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Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: The Pure In Heart

Transcribed Message
November 5, 2017
Matthew 5:8

What the Bible consistently puts before us is at the heart of the matter, which is what is really important to God, is the matter of the heart. Let's do a quick review of the Beatitudes to this point. We have made a number of comments about the collective truth that God has given to us in what we call the Beatitudes. This is not about how to get to heaven. The Beatitudes are not about how to get to heaven. They're about how a person lives who's on their way to heaven. So we don't have a ladder here that we're climbing and if we can achieve enough of these Beatitudes we'll feel better and better about ourselves and we'll be assured of heaven. This is more like Paul in Philippians 2: work out your own salvation in fear and trembling. That's what we see Jesus giving us here in the Beatitudes.

Secondly, we said there's a natural progression that as you read through these Beatitudes it's almost as if the Spirit of God through Christ gives to us some sense of progression. It rightfully begins with having a spirit of brokenness and humility before God. Blessed, it said right at the outset, are the poor in spirit. God wants us to have a sense of dependency upon Him and on His grace.

Then there's a sense of correlation in the Beatitudes. We've already noted that there are seven different Beatitudes. Lord willing, we'll finish the last one next Sunday. But of those seven, we noted that the fourth one is the hinge between 1 through 3 and 5 through 7. Think of it this way. The poor in spirit. Who but the poor in spirit are more likely to be merciful to somebody else? When you really understand your need before God, it is most likely that your heart, moved by the Holy Spirit, is going to be merciful in your thoughts towards somebody else. Or how about the idea of the one who mourns over sin? The one who mourns over sin is most certainly the one who is going to be burdened about their own purity of heart. As we'll see in that last one, those that are meek, those that really exercise strength under control, who is it but the person who is

meeek, understanding that as Jesus presented it? Strength under control. That's the person that can be the peacemaker. The peacemaker is really a person of meekness.

This morning, let's look at the condition of our heart and how Jesus wants us to keep it pure. I want to ask and answer three questions this morning as we deal with this 6th Beatitude. The first one: what is purity of heart? We really need to know what Jesus is talking about when He talked about purity and we want to know what He's talking about He talks about the heart. Let's start with purity and a definition of the word. The Greek noun that is used here by Jesus when He said blessed are the poor in heart. *Katharos*. To make clean, to purify, to cleanse. You are familiar with the English word that comes right out of this kind of in a transliteration. Catharsis. So you think of catharsis and that's the very idea of the word that Jesus uses here. You think of catharsis as some kind of a medical term relating to our physical body where there is some kind of cleansing, some kind of a purification that needs to be done. It's a word that is used in psychology. It's a word that speaks sometimes of people who have a pent-up emotion. Sometimes they have very bad feelings or attitudes or whatever and there's this great outburst and this release and we sometimes talk about that as being cathartic. That was a catharsis of one's spirit. So we talk about it in that regard.

There's a spiritual element to this obviously as well and that is given to us I think in 1 John 1:7. The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all evil. So all of this would come to us and say Jesus's desire for us is that we would be pure in heart. If we were to ask David what it means to be pure in heart, David might very well say from Psalm 24: "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and he does not swear deceitfully." From David's vantage point, purity of heart is not simply to be understood as purity and cleanliness, as we might easily think of it. He actually connects it to not being deceitful, to not having falsehood in your heart. When you have an impure heart, when your heart is not right, when you want to deceive, what is it that you're wanting to do? You're wanting somebody to think about you or the circumstance or something that's going on in a way that isn't true. That is to have an impure heart. David says he doesn't want to be in that place. He doesn't want to think, feel, speak in a way that reveals a deceptiveness in his heart and impurity in his heart.

