Blessed are the Pure in Heart

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[0:00] Good morning. I've often wondered what it would be like to stand up in this high place. It's rather strange. This morning I'm going to be speaking on Matthew 5 verse 8.

It's the beatitude that says, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. At first glance, the scripture, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God, seems very simple.
All it appears to be saying is that we need to live a really good life, be really good people, follow God, and then we're going to see him one day. But on closer inspection, the scripture is far more in-depth than that, and offers far more than that.
Because when Jesus is saying this, he is addressing a context in his day that he addresses throughout his ministry.
And he's addressing the crowds, but he's also specifically addressing religious people, and specifically the Pharisees, who presented themselves as always being righteous and clean.
[1:14] And so when Jesus is saying this, he's not just speaking about ceremonial cleanliness. He's not just speaking about external piety. But what he is speaking about is an inner moral purity.

And so when he's saying, Blessed are the pure in heart, what he's really saying is, Blessed are those who come, and they come with an undivided heart.
Blessed are the ones who come free from the tyranny of the divided self. Blessed are the ones who come to me free from deceit.
Blessed are the ones who come to me who are utterly sincere, who are unashamed of what is really happening for them. Who are unashamed, who come to me and say, this is what is really going on.
And Jesus is addressing this issue in calling people to a different kind of life than simply presenting themselves as being pure.
[2:17] And what he's really saying is that the internal sham and deceit and moral filth that is within us cannot exist in sincere devotion to him.

And he's really speaking about hypocrisy in this. And so he's saying, Blessed are the pure in heart.
And the second part of the beatitude says, For they shall see God.
And while this is certainly referring to the fact that we will see God one day, it is also referring to the now. It is referring to the fact that we will, as we are pure in heart, as we come to God in this way, with this undivided heart, we will experience him with the eyes of faith.
We will experience what it is for the Holy Spirit to be able to walk with us in this journey into wholeness and into healing.
It is very easy for you and I, and I'm sure all of us would admit to this, it is very easy for us to come to God and present a good self.
[3:31] I have a great story. I've told this story many times, but it's a story about one of my children. One of my sons, I have two boys and two girls, one of my sons, when he was very small, he developed a great addiction to chocolate.

A good addiction to have. But he would find chocolate basically in every place that he could. He had this uncanny knack of being able to sniff chocolate.
And, you know, we would think we'd hidden all the chocolate, but he would somehow find it. And one morning I came down, he is still an early riser, and he was downstairs, and his mouth and his face was covered with chocolate, as was his pajamas.
And I looked at him and I said to him, where did you get the chocolate, gal? And he looked at me with this wonderfully innocent face, and he said, what chocolate?
And I said to him, you know, the chocolate that you've just been eating, and I could see in his head he was trying to present some kind of argument, and he said, I didn't take any chocolate.

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[4:43] And I said, Cal, the chocolate is all over your face and on your pajamas. And, you know, in his head the wheels were going, and he looked at me and he said, oh, that chocolate!

And he said, well, you know what happened, was that I was coming down the stairs, and there was a piece of chocolate at the bottom of the stairs.
And I fell on the chocolate. And so it just got all over me. But, you know, and we sat down and I said to him, you know what, honey, you're lying.
And he said, yeah, you're right, I'm lying. And he told me where he had gotten the chocolate, and we talked about it. And, you know, he was able to, in the acknowledgement of him not telling the truth, he was able to say, I'm sorry, Papa, I'm sorry I told lies, and I'm sorry I stole that chocolate.
And we were able to be reconciled. What happens for many of us is that when we come to God, we come pretending that we haven't taken the chocolate.
[5:48] We come to God pretending as if we have pure hearts. We come to God as if he doesn't see, but the reality is that God sees everything.

