

Community Church of Issaquah  
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## The Beatitudes: Part 3

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We will continue our study of the promises made to those who sat at the feet of Jesus on the Mount of Beatitudes, which have been named for the beautiful words he spoke. Today we'll look at the fifth and sixth of these Beatitudes. Janine has shared those verses from the fifth chapter of Matthew, but if you'll permit me, let me read these two verses again:

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy;  
Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

If you were to close your eyes and imagine yourself sitting there listening to this young teacher saying some very powerful things and making some very bold promises, what would you be asking yourself? ‘Obtain mercy?’ ‘See God?’ Though I would never want to doubt this man who was being called the Messiah and Son of God, let me try to wrap my head around all of this. It confuses me a great deal. Perhaps part of that has to do with my upbringing. Raised in the South, I often heard some lamenting, “Lord, have mercy.” The reason for saying it varied. Maybe it was due to the bad behavior of a child, or someone driving poorly, or a long line at the cashier at the grocery store. Whatever the cause, it was a frequent lament. Of course, so was “Bless your little heart,” which was not an expression of compassion, but rather an insult in a sweet way of saying, “Boy are you dumb.”

It didn't dawn on me until I became a Bible student that this phrase, "Lord have mercy," was not really a call for help directed at Christ Jesus. It was simply an expression of frustration. When Jesus spoke the words, "Blessed are the merciful for they will obtain mercy, There was a different set of ears hearing that than there is today. First, it might be wise to examine the meaning of the word mercy and then try to understand what exactly Jesus was saying. Let me clarify this a bit. The word 'mercy' comes from the Latin word, 'merced' which means 'the price was paid.' Whatever had been your transgression or sin, you could receive forgiveness or kindness through God's mercy. Mercy actually is the compassionate treatment of those in a difficult situation when you – or anyone else – has the power to punish or harm them but choose to be kind or benevolent.

There are numerous times in the Bible where mercy is sought or given. Later in his gospel in chapter 17, Matthew tells the story of a man who went up to Jesus and fell on his knees. He pleaded, "Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or water." Jesus's response was to heal the man's son. That is an expression of mercy and compassion that led Jesus to do something kind, so he healed and restored the son. That's mercy. Mercy is a gift that is given to someone who is suffering by a person who has chosen to act with compassion. The action that is the result of compassion is mercy.

Do you remember the parable or story of the lost or prodigal son? When he realized his transgressions he

sought to be reunited with his father and family. The father in this story is symbolic of God who had the power to punish but instead forgave and restored his son to a loving family. But mercy doesn't always show itself in big moments of actions. Mercy makes room for others. Could mercy lead us to not complain about some staff in a restaurant when service is poor and a tip is automatically added to your bill. We have the power to punish by complaining or blocking the tip amount, but mercy would be the opposite – being kind and offering mercy.

Mercy that comes from compassion might result in our choosing not to make it difficult for someone who hurt or offended us to apologize. This is the mercy of forgiveness. For those of us who have chosen to be active in the mission of the church, sometimes mercy might mean extending help to a child or family in need. Tools4Schools is an example of mercy showing itself in compassion. Mercy has many different looks and expressions, but mercy always comes from our choice to not punish but praise.

The underlying message of this Beatitude is firm and should be taken very seriously. In the Epistle of James, the second chapter, he put it this way: “For judgement will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; but to the one who has shown mercy, mercy triumphs over judgment.” Paul put it this way in his letter to the Ephesians, “But because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.” And, one of my absolute favorite verses of scripture from Titus, chapter 3: “He saved us, not because

of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewed by the Holy Spirit.” When we receive God’s mercy, we are washed clean or purified by fire. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Jesus followed those words with this promise, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. In truth, there’s a bit of a problem with this promise. When Jesus says the pure in heart will see God, this has a deeper meaning for those hearing then and now. Who are the ‘pure in heart’? Those who are focused only on their devotion and relationship with God or those who want only to bring glory to God and to be holy like God – these are the pure in heart. The problem is, most of us are not truly pure in heart.

Do you remember that first Beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit?” We learned that those of us who are poor in spirit are those spiritually seeking to be dependent on God for everything that is good. When we examine our own lives, most of us will come to realize that we do not have a pure heart. Our hearts are divided. One part wants to love God fully and do God’s will always, and another part of us wants to be a bit more independent or self-centered, to follow our own chosen path.

Let’s look at the words used by Jesus as he spoke. The Greek word for ‘pure’ that Matthew uses here in Chapter 5 verse 8 is ‘katharos’ which means to be ‘clean or blameless.’ If we are to be pure in heart, we must be blameless in who we actually are, not only in what we do.

A pure heart has nothing hidden but is totally transparent with a strong desire to please God in everything we do. So how do we truly become pure in heart? By giving our lives to Jesus and asking him to cleanse us. That is exactly what the Psalmist meant in Psalm 51:10. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

The promise to those who have asked for and received a pure heart is that they will see God. It would be easy to confuse the message here and claim that we would see the face of God here on earth. I believe what Jesus is saying is that when we strive to be pure in our living for Jesus, we will be rewarded in the afterlife with the joy of seeing God. Too often we focus on the things of this life – material things, but these are always temporary. Living a pure life in Christ is eternal for those who seek purity or pure in heart.

John wrote in his first epistle, chapter 3, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." Purity of the heart means being made clean through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. When we have sinned or transgressed, there is a strong need to purify our hearts by seeking God's forgiveness and grace. Does that only happen once? No.

Let me give you a simple, and silly, example. If you wear a garment, even if you wear it several times, and you wash it to cleanse it, will washing it once keep it clean forever? If

you drink your coffee from your favorite mug or cup and use it every morning to jump start your day, will washing it once keep it clean forever? The same is true with our lives. If we try to do our best at being a strong Christian all day every day, but stumble or lose our temper or have one bad thing after another happen and we lose our patience, did our asking God's forgiveness and mercy once take care of all these situations forever?

No. Living a life that is totally centered on God does not mean that we won't sin or transgress. It means that we need to come to the Lord often seeking to have our hearts purified so that we can grow and learn and move ahead with the desire to be totally focused on God. One way we might think about this is to be mindful of what we take into our lives. We all live in a world filled with people and messages that can turn us away from the Lord. Exercising more control over what we put in our hearts will definitely have influence on how pure in heart we are.

For anyone to be pure in heart does not only mean their actions. It is also the motives behind your actions. Someone that is pure in heart loves God first and fully, and their actions follow this deep love by obeying God in what we do in our daily lives. One final thought. To see God does indeed mean that we will be able in our heavenly life to see God, but we also see God in this life. We can see God at work in the lives of others and ourselves and sense his presence and goodness. When we are in relationship with God, we are in His presence. Purity or being pure in heart does indeed set a very high standard, but with God's

grace and forgiveness, our heart can be made pure when we clean them every day.