

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Blessed Are The Pure In Heart

Text: Matthew 5:8

Introduction: Truly this passage of Scripture is one whose depths are immeasurable. The breadth of this statement is among the greatest utterances in Scripture. The subject of holiness is all throughout Scripture, and it's impossible to exhaust its meaning.

The Context

For most of its history, Israel was in desperate condition, politically, economically and spiritually. A large part of its income was devoted to the Romans. One can see why many wanted Jesus to set things in order now and visibly. But the most significant and concerning issue wasn't the political or economic, it was the spiritual.

At this time the most influential religious system was that of the Pharisees. It was a pervasive legalistic system that dominated the Jewish society. Over the years various leaders reinterpreted and interpreted Scriptures, and became more authoritative than the Scripture itself. The system was in essence, a series of do's and don't that covered almost every aspect of Jewish life.

There was an overwhelming impossibility to keep these laws. Because of this failure, many were depressed, anxious and overwhelmed of their own failure to do so. Thus, the leaders developed a plan that if you kept some of the laws perfectly that was good. But even that was impossible. So eventually people were told to pick one law and keep it perfectly.

In Matthew chapter 3 we see the refreshing, non-stifling, never ending system of demands message of repentance from John the Baptist. They didn't want another rabbi, another law, another command. It was this that caused people to seek to be forgiven and free. Many thought John may be the Messiah.

The people knew that someday God was going to come and sprinkle their souls with water and cleanse them from sin, and replace their hearts with a fleshly heart not a stony one, cf. Ezekiel 36:25-26. Psalms 32:1-2 "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!"

The story we have of Nicodemus indicates such a desire for God, John 3:2 "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs You do unless God is with him." Jesus replied about being born again. Nicodemus knew of this, and wondered how to be

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righteous, to be redeemed to become a child of God. As a teacher of the law, he seemed to know that all those laws weren't enough. Another example is the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life.

The Meaning

Throughout Scripture and in many cultures, the heart has been used metaphorically to represent the inner person, which is the seat of motives, personalities and attitudes. Proverbs 4:23 "Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life." Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." The heart is the control center for the mind and will as an emotion. Genesis 6:5 "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." David acknowledged before the Lord in Psalms 51:6, 10 "Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Yet we see the wickedness of the heart and its tendencies. Jeremiah 17:9-10 "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." And Jesus said this about the heart of man in Matthew 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."

Application #1: God has always been concerned with the inside of man, the condition of his heart. When the Lord called Saul to be Israel's first King, 1 Samuel 10:9 "Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart." The new king began to resort to his old patterns, he chose to disobey God and trust in himself. He presumed to take for himself the priestly role and refused to destroy the Amalekites and their possessions which God had commanded. The Lord took the kingdom away and gave it to David. 1 Samuel 16:7 "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

As it's been said many times, watch your heart and be careful where it may lead you. If it's leading towards carnal, secular ways, renew it with a desire for the Lord and His ways.

The Pure At Heart

The Greek word for pure is where we get *catharsis* and the basic meaning is to make pure by cleansing from dirt, filth and contamination. In psychology the term means to cleanse

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emotionally and the mind. It also is related to the Greek word *castus* which is where we get our english word *chaste*. Overall it's used in context of refining metals leaving only what is pure.

Application #2: when this principal is applied to the heart, the idea is that of pure motives of single mindedness, undivided devotion, spiritual integrity and true righteousness. You cannot be devoted to two masters. Not pure at heart is double mindedness and is always trouble for the believer. Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

A more convicting verse is James 4:4 "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." The answer to this from James comes in vs. 8 "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

Application #3: Christians have the right motives concerning God, even though we often fail to be single minded towards God. Cf. Romans 7:15, 21, 25 , the deepest desire of the true believer is holiness, even when sin halts that.

Thus purity of heart is more than sincerity. One can be sincere, yet lead to worthless and sinful things. The pagan priests who opposed Elijah demonstrated their sincerity when they lacerated their bodies in order to induce Baal to send fire. Some crawl on glass and nails for hundreds of yards to show their devotion to a shire or a saint. Your sincere devotion is wrong and misaligned before a Holy God. The scribes and pharisees believed external actions and devotions such as giving, but Jesus said in Matthew 23:23-24 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" And in vs. 26 "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also."

Conclusion: I will pick up next week for the rest of this verse. But today let's consider our motives for purity. Are they self righteous motives? Or are you motives for purity driven by your desire to please God?