



Series: The Upside Down Kingdom

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Text: Matthew 5:8

Title: Blessed are the pure in heart

Good Morning Mercy Church! If you are new with us, welcome! My name is Spence and I serve as the Lead Pastor here. And we are in a series of sermons called The Upside Down Kingdom where we are looking at the opening to Jesus' famed sermon on the mount. This opening is in many ways like a summary of the whole thing. It's powerful and poetic and in here he paints a picture of a world so different from the world we live in that it feels upside down. And each week we are seeing how he exposes our world as empty & even harmful and how HE offers a more fulfilling way. And I think today is maybe the one that will cut deepest because it deals with us at our deepest level. How many of you have ever heard the phrase...when talking to somebody and trying to encourage them, especially when parenting. It's the phrase that says character is what's most important. It's the phrase that

acknowledges beauty is only skin deep and it fades over time. It goes something like this It's not what's on the outside, but

It's what's on the inside that counts.

You've heard this before. It's not what you look like on the outside, but instead, it's who you are on the inside that counts. We are approaching graduation season right now and I guarantee you that graduation speeches will be filled with versions of this modern proverb. You watch. High Schoolers just watch some of your valedictorians or class presidents will get up there and quote Taylor Swift and Dr. Suess and say OH THE PLACES WE WILL GO. And then they will get serious and say something like "Just remember class of 2024...we are Panthers (or whatever other mascot you have) and it's not about what you **do** in life it's what's on the inside that counts. It's not what you do, **it's who you become.**

And I think Sarah or Vikram or whoever the valedictorian is...is right. It's what's on the inside that counts. That idea is not new with us. Since the ancient Greeks and Plato, cultures have prized the interior person. In today's world it goes something like YOU HAVE TO BE who you are INSIDE. Why? Because it's what's on the inside that counts.

And today Jesus is going to agree yes, it's what's on the inside that counts. But he's also going to help you understand WHO YOU ARE IN THERE? And more



importantly who are you meant to be? AND **WHY** it matters. That's what we are missing in all the identity conversation. Not just who am I? But Who SHOULD I BECOME on the INSIDE? And WHY?

Our culture does a poor job of answering the follow up questions. If it's what's inside that counts...what does it count for? We don't talk about WHY it matters. So modern culture says, 'be true to who you are on the inside' and like any thinking person you should say 'why?' And RIGHT there you have a problem. Because there's no satisfying answer to that question that the world can give.

Jesus offers us a powerful answer today about who God has created us to be on the inside and then a powerful promise for why it counts.

SINCE we were out of the beatitudes last week and more importantly because they build on each other I want to read everything we have covered so far. STAND UP.

When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to teach them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

New Slide

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

-- Matthew 5:1-8

BE SEATED.

Blessed are the pure in heart. For they will see God.

Here's our outline:

1. **What does it mean?** For both. What does it mean to be pure in heart and what does it mean to see God?
2. **Our Dilemma:** Why we are not pure in heart. There's a simple reality that is impossible to escape - we are not pure in heart. Why?
3. **How do we become pure in heart?** If it's what's inside that counts but our inside isn't good...what do we do? How do we become pure in heart?
4. **How do we stay pure in heart?** If we become someone different, how do we stay that way

Start with what it means and how about we start with the promise..." They will see God." What does it mean to



see God?¹ Well this is one of those simple ideas that has several blessings built into it.

Ok I don't know if you know this but I'm an avid hunter. And by that, I mean I've hunted 3 times in my life. I'm not a hunter, I'm a guy that enjoys going hunting and hope to one day be worthy of the title hunter. But in hunting you are always watching & waiting. Trying to put yourself in the right spot to SEE the animal you are hunting. You gotta make sure you look right, gotta make sure you are in the right spot, and you gotta make sure with some animals you gotta SOUND right. Went hunting for wild hogs last week and you even gotta SMELL right. ALL so that you can SEE the animal. And even then, you aren't sure that you will. You just kind of hope to get a glimpse.

And sometimes we treat a relationship with God like a hunt. I think I gotta look right & sound right & do everything right and MAYBE I will see God when I die. But that's not what it means to see God. God is much more accessible to you than you may think. When you see "see God", you need to think about it in terms of a king's court. The King will see you now. Or for us, maybe think of it like a doctor's office. The doctor will see you now. Seeing the doctor isn't simply a visual thing. It's an appointed time with the doctor. See what Jesus is saying is whoever the pure in heart are...they

¹ Three of these are owed to John Piper from his sermon on this beatitude titled "Blessed are the pure in heart." citation

are the ones who will see God. Who will be in the presence of God.

