pure heart is it makes you behave and it's what you have by reason of your relationship with Christ your understanding of your behavior as a Christian as affected you do not do things not because there's somebody standing over you with a rod saying this is what you must do you do because your heart is a new heart

Christ the Lord has created by the spirit a new heart within you and as such you understand that many things in your life you might be better off without and he is the one who teaches you that and enables you to understand that James the apostle is another who considers the same thing in a different way who it's really to do with the activity of the Christian in chapter 3 I think it's verse 17 the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable gentle open to reason full of many and mercy and good fruits impartial and sincere and the harvest of righteousness is sown to peace by those who make peace it's to do with how you are influenced by the spirit of

God who is informing you instructing you guiding you teaching you what's good what's beneficial what's harmful and what you should be as a Christian in his comments in this passage Don Carson reminds us again of our humanity this is what he says the demand for genuine perfection loses itself in the lesser goal of external piety the goal of pleasing the father is traded for its pygmy cousin the goal of pleasing mom do you understand that do you follow it it's easy for you to forget i'm not doing this because my standard of behavior is being measured against my neighbors i'm doing this because i'm a christian believer who is being taught of the lord and my life has been transformed and goes on being transformed by him and that's what the pure heart is a heart that christ has made his own into which he pours his love and his blessing and we need to go on discovering that for ourselves and the promise that we have is that we shall see god and again you're saying well i mentioned it when i introduced these three points it's so obvious that perhaps we do not want to say much about it we shall see god god cannot be seen god is spirit and no man has ever seen god and lived and yet christ says that we shall see god so we need to believe him and we need to understand how can we see god where do we see god if we are pure in heart i think the answer is perhaps a simple one one of the puritans said god alone sees the heart and the heart alone sees god god alone sees the heart and the heart alone sees god usually usually if you want to talk about seeing somebody you're talking about the eyes because that's what we see but puritan is right this seeing of god is seen with the heart and the heart is a heart that is pure and when we see god with a heart we see him as someone who is revealing himself to us through his word through his people through his providence through the fellowship that we have with him in the ordained means of grace that he has given to us

Christ has promised before he left the world lo I am with you always we see always as if we use the word always in the sense of ever is ever present but it means more than that I think every way possible by which he can communicate his presence to us he is there to do so and whether we see him in his people or whether we see him in his world or whether we see him in the way that he keeps things back from us or gives us what we do not deserve we only are able to do that through through the possession of this pure heart that is his people's not some people but all people that are his the

Lord's people and I love that tonight how much you may think yourself to be unworthy and there's not one of us who would say that we are worthy beneficiaries of any of God's mysteries the only worthiness we have is in Christ Jesus and that's what we should remind ourselves of what we have we have from him and we bless him for what he has given to us and when we see God remember he is the one who has revealed God to us and you see John writing his gospel he tells us that that is it is through him that we see the father and if we see the father through him we have seen something that the eye of man cannot see the heart of man has the heart of man that is made pure is the heart that will see

[38 : 43] God well I hope that you'll be able to say that even over this coming weekend that you can say well I've been able to see something of God in his word in his people in his sacrament in the fellowship that we have enjoyed or expect to enjoy may God bless these few thoughts