

# The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Much And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”  
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”  
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

## **Blessed Are The Pure In Heart**

**November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**Matthew 5:8**

**Rev. Paul Carter**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you I'd invite you to open it now to Matthew chapter 5. We're taking a long, slow walk through the Sermon On The Mount and we are zooming in today on the 6<sup>th</sup> beatitude:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8 ESV)

Of all the beatitudes we've looked at so far this feels like the most pastorally URGENT and the most culturally relevant of them all. It's hard to be pure of heart in a putrid culture. We need help here. We need guidance – and we need hope. Because in our impurity it very much feels as though we are losing our vision of God – as a culture, as individuals, as families and even, it seems, sometimes, as the church. So I would argue, few things could be more important for us this morning than taking a deep dive into this 6<sup>th</sup> beatitude.

By God's grace we're going to ask and hopefully answer 5 questions together:

What does it mean to have a pure heart?

What does it mean to see God?

How do I get a pure heart?

How do I keep a pure heart?

And what if I've lost my pure heart?

Let's begin at the beginning: what does it mean to have a pure heart?

## What Does It Mean To Have A Pure Heart?

I'll warn you up front that you are going to hear a lot of Martin Luther this morning. I found his commentary on this beatitude to be remarkably insightful – and I suppose we shouldn't be surprised by that. Luther had to work very hard to recover a biblical understanding of this beatitude against an awful lot of cultural and even religious pressure to the contrary. In his day to be PURE OF HEART – meant to be OTHERWORLDLY. It meant to LEAVE BEHIND the corruptions of culture; it meant to be a hermit in the desert or a monk in the monastery. The Roman Catholic Church had given up on the idea that you could have a pure heart while living in the world – and Luther pushed back hard on that. He wanted to be clear that you could be PURE OF HEART while living a HUMAN LIFE in a broken world.

So he started with what this doesn't mean and I think that's a useful approach. The first thing he would have us understand is that to be pure of heart doesn't mean to hide away from the world.

### 1. It doesn't mean to hide away from the world

You don't have to be a hermit living in the desert or a monk hiding away in your monastery. On the contrary:

“The Scripture speaks of this pure heart and mind, that it is quite consistent with it that one be a husband, love his wife and children, think about them and care for them, and busy himself about other matters that belong to such a relation. For all this God has ordained.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary On The Sermon On The Mount* in Lexham Classics, translated by Charles A. Hay (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 33-34.

The job of the Christian is not to hide from the world. Jesus in John 17 prayed that you would be IN the world – but not OF the world.

So whatever else it means, to be pure of heart does not mean to HIDE AWAY from all contact with the world. It doesn't mean to become a PREPPER and to live out in the woods while the world goes to hell in a handbasket.

Purity of heart is something we pursue while we live in a broken and fallen world.

Luther was also eager to point out, following Jesus, that purity of heart has very little to do with external appearances.

## **2. It doesn't mean to concern yourself with external appearances**

Jesus of course frequently stressed this point in contrast to the understanding and approach of the Pharisees. So in Matthew 23 Jesus really drives this point home, he says:

“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.<sup>26</sup> You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.<sup>27</sup> “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.<sup>28</sup> So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:25–28 ESV)

Jesus is clearly saying here that we need to the priority on the inner life of the person – not the external appearances. What value is there in LOOKING LIKE you have it all together, if inside your heart there is nothing but bitterness, malice, wickedness, greed and deceit? What is the value in that? That's just hypocrisy, Jesus says.

Hypocrisy, by the way, has nothing to do with falling short of your own expectations – that's how people tend to use that word today in the church. If someone doesn't quite live up to their own standards, we say, “Oh that person is such a hypocrite!” But that's not what a hypocrite is.

That's just what a sinner in process is. According to the Bible, according to Jesus, a hypocrite is someone who wants to APPEAR righteous, who doesn't actually want to BE righteous. They are only concerned with presenting a front. They are an actor. They are only concerned with appearances.

That's a hypocrite – and according to the Bible, that's the opposite of what it means to be pure in heart.

So that's what it's NOT – and in every generation probably, you have to tear down some false notions in order to clear the path for a proper understanding of what it means to be pure in heart. So let's talk about that now. To be pure in heart means to have a heart that is formed by and overflowing with the life-giving Word of God.

