

## THE BEATITUDES: Our King — His Kingdom — His Citizens

### 7. Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

#### Matthew 5:8

**PREFACE** — Once again, let's frame our study of this next Beatitude with this reminder: Jesus is the Savior King of an everlasting Kingdom. He has an agenda; a government that reflects and expresses His character. He has ways — He has values — that simply don't fit with the ways and values of fallen culture — in fact His Kingdom is radically counter-culture. His ways — His values are **formed in** and **expressed through** the lives of the men and women who have embraced His rule. **It is through the transformed lives** of redeemed men and women that the ethos of the Kingdom of heaven invades the earth!

This morning we come to the **sixth** Beatitude. Before we stand and read the passage, I want to read to you the testimony of a young lady that tells us how utterly awesome Jesus is — and in such a beautiful way sets up the weightiness of this beatitude

*I hadn't even made it to Christmas break of my freshman year of college and I had already managed to fail almost all of my classes, get arrested, lose my license, total my car, and I was facing theft charges. I had been an adult for all of three months, and I had already burned my life into the ground. And I hated myself for it. I couldn't figure out why, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get my life on track. I couldn't figure out why I was so messed up. But the problem was I actually wanted to be a good person, but I realized there was something in me that didn't work, something that wasn't good. And I could only think of one way to change that.*

*So, when I was 18 years old, I decided to end my life. I made that decision because I couldn't think of another way to get this freaking heart out of my chest that I didn't want anymore. So, I made a plan. I decided to wait until after Christmas cause I didn't want to ruin the holidays for anyone. Apparently, that felt like the politest time to end your life. But in the weeks leading up to Christmas, something happened. Somebody invited me to church. And I said yes because I actually had nothing left to lose, and I barely got in the building that day. But something changed. I got a glimpse of a God that I didn't know, but would one day change not only my life, but save it.*

*Today, when I get caught up in worship, it's this time in my life that I think about. Sometimes I'll stop singing. I'll just put two fingers to my neck, and I'll feel my pulse. This is my deepest worship, to feel my heart beating fourteen years after I decided it shouldn't. So, if you're here today, and you're not really sure why this matters, why does it matter what goes inside my heart, I can tell you that because of what was in my heart I was as good as dead, but now I'm alive because of the transformation that God did in me. I can tell you that there is nothing that will impact your life and the lives of those around you more than the contents of your heart.*

Each of the Beatitudes are so profound — but we want to remember that these are not stand-alone soundbites. These aren't the Jesus version of nine enneagram types where you identify with one with perhaps a dash of another. There is a **progression** and a **continuity** in the **formation** of these *attitudes* — the *character* — the *way of being* that mark His Kingdom and His citizens. Each leads to the next and presupposes the one that has gone before. We will see that once again this morning.

Collectively — all of these Beatitudes fit into and shape the heart of each and every citizen in the Kingdom of God. Collectively these Beatitudes **are** a description of the character — the “*way of being*” — of the man or woman who by faith has embraced Jesus as Savior and King — the life that **results from** genuine salvation and **leads to** flourishing!

### **Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

This text is so simple — yet simply profound; simply powerful! I believe the passage begs at least two questions. **1. What** is purity of heart? **2. How** do you actually cultivate a pure heart? The answers to those questions have important implications.

**1. What** is purity of heart? First — we'll lean into the word **heart** and then we'll lean into what a **pure** heart is.

**HEART** — There's a reason why Jesus didn't say “*Blessed are the pure in language*” or “*Blessed are the pure in action*” or even “*Blessed are the pure in*

religious ceremonies, or diet — for *THEY shall see God.*” There was a powerful group of men in Israel obsessed with purity of language, religious rituals and diet. But they were far from pure — and far from God.

*Matthew 23:27–28 (CSB)* <sup>27</sup>“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. <sup>28</sup>In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Jesus said, *Blessed are the pure in heart* because the Kingdom of God and the life that flourishes is NOT an outside in bit of business. It is an inside out reality! Those who have embraced Jesus as redeemer and King have experienced the power of the King that transform men and women from the inside out — and as a result they, and they alone, see God.

Modern western culture makes a distinction between the mind and the heart; i.e. our mind wills and our heart desires — the heart feels. Here’s the problem for a lot of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians: They think of the heart in terms of feeling — as a result they think of “purity of heart” in terms of what they’re feeling instead of a radical reorientation of their entire life.

We need to remember that we are reading a very Jewish story. Jesus was Jewish speaking to Jews. Those listening to Jesus understood that the heart referred to the **entire** interior life of the person - a person’s feelings, mind and the will were all a part of the heart.

**John Nolland** — *The ‘heart’ locates the core of a person, that place from which we feel and think and determine our actions*<sup>1</sup>

**Paul Tripp** — *The heart is the causal core of our being.*

**PURE in heart** — Philosophers and theologians have sought to define **what** purity of heart is. Like *righteousness*, the word *purity* has more than one element to it.

