

MATTHEW 5 - THE BEATITUDES

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART,

FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD.

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MATTHEW 5.8

katharos - clean, unsoiled; sincere, void of evil

kardia - the center of a person

regarded as the seat of feeling, impulse, affection and desire

- ▶ Our society blesses “doing”—achievement, production. The rabbis who had taught those who were now listening to Jesus, placed their emphasis on the study and faithful observance of the Torah, especially the Sabbath, followed by a multitude of prescribed works.
- ▶ Were they wrong? We are quick to write them off for their perspective and hypocrisy, especially as we see their irrational anger in confronting Jesus after he healed someone on the Sabbath and sent that person off carrying his portable bed.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” For this reason they tried all the more to kill him . . .

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline. But if you are careful to obey me, declares the LORD, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing any work on it, then kings who sit on David’s throne will come through the gates of this city with their officials. They and their officials will come riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by the men of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses.’ ”

JEREMIAH 17.21-25, 27

- ▶ The Jewish people, and particularly, the scribes, knew their history. Jeremiah's audience did not listen; Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews deported to Babylon. Even after their return under Ezra, "Sabbath faithfulness" was a problem—especially when the opportunity was there to make money! By this time, the Jews were sick and tired of foreign oppression and were desperate to see the fulfillment of God's kingdom promise.
- ▶ Now Jesus, following the mission of John the Baptizer, has come declaring that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When he teaches, this rabbi is concerned with *being* rather than *doing*. When he finished his beatitudes, he then said—
"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

- ▶ When we go back to Jeremiah 17, we find that, behind the issue of Sabbath disobedience, was a damning root issue.

“Judah’s sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of their altars. Even their children remember their altars and Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills.”

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.”

JEREMIAH 17.1-2, 9-10

- This heart issue was so beyond correction and remedy that God, being merciful, took the initiative and promised to give them a new heart—

“I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.”

JEREMIAH 24.7

I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.

JEREMIAH 32.39-40

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

EZEKIEL 36.26-27

- ▶ In spite of knowing God's diagnosis of their sinful hearts and His promised remedy, the scribes and Pharisees held to the belief that they could be right with God by their doing. Remember that Nicodemus did not understand this promised work of God—

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. . . . "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

JOHN 3.3-5, 9-10

Despite being a teacher of the Scriptures, Nicodemus did not understand the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the necessity for God to do a "Spirit-ual" work. He, like his contemporaries, believed that being a Law-observant Jew qualified one for the kingdom of God. Such people found the message of Jesus and John the Baptizer—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—irrelevant to them. They were incapable of seeing their hearts as God saw them (Jeremiah 17.9). One of the Apostle Paul's emphatic themes would be that no one can be right with God and "see God" by one's own efforts to do what is right.

- Our efforts to be moral and right with God invariably leads only to self-measured righteousness (external), produced by a heart that is governed by self-affirming motives (internal). Assessing them as the Judge of their hearts, Jesus was unequivocal in his condemnation of the Pharisees—

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.” Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

MATTHEW 23.25-28

- This blessedness of purity of heart could only be accomplished by a better priest who could offer a better sacrifice and establish a better covenant—one that could truly give a new and pure heart—Jesus, the Righteous One.

“The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. . . . By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

- ▶ There are two aspects to this blessedness of purity of heart; the first is foundational: the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit to make us new creations (2 Corinthians 5.17). It is our faith in Him that grants forgiveness of our sin and makes us righteous through his merit. Thus, we receive the promise of eternal life, the promise to see God. The Apostle Paul wrote that God has “set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Corinthians 1.22). The second aspect is living according to the influence of the indwelling Spirit and God’s Word written on our hearts. Martin Luther said—

What is meant by a ‘pure heart’ is this: [a heart] that is watching and pondering what God says and replacing its own ideas with the Word of God.”

The Apostle Paul emphasized this in writing to the Colossians—

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

COLOSSIANS 3.1-4

Jesus warned his disciples about hearts that are weighed down with the concerns of life or the deceitfulness of wealth and pleasures. To be ready to stand before him requires watchfulness and much prayer—guarding one’s heart and keeping our hearts under the influence of the One who has given us this new and right heart.

May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

1 THESSALONIANS 3.13