

Psalm 51:1-13; Mt. 5:8
Reaching for the Highest Ideal

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God – Mt. 5:8

Of all the beatitudes we've studied up to this point I must say that the one before us today seems so far beyond us that we can do little more than gaze at it the way we would gaze at a distant bright and shining star in the heavens. Can you not detect a contrast in this beatitude in comparison to the others?

We can readily relate to being poor in spirit – because that is in fact what we are. In the hardness of our hearts as lost sinners we wouldn't have admitted our bankruptcy but our denials wouldn't change the fact of it. And we can readily relate to mourning over our sins. Here is something that we can detect. Here is something that is very much near at hand – so much so that we're able to cry as Paul does in Romans 7:24 *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

Seeing what we truly are before God has enabled us to submit to the terms of the gospel. There really is no high and lofty attainment, then, to these first 3 beatitudes. Neither is there initially a lofty attainment to the 4th beatitude. We hunger and thirst for something that we don't have but that we wish we had. We hunger and thirst for righteousness. We see righteousness as the qualification for heaven and yet our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

But in the gospel of the kingdom of heaven we learn that God supplies what we lack. Righteousness comes as a gift when we receive Christ. This righteousness is imputed to us and gives us a perfect standing with God. This is why we are filled because God in His grace has supplied what we lacked.

I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones when he looks upon the 4th beatitude as being the summit of the mount, so to speak. He sees the 4th beatitude as being the water shed from which the remaining beatitudes flow. And when we analyze the beatitudes this way we really don't have too much trouble understanding the 5th beatitude – even though on the surface of it, it may appear to be confusing. The 5th beatitude – *blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy* places a strong emphasis on the truth that you cannot be saved without your salvation leading to a transformed life. A denial of life-transformation becomes a denial of the very mercy a sinner professes to receive from God.

So the 5th beatitude is not terribly hard to understand in the context of the other beatitudes and in the context of the gospel. It aligns with the experience of those that have been truly saved. Most willingly and desirously will they show mercy to others and forgive others because they are keenly aware of the mercy and forgiveness they've received themselves from Christ. Those who find it difficult to show mercy and forgiveness only demonstrate that they have little or no idea of what they've received which ought to lead them to wonder if they've really been saved at all.

But now we come to the 6th beatitude – *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* – and it seems that all of a sudden this beatitude shoots into the sky and soars as far beyond us as the stars of heaven. This beatitude, you see, presents the highest ideal both in terms of what is to be attained and what the qualification is for that attainment to be realized.

Seeing God – there's the attainment and what a lofty ideal is presented to us – *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. But alas – purity of heart – there's the qualification for the attainment and doesn't that put the attainment well out of our reach? Haven't these previous beatitudes forced us to acknowledge the things within us that stand in stark contrast to purity?

And yet we know that the Lord Jesus never wasted words. Had these words been spoken by any one of lesser authority it would be easy, I suppose, to dismiss them as presenting a lofty but unrealistic ideal. But if these words come to us from Christ Himself then we cannot view them as presenting an unrealistic ideal. I don't believe that Christ would have wasted His time and breath just to hold out an ideal that was hopelessly beyond us.

Quite the contrary – I believe that Christ is presenting this beatitude because He wants the subjects of the kingdom of heaven to adopt this high ideal and to reach for it. And that's what I want to focus on this morning – reaching for this high and lofty ideal. The question, then, that naturally arises that I'll endeavor to answer today is simply this:

How Do We Reach for the High Ideal that is Presented by this Beatitude?

Or – if I could put the matter even more simply – How do we make this beatitude our aim?