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<sup>1</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 205). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

Like *righteousness*, this word *pure* also carries the crucial and essential meaning of legal purity. ONLY those who are *pure in heart* in a judicial sense can ultimately live in the presence of God for eternity. **THAT** is why Jesus came. The King of the Kingdom died on the cross to cleanse the hearts of rebels (that would be you and me).

*Hebrews 1:3 (NKJV)* <sup>3</sup>*who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

*Revelation 1:5 (NKJV)* <sup>5</sup>*and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,*

Surely — THAT purity of heart is literally essential to the life that is ***blessed*** — makarios — *flourishing*. Our sins had separated us from God, who IS life. Jesus shed His blood to cleanse us from our sin so that we can be restored to fellowship with God who IS life.

*John 17:3 (CSB)* <sup>3</sup>*This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ.*

Sixty years after Jesus died on the cross John wrote these amazing words

*1 John 1:1–3 (CSB)* <sup>1</sup>*What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—* <sup>2</sup>*that **life** was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you **the eternal life** that was with the Father and was revealed to us—* <sup>3</sup>*what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed **our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.***

Because of the blood of Jesus, we can experience here and now life in fellowship with God that flourishes— and we will experience life that will flourish in a way that we cannot comprehend in His presence forever in a New Heaven and a New Earth.

But there is another meaning of this word “*pure*” that is related to the way that we see God in the here and now — see God in nature; see God in Scripture; see God in our church family.

One philosopher explained the word “*pure*” like this:

*“Purity of heart is to will one thing. It’s to have no mixed motives, no dueling ambitions. It’s to set your heart on one thing and one thing alone: God and his goodness.”*

Here’s the way theologians frame it

*There can be two ideas connected to this. One is of inner moral purity as opposed to the image of... ceremonial purity. The other idea is of a single, undivided heart—those who are utterly sincere and not divided in their devotion and commitment to God.<sup>2</sup>*

*a single-minded devotion to God<sup>3</sup>*

*it denotes one who loves God with all his heart (Deut. 6:5)<sup>4</sup>*

*The purity referred to means singleness of motive and of devotion, as opposed to a divided motive.... completely devoted to God (or, to serving God).<sup>5</sup>*

***Psalm 86:11 (NET)** <sup>11</sup>O Lord, teach me how you want me to live! Then I will obey your commands. Make me wholeheartedly committed to you!*

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<sup>2</sup> Guzik, D. (2013). Matthew (Mt 5:8). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, C. (1992). Matthew (Vol. 22, p. 100). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> France, R. T. (1985). Matthew: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 1, p. 116). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992). A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew (p. 113). New York: United Bible Societies.

Those who are not yet Christians — and please remember that if you're a Christian there was a time when you were a "Not yet Christian" — so speaking as a former "not yet Christian" — I had a problem with the idea of having a pure heart. It was easy to think of Jesus being at war with our hearts and at war with our passions. The reality is that Jesus is not at war with your heart — He is at war FOR your heart! Jesus is after our hearts because Christianity is not a worldview to believe. It's about a person you love. The history of the world is about a good God on a relentless pursuit of men and women He loves — men and women who have spent their lives building their own kingdom for their own glory instead of living for His Kingdom and His glory.

The cross of our King is the evidence that there's nothing He wouldn't do, nothing He wouldn't sacrifice, nothing He wouldn't endure, to win your heart.

**In THAT light** — to be *pure in heart* is to will one thing: Return love to the God who first loved you. To be pure in heart is to choose Jesus over everything and everyone because He is alone is worthy of such love.

It is so absolutely radical to think of the way Jesus set out to inaugurate His rule in the world — and the way He is advancing His rule in the world today! Our world is not that unlike the world in which Jesus lived and spoke to. The world under Roman rule was a mixture of sophistication and brutality — an empire marked by power, tyranny, terror, and greed. Luke the historian describes the world of Jesus and the crowd listening to Him in **Matthew 5**.

***Luke 3:1–2 (CSB)** <sup>1</sup>In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.*

This is more than a time stamp! Tiberius was known for his cruelty and severity. Pontius Pilate was also renowned for his brutal massacres of the Jewish people in Judea, and his intense hatred of the Jews. The rulers from the family of Herod the Great (Herod, Philip, and Lysanias) were known for their corruption and cruelty.

Jesus came into THAT world. The people were longing for and anticipating the coming of the promised Messiah who would make everything right. That is exactly what He was going to do — but not in the way that they expected.