What if we were to go to the New Testament? Who do you suppose could help us out to understand something about the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament? James. This book we find in the New Testament that gives almost a mirror explanation for the Sermon on the Mount. What does James say? In the 4th chapter and verse 8: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded." Now here's another picture of purity or impurity. David linked impurity to deceitfulness to falsehood. He didn't want that in his heart. James, on the other hand, does something very similar. He says if you want to draw near to God, you have to have a pure heart. You have to have a clean heart. What James underscores is that you don't want to have a divided heart, that you don't want to be unstable in all of your ways. That is to have an impure heart. So from James we can say this: to have a pure heart is to be single-minded. To have a pure heart is to have a sense of integrity in our heart. To have a pure heart is to be undivided in terms of what it is that God has called us to do. It is to be unadulterated, unmixed. That's the idea of purity. Jesus says blessed are you if your heart is undivided. Blessed are you if your heart isn't wrapped up in deceit and falsehood. If it's clean. If it's pure. He brings us to this place of where we're to be clean, to be undivided and that is of course our hearts.

Let's look secondly at an understanding of the heart. What is in view when Jesus says blessed are the pure in heart? As you're familiar as I know you are with your Bible, you know that the word "heart" is used in a whole variety of ways. Sometimes the Bible speaks of our heart in relation to our emotions. So Jesus would say to the disciples the night before He was going to be crucified, "Let not your heart be troubled". He was talking to them on the emotional level. He didn't want them to be so disturbed in their heart that they were going to be anxious. It's used of our mind: as a man, as a woman thinks in their heart, so are they, the writer of Proverbs says. Just the way you think in your heart reveals what kind of heart you have. It's used of our will. Remember in Daniel that wonderful statement? Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. So when the Bible speaks about our heart, when Jesus says blessed are the pure in heart, He's capturing the essence of who we are. He's talking about our emotions. He's talking about our mind. He's talking about our will. He's talking about the unseen part, the

center of our life, the very person that we are and that we are becoming. That part obviously that only God sees. That's why the writer of Proverbs says to us in Proverbs 4:23 to guard, protect, keep your heart with all diligence. Why? Because out of it flow the issues of life. What a great reminder! Keep your heart. Protect your heart. What is that? It's who you are, the center of your being. It's everything about you. Protect yourself, the writer of Proverbs says, so that the issues of life that flow out of you will be reflective of the kind of person that God has called you to be. With that in mind we're to be pure in heart.

Look at what Jesus has in view. What is Jesus's main concern? What is on the mind of Christ when He says to us I want you to be blessed by being pure in heart? I think it is very clear that He is concerned about what's going on on the inside. The focus is on a pure heart, not something external. Not something that is so much easier to focus on which is just external stuff. While that's good and that's to be valued, there is reason to appreciate that. If that's the full extent of our concern about purity and cleanliness, then we miss the point that Jesus is making, because His concern is what's going on inside.

Remember the statement in 1 Samuel 16:7 – man looks on the outward appearance. What does God do? He looks on the inside. God looks on the heart. Matthew 5:8. That was Jesus's concern here. The context in which Jesus makes this statement is crucial to understand what it is He's driving at, because as He speaks He's talking to His disciples and His followers, but He is also talking to this wider broader audience. No doubt, there were some religious leaders who were a part of this gathering, and even if they were there, their influence on all of these people was very real and impactful. Their influence basically said this: what God is most concerned about in terms of your walk with Him is what people can see. The message of the Pharisees was as long as outwardly you're acting and conducting yourself in the proper way, that's really the main thing to focus on. That should be our main concern. Of course, Jesus taught and modeled something completely different from that. That's why He would say, and we're going to get into this as we go further in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you think it is wrong to commit adultery? Of course it is wrong to commit adultery. But it is also wrong to lust after a woman. Every time, Jesus is going to speak

to them about what they're concerned about on the outside and he's going to bring it over and say the real issue is what's going on on the inside. So here Jesus is ministering in a religious context in which people were basically being encouraged to live in hypocrisy.

