September 27, 2015

“Blessed Are the Pure in Spirit”

Matthew 5:8

**FCF**: Problem of a purity of heart

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Christ has shown us the path for our lives.

(magnet) We should then heed and pursue it.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Compromise is not always a good thing. Consider a divided heart (READ Doriani, 32):

Studies of World War II have shown that some American industries did a profitable business with Nazi Germany until the final stages of the war. *IBM and the Holocaust*, by Edwin Black, shows that Hitler’s regime used American technology to organize slave labor and to manage death camps. IBM facilities operated in Germany throughout the war. Indeed, IBM’s chairman, Thomas Watson, received Germany’s Merit Cross for his contributions to German industry during wartime. Other researchers have shown that IBM was hardly alone. ITT sold components for V-1 “buzz bombs.” Ford and General Motors sold trucks; Standard Oil sold oil. RCA, Chase Manhattan, and others did the same, selling what they could.

This is what can happen when the need for national security and the desire for profits collide.

It’s a terrible example of double-mindedness, of mixed loyalties, of the divided heart. And the terrible reality is that the seed for it lies within all our hearts. But there is another way.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 5:1-12

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Some of you may have heard of a film coming out soon called *The Martian*. The basic premise is this. During a manned mission to Mars, Astronaut Mark Watney is presumed dead after a fierce storm and he is left behind by his crew. But he has survived and now finds himself stranded and alone on this hostile planet. So NASA and Watney have to figure out how to get him home. NASA needs to send a crew to rescue him. But Watney needs to work with his limited supplies to survive, to maintain contact with Earth, and to get to a new site. The stakes are enormously high as both parties are desperately trying to find a path, a way ahead.

Here’s the thing. Our dilemma is not in a popular book or a Hollywood blockbuster. We have not been marooned on the fourth planet out from our sun. But we are still facing high stakes – not just for survival but what it means to truly flourish in this life and to enter the next.

We are looking at the “Beatitudes” – Latin for “blessed”. What does that mean? It goes beyond the realm of just feelings and emotions. Each of these is an assessment of a life, of experience and direction. Jesus knows we are wired to have heroes. He then is saying, “*This is who you should aspire to, envy, imitate, and emulate. For this is what it looks like to follow Me*.”

How do the Beatitudes fit together? The first three speak to our deepest need. The fourth to that need met and satisfied. The remaining to what it looks like to have had those needs met and satisfied. Put another way, Christ has shown us the path for our lives. Part of that, as we can see from this sixth beatitude, includes a purity of heart. We need to heed and pursue this.

Well, what does that look like? That takes us to three follow up questions. First, who is Jesus speaking of? Who are these people? Second, why are they described this way? Why are they said to be blessed? And, third, all that being true, how then can this be true of us?

1. **WHO ARE THEY?**

So, first, who are these people? Who is Jesus speaking of here? (READ Matthew 5:8)

1. *Inward Purity*

From the start, it’s obvious Jesus has a certain kind of purity in mind here.

1. Not merely outward

It is not merely outward. It is not merely ceremonial. All the sacrifices, the rites and rituals of the Old Testament, were meant to point to something else – the need for a moral purity. This was something the prophets made clear and something the Pharisees of Jesus’ day failed to see.

1. But in and from the heart

This purity was not merely outward but in and from the heart. The heart – the center of our thoughts, the source of our emotions, the seat of our will. This is a purity in and from the heart.

1. *Honest Purity*

That is to say, it is an inward purity. Even more specifically, it is an honest purity.

1. Not hypocritical

Such a heart is not hypocritical. It is not governed by mixed and ulterior motives. Duplicity and deceit are abhorrent to such a heart. Jesus is tapping into the Psalms here (READ Psalm 24:3-6).

1. But with sincerity

This is no hypocrisy but a deep sincerity, a transparency. It means to be free from all falsehood.

Who is Jesus speaking of? Those governed by an inner honest purity with God and man.

*Illustration:*

And, as with each of the Beatitudes, Jesus alone is the One who perfectly embodies this. Consider His trial (READ Matthew 26:57-60). As legally precise as those minds were against Him, as hard as they tried to find something, no legitimate charge could be brought against Him.

*Application:*

Which is natural for Jesus. But not us. We cry out for authenticity, for transparency. Some of us have special equipment that can sniff it out. Oh, we insist on it in others. But our tendency? To hide, to wear masks. To be fake, not to be real – with God or with one another.

And Jesus is making clear that He not only shares that desire we have in our hearts for others. If we’re to follow Him, He insists on it in us! And, thank goodness, He brings it about.

Christ has shown us the path for our lives. We should then heed and pursue it.

1. **WHY ARE THEY BLESSED?**

That’s “who”. But why are the pure in heart described this way? (READ Matthew 5:8)

1. *Seeing God Now*

They are blessed because they shall see God. When? Even now. In the present. How? The sincere undivided heart, the one living for God and longing for God above all things, has a new way of seeing. They see more truly than anyone else. And so they see with expectancy.

1. In nature

They see God in nature – the power behind creation and the great design displayed throughout.

1. In the times

They see God in the times – in history, His hand in the past. And in current events, even now.

