

King Jesus Defines Righteousness – Pt. 3

Matt. 5:1-12

Intro. I've never quoted a Harvard psychologist in a Bible message! But Dr. Gordon Allport published some observations concerning religious behavior, bigotry and prejudice that fit quite well with our study of the Beatitudes. Leroy Lawson cites Allport's findings in His book entitled, Blessed are We.

From the Midwest with a protestant background, Allport found that a majority of adherents in any religion could be described as **extrinsically religious** or religious on the outside. They are users of religion. Going to church, for example, can be a relatively easy way to gain status in the eyes of the community / to win friends / make good business contacts / and to become more self-confident and even more influential. They could be called "church groupies." He writes, "*Perhaps the most useful aspect of this 'outside' religion, however, is its self-sanctioning quality. Such believers assure themselves that God sees things exactly the way they do; they are righteous as God is righteous, because God is like them.*" According to Allport, the **extrinsically religious** person "*turns to God but does not turn away from self. They talk about heaven but live very much in this world.*" Their religion serves them; it gives them a sense of security, status and self-esteem. Yet Allport's studies prove these "*religious on the outside*" people exhibit strong tendencies toward prejudice and bigotry (attitudes the Bible condemns as unloving and unlike God who is "**no respecter of persons.**")

On the other hand, Allport found some people who were what he called **intrinsically religious** or religious on the inside. They love the Lord with heart, soul and mind. "*Admittedly,*" he said, "*this is a smaller number of people.*" Allport reports these believers had a "*...deeply interiorized religious faith and were totally committed to it. Their love of God was integral and all-encompassing. Theirs is an open faith, with room for scientific and emotional facts. Intrinsic religious love is expressed in a hunger for and commitment to oneness with God and all others. The intrinsically religious had little prejudice or bigotry. They practiced what they preached and evidenced a striking humility.*" The toughness of their minds joins the compassion of their hearts in the pursuit of God's will.

Dr. Allport's conclusions echo a major concern Jesus addressed in His teachings. In **Matt. 7:14-23** Jesus turned to many in His audience who were "**extrinsically religious.**" Before giving the parable of the wise and foolish builders, He said, "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'**" Jesus distinguished the **intrinsically religious** from the **extrinsically religious** as people who do the will of His Father. In other words, their faith is living and life-changing. In **Matt. 15:8, 9** He again drew a solid line between those who are Christian inwardly and those who are Christian outwardly. He said, "**These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.**" The worship of those whose religion is extrinsic is lip service only...it doesn't impact the heart.

While every page of Scripture challenges the status quo, the Beatitudes have an unusual capacity to separate outward faith from inward faith. Like an eight point test, the Beatitudes determine whether our lives are truly under heaven's rule. In the book of Amos, the plumb line represents a perfect and reliable standard. In the same way, the Beatitudes test how our lives line up with God's righteousness. When the results are in, every person should realize their spiritual poverty and cry out for God's mercy and salvation. This was the purpose of Christ's first sermon. The sermon wasn't given to show people how to be saved. It was given to show how desperately every person needs to be saved! The Beatitudes function like the Law of Moses. As **Gal. 3:24** says, **the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.**

The Jews of Galilee, like every sinner, had to come to terms with how sinful and lost they were before they would turn to Christ to be saved. But post-salvation (after we trust Christ to save us), the Beatitudes present a profile of how Kingdom people must conduct themselves in a fallen world.

During the past two Sundays we considered the first four Beatitudes. Each of the first four relate to how we think about ourselves in light of our holy Creator. This is the critical starting point because as **Prov. 23:7** says, “**As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.**” So let’s read the first four again starting at v. 3 - “**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**” We noted the orderly sequence so evident in these Beatitudes. The **poor in spirit** sense their hopelessness and utter dependence on God’s mercy and grace. They take life seriously and **mourn** because of all sin has done to offend God and bring misery to His creation. In humility and **meekness**, they submit to God who alone can save them and make them righteous. Then having experienced His forgiveness, they hunger and thirst for righteousness the way a thirsty traveler searches for food and drink. Their passion for righteousness reminds us of **Psa. 42:1, 2 - As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.**

This verse provides a good transition to the next two Beatitudes we’ll consider this AM. If the first four relate to how we think about ourselves in God’s world, the remaining four relate to our attitudes and response to others. By the way, in case you hadn’t noticed, this Beatitude series has expanded from two Sundays to four. I figure this way...with a winter like this...what’s the big rush? And besides that, I love to keep Pastor Dale guessing!