And what Jesus calls us to in this verse is, coming to him, coming with a pure heart, means that we come exposing everything.
He knows it already. And what he asks of us is to come with our hearts revealed to him, with everything that has been going on inside of us.
As I work in this kind of ministry, in the ministry of Living Waters, as I work around the world, I'm very convinced by the fact that the church faces a major problem.
And the major problem that I think it faces is the problem of respectability. I think we live in an age where in our churches, it's important that we look good, that our reputations look good, that we come across as really moral people who look as if we're doing the right thing.
[6:58] But I believe that what God is calling his church to around the world is he's calling us to be a holy people who come to him with pure hearts, who come to him saying, this is really the state of my heart, and I desire for you, I desire to see you, I desire to see you work in my heart.

Because the call to purity of heart really is a call to unrespectability. It is a call to reveal the sham and to reveal the hypocrisy in our own hearts.
It is a call to reveal the moral, the sexual and relational sin that so many of us have learned to mask so well with our religious platitudes, with our religious rituals.
But the call to purity of heart is also the call to experience the wonder and the richness and the utterly disarming person of Jesus. It is really the call to taste and to see and to experience the healing presence of the only one who can really heal us, of the only one who can truly make us pure.
In working with people around the world and in working with people in living waters, I am very aware of the fact that we come to God really desiring purity.
[8:18] I don't think if I was to take a survey here this morning that there is one single person who would say, I do not desire to have a pure heart. I do not desire to come to God honestly.

But what I have noticed, I have seen three responses in the way we come to God, even though our intention may be to come with pureness of heart. I have seen three responses that basically categorize us in some form or another, all of us.
The first response is that many of us come to God and say we desire to come with pure hearts, we desire to come and actually expose what is there, but we have our own set plan as to how that should transpire and how God should work in our lives and how that purity of heart should come about.
The second response that many of us have is that even though we are aware of a brokenness in our lives, we come to God and we run away from Him.
We come to Him and we move away. And we feel a deep shame at what is really there. And the third response is the ones who come to God and say, I don't care what anyone says anymore.
[9:32] I am tired of living in this impure way. I am tired of these things that keep me from being able to experience you. And throughout His life, if you look at the stories of Jesus, if you look at the miracles of Jesus, if you look at the way Jesus encountered people, Jesus continually encountered people and called them to purity of heart.

What Jesus did continually throughout His life was He called people to stand in this place of being able to say what was really, really happening. In Luke 17, actually Luke 18 and 19, we read a trio of stories that illustrate very well the three examples I just gave you.

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There are stories of three people who encountered Jesus and there are three different responses to what Jesus calls them to. In the first story, we read of a rich young ruler who comes to Jesus and he comes to Jesus and he's a very pious man, he's a very wealthy man, and he comes to Jesus and he says, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
And Jesus says to him, well, you know, keep the commandments, honor your father and mother, and almost the man says, yes, I've done all of that. And almost as a throwaway line, Jesus says to him, oh yeah, and by the way, sell all that you have and give it to the poor.
And what Jesus really calls him on is the full expression, the fullness of what he needs to do in order to experience what he's asking Jesus for.
[11:11] And what Jesus is really calling him to is purity of heart. This man presents as being very outwardly pure. He's pious, he's wealthy, but he has come to be defined by his piety and his wealth.

And giving up that definition, that identity that has defined him, will make him dependent on God. And it's apparent that this isn't what he wants to do.
And so what he does is he walks away sadly. For this man, you see, Jesus has exposed the lie. He's exposed the mask.
He's exposed the disguise. And he's invited this man into a new kind of relationship with him. Much as he did with the woman at the well, where he invited her to take off her disguise.
He told her who she really was. And he gave this man a chance to respond. But this man had a specific idea of how he thought, of what he thought Jesus should be asking him to do.
[12:16] And so he walks away very sad. In the second story, we read the story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is a man who has been scorned.