To see God is to be admitted into his presence

And there is no greater promise in all of scripture or in all of human existence than the promise that in this life you can enter into the presence of God in some measure and then after this life you can see God fully face to face. It's why Jesus is announced in the beginning of Matthew as Emmanuel - "God with Us." It's why he closes this gospel saying I will be WITH YOU. To see God is for God to be with you always. That's not a Christian platitude. It's an incredible promise. It's why God has chosen to give his Holy Spirit, his presence, to every follower of Jesus. That's John 14. He is WITH YOU. All the blessings of the Christian life come when you are in his presence. All the good God has for you starts by you seeing him.

When you see God like Job you are humbled by his glory.

5 I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore, I reject my words and am sorry for them; I am dust and ashes. -- Job 42:5-6

When you see God rightly, you fall down in awe & wonder and humility because his glory is so powerful and pure. You will never desire God until you see how holy he is and how unholy you are. Your pride is



perhaps your greatest enemy in this life and the next and God in his kindness will bring you off that pedestal. Bring you out of the center of the universe and humble you FOR YOUR GOOD.

When you see God like Israel you are comforted by his grace. The great priestly prayer of Numbers 6. That God gave to Moses to be spoken over Israel.

24 "May the Lord bless you and protect you; 25 may the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; 26 may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace." Numbers 6:24-26

When God shines his face upon his people it is blessing and grace. It gives us peace. It warms our soul like us lifting our faces toward the sky on a clear day. Some of you are in a storm and you need peace. Some of you are in long suffering & you need peace. Some of you are getting everything you ever wanted and realizing none of that satisfies the soul. YOU need PEACE. All you need to do is see God.

When you see God like the New Testament Church you are changed by his Spirit,

18 We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...

2 Corinthians 3:18

We are looking now at the glory of the Lord because God has lifted up a veil that used to be over our eyes. This is why the song Amazing Grace says I once was

lost but now I'm found... Was blind but now I SEE. One of the ways we Christians try to explain how God saved us...he opened our eyes. And that's the language of scripture too. It's why if you aren't a Christian and you know a friend of yours that wasn't but now, she is, or he is and you are like WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? And your friend who is a Christian is struggling to make sense it's because it's hard to explain SEEING for the first time. But you are overwhelmed with joy because God has pulled the blinders off your eyes and now you SEE! And man, you are just changed by sight. And like the blind man Jesus healed all we can really say is I don't know much but I know I was blind & now I can see. And that offer of life change so powerful that it's like SEEING for the first time...God is extending that to you.

When you are admitted into the presence of God, he humbles you, comforts you, and transforms you. That's what it means to see God. And all you have to be...is **pure in heart.**

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

What does that mean? Well, in scripture the heart is not so much the physical blood pumping organ as it is the deep inner spiritual core of a person. It isn't tangible, it's intangible. Which is why when you want to communicate love you don't send a picture of the organ of the heart with all its arteries and veins & everything. Because that's not the heart we are talking about. You send that red symbolic heart symbolizing



the place where affection comes from in your inner core. So, what does it mean to be PURE in that inner core? Psalm 24 helps us out.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. Psalm 24:3-4

A pure heart is an undivided heart FOR GOD. It's not just a genuine person. Oh, she's got such a good heart. It is 100% devoted to God all the time and in all its ways. That last part there - does not swear deceitfully. In short that means you never lie. Because a lie is where you are trying to be two things. Publicly you try to be one thing while in your heart you desire to be another. When you say, "I was at home last night." when really you were out with a girl or guy you know isn't good for you. And so, you lie because you want to follow God, but you also want to follow you. And this isn't new with you. It's been a problem since the first sin.

God's people have always struggled with divided hearts. Satan himself is called the father of liars & the great deceiver.

Which is why the GREAT COMMANDMENT is what?
4 "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength -- Deuteronomy 6:4-5

This was the commandment repeated all the time. Passed down from generation to generation. Known as

the "great shema" or great commandment. And it was a command not to perform but a command about the heart. To love the lord with ALL your heart. What did Jesus say when he was asked which command is the greatest? He said Love the Lord your God with all your HEART

36 "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?"

