

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 1)

The Good Life – A Fresh look at the Beatitudes

Study 6 – The Hope of the Pure

Introduction

One of the most distasteful and spiritually dangerous things about man-made religion is its capacity to breed and foster hypocrisy. Because man-made religion is all about rules and regulations and because it so often focusses on externals, it is not uncommon for people to pretend to be something which they are not. In man-made religion it is all too easy to honour God with one's lips but to have hearts which are far from Him (Matthew 15:8).

As we shall see in this study, Jesus was deeply concerned about the human heart and the importance of trusting and obeying God from the heart. This is clear not only from our text (Matthew 5:7) but also from Jesus' teaching in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Nor is this emphasis on the heart surprising given what we have already seen regarding the role of this Sermon and the Beatitudes in particular, as an announcement of the end of the exile for Israel. As both Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31ff) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:24ff) had promised, the end of the exile would bring full forgiveness and a change of heart for God's wayward people.

What is perhaps surprising and important for us to hear is that in this emphasis on the heart, Jesus was not introducing something new. From the very beginning of the Bible, God had always been concerned about wholeheartedness in our relationship with Him. God's relationship with Adam and Eve in the Garden was personal and relational, so much so that God personally came seeking them when they rebelled against Him. And the same was true of God's relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and with Israel their descendants. Circumcision in the flesh was intended as a sign that the true people of God needed to be circumcised in heart by God (Deuteronomy 10:6). Laws regarding clean and unclean food pointed to the need of a clean and undivided heart toward God (see Jesus' teaching about the food laws in Matthew 15:16-20). As the LORD Himself declared, the first and the greatest commandment was that His people should *love Him* with all their *heart* (Deuteronomy 6:5).

From the very beginning, God wanted the love of those whom He had created, love springing from a pure heart. This is what sin destroyed and what religion no matter how sincere could never fix. This is what Jesus came to restore, not just for wayward Israel but for the loveless and restless world.



Investigate and Think



Read Matthew 5:8

- The word translated 'pure' is literally 'clean'. What do you think it means to be 'pure in heart'?

- What do you think Jesus means when He says that the 'pure in heart' will see God?

Read Psalm 24:1-6

- Who may enter the LORD's Holy presence according to this Psalm?

- What promise does this Psalm hold out to the 'pure in heart'?

Read Ezekiel 36:22-32

- This passage gives us God's assessment of Israel's fundamental spiritual problem. What was wrong with them? (see vs 25-26)

- What needed to happen for Israel to be in right relationship with the LORD?
- How would this change be brought about?

Read Matthew 15:1-20

- What did Jesus see as the fundamental problem for the people of His day?
- Why was religion (e.g. ceremonial hand-washing and eating kosher food) unable to solve this problem?
- What solution was required if Israel's worship of God was not to be in vain?

Read Matthew 5:8 again

- In the light of what you have learned from Psalm 24, Ezekiel 36 and Matthew 15, what do you understand Jesus to be saying in this Beatitude?



Apply

- In what ways have Jesus' words in Matthew 5:8 challenged or encouraged you?

- Would you consider yourself to be 'pure in heart'?

- If your answer above was 'No', what needs to change for this Beatitude to be true of you?

- If your answer above was 'Yes', what are the areas in which you need to grow in relation to this Beatitude?