1. **Blessed are the merciful – v. 7 - Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

The **poor in spirit, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness** all share something in common. They know their limitations...what they can and cannot do. Because they know their life isn’t self-sufficient, they look outside of themselves for help. They understand mercy because they admit their own weaknesses, inadequacies, dependence, and incompleteness. Having received such gracious and merciful blessings from the King, they show mercy to others. The word translated merciful comes from the Greek word, *eleemon*. It signifies actions that are beneficial and charitable. Dr. William Barclay points out the original word in Aramaic suggests the “*willingness to get right inside the other person’s skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings.*”

Showing mercy to others begins with a generous and compassionate attitude toward them. Instead of a critical, fault-finding spirit, mercy looks at others with kindness and concern. Instead of calling that driver who cut you off a jerk...mercy wonders what crisis might be going on in their lives to cause them to drive with such reckless abandon. (notice how gender unspecific I was.) I’ll never forget the time a deacon failed to complete an assignment 3 months in a row. Before the next Board meeting I phoned our Deacon Board chairman to talk about it. My question to him was, “*What do you think we should do? I mean, this thing is important and we really need to act on it!*” Now I was thinking along the lines of a public flogging or at least a reprimand. I mean, we take leadership seriously here at MBC! But here’s how the chairman responded. I’ll never forget it. He said, “*You know, God has been so patient and forgiving with me...I think we should forgive our brother and ask how we might come alongside and help him get this thing done.*” I gulped and said, “*Me too! That’s what I was thinking.*”

Showing mercy to others includes both the forgiveness of the sinner and compassion for the suffering and needy. Because “*a picture is worth a thousand words,*” the Master Teacher supplied a video that dramatically shows mercy in action. It’s the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Because it's so familiar, let me just read it to you. **Lk.10:30-35.** "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

The priest and the Levite saw the man who had been robbed, beaten, and left to die. **They passed by on the other side** of the road. But a Samaritan traveling that same road saw this man and had compassion on him. He allowed his travel plans to be interrupted so he might minister to the man's needs. He didn't look the other way. That's what mercy is and that's what mercy does. *It seeks opportunities to make life better for those in misery whether they deserve it or not.* And the mercy of this Samaritan was extravagant not meager. He went above and beyond when he told the innkeeper, **'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'** The priest and Levite proved their religion was extrinsic and bigoted. Like Job's friends, these men of the cloth no doubt felt the beaten man got what he deserved. Do thoughts like that ever enter your mind when bad things happen to people you know? And who knows...under all that dirt, blood, and torn clothing, they might find a criminal or social outcast. Worse than that, he might be a Samaritan. The Scripture doesn't say. So they passed by. After all, they were on a tight schedule and were headed for a seminar entitled, *The role of the Temple in societal transformation.* Though we know very little about the Samaritan, he had the telltale symptoms of a man whose religion was intrinsic! His actions were loving and merciful. He exhibited no hint of prejudice. He was willing to be inconvenienced and responsible for the care of someone he never met. He saw a need and an opportunity to show mercy and he did what he could.

One of the great declarations concerning the nature and attributes of God is **Deut. 4:31 - For the LORD your God is a merciful God...**The mercy of God is a continuous and predominant theme from Genesis to Revelation. Mercy is deliverance from the judgment we justly deserve. On the other hand, grace is extending kindness to the unworthy. It's goodness we don't deserve. This predominant attribute of God is declared many times. I think of **Psa. 25:6** where the psalmist prayed, **Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.**

One Christian author remembers how when flustered, his grandmother would say, "*merciful heavens!*" (I bet you haven't heard that one in a long time!) But isn't it interesting that nobody ever exclaims, "*merciful earth!*" Mercy is a rare commodity down here. This is especially true with the media. They love to broadcast people's failures and shortcomings. The American public never knew president Roosevelt was unable to walk without crutches. Out of honor for the man and his office, the media refused to film his wheelchair or how he struggled to stand to his feet. But the rules of the game have changed. The media is heartless and unmerciful. This lack of mercy is directly related to the rise of **selfism** we spoke of last Sunday. By the way, last night Evy Campbell's recitation reminded me of the prophecy made in **II Tim. 3:1, 2 - But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves...** Nearly 2,000 years ago, the Holy Spirit told us to expect **selfism** in the last days. At least the priest and Levite saw the beaten man. Selfists don't even notice the misery around them.