37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. -- Matthew 22:36-37

The pure heart It is a heart that has never compromised. These are the ones who will see God. A singular devotion to God & his ways with everything you do.

To be pure in heart is to be singularly & totally devoted to God & his ways all the time.

He's #1 and he has your whole heart. That's the first part of our sermon. What does it mean to see God. We all want to see God! We want to be admitted into his presence, to be humbled by his glory, to be comforted by his grace, to be changed by his spirit. There is a desire, no matter how dormant or vibrant, there is a desire imprinted on the heart of every person to see God. but it requires an undivided heart. A pure heart. Which leads to part 2 of our sermon. Our Dilemma

By now you've probably figured it out.



Our dilemma: we are not pure in heart

Listen the reason this beatitude is so powerful is because Jesus reveals he is after your heart. Which is a consistent theme in scripture. When Samuel anoints David to be the next king of Israel Samuel says to David's dad - Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. This reality...that God looks at the heart...it exposes us for who we really are. When we learn that despite the front we put on, God sees the real us. The heart level us...it takes us to a pretty vulnerable spot, right?

Because the real me isn't as "pure" as the me you see. I may act somewhat Christianly but, on the inside, I've got thoughts and feelings about things and people. And that's after years of walking with Jesus. After years of knowing Jesus, I can still find myself acting one way on the outside and feeling totally different on the inside.

We are CHAMPIONS of this in the south. We can smile & small talk while at the same time be thinking on the inside "I don't care at all about this." We can hear someone say they are about to make the DUMBEST decision we've ever heard of and reply with "well bless your heart." BTW - I know many of you moved here from far away. Like outside of the southeast. Bless Your Heart is code for...Oh you dumb but I am not gonna say it cause it aint my place.

And this ESPECIALLY puts on alert those who put on a good religious performance out of the wrong motivations. Look at what Jesus says to the religious teachers of his day.

These leaders thought that what mattered to God...that what counted... was what's on the outside. Their performance. They were incredibly exact with their obedience to God's laws. But their hearts were not in it. So, they would obey God's laws around what foods were clean or not, but their speech revealed their hearts weren't in it.

27 "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. 28 In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness -- Matthew 23:27-28

Whitewashed tombs. Pretty on the outside, dead on the inside. The problem isn't your behavior! Listen this is so big. The problem isn't your behavior! You are not missing God because of your behavior. It's not what's on the outside but what's on the inside that counts. And what's on your inside is what's killing you.

If you've ever been around a cancer diagnosis you know that sometimes, when they catch it, that person APPEARS healthy. And we all say...that makes no sense. They appear healthy. Fit, exercising. Like when my



grandfather got it, he was in his 80s still golfing regularly. But EVENTUALLY the cancer made its way from the inside to the outside and we all saw the effects.

This happens in people all the time spiritually, but the problem is you don't see it. And today I'm praying for a wakeup call. It's what's happening on the inside that counts.

Some of you are seething with anger or resentment towards your spouse. And none of us can tell. Not even the people closest to you. But you are letting it fester. Some dark ideas and thoughts. See this is where affairs begin. You RARELY see affairs when a husband and wife have hearts singularly devoted to one another. No, what's inside starts turning. And then eventually if you don't deal with it, it comes outside, and you start flirting with sin. You start looking at stuff you shouldn't look at and entertaining conversations you shouldn't entertain. You start lashing out. You start down some dark roads, but it started INSIDE while everything looked good on the outside.

And I'm saying that to say if THAT'S YOU. If you are outwardly looking like nothing is wrong but on the inside there's trouble...on the inside there's anger or rage. On the inside there's lust. On the inside there's despair. On the inside there is WHATEVER. It's time to deal with it. Today.

I HAVE GREAT NEWS FOR YOU. You are not alone. Jesus once was in a conversation with his disciples about the salvation of rich people whose hearts on the inside are greedy. And he said it's so hard for rich people to go to heaven. And the disciples throw up their hands and say, "Well who then CAN be saved?" Jesus says

26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." -- Matthew 19:26 (CSB)

You can't save yourself, but the greater news is with God all things are possible.

God loves you. And he is not leaving you with that divided heart. He's the one who says its what's inside that counts. And he's not going to leave you in a mess. If you will receive it, he has an answer for your divided heart.