He's been the object of scorn in his village. And he has been defined by his wealth, but also his corruption, and also his physical stature. And he hears of Jesus coming, and his response to Jesus is to say, I want to see him, but his physical stature prevented him from doing that.
So he runs ahead, and he climbs up into a tree. He desperately wants to experience Jesus, but he doesn't quite know how. And so Jesus comes by, and Jesus stops underneath the tree.
Now imagine for a moment, if you've been an object of real scorn and shame in your community, you're kind of hiding out, and then all of a sudden Jesus stops.
Imagine the crowds of people around him. Jesus stops, looks up into this tree, and says, he names him, he says, Zacchaeus, come down. I know if it was me, I would have said, it's okay Lord, you know, kind of pass on, go on, everything's okay.
[13:32] But his response to Jesus is to say, I'll come down. And he comes down. And in meeting with Jesus, Jesus really is exposing him. He's coming to Jesus, you know, in front of all of these people.

Jesus is exposing everything about him. But his response to Jesus is to reveal everything. And then to come to the place of saying, I'll give half of what I have to the poor, and I'll give four times as much back for the people I've wronged.
And his response comes out of this purity of heart. This encounter with Jesus causes this to happen for him. In the third story, we read of a man who is blind from birth.
And he hears Jesus coming by. And for this man, the experience of his life has been blindness. His brokenness is very obvious for all to see.
Everybody knows what is wrong with this man. And in some ways, the people have kind of ignored him. And so he hears of Jesus coming, and his response is to say, what's going on?
[14:40] And people say, well, Jesus of Nazareth is coming. And so he shouts and he says, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And the people say, keep quiet.

Keep quiet. You know, go away. But this man persists. And in his persistence, Jesus comes to him. And Jesus says to him, what do you want me to do?
And he says, I want to see. And Jesus heals him, and he's able to see. And so for this man, as he comes to Jesus in his brokenness, with this purity of heart, when he comes to Jesus with everything that is wrong with him, in a very literal way, he does see God.
He sees Jesus, because Jesus heals him of his physical blindness. But in all of these stories, we see the responses of people to Jesus.
And for many of us, when we come to Jesus, when we come to God, we come with our own disguises. And what his desire is to do is to disarm us, and to enable us to take off our disguises.

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[15:50] Much of what we do in the work of living waters is stand with people as they take off their disguises. people who come and say, what I have done is outside of the realm of the grace of God.

Some people who come and say, I am too proud to receive free grace from God. People who are afraid of, or see themselves as being above accepting the charity of our Heavenly Father.
And for some, the desire for purity of heart may be there, but the willingness to pay the price may not be. And over the years, I have seen men and women stand in this place.
And over the years, I have seen men and women as they have come without deceit, with undivided hearts. I have seen them experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their healing journey.
I have seen them see God. I have seen them see God work in their lives. I think about a couple who are well known in the city, who are pastors in the city.
[16:59] And I think about the way they initially came to us. The way they initially came, their marriage falling apart, living a lie of seeming as if everything was together.

and I have watched as they came in pureness of heart. I have watched as they came without deceit. And I watched the Holy Spirit come and transform them as they stood in that place and allowed God to change them.
I think of my friend Greg, and I use his example with his permission, and I think about him, the image he projected to the world of everything being okay, yet underneath, struggling with issues of sexual addiction, with issues of alcohol addiction.
And I saw him much like Zacchaeus as he came and pulled away, came and pulled away. I saw God come and deliver him.
And I saw God come and move him into a place where today he is a man who tells others, who shares what purity of heart can bring about.
[18:06] And I have certainly seen this in my own life. As I look at my own life and I see my initial desire to have God bless me as a homosexual man, to have God bless my homosexual union, and I see the faithfulness of God in being able to call me, and his faithfulness in saying, if you desire purity of heart, stand before me with all of the brokenness in your life.

And I've seen him take me from that place and I've seen him move me into the place where I now stand and bring hope and life to others. I believe that the call to you as individuals is to come out from the respectable places where you have hidden for many years.
I believe that for many of you as individuals, God calls you to stand with purity of heart so that you truly can see him and experience him.
What better day to do it than on Pentecost Sunday? And I believe that the call on you as a church is to stand as a church pure in heart so that others may see God in this place.
respond to that call this morning. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.
[19:41] Amen.

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