Instead of going after the Roman empire — He went after the human heart. His strategy didn't dismiss the Empire-sized corruption and brokenness. There is coming a day when He will deal directly with that domain

***Revelation 11:15 (CSB)** <sup>15</sup>The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.*

His strategy wasn't dismissive — it was indicative of the type of Kingdom that He came to establish. His Kingdom — His reign — was inaugurated on the cross and works its way from the inside out. His Kingdom heals the thing that is at the core of what's broken in marriages, families, circles of friends, cities and countries — the human heart — the core from which everything flows. He turns the world upside down one heart at a time.

If you think the Gospel is going to be swallowed whole by the world we're living in remember this: If you're a Christian today, it's because Jesus captured the hearts of men and women 2,000 years ago. Jesus had their hearts, so they spent their lives on Him and for Him! So few with so little had had a single will — one overriding devotion that directed every part of their lives to Jesus and for Jesus.

***Philippians 1:21 (CSB)** <sup>21</sup>For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

The first followers of Jesus were not mythical people — spiritual unicorns that no one has ever really seen. They were real people like you and me. They faced the same distractions and struggled with the same kinds of desires that compete for the real estate of our hearts.

I want us to close by looking at some ways we can keep our hearts pure, unmingled in our devotion to Jesus — and how to cultivate a single passion for Jesus.

## **PITFALLS TO A PURE HEART**

**1.** If purity of heart is to will one thing, we need to guard our hearts from willing a right thing for the wrong reason. Doing the right thing for the wrong reason is moralism. At its best moralism is **cleaning up our exterior lives** while **ignoring our interior lives**.

That can be reading God's word just to check a box instead of reading God's Word to meet with the God of the Word and allowing the Word to read you.

That can be abstaining from the physical act of sexual sin while indulging in sexual fantasies — or being kind to your co-worker on the surface while secretly wanting them to fail so you can advance — or being crushed with envy when they experience any level of success.

At its worst, moralism is hypocrisy; being concerned with the **appearance** of our spiritual lives in terms of how we will be perceived by others for our own gain.

***Matthew 23:27–28 (CSB)***

If you hate hypocrisy in the church, know that God hates it too. Jesus is at work to remove hypocrisy from His church. But the painful part about this is that in order for God to remove hypocrisy in the church, He first has to remove it from your own heart. Because the church is collectively whatever we are individually. We must allow Jesus to do **first in us** what we wish He would do in others.

**2.** If purity of heart is to desire Jesus above all things, we need to guard our hearts from refusing to acknowledge and admit to ourselves that we experience thoughts, temptations and desires in our heart that war against our love for Jesus. THAT is a very real thing. THAT is why we see so many Christian leaders who are taken out by their own moral failures. THAT is why we see pastors and people whose faith has impacted others decide to end their lives. THAT is why we see people standing strong in one moment and crumble to the ground in the next. What happened in that moment didn't happen overnight — but it did happen in the dark.

***Ephesians 5:8–13 (ESV)*** <sup>8</sup>for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup>(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup>and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose



*them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.  
<sup>13</sup>But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,*

By design of the King — community is crucial component to purity of heart.

**3.** If purity of heart is to desire Jesus above all things, we need to guard our hearts from approaching our relationship with Jesus as though He is the first on the list of many desires. I know this sounds harsh — but THAT is idolatry. We can miss this if we compartmentalize our lives: Here’s my Jesus box. Here’s my box. Follow me here.

I won’t pretend to speak for you — so I will speak for myself and if you nod in agreement, praise the Lord. I truly want to see God’s Kingdom come and God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. But throughout my life I’ve also wanted a nicer/bigger apartment — or a remodel of our house. I’ve wanted our kids to go to good schools. But the challenge has been that my desire for those good things was often at war with the ultimate thing — with the **one** thing Jesus tells us to desire: Him and His Kingdom.

Does that mean that we have to stop caring that our apartment can’t fit our families or stop caring about our kids’ school or that our appliances don’t work? Pure in heart cuts to the core — the heart of the matter. Pure in heart is not just about what we do — it’s about **how** we do it — and **why** we do it.

One example can be where we live. I’ll try illustrate by life 3,000 miles away in Brooklyn and Manhattan (and we can use it to create a diagnostic for life in suburban Sacramento).

In Brooklyn or Manhattan, they choose an apartment based on the amenities it has, how affordable it is, how close to a train it is, how they feel about that neighborhood — and whether or not it’s cool and relevant, or obscure and out of the way. But to desire one thing — Jesus (and His Kingdom) — would not look so much like that at all. Instead — you would pick an apartment as if you (or you and wife/family) are missionaries — called not to a country — but to a neighborhood or a block.

When we desire Jesus (and His Kingdom) above all things, that whole process begins with Him; asking Him who most needs the Gospel; asking Him who needs to bump up against a citizen of His Kingdom; asking Him where He wants His Kingdom to break out and how we can partner with Him.