I. We Must Appreciate What this Beatitude Presents

This beatitude presents the prospect for seeing God. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

The reason this beatitude sets forth such a high ideal is because there is a sense in which God can't be seen. So we read in Ex 33:20 God's answer to Moses request to see His glory – *And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.*

Paul writes to Timothy concerning Christ – 1Tim. 6:16 *Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom [be] honour and power everlasting. Amen.*

We know that the very angels of heaven who are without sin cannot see God. And so we read in Isa. 6 how they cover their faces with two of their wings when they cry to one another *holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.*

What these verses indicate to us is not that the words of Christ are beyond us – but that the greatness and splendor and majesty of God is such that God cannot and will not ever be fully taken in or comprehended by mere men – even redeemed men. There is more of

God, in other words, than we have the capacity to understand. And when you think about it – how could it be any other way? The problem with the cults and the false religions of the world is that their false gods are completely within the realm of man’s comprehension. One of the reasons the Jehovah false witnesses reject the doctrine of the trinity is because such a doctrine is beyond what they can comprehend. Men love to fashion their gods in such a way that they are within the puny limits of their finite minds.

The God of the Bible, on the other hand does not present Himself that way. He is far above and beyond man’s ability to take in. And so we read in Isa. 55:8,9:

8 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

9 *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

What then does Christ mean when He holds out the prospects for seeing God in this beatitude? I think we can answer the question by looking back at the state of man before the fall and then looking ahead to man in his glorified state through redemption and then making the application that would apply today.

Looking back – we see man before the fall holding close communion with God. I love the description that’s given by implication back in Gen. 3:8 which tells us *and they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day*. That verse indicates to us that it was the regular practice of Adam and Eve to enjoy fellowship with God in those daily walks. They were that close to God. They could see Him in such a way that they were able to converse with Him as openly and spontaneously and routinely as any two people could hold communion with each other.

And when we look ahead to redeemed man in glory we are told in 1Jn. 3:2 *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*. Being conformed to Him, we shall be enabled to see Him certainly in a way we’ve never seen Him before. The disciples, in the mount of transfiguration, were given a glimpse of what the glory of the kingdom will be when they beheld Christ and it seems that the author of the gospels find themselves at quite a loss when it comes to being able to describe Him.

- *His face did shine like the sun, and his raiment was as white as the light* – says Matthew in his gospel – Mt. 17:2.
- *And his raiment became shining, exceeding white like snow, as no fuller on earth can whiten them* – Mk. 9:3.
- *The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening* – Lk. 9:29. *Dazzling* – another version calls it – *sparkling* says Young in his literal translation. The word Luke uses occurs nowhere else in the Greek and is defined by one lexicon as *flashing out like lightning – to shine – to be radiant*.

Such are the prospects, then, that this beatitude holds out to the subject of the kingdom of heaven. But as I've noted throughout our studies in the sermon on the mount – Christ is not speaking in exclusive terms of the future glory of the kingdom of heaven. Christ has established His kingdom already. Those that trust in Christ are subjects of that kingdom now. What does this beatitude mean, then, in terms of seeing God now?

And the answer to that question is that we behold Him now with the eye of faith and we behold Him a number of ways. We see Him in His creation – we are very much aware that the heavens declare His glory and the firmament showeth His handiwork (Ps. 19:1). Since the power of the Holy Spirit has come upon us in salvation the blinders have been removed from our eyes so that we see His glory in the things He has made.

But we also see Him in the realm of His providential dealings. We have come to know and affirm the truth that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). As subjects of the kingdom of heaven we've come to see that every circumstance of life is ministered to us by our Savior and Redeemer. Nothing comes our way apart from God. Nothing catches God by surprise. He rules over all so much so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from our heavenly Father.

In salvation we've gained the spiritual sensitivity to see His hand everywhere and to see Him working in everything. And then of course we see Him in His written revelation. And let me say something here again that I said many times in the past but I haven't stressed it recently – which is that the written revelation of God does not come to us merely as the record of revelation to others – it comes to us rather as God's direct revelation to us – so when the Spirit of God bears witness to our hearts of the truth of God and applies that truth to our hearts – then we do see God – He's revealed to us the way He was revealed to Moses in the mount – or the way He was revealed to the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace – or the way He was revealed to John on the Isle of Patmos.