Do you know what the opposite of a pure heart is? The opposite of a pure heart is hypocrisy. Jesus is interested in what goes on on the inside. I want to show you this while staying in the book of Matthew. Just listen to what Jesus says in interacting with the religious leaders of His time up to this very point. In Matthew chapter 12 and verse 33: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad. For the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." He cuts right to the heart of the matter, doesn't He? in the 15th chapter and verse 8-9: "This people honors Me with their lips but their heart is far from Me. In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." It speaks to the idea that we can come here week after week and we put on a certain appearance. We speak a certain language and it fits in and everybody thinks it's good and we're okay. That's basically the religion of the Pharisees of the 1st century. In the 23rd chapter, listen to what Jesus says in verse 25: "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside you're full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, and the outside also may be clean." Now I imagine the Pharisees didn't exactly appreciate Jesus's words, did they? He wanted to do heart surgery. They didn't want anything to do with heart surgery. They wanted people to look at them from the outside and see how religious they were, how well behaved they were. Jesus is pressing them to understand that it is a lot more about what's going on in here than about what anybody simply sees. So we're going to ask the second question. The second question is how is purity realized? Before we answer that question, we ask this question: how is it that my heart can be pure? What the Bible says about the nature of our heart? Our heart is in a bad way. Our heart is, as Jeremiah said, deceitful and wicked. Who can know it? Who can know the full depth of the deceitfulness of their heart is what Jeremiah is pointing to. I didn't write down the guy's name, maybe it's because I couldn't pronounce it, but I

wasn't even thinking I was going to mention this this morning. I read this week of a Russian novelist who said this: "I don't know what the heart of a bad man is like, but I know the heart of a good man, and it's terrible." He's talking about himself. I don't know the depth, he was saying, of what a bad man's heart might go to, but I know the depth of my own heart. I know what I'm capable of. I know what I can think. I know what I can do.

That is where we focus our attention now. So let's look at the second point. How is it that we get a pure heart? Here's Jesus's concern. Here is His blessing. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Let me suggest five things that I think the Scriptures put forward for us as we think in terms of God's work in our life, the Holy Spirit taking and doing heart surgery on us. How is He going to do that? What is He going to use? What's going to bring that about? I think it would begin first of all with David and with James and say this: a heart that is fixed on God. If you want a pure heart, you begin by focusing on a heart that's fixed on God. Remember, our definition of purity is this idea of being unmixed, free from contaminants, undivided, not double minded. David was the one man in all the Bible of whom God said he's a man after My own heart. On what basis would God say that about David? It certainly wasn't because he was sinless, was it? It wasn't because he was perfect. The record of David's life is right there before us. It speaks to some terrible things that he involved himself in, failings of many different kinds. Yet God the Holy Spirit recorded for all of eternity that as David stood before God and as God looked at this man, He could say of him he has a heart that is after Me. He is a man after My own heart.

If David were here this morning, we could ask him, David, what is it that is of concern to you? I think he'd say: Proverbs 26:2 – Prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my heart and my mind. Psalm 27:8 – You have said seek my face. My heart says to You, Your face, Lord, do I seek. What is that? That's a pure heart, not a perfect heart. It's not a sinless heart. It's an undivided heart. It's a heart that cries: God, I want to be focused on You. I want my attention to be fixed on You. Psalm 57:7 – My heart is steadfast, O God. My heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody. Psalm 119:2 – Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart. That's a pure heart. That is an undivided heart. That's a fixed heart. That is what God is looking for from us.

Secondly, you know what's coming next. If we're going to be people who are undivided, who are focused on God, how do you think that's going to happen? It's going to happen because we're people of the book. Secondly, we have a heart for the Word. A person with a pure heart has a heart for God's Word. John 15:3 – Jesus said to His disciples, you are clean through the Word which I've spoken to you. When Jesus said in John 15:3 now you are clean, it's the same word in Matthew 5:8. *Katharos*. Pure. Psalm 119: "How shall a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your Word. With my whole heart I seek You. Let me not wander from Your commandments. I've stored up Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You." You can't have a pure heart. You can't have an undivided heart apart from this book. You can't get there. The only way you're going to be that kind of person is if you're washing your soul, your mind, your heart and your emotions every day with the truth of the Word of God. That's what it is to be people of the book. Do you want to be undivided? Do you want to have a pure heart? There is no way you get there disconnected from the Word and the truth.