When speaking to a group of religious leaders who just accused Him of defilement because He ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus quoted **Hos. 6:6**. He said, **But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'** Mercy is internal...sacrifices are external. Mercy originates in the heart and mind but sacrifice can be a mere outward formality. God desires and delights to see His attributes show up in the lives of His people...particularly His mercy and love. **Zech. 7:9 - This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another."** Mercy does what God does. In the video of the Good Samaritan, the priest and Levite represent formal, external religion. The Samaritan represents God and His mercy. People who live under God's rule endeavor to be like Him.

So the **blessed** individual of **v. 7** *seeks opportunities to make life better for those in misery whether they deserve it or not.* They engage in ministries of mercy and compassion. And who can calculate the vast number and wide variety of opportunities to show mercy? Opportunities to show mercy to others abound in organized ministries like FCOC / Carriagetown Ministries / Forgotten Man Mission / Meals on Wheels / Caring Connection / Room of Grace, and many others. The demand for spontaneous unsolicited ministries of mercy is endless. All around us friends are suffering financially, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. We live in neighborhoods where crisis is routine. Instead of asking, "What can I do?" the merciful do what they can. God doesn't ask us to do more than that.

A little girl was rather late to arrive home from school one day. Her worried mother wanted to know why she was so late. She said, "*I had to help another girl. She was in trouble.*" The mother asked, "*What did you do to help her?*"...she said, "*I sat down and helped her cry.*" Sometimes an empathetic heart is all the mercy a friend needs. They don't need us to be clever or to pretend we have the wisdom of the ages. They just need to know we care and we care enough to pray with and for them.

But the hour is moving faster than we are. Notice the specific blessing in **v. 7. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.** The same hand opened to receive mercy and forgiveness must be opened to give it. That's just how it is. The heart that receives must be a heart that gives. Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the unmerciful servant in **Matt.18**. He gave this parable to answer Peter's question. Peter asked, "*How many times do I have to forgive a brother who sins against me?*" In other words, at what point can I legitimately write him off?" So Jesus responded with a parable. He said the kingdom of heaven is like a king who cancelled the debt of a servant who owed him 10,000 talents (which was equivalent to several million dollars.) That same servant went out and found another servant who owed him 100 denarii...a much smaller amount. He showed no mercy to his fellow servant but had him thrown into prison until he paid the debt. When the king heard what his servant had done, he changed his mind and had the unmerciful servant jailed. The punch line comes in **v.33** where the king turns to this unmerciful servant and asks, "**Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?**" So **blessed are the merciful.** The merciful are shown mercy, but the unmerciful should anticipate only justice. How much mercy did it take to forgive your sins and mine? We should show mercy in that same proportion.

Can you see the connection with the Beatitudes that precede this one? The poor in spirit know who they are and the sins they have committed. Refusing to lower the bar or compare themselves with anyone else, they acknowledge their failures and mourn their sinful state. In humility and meekness they receive God's salvation and thirst to know Him better. Because God's great mercy has been extended to them, they have a generous attitude toward everyone and give no thought to prejudice or who deserves what. Listen...too often Christians are unmerciful because we forget we are sinners saved by grace. We start to think we deserve the mercy and grace we received. But the merciful are like their King. Jesus said in **Lk. 6:36 - Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

2. Blessed are the pure in heart – v.8 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

When we hear the phrase, **pure in heart**, our minds automatically sprint to issues of moral purity. That's what the world has done to us...a world where the sexual floodgates are wide open / images bombard us continually / and immorality is unbridled. The **pure in heart** forsake sin and pursue righteousness in word, thought, motive and deed. We can be sure of that. The word **pure** is *katharos* in Greek. Its basic meaning is unmixed, unadulterated, and unalloyed. "Is it *Pure Michigan* or *Poor Michigan*...I can't remember."

In **Matt. 19** purity of heart is illustrated in a way that is unrelated to sexuality or ethics. Its message penetrates deeper than behavior. In **Matt. 19** a wealthy young man **came...to Jesus**. I picture him as a firstborn, an "A type"...a golden boy. He was top of his class. Now he's tracking upward in the world business and finance. Let me read the story. **vs. 16-22 - Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.**

If we believe this young man's testimony and I think we should...he wasn't immoral or unethical...far from that. He was raised to fear and obey the God of Israel. Concerning God's commands, he said, **All these have I kept**. He's better than the average bear! Outwardly or extrinsically, he's quite a specimen! But Jesus implied that he lacked something. Though his performance was stellar, something was missing. So the young man asked, **"What do I still lack?"** In **v.21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Now some take this to mean that Jesus is opposed to money and wealth. They say Jesus taught that wealthy people who follow Him must give their wealth away. While earthly riches bring added responsibility and often trip people up...I'm reasonably sure that isn't the point here. The real issue in this young man's life had to do with purity. You may have never looked at the story this way before. The missing element in this young man's life was a love and loyalty for God that is pure, unmixed, and undiluted by anything else. Let me explain.