It is true that we see through a glass darkly but we see, nevertheless. And the fullness and clarity of our vision depends in large measure on the challenge that our beatitude presents to us – and this leads to my next point – for if we would reach for the high ideal presented by our text – not only must we appreciate what the beatitude presents, but:

II. We Must Know How the Beatitude is Practiced

This high ideal of seeing God is presented to us on a conditional basis – *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. I believe this beatitude sets before us the very essence of the doctrine of sanctification. And I think that we'll further see that the two parts of the beatitude work together to promote each other.

In other words – as we strive for purity of heart, we'll see more of God and as we see more of God we'll be stirred to strive even more for purity of heart. The two things go hand in hand. Now in viewing this beatitude as pertaining to sanctification, it's important to bear in mind again the order of the beatitudes.

We have noted already that the 4th beatitude represents the summit. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* We've taken note of God's gracious provision of righteousness. What we hunger and thirst after, keenly aware of our lack of it – God freely provides in Christ. His righteousness is imputed to us and this is how we find the fulfillment that is held forth by this beatitude.

You could say that the 4th beatitude corresponds to our justification before God. We can see, then, the truth in the 6th beatitude that is expounded in other places in the New Testament – most notably James epistle – in which the truth is forcibly pressed that sanctification inevitably follows justification – which is just another way of saying that where salvation has been truly wrought by the Spirit of God, the desire for holiness will follow.

This is the meaning of *pure* in the phrase *pure in heart*. It speaks of holiness. We generally think of holiness as being purity. The phrase in our beatitude could read *clean in heart*. 10 times the Greek word is translated by the English word *clean*. And so in the ethical sense of the word it means *to be free from corrupt desire; free from sin and guilt; free from every admixture of what is false; blameless, innocent, unstained with the guilt of anything.*

And as I said in my introduction – this seems to put the beatitude out of our reach because we know ourselves to be defiled. We are well aware of our sin and guilt. To suggest that we're pure would seem to be the very essence of hypocrisy. There are a number of scriptures, however, that reveal to us how this purity is gained.

We read from Psalm 51 in connection with our study. Listen to David's petition in verse 7: *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.* Three verses later in v. 10 he prays: *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.* I take the two ideas in this verse to be parallel expressions of the same thing so that creating a clean heart is the same as renewing a right spirit.

These are Old Testament verses that point to the benefits of the sacrifices of that time. We know that those Old Testament sacrifices point us to Christ and bring to our remembrance His shed blood. And so with reference to anti-type of the Old Testament sacrifices the author of Hebrews says:

- Heb 9:14 *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*
- Heb 10:22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Here, then, is how purity of heart is obtained. It's obtained through faith in the blood of Christ. It's obtained through the sure hope that Christ's blood washes away our sins and satisfies the claims of God's justice against us. It's gained through faith in the promises of God that pertain to salvation.

So we read in 2Cor. 7:1 *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* Peter stresses the same thing – utilizing the promises of the gospel – when he writes in his 2nd epistle 1:4 that there are *given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* Partaking of the divine nature – couldn't that correspond to being pure in heart?

And so purity of heart is gained by beholding Christ – beholding the very dying form of One who gave Himself for you. Listen to 2Cor. 3:18 *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Purity of heart is gained by holding the hope of seeing Christ in His glory when He appears. Listen to the words of 1Jn. 3:2,3: *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

Do you begin to see how the two things work together? We gain purity as we see Christ by faith and as we see Christ by faith we're stirred in our hearts to strive for purity. We plead His blood and we claim the promises of the gospel and in this fashion we press on for purity.

Before I leave this point let me add one more thing about the place of this beatitude among the others. Based on what I've said so far it might be easy to wonder why this beatitude follows the beatitude about being merciful. You would think that the beatitude that depicts the essence of sanctification would immediately follow the beatitude that depicts justification and that being merciful would then become the fruit of both.

I realize, of course, that a person must be careful not to make too much of the analysis of the order of the beatitudes. Lloyd-Jones warns about the tendency to analyze scripture to death in order for the preacher to make things conform to his preconceived ideas or to his sermons. Having said that, however, I think it would be accurate to say that the 5th beatitude about being merciful implies something that is very much a part of our sanctification. Indeed it could be viewed as the driving force of sanctification. The thing I have in mind is the principle of gratitude.