### **3. It means to have a heart that is formed by and overflowing with the life-giving Word of God**

Luther again is helpful here; after rejecting a number of false conceptions he says:

“But that is a pure heart, that is ever on the lookout for God's word, and takes this in place of its own thoughts.”<sup>2</sup>

Oh man, isn't that good? It's exactly what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:2. He said:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2 ESV)

By the way, there is less difference in Greek and Hebrew thought between “the heart” and “the mind” than there is in English thought. We tend to think of the “heart” as being the seat of emotions and the “mind” as being the seat of the will and the intellect, but they didn't make that distinction in that culture. The two terms are used more or less interchangeably to refer to the inner life of the person. So here Paul is telling folks to pursue INNER TRANSFORMATION so

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary On The Sermon On The Mount* in Lexham Classics, translated by Charles A. Hay (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 35.

that they can be perfectly attuned to the will and Word of God – that’s what it means to have a pure heart.

In the Bible – the heart is understood as the WELL SPRING of all thought and action. Everything begins INSIDE. Life goes from the INSIDE to the OUTSIDE. So Jesus would say:

“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34 ESV)

Or as Proverbs has it:

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23 KJV)

Everything starts IN HERE – so if you are rotten in here, then you are going to have a rotten life. You are going to say bad things, do bad things and experience bad outcomes. So – guard your heart! For OUT OF IT are the issues of life!

Old Testament and New – everyone is on the same page here – the heart is the wellspring of life and so we want a PURE HEART – a heart that is formed by, attuned to and overflowing with – the life giving Word of God.

And what are we promised if we have that? That’s our next question.

### What Does It Mean To See God?

Jesus says:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8 ESV)

So what does that mean? What does it mean to “see God”?

As is so often the case, I think there is a clear “now” and “not yet” piece to this promised reward. So first of all, “to see God” means to see him RIGHTY in the here and now.

## 1. It means to see God rightly now

Jesus seems to be saying that if our hearts are PURE – if they are formed by and filled with the life giving Word of God – then we are going to see God correctly. Our vision of him is not going to be distorted by sin, deceit or confusion. We’re going to see God as he is and as he is revealed in Holy Scripture. So Luther says here:

“For he who regards him as wrathful, does not see him aright, but has drawn a veil and cover, yes a dark cloud, over his face. But to behold his face, as the Scripture expresses it, means to recognize him aright as a gracious, benevolent father, upon whom one can rely for everything good.”<sup>3</sup>

Brothers and sisters, here’s a hard truth: when WE are off, when OUR hearts are defiled then we tend to SEE GOD through the LENS of our sin and corruption. If we are unmerciful, then we assume he is unmerciful. If we are faithless, then we assume, he is faithless.

And of course it works the other way too – Luther was pushing back on the distortions of his age – but there are distortions in our age too – so I think we would want to say that if we are permissive then we assume God is too, if we are indifferent to human life, then we assume God is too.

The point is – we tend to see God through the lens of our own sin and corruption – so the blessing of a pure heart – the blessing of a heart that has been formed and filled with Scripture – is that we are able to see God as he is – specifically as he is revealed in the Christ of Scripture.

And what an incredible blessing that is!

Jesus said to Philip:

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9 ESV)

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary On The Sermon On The Mount* in Lexham Classics, translated by Charles A. Hay (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 39.

God is revealed – CLEARLY, PERFECTLY, RELIABLY – in the Christ of Scripture. Do you understand that? The Jesus of the Bible is not an aberration in God’s character – he is the essence and display of God’s character. If you are seeing Jesus – as he is depicted and proclaimed in Scripture – then you are seeing God.

That’s who God is – and with a pure heart you can SEE THAT – thanks be to God!

But, as I said, there is a “not yet” component to this blessing as well.

If we have a pure heart we get to see God now in the Christ of Scripture and we get to see God perfectly – face to face actually – in the life to come.

## **2. It means to see God fully in the life to come**

The Bible talks about that in Revelation 22:4; it says:

“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” (Revelation 22:4 ESV)

You know, both sides of that verse are amazing! We tend to focus on the first half – and I get it! They shall SEE HIS FACE!!! It doesn’t get any better than that! One day we are going to SEE JESUS! We’re just going to read about him in the Bible – we are going to SEE THE LORD – are you looking forward to that? Me too! So you can be excited about the first half of that verse – but you should also be excited about the second half. The second half says that his name will be on your forehead. What does that mean?