Matt Smehurst had a great quote that I read just yesterday: "Addiction to social media will make you aware of everything and wise about nothing." Isn't that true? You'll know more than you probably need to know. You'll know stuff about stuff you don't need to know. You talk about impurity. Our world is awash in impurity. It's right there. It's right there on our phone. Just one touch away. All of the impurity that we could ever imagine and then beyond what we could ever imagine. That's sadly where a lot of people spend the majority of their time. They spend a lot more time looking at that thing than they do the Word. Now unless you've got your phone open to your online Bible, then that's great. But what a great comment! You're going to know a lot of stuff about a lot of stuff, but you're not going to have the wisdom of God.

Thirdly, how about a praying heart? Do you want a praying heart? Who can give us a pure heart? Who can give us a clean heart? We already read that. God can. God can give us one. David said in Psalm 51 – God, give me a clean heart. Give me a pure heart. Clean my heart. It is a good reminder to us that God alone can create a clean heart within us. So why not make it a daily part of our prayer regimen? Jesus said to be pure in heart. Why not just add that to the list of things that we pray for every day? God, today give me a pure heart. What does that look like? What does that mean? I'm going

to be undivided in my loyalty to You. I'm going to be unmixed in how I see my world and the choice is going to be focused on You.

Fourth, a heart that seeks fellowship with other believers. A heart that seeks fellowship with other believers. You need to hang out with people who want the same things you want. You can't hang out here all the time. We have to go out into that world. If you're not ever hanging out with people who want the same things that you want, and hopefully they want purity of heart as well, then you're going to miss. The writer of Proverbs says: He who walks with the wise is wise. What if we just amended that? He who walks with the pure is pure. You spend time, you rub shoulders with, you interact with people who want an undivided heart, who model for you in their language and their lives, their words, their goals. somebody who's undivided in their devotion to Christ. Iron sharpens iron so one person sharpens another. That's why the writer of Hebrews says don't forsake getting together with other believers. Why not? Because if you're walking with the pure, you've got a whole lot better chance for purity.

I had a delightful conversation recently with a couple who are at a point in their life where they could make a lot of choices to do a lot of things. God has blessed them and given them that capacity and ability. But what they said to me was so encouraging and such a blessing. They said: Do you know what we want to do on Sunday? We want to be here. They could be traveling the world literally. But they said we want to be a part of the people of God. We want to be rubbing shoulders with people who want to be pure, so that there is that mutual encouragement. Too often people get to a certain stage in their life and it's like it is just bucket list time, and most of it happens on the weekend sadly. They disregard what God has said about one of the primary fundamental means of sanctification that He uses in our life, which is being with the people of God. It starts off here but it can't stop here, because if you say to me, well I've tried. It didn't seem to matter that much to me. Then you're missing something because that's God's intent. That is His heart for us, that we be together and that we regularly encourage each other to purity.

Then lastly, the heart has zero tolerance for sin. A heart with zero tolerance for sin. Jesus is going to say be absolutely ruthless about dealing with sin in your life. Remember He says if your eye is causing you to lust, then pluck it out. If your hand is

causing you to sin, cut it off. He is not being a literalist there. He doesn't expect us to physically maim ourselves. What is He saying? He is saying have absolutely zero tolerance for sin in your life. Don't yield an inch to it because it will take a mile.

Acknowledge when we sin. Confess it, right? 1 John 1:9 – if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to do what? Cleanse us. Purify us from all unrighteousness. So we live a sin-confessing life because a part of our desire and our heart and our prayer is God, make me mindful of sin in my life so that I can deal with that. You have said You want me to be holy just as You are holy. You've said that You have chosen me to walk in holiness and blameless before You. So we have zero tolerance for sin in our life.