What compels us to be merciful toward others? What is it that becomes a compelling force in the matter of forgiving others? Is it not the fact that we're grateful for mercy received ourselves and we're grateful for the blessing of being forgiven for so much? I wouldn't press the matter too far but I nevertheless think that the gratitude so clearly implied in the 5th beatitude becomes a contributing force to the effort put forth in the 6th beatitude to attain purity of heart.

If we would reach for this high ideal, then, presented to us in this 6th beatitude, we must appreciate what this beatitude presents and we must know how this beatitude is practiced. It remains for us to consider finally and briefly that:

III. We Must Avoid the Danger that this Beatitude Implies

Blessed are the pure in heart – our text says – for they shall see God.

And in placing this emphasis on the heart the danger that's implied that must be avoided is the same danger that the Pharisees of Christ's time had been swallowed up by. It's the danger of externalizing religion. True religion, you see, is a matter of the heart and not merely a matter of externals. This becomes a very easy thing to forget and the devil undoubtedly has his part in trying to keep us from remembering that religion is a matter of the heart. The church at Ephesus would forget this and as a result all the ecclesiastical machinery of the church would function smoothly but they would lose their first love.

The Pharisees of Christ's day knew full well the practice of externalizing religion and as a result they nullified the power of religion by their tradition and the best attainment they reached was their ability to fool others into thinking they were pure, when in fact, as Christ says, they were whited sepulchers which appeared beautiful outward but were within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness (Mt. 23:27). Certainly nobody who is swallowed up by such a mindset can be said to be enjoying fellowship with God in the sense that they're seeing God.

There are many in fundamental circles that wonder why they are viewed by outsiders as being Pharisaical. And I should say in defense of fundamentalism that many of the charges aimed at them are unfair and spring from hypocrisy and worldliness or a spirit of ecumenical compromise. If you've never read *Evangelicalism Divided* by Ian Murray, I would recommend the book. I don't know that Ian Murray would identify with fundamentalism – but the documentation he provides certainly vindicates the separatist stand that fundamentalists have taken against ecumenical evangelism.

Be that as it may – I'm afraid that it cannot be denied that there are many in fundamentalism that externalize religion and would view purity in terms of certain conservative cultural traditions. And then there are others in fundamental and evangelical circles that seem so limited in what they preach or teach that all they manage to do is impose external rules for living upon those that hear them preach or teach. It seems that the only thing they've ever learned to do is to expound the rules for living and then gauge the spirituality of their hearers in accordance with their external compliance.

The thing that really needs to be accomplished in order for the people of God to be encouraged to reach for the ideal of our beatitude is that Christ needs to be presented and Christ needs to be remembered and Christ's love needs to become the driving force in the Christian's pursuit of purity and the way Christ's love becomes that driving force is for the love and grace and mercy of Christ to be continually emphasized.

And so I wonder today – are you reaching for the ideal that this beatitude presents? Christ intends that we behold Him in His glory. Christ intends that we enjoy the intimacy of communion with Him. He has made provision for this intimacy to be realized. It's His blood that purges our minds and hearts. It's His blood that washes away all our sins. It's His blood that enables us to draw near to Him in full assurance of faith in order to behold Him and know Him.

Let me warn you that the failure to strive for this ideal will leave you with nothing more than an empty shell when it comes to religion. One of the reasons that Christianity bears reproach today is because it's perceived as being nothing more than an empty shell. One of the reasons that children will grow up and cast off the religion of their parents is because they perceive their parents religion to amount to nothing more than an empty shell.

It would seem, then, that we're faced with a choice – a choice that bears very serious ramifications. We can strive for the ideal of this beatitude and obtain purity of heart and enjoy fellowship with Christ – or we can go the way of empty shell religion which is the way of worldly hypocrisy.

May God save us from mere externals and instead draw us more and more to Himself that we might know the blessing that's pronounced upon those that are pure in heart. May our vision of Christ be so full and so clear that we are able to confess that by His grace we enjoy the blessing of seeing God because we appropriate continually the means for establishing and maintaining purity of heart.