Well, you’ve heard me say before that in the Book of Revelation, in a number of different places, the Bible speaks about how BY THE END, by means of various shakes, upheavals and tribulations – all people will be sorted into two opposing camps: the camp of the Lamb and the camp of the beast – and they will be easily identifiable as belonging to those camps because they will be clearly marked with the name of their Master – on both the hand and the forehead. Which is a symbolic way of saying that by the end everyone will bear the impress of their Master in

terms of their INNER THOUGHT LIFE and also their EXTERNAL ACTIONS. Forehead and hand. At the end we will think and act like the one we follow.

Isn't that good? If you are a follower of Jesus, isn't that a wonderful promise? Don't you long for the day when ALL YOUR THOUGHTS will be the thoughts of Jesus? That's the goal of every true Christian – Paul would encourage his people:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5 NRSV)

That's the goal! That's our highest ambition as followers of Jesus Christ: to think God's thoughts after him! To be PURE in ACT, THOUGHT, DESIRE and INCLINATION. To be like Jesus in all respects. That will be GLORIOUS!

Do you think about that day – and do you think about how to get to that day?

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones says here:

“Do you spend time in meditating upon the glory that yet awaits you? If you do, the greatest concern of your life will be to have a pure heart.”<sup>4</sup>

Is that the greatest concern of your life, brothers and sisters? It ought to be! If you want to see Jesus – if you want to be like Jesus – then you need to be asking the question: how do I get a pure heart?

### **How Do I Get A Pure Heart?**

Thankfully, Jesus answered that question. In his nighttime encounter with the Pharisee Nicodemus Jesus said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly,

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<sup>4</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 98.



truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3–5 ESV)

Do you want to SEE the Kingdom of Heaven? Do you want to SEE God? Then you must be born of water and the Spirit. What in the world does that mean? Jesus is quoting here from an Old Testament source – as he would often do. He was quoting from Ezekiel 36:25-27 which records God saying – in one of the most important promises in the Old Testament:

“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. <sup>26</sup> And **I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.** And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And **I will put my Spirit within you,** and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)

So this is God promising to DO something in the future that will cause people to be born again – that will cause hearts to be WASHED, PURIFIED and inhabited with a whole new SPIRIT – indeed the very Spirit of God – and in John 3 Jesus is saying to Nicodemus – that is exactly what I’ve come to do! I have come to give people a new heart and a new spirit – without which no one can see the Kingdom of God.

So how do you get a pure heart?

You get it by going to Jesus!

You get it by meeting him at the cross! This is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Christian Gospel! This is what we celebrate – this is what we sing when we come to the Lord’s Table:

*There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> William Cowper, *There Is A Fountain* in *The Hymnal* (Canada: The Baptist Federation Of Canada, 1973), 321.

That's the Gospel! The Gospel is the Good News of what God has done in Christ to CLEANSE us from sin and unrighteousness! Jesus on the cross acts like a sponge that can draw out of us all our filthy stains – the corruption of sin, the filth of sin, the shame of sin, the mark of sin – he can take that all – we can transfer that to him through confession and faith – and he can absorb the wrath of God against those sins on our behalf, extinguishing it, satisfying it – forever!

That's the Gospel – that's the great exchange. And you can take advantage of that today. Right now you can ask Jesus to take all your sins and to VANQUISH and EXTINGUISH those sins on the cross. And he will do that. He will give you a new heart and he will pour his Spirit out upon you and with the Spirit in your heart, the Word will come alive – he will catch bits of it as it is read and preached over you – and he will press it home on all your brokenness and confusion and little by little he will heal you and restore you to your original health and glory. By means of these things – by means of the water and the Spirit – you can be born again – you can have a whole new CLEANSED, PURIFIED INNER LIFE – thanks be to God!