1. In our lives

And they see God acting in their lives. There is a living vibrant relationship at work between the creature and the Creator. They can see answers to prayer, His work in their hearts. And others.

1. *Seeing God Then*

The pure in heart can see God now. But even more then. There’s a future element here. Such a person is on a trajectory, with an inevitability to their experience (READ 1 John 3:2). One day, they will stand in God’s presence, communing with Him. Faith shall become sight.

1. Genesis

Think of what we read of how things were. Genesis alludes to a regular ordinary experience for Adam and Eve – before the Fall – walking with God in the cool of the day. Can you imagine?

1. Revelation

And what do we read of how things will be? (READ Revelation 22:1-5) This is like an ancient court. The king was accessible only to his closest attendants. That’s what we see – of us!

Why then are the pure in heart said to be blessed? Because they shall see God. Just as we sing in “The Doxology” – “*as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be*.”

*Application:*

Genesis and Revelation give us the bookends of human history. They show us what and who we were made for, where we come from and, as followers of Christ, where we are going.

(READ Matthew 5:8) This is not a terror but a delight. This is not something for us to dread but something for us to look forward to. This is not a subject to shy away from but one to draw people to. For this is not a vain delusion but a powerful realization of our deepest desires.

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1. **HOW CAN THIS BE TRUE OF US?**

Which brings us to the last question. How can this beatitude be true of us?

1. *Through the Message of the Gospel*

Through the message of the gospel – something we begin and keep beginning with.

1. Solas security

That is, our standing with God is secured by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And so there is nothing we can do to make God love us any more. Or to make Him love us any less.

1. Deep change

As that message seeps into your bones, it works deep change into your life. You realize you have nothing to prove. All that striving, your being so driven because you’re unsure of who you are, is done. You realize there are no more masks to wear. All that pretending and shifting around because you’re unsure of what other people think is over, mercifully brought to an end.

1. *By the Power of the Holy Spirit*

How? Through the message of the gospel. And the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Christ’s continuing ministry

Christ made clear His work was not done upon His ascension. It was just beginning (READ John 14:15-17). Jesus was sending “another” – meaning the Spirit would continue His work.

1. To apply what has been accomplished

The Spirit would continue Jesus’ work to apply what Jesus had accomplished. Jesus has died the death we deserved to die and lived the life we should have lived. And the Spirit has been sent to work that into us, to make us pure in heart, to rid us of our play acting and to set us free.

How then can this be true of us? Through the gospel message and the Spirit’s power. Which means there is nothing we have to prove. And there are no masks we have to wear.

*Illustration:*

Chameleons are fascinating creatures. At last count, there are 202 species. They have long rapidly extrudable tongues and independently mobile eyes. Most have prehensile tails. And, of course, they can change their skin color – not just through pigments but by adjusting the spacing of nanocrystals in their skin which then affects the wavelengths of light that are reflected off of the crystals. Amazing design! Why? For signaling but also for camouflage – to blend in.

Again, they’re fascinating creatures. But we’re not meant to be chameleons.

*Application:*

And we don’t need to be. (READ Matthew 5:8) How can this be true of us? Read this book. Let it read you. Get the answers to your questions. Wrestle with its implications.

Then ask Him to change you. For some of us, that may mean saying, “*O God, I’m tired of the hoops I’ve been jumping through and the masks I’ve been wearing. I want to be real. I confess I’ve been running my life and running from you. I’m done with that and turning to you*.”

For others of us, that may mean saying, “*Lord, I’ve forgotten what it means to be pure in heart, to have that transparency and deep sincerity. I’m a fraud, a fake. I’ve lost my longing to see you. This isn’t who or what I want to be. So I repent. Have mercy and restore my sight*.”

Know that He delights to hear prayers like that, such cries to grow in being pure in heart.

**CONCLUSION:**

Who is Jesus speaking of? Why are they described this way? How can this be true of us? And what would this really look like in someone’s life? Let me tell you something of my own experience. The best way I can think of capturing this is to take you to the Spring of 1988 and my younger brother’s high school graduation. The ceremony was finally over and crowds of people were milling about. Friends and acquaintances were catching up while the graduates were posing for pictures. My parents saw and struck up a conversation with Cindy, a girl from my own graduating class. She asked about how I was doing and, after a bit of exchange, said these striking words, “*The thing about Richard is that he’s real. What you see is what you get*.”

Now, I only heard about this second hand. But I take it as a high compliment worth my aspiring towards. And a bit surprising, given that we’d grown up going to the same schools. You need to understand that I was an insecure kid. I had no real sense of self. I desperately wanted to be popular. Or at least just liked. I was drawn to whatever drove the in-crowd and was willing to try whatever seemed to work for them. And none of it worked for me. So, by the time my junior year of high school was over, I was discontent, angry, and miserable.

And then I met Christ. Or, rather, He met me. I was exposed to the gospel. And by it. The Spirit showed me my real need, made clear the significance of Christ’s finished work, enabled me to understand and embrace it, and set me free. Not that I am perfect or have arrived, by any means. But a transformation began that altered the course of my life and was made clear to others in ways I couldn’t even see. God is good. The gospel is true (READ Matthew 5:8).

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