



This morning we continue our series of messages on the Beatitudes, with a message on the sixth beatitude – *blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*. Each week I have read the entire passage of the Beatitudes and will do so again this week, so follow along with me as I read.

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,

2 and he began to teach them. He said:

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

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

5 Blessed are the meek, 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.

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

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This beatitude has been the most difficult for me, so far in the series, in terms of writing a message. Part of the reason, I believe, is because it is easy to miss the point of this beatitude. Generally, we focus on the first phrase – *blessed are the pure in heart*. Reading that phrase we make this beatitude about personal purity and the need to live a holy and righteous life. There is certainly nothing wrong with that emphasis; indeed, it is an important part of a life of faith, but that is not what Jesus is speaking of in this beatitude. The meaning of the beatitude is in the second phrase – *for they will see God*. Jesus is telling us that the importance of being pure in heart is so that we can see God.

This is why I had a harder time writing this message than the previous ones in this series; because I had been missing the primary point. I began writing a message about personal purity but by the latter part of the week I realized I was missing what Jesus was telling us. The message of Jesus, I believe, about being pure in heart is about the ability to be able to see God, and to see him at work in this world. Being pure in heart, Jesus says in this beatitude, is not the end goal; the goal of being pure in heart is to be able to see God, and if you can see God – and see God at work – you are a blessed person.

As Jesus says, and implies, in many places in the gospels, we do not see as clearly as we believe that we do. In Mark 8:18 Jesus says *do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?* This was Jesus' way of reminding us that our vision is very influenced by the world around us, often to the point that we do not see reality as clearly as we believe we do. We are very much shaped and molded by the changing tides of public opinion and our historical context. What we need is an eternal anchor that helps us to understand what is real, what is true, and what is genuine. This anchor, we believe, is the gospel.

So what is it that Jesus wants us to see? I believe there are many things he wants us to see, and I will focus on three of them this morning –

1. Seeing God in others.

We have become such a harsh culture. We are so hard on one another. We are divided in so many ways. It's getting to the point that people will only associate with those who have the "right" political affiliation, voted for the "right" candidates, have the "right" religious affiliation, and any number of other qualifications that must be met. I have always admired the manner in which Jesus paid no attention to the expectations people had of whom he should associate with. I'm also troubled by that willingness, because I don't always have it in me. This example of Jesus is one we must adopt in our lives.

I am often trouble by social media, mostly because of the tone. It can be so harsh, and it's hard to say anything without sparking a debate. If I posted that I love kittens someone would say *what do you have against puppies? Why don't you like puppies? What kind of person doesn't like puppies?* People are so often looking for a reason to tear others down, but I have no interest in getting involved in social media debates. If you want to do that, be my guest. I am connected to many of you on social media and I see some of the debates that pop up, but I have no desire to get involved in them.

In the midst of such a contentious time, can I see God in others? If my heart is pure enough that I can see God in others, I am indeed blessed. Jesus could do that, and as his people, that should be something we are able to do. But our hearts are so easy diluted by things that cause us to look at people in ways that make it hard to see God in them. We are, for example, diluted by fear of those who are different from us, by race, by class, and so many other things that affect how we see people. Tanya and I went to see the movie *Hidden Figures* when it was in theaters. If you have not seen the movie, I highly recommend it. The movie tells the story of African-American women who worked for NASA as mathematicians, and related the ways in which they were treated. Tanya was watching it again yesterday, and I watched a couple of scenes and was again struck by the terrible ways people are treated simply because of their ethnicity.

The same was true in the day of Jesus, and as much as Jesus tried, he was not always successful in getting the religious leaders of his day to see God in people who were different from them. They saw many people as unworthy of God's love and they could not conceive that God could be reflected in them. I've been in more than my share of worship services over the years where that type of message was communicated. It was a message that condemned "those kinds" of people. You know who "those kinds" of people are, don't you? "Those kinds" of people are the ones that God doesn't like, according to the people who don't like "those kinds" of people. "Those kinds of people," however, are also God's

children and they reflect his image, as we are told in Genesis 1:27 (*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*).

2. *Seeing God in ourselves.*

It has been many years since I was a middle and high school student, but I still remember the anxiety I felt on most days as I walked into the school. How would others see me? Would they accept me or would they reject me? That is a very difficult time of life, but we continue to worry about what others think about us, no matter how old we become. As much as we worry about how others see us, how do we see ourselves? Though we can be hard on one another, we can be especially hard on ourselves. I am my own worst critic, and I've had a lot of critics over the years, but none are harder on me than me.

Over the years of life we can be so hard on ourselves that we arrive at the point where it is hard to see God at work in us. Jesus dealt with many people who had arrived at this point. I think of the Samaritan woman, in John 4, whom Jesus had a conversation with at a well. John 4:1–9 relates to us the story – **1** *Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—* **2** *although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.* **3** *So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.* **4** *Now he had to go through Samaria.* **5** *So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.* **6** *Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.* **7** *When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"* **8** *(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)* **9** *The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"* *(For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)* The woman was surprised that Jesus would speak to her, but Jesus was not going to be bound by the conventions of the day that caused this woman to imagine that he would want nothing to do with her.

I think of the woman in John 8, who was brought before Jesus because she was taken in adultery. As John writes in 8:2-11, **2** *At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.* **3** *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group* **4** *and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.* **5** *In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"* **6** *They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.* **7** *When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."* **8** *Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.* **9** *At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.* **10** *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"* **11** *"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."* I imagine at that point she couldn't see much of God in herself, but Jesus did. Over and over we see Jesus dealing seeing God in others even though it was doubtful that they could see much of God in themselves.

Can you see God in yourself? Do you know you are a precious creation of God? Do you know that you are, even when people say harsh things to you? Even when people tell you that you are no good, or not worth anything?

3. *Seeing God in the world.*

Now there's a challenge, seeing God in today's world! Where do we see God in suicide bombings? Where do we see God in war? Where do we see God in the abuse that is so rampant? Where do we see God in the hateful rhetoric that is tossed back and forth across partisan divides?

Make no mistake about it, however, God is indeed in the world and at work in the world. Some people make the mistake of believing that if they do not very obviously see God then he must not be present, and there is a large contingent of people who believe that. What we see is not always accurate, though, as we must remember.

When my family moved from town to our farm, we were outside of the “city” water supply. As we could not get what we called “city water” we had to come up with an alternate water source. At the bottom of the hill behind our house was a spring that offered a steady flow of water year round. We built a springhouse around the source, installed a pump, and ran water lines up the hill to our house. The springhouse provided us with an ample supply of water that was also, fortunately, free. There was, however, one catch that came with that free water. After a hard rain the spring became muddy, and when we turned on the tap in the house to get a drink of water, it was a bit muddy looking. It was obvious, just looking at it through a glass, that the water was less than pure.

When I read the beatitude about the *pure in heart* I often think of our spring and its sometimes muddy water. It was not difficult for my family to recognize that our water was not always pure, but was it always pure when it was clear? Coming out of the hills of West Virginia, with its strip mines, underground mines, and chemical runoff from the many steel mills, it was probably not pure, even when it appeared to be.

The point is this – even though we think we see clearly, we don’t see as clearly as we believe. Our vision is clouded by the world in which we live, sometimes to the point that we cannot see the ways in which God is working in others, in us, and in our world. But make no mistake, God is indeed at work, and when we are pure enough in heart to see this, we are indeed blessed!