Now that leaves us with two more very important questions. We won't give them much time, but they are both absolutely critical to this conversation. The first one is this:

### **How Do I Keep A Pure Heart?**

As BORN AGAIN BELIEVERS we have to STEWARD the PURE HEART that we've been given through the grace of our salvation. The Bible says:

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” (Proverbs 4:23 NIV11)

Guard your heart! Brothers and sisters, guard your heart!! Above all else, guard your heart, for everything else you do in life flows from it.

So how do we do that? How do we guard our hearts?

Well, first of all you have to FILL YOUR HEART with the life-giving Word of God. You learned this in Sunday School:

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” (Psalm 119:11 KJV)

You’ve got to FILL YOUR HEART with the good stuff. If your heart is filled with the good stuff then no poison – no contaminate – no rot or impurity is going to be able to get in. So fill your heart with the good stuff. The Apostle Paul says:

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8 ESV)

Think about these things! Start your day with time in the Word! Use your drive to work to LISTEN TO THE WORD READ AND PREACHED AND EXPLAINED. Now be careful: you can’t substitute Christian politics for Daily Bread. A lot of young people today think that listening to The Briefing or to some Christian Worldview podcast is the same thing as listening to the Bible – no it is not! Get the pure stuff into you and then you will be able to digest the other stuff with more discernment. You can’t skip this step. Fill your mind every day – fill your heart with the good stuff. Fill it with the Word of God.

And then also – cut out all the bad stuff. Cut out the garbage. Be discerning with your inputs. Watch what you watch, brothers and sisters. I don’t want to sound like an old crank, but I will tell you that one of the things that has changed over the 27 years that I’ve been in ministry is the sort of content that born again Christians feel comfortable consuming on TV, at the movies and now through the internet. I guarantee you this: your born-again Grandma would not have been watching Game of Thrones. Your born-again Grandpa would not have been watching Squid Games – so why are you? That level of nudity, that level of graphic violence is just not appropriate for born-again believers. Not if you want to have a pure heart. Not if you want to see God. You need to keep that junk out.

You have a role to play in KEEPING your pure heart.

Which leads us to our last question:

## What If I've Lost My Pure Heart?

As everybody knows, clean things can become unclean. When we first moved to Orillia we bought a house on Gerald Street and it had a little pool in the backyard. It was just 4 feet deep and about 24 feet long by 12 feet wide – so it was pretty manageable. I remember when Madison was about 10 years old she wanted to have a pool party for her birthday so I worked hard for a couple of days before to get it all cleaned up and ready and it was looking great. It was blue, clear and perfect! And then the night before the party, there was a storm and all kinds of pollen got washed into the pool. And I woke up the next morning – the morning of the party – and our pool was starting to turn green. So I went down to the pool store and I bought some chemicals and some shock treatment and I did everything I was supposed to do – but still the pool was looking pretty green. About an hour before the party I went back to the store and I bought some blue dye. I don't even know why they sell this stuff – it was awful. My pool went from dull green – to nuclear reactor green just before all Maddie's little friends arrived. It was not my finest hour – but the point is – we are all living in a pollen storm right now as modern day believers. We are trying to keep a pure heart in a world that is 24/7 smut and shame.

We are being BLOWN AWAY and we are being DEFILED on pretty much a daily basis. We need the rebuke of James 4:8 to be read to us on repeat:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8 ESV)

That's our verse, brothers and sisters! We need that call. We need to be reminded that we need to attend to our inner waters on a daily basis! We need to scoop the leaves out, we need to shock the system, we need to run the filter. Fouled waters can by the grace of God be made clean. It takes confession, it takes fresh application of the Gospel, it takes discipline and self-restraint – and it takes prayer. Lots and lots and lots of prayer.

But by the grace of God – it can be done. And in the grace of God – it is done. It is done every time we are called back to the Lord's Table. That's what this is. It is SHOCK TREATMENT for the contaminated soul.

Do you remember when Moses threw the tree into the bitter waters and they became clean again? That's what this is. This is God applying the shock treatment of the cross to the inner waters of our soul.

This is God, in his mercy, providing for our sin and weakness.

*The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in His day;  
And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away<sup>6</sup>*

Thanks be to God! Let's prepare our hearts now to meet the Lord and to be refreshed in his mercy as we gather together around the table. Let's pray.

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<sup>6</sup> William Cowper, *There Is A Fountain* in *The Hymnal* (Canada: The Baptist Federation Of Canada, 1973), 321.