In **Matt. 6:24**, Jesus said, **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.** That's pretty forthright and clear. Later, the Apostle Paul wrote in **I Tim. 6:10**, that money isn't the root of evil, **but the love of money is...** When the young man asked which commands must be obeyed to have eternal life, Jesus listed six commands a person must obey. The young man claimed he was innocent of disobedience to these commands and I tend to believe him. But in the next sentence, Jesus continued His response a different way. Notice that Jesus didn't say a word about the first and the greatest command. So what command is that? Good question! Thank you for asking. The answer is found four chapters later in **Matt. 22:36, 37 - "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'** Rather than recite this one all important command Jesus knew he was violating, Jesus let him figure it out for himself. When asked a question, Jesus often responded this way or with another question.

So instead of laying chapter and verse on him, Jesus spoke right to this young man's heart. He said, **"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** You see, Jesus knew how much this young man loved his money. Of course, the young man had no idea Jesus knew this.

His love for God and people shared space with money-love. His affection for God was mixed and diluted. He wasn't **pure in heart**. Whatever love he had for God was divided and diminished by his love for money. In Bible terms, he was double-minded and maybe an idolater. And notice, his love of money and possessions prevented him from following Jesus. He couldn't walk away from it. The story ends on a sad note. **vs. 22, 23 - When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Reporting the same event, Mark wrote, **Jesus looked at him and loved him. (Mk. 10:21)** Jesus loved him, but the heart of this young man was already spoken for. He loved his wealth.

So look at this sixth Beatitude again. **v.8 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.** The blessing enjoyed by the **pure in heart** is increased vision or perception of God as He is. The Bible says no man has seen God at any time, but the pure in heart will someday! The OT has a promise that coincides so beautifully with this sixth Beatitude. **Jer. 29:13 - You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.** Notice the proviso...**when you seek me with all your heart**. Speaking through His prophet, the Lord didn't say half or three quarters of your heart. He said, **when you seek me with all your heart**. Because increased perception or knowledge of God is a matter of the heart, this can only happen for the person whose religion is inward or intrinsic.

I was searching for some significant item with my grandson one day. When we couldn't find it, Danny said, *"Let's ask grandma. She's a good looker."* In other words, *"grandpa, you're not such a good looker!"* The boy's right! I'm not sure I understand why...but I can't find things the way Peggy can. If I were to hazard a guess, I think she focuses better than I do. When she sends me to the store to find some specific product in a grocery aisle with 10 million other products, the sacks and cans and boxes and labels all seem to blend together like the colors of a tie-dye shirt. It's enough to make a guy dizzy! I know it's in there somewhere...yet being a man, I hate to ask.

That may not be the best illustration, but I think **purity of heart** involves purity of focus. It's seeking God above all else. In **Psa. 16:8** David said, **I have set the LORD always before me.** The old Irish hymn we love to sing says, *"Be though my vision, Oh, Lord of my heart. Naught be all else to me save that thou art."* The old wording of that second stanza tends to fly over our heads. Naught be all else to me means this... *"Lord, I don't want you to be anything to me other than the truth about who You are."* Remember what Gordon Allport observed? He said those whose religion is extrinsic tend to think God is like them. Their thoughts about "the man upstairs" rise no higher. But the **pure in heart** are saved people who want to know God more than anything. He fills their vision / captures their affection / and occupies their thoughts. God's promise to **the pure in heart** is this...you will find Me...you will see Me.

Here's how this sixth Beatitude fits in the progression. Along life's way, those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness** are certain to make a discovery. They realize the true goal they hunger for is not merely changed behaviors or an improved lifestyle. Their true search is for a person. As Paul said in **Phil. 3:8**, they trade everything to know Him. In this verse Paul renounced his own righteousness and efforts to keep God's law and said, **I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.** Remember how I said the theology of the NT is contained in germinal form in the Beatitudes. Here's an example. As the poor in spirit grow in grace, their field of vision narrows and their focus tightens. Instead of trusting their performance, they lean with increasing weight on the One who performed for them, because Christ is our life. They learn to walk by means of His Spirit. Instead of loving and pursuing many things, their heart is increasingly captivated by the One who alone is worthy of uncontested first place. These are Kingdom people. Their faith is intrinsic...it's inward and vibrant. They are merciful and pure through and through.