What is the endgame? What does Jesus say as a result of one who has this desire in their heart to pursue God above everything else, to walk free of deception and falsehood, to not have a divided heart and not be wavering in our walk with God? He says to us thirdly in answering the question why should we pursue purity of heart. He says because those who are pure are going to see God. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. What does He have in mind here? We know for sure that we're going to see God in the future. So we could very well say this is a part of that without question. 1 John 3: When we see Him we're going to be like Him because we're going to see Him just as He is. So clearly, that is a part of this hope and this promise – that one day we're going to see no longer, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, in the mirror darkly, but then we're going to see Him clearly face-to-face. What does it mean when Jesus says that we're going to see God? Well it has to be part of that future hope and promise.

But I think there's more here. I don't think this is just saying you know you're going to see God as a child of God someday. I think there is also an understanding that He wants us to have here in the present. How do we see God in the present? Someone I think said it well when they put it this way: "The eyes see what the heart loves." Isn't that good? The eyes see what the heart loves. Purity brings clarity is another way of saying it. If you have a heart that is undivided for God, that's the affirmation that David was saying. He had an undivided heart, unwavering. If that's the case, if purity brings clarity, if the eyes see what the heart loves, that means that I should have eyes that see God at work in my life. I should be able to see things that God is doing in my life. What

encouragement! For the pure in heart to go through the day and to be mindful of the working of God in our life! How easy it is to go through the day at the speed of light with which we move and miss it all, to be oblivious to it, to not be mindful of it. Why? Because we're not pure in heart. Our heart is divided. We're not even thinking about those things that are eternal. We see God in our life. We see Him in our circumstances. We see Him in our world. How great is it to hear reports of what God is doing all around the world. I think it's the idea of being aware of His glory and power, His Majesty. It certainly must include the idea of being comforted by His presence. We're aware of the presence of God in our life, in those times that are so crucial. We're walking in fellowship with Him, right?

Paul's prayers are just such an encouragement. In almost every one of his epistles, he's praying for those people that he's writing to. In Ephesians 1:18, Paul says, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be opened so that you may see with understanding. I think that's "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" being answered. Paul's prayer for us and for those that he ministered to: I pray that the eyes of your heart may see God at work in your life. I pray that the eyes of your heart be so focused on God, be undivided, unwavering in your commitment and the integrity of your heart and your life. May it be such that you see the hand of God at work all around you. Because you know what? The primary focus of the Christian life is what's going on on the inside, what's going on in the heart. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.

So what do we take away from this 6th Beatitude? The purer your heart, the more clearly you'll see Him. You'll see what God values. You'll see what God loves. You'll see what is God's will. Have you ever considered that at times we're confused about the will of God because our heart is divided, because our heart isn't focused as it should be? Pursue purity because we have this incredible incentive. The vision of God. To see God is Jesus's promise.

We close with this. Let this be our prayer. Search me, O God (Psalm 139), and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there is any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. I like the way the English Standard Version says it. See if there's any grievous way in me. See if there's any way my heart is wandering.

See if there's any falsehood, Father. See if there's any sense of deception, even self-deception. Show me how I'm deceived within my own heart. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me know my thoughts and see if there is any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You that You regularly answer that prayer as we call out to You to do just that. Lord, we do that as we close this morning. We pray that You would, by Your Spirit, show us things in our life, Father, that are not consistent with Your truth. Show us, Father, how it is that we may have a deceptive or divided heart. Lord, we pray that if there is someone here this morning that does not know You in a personal way that their heart, their mind, their eyes would be opened to the truth of the gospel first and foremost. To know that what Jesus did, He did for each one of us in His death on the cross, and that by putting our faith and our trust not in ourselves but in Christ, You have said You give to us the most wonderful gift that we could ever receive – the gift of eternal life. So we pray that You would do that good work as well. Lord God, for this body of believers, for the witness that we would bear in this community, we pray that we would be people who are undivided, that we would be people who are pure in heart. We ask in Jesus's name, Amen.