Desiring Jesus (and His Kingdom) above all things should influence those who are single and desiring to be married. Looking for that person you will spend the rest of your life with is more than looking for comfort and a companion. It's about looking for a life-long co-laborer to be a part of seeing God's Kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When it comes to your job, your career, desiring Jesus (and His Kingdom) above all else will lead you to ask Jesus which office, or retail opportunity or trade shop most needs the Gospel — and what earning potential allows you to help underwrite Kingdom work in your city.

*Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV) <sup>23</sup>Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup>knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

*1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV) <sup>31</sup>So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

I love this quote — *What if instead of taking a list of desires and moving Jesus to the top we actually moved Jesus to the center of every desire that we had?*

Where you are matters to God and what you do matters to our King, because His citizens are His instruments to bring about His Kingdom.

**Pure in heart** is about desiring the saving plans and purposes of Jesus to be the single driving force of every decision that you make.

## **CULTIVATING A PURE HEART**

**1.** Pursue God! God, Himself, is truly our only hope for having a pure heart — our only hope for having this single desire/single will.

This is where the progression, continuity and unity of these beatitudes is so very important. Cultivating this single desire — this purity of heart traces back to the fourth Beatitude: The deep, desperate, profound and persistent hunger and thirst for God.

***Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup>You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

When we see God, our desires are changed. Greg Beale in his book *We Become What We Worship* —

*“What people revere they resemble, either for ruin or restoration. We’re all moving in one direction or the other, either ruin or restoration, there is no middle ground.”*

***2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup>And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

WOW!! We get to be transformed into God’s likeness as we look at Him.

That is why the pastoral leadership of Metro has from the very beginning of Metro to this very day been unwavering in encouraging you to read through the Bible. That is why the pastoral leadership of Metro has from the very beginning of Metro been relentlessly intentional about the time we devote to music and the time we devote to the study of Scripture — so that we will all get a clear look at Jesus! We are in awe of the responsibility because we truly understand that an encounter with God — seeing who He is — seeing His Heart and His ways — is our only hope at purifying our hearts.

We need to understand that our adversary the devil works overtime to bring us to the place where form replaces freshness, ritual replaces reality and worship treats God as less than the living God. The devil knows when that happens, we will never see the living God in a heart changing way.

AGAIN — an encounter with God is our only hope at purifying our hearts.

In [Ezekiel 36:26](#) the Lord says: *“I’ll **give** you a new heart. I’ll remove from you a heart of stone and I’ll **give** you a heart of flesh.”* We don’t **earn** new hearts. We are **given** new hearts. Isn’t that great news?!

**2.** Run from sin. Don’t entertain it. Don’t flirt with edges of it. Don’t invite it home with you. Again — this is tied to the preceding Beatitudes. As we see God, we begin to see sin for what it is — we begin to hate sin.

[Proverbs 4:23 \(NKJV\)](#) <sup>23</sup>*Keep (guard) your heart with all diligence, **For** out of it spring the issues of life.*

If you want to cultivate a pure heart the question is not: *“Where is the line, when it comes to sin?”* — or *“How far is too far?”* — or *“How close can I get to sin without sinning?”*

The apostle Paul wasn’t asking those questions! For him the **only** question was: *“How fast can I flee from sin?”*

[2 Timothy 2:22 \(ESV\)](#) <sup>22</sup>*So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

So, do you want to be faithful to your spouse? Flee from any environments that would tempt you to not be faithful to your spouse. Do you want to be celibate with your boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage? You need to flee from environments that tempt you to test those boundaries. Do you want to honor God and others with your words and not stumble into gossip or grumbling? Flee from environments in which you feel most tempted to do that. Do you want to stop watching porn, stop having one too many drinks, stop binge eating to try to deal with your emotions or stop spiraling into hours online to try to turn off your emotions? **RUN!**

Some of these decisions might be **uncomfortable**. Some of them might even be painful — cutting off relationships. They will **certainly cost** you something. But when we look at our King — we understand that love always costs you something.

Our King defined love in terms of sacrifice because you don't hang on a cross for something that you don't love. To love Jesus in return requires sacrifice.

WE NEED TO REMEMBER — Fleeing from sin isn't just about what you are running from — it's about WHO you are running TO.

### 3. Confess sin and Return to the Lord

What sin do you need to drag into the light today? And we NEED to do that with sin because sin will tell you one of two things: <sup>1</sup>You're fine and there's no consequences, or <sup>2</sup>You're stuck and there's no hope.

The light of the glorious Gospel — the light of God's Word — the light of who Jesus is drains the power of sin and shame. Jesus is the light that shines into the darkness — and the darkness has not and cannot overcome Him (John 1:5).

Whatever sin you need to drag into the light today — Jesus will be there when you do. Don't spend another moment in darkness because in the light there is a good King — a crucified and risen King waiting to welcome home the people He loves. Jesus changes everything!