Part 3 of our sermon: **How do we become pure in heart?**

The people of Israel faced this same dilemma all throughout their relationship with God. They couldn't keep the law of God they were called to keep. I've been reading Leviticus in my daily time with the Lord and its filled with "if you sin this way...or that way...here's what you do." And each time what God says is you CAN'T FIX IT ON YOUR OWN.



Listen I love fixing things in our house. Courtney doesn't exactly love that I love it. But I love TRYING to be handy. I'm not handy. But there are some things I know I just can't even start on. Electricity. Ya'll I can watch all the you tube videos I want on that but at the end of the day I'm just gonna kill myself if I mess with that. No, I need a professional that can come take my place and repair what I cannot. I need a substitute to do what I cannot.

That's what the role of the high priest was in the people of Israel. The high priest was there to go before God on behalf of the people. The people would bring a payment for their sins. But they couldn't go into the presence of God. they couldn't be admitted. They weren't pure in heart. So, the priest had to do all of these cleansing rituals and THEN go into the presence of God carrying the sin offering of the people. And he would present it to God. And God accepted this offering and purified the RECORD of the people. But couldn't of course cleanse their hearts. Only their record. So, they would have to keep going back again and again. Well, listen to the author of Hebrews talk about Jesus.

21 and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. -- Hebrews 10:21-22 (CSB)

The substitute came in on our behalf. We could not go to God. So, Jesus entered in on our behalf. He became both our high priest AND the sacrifice for our sins. He was admitted into the presence of God because he was pure in heart. And instead of offering a sin offering he offered himself. And this act...his blood instead of ours...cleansed us from an evil conscience and washed us with what? Pure water.

Catch what Jesus did? He changed our HEARTS. He cleansed our hearts. He's the substitute who did what we needed and could not do on our own. All we have to do is draw near. It's an invitation. Draw near with a true heart. A genuine heart. A heart that honestly wants God...and because of what Jesus did, you will see God. you will be comforted by his grace. You will be transformed by his spirit. And you will be secured for all eternity.

Leads us to the final part of the sermon. **How do we stay pure in heart?**

We become pure in heart through Jesus how do we stay pure in heart so that we might see God? Well, here is the thing. Yes, Jesus gives you a new heart. And he secures you forever, so I do not believe you are in danger of losing your salvation. BUT I do believe the evidence that one has experienced God's transforming power is they desire more of God's transforming power. So, think of these applications as ways to experience God's transforming power. One of our 5 core values as a church is that we "expect God to change a life today." That means we expect God to do things like purify the



hearts of believers in some continual fashion so that we might experience more and more of the blessing of living his way in his kingdom. Here's the take home get practical side of this: u want to stay pure in heart?

Keep your eyes on Jesus

The opening verse of Hebrews 12 talks about this. It says life is like a race. Not a sprint, but a marathon. Requires ENDURANCE. A long-haul mindset. Life is a marathon! Somebody who has lived a minute say Amen. So, the author of Hebrews says

Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. -- Hebrews 12:1-2

Look at Jesus. In your mind's eye, he's both the prize at the finish line of the marathon, but he's also the next few steps just ahead of us. Keep your eyes on Heaven but also Keep your eyes on him today. That is why I go to him in bible reading & prayer every morning. It's because my heart needs to have its sight put back on Jesus for today. Now the final two...should come with a warning. If you do these, your life will change. God will shape you into a different person.

Seek the Lord's refining work

I want to ask you when was the last time you SOUGHT out the Lord for refinement? Not for help with your troubles but for him to expose and clean out the rotten

sin in your heart? This is what David prays for in Psalm 51 and its great prayer we can pray as well:

10 God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. -- Psalms 51:10 (CSB)

Let's not just go to God with our troubles. If it's what's inside that counts, let's be willing to let the Spirit of God examine what's inside! And call us to repentance with whatever it is!

This is how we keep from becoming legalistic rule following dead hearted Christians. It's seeking the Lord's refining work IN OUR OWN HEARTS. Here's a great very simple question - a good community group question - "What is God doing IN YOU lately?" Not just what are the events in your life happening around you. But what refining work is taking place in your heart?

Take steps that require you to trust the Lord with all your heart

If you want to the Lord to change your heart, try flexing your faith muscles a little bit. Look at situations and relationships and ask...what would it mean to TRUST THE LORD with all my heart in my marriage. Like God says I am to sacrifice myself for my spouse. Am I ready to trust God with all my heart and give my whole heart to that step of faith?

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways know



him, and he will make your paths straight -- Proverbs
3:5-6

CLOSING