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Matthew 5:7 - 5:8 (Beatitudes 5 - 6)



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg expounds on the fifth and sixth Beatitudes from Matthew 5:7-5:8. He interprets mercy as a compassionate action towards those who are in need of it, such as the poor, instead of demanding rights or enforcing justice. Gregg also discusses the importance of forgiveness and how it is a continuous act of extending trust to those who have wronged us. He concludes by explaining the significance of having a pure heart, which entails being undiluted, uncorrupted, and unpolluted, and how it leads to being a peacemaker and ultimately seeing God.

Transcript

We're turning to Matthew 5 to continue and hopefully complete our consideration of the Beatitudes. This is only the beginning, of course, of the longer series that we've begun, going through the entire Sermon on the Mount. And I suppose I should not anticipate that we will necessarily get through all the remaining Beatitudes in this session.

We may or we may not. There's nothing that compels us to, as far as the schedule goes. And they may detain us a little longer in some cases than I anticipate.

We have talked about the first four of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, which are verses 3 through 6. We have now verses 7 through 10 to consider. Let me read all the Beatitudes again, just so that we can get the flow of the whole passage. Beginning at verse 3, Jesus said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

And blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In verse 7, Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain

mercy. I believe that the suggestion is strongly there that only they shall receive mercy.

They shall obtain mercy because they are merciful, suggesting that if such people were not merciful, they would not qualify to obtain mercy. That deduction could not be drawn from the verse alone without additional biblical material to guide us, but it might be suggested from this passage alone. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

It certainly suggests that they shall obtain mercy because they are merciful. It would be possible for someone to say, Well, other people will obtain mercy, too, and everybody who obtains mercy is blessed, and that includes merciful people as well as maybe some who aren't so merciful. But that is, of course, not what Jesus means.

What Jesus means is that it is the showing of mercy that obtains mercy. This is very clearly taught throughout the New Testament and even in the Old Testament. And mercy needs to be understood in order to appreciate what is being said here.

We all desire to obtain mercy. Jesus does not say here whether it is from God or from other people that we can expect mercy. One might understand him to say that if you are merciful to other people, other people will be inclined to be merciful to you.

If you are generous to others, people will be more inclined to be generous to you. And that may be true, and that may well be part of what Jesus would have us know from this passage. But I believe from the additional information that Jesus gave in his teaching, even later on in this same sermon, his point is not that if we are kind to people, they will be inclined to be kind to us, but rather if we are merciful to other people, God will extend mercy to us, and he will not do so otherwise.

Now, what kind of mercy is in view here? Mercy in the Bible is expressed in two ways. It has to do with showing benevolence or generosity towards someone that they do not deserve. If a person has been kind to you and you are kind back to them, you are not showing them mercy.

You are repaying a debt. It says in 1 Timothy 5 that if a widow has sons or nephews who could support her, then they should show piety at home and repay their parents by supporting them. Now, repayment of parents is not showing mercy.

Repayment is paying a debt. And justice would require repayment of a debt. Mercy goes beyond justice.

And let me just clarify. You may have heard me say this before, but in case it's been a long time, you've forgotten or maybe you've never heard me say it. I want to clarify what the relationship is between justice and mercy.

Many people think there's a stark dichotomy between justice and mercy. I've heard people say, I don't want any justice from God, I just want mercy. And they say that

because, of course, we know that as sinners we deserve to die.

The wages of sin is death. We deserve condemnation because of our sin. And if we got strict justice and nothing better than that, we would die and be condemned, and that's not really what we desire.

We desire God's mercy. But because of that distinction that has sometimes been made in preaching between receiving mercy from God and receiving justice from God, I dare say we don't want to receive less than justice from God. We don't want to receive less than justice from anybody because we don't want people to treat us unjustly.

It's one thing to think of justice as being punished with that punishment, which is do you. Of course, we don't prefer for that to happen, and we would rather have mercy. It's another thing, though, to think of justice in terms of getting what we have earned in the positive sense.

If you work 40 hours for an employer and you expect your paycheck on the Friday when the day comes for pay and you don't receive it, you have suffered an injustice. There is a debt owed you and you're not paid that debt. Nobody wants to suffer an injustice.

Everybody who is sensitive ethically is concerned about justice and wants justice. But by justice we simply mean that people get what is their right to receive and not less than what is their right to receive, at least in a positive sense. That if you've earned something and desire it and have it coming to you and someone withholds it from you, that is an injustice, and in such a case you would cry out for justice and fairness because you have been deprived of something that is owed to you.

And justice is, therefore, really just giving somebody what is their due, allowing somebody to have what it is their right to expect. It is, therefore, justice is simply not violating another person's rights. If you kill somebody who has done nothing worthy of death, that's an injustice.

You've deprived them of their right to their life. If you steal from them, you've deprived them of their right to their property. If you slander them, you've deprived them of their right to their reputation.

And, therefore, these are injustices and all of us are outraged when people treat us unjustly. We want justice and we should want justice. God wants justice, too.

But by justice we mean that we do not deprive another of their rights and they don't deprive us of what we regard to be our rights. Now, of course, Christians often will react and say, well, we're Christians, we don't have any rights, we're dead, dead men have no rights, etc., etc. Well, this is, of course, how we are to reckon.

We are to reckon ourselves as having no rights. But we really do have rights and if we

had no rights, it would be not wrong for someone to do something evil to us. If somebody stole from you, it would not be wrong if you had no more right to your property than they had.

If somebody slandered you, they would be doing you no wrong if you had no right to have people speak honestly of you. The fact that people who would violate you are doing something wrong to you proves that you have certain rights. Now, as a Christian, you are called upon to lay down your rights, to act as if you have no rights.

If somebody violates your rights, you forgive and you do not make an issue of it. That is really what the Bible teaches about our rights. It does not teach that we have none.

In fact, the Apostle Paul said that he had rights. He says, Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to lead about a sister as a wife? Do we not have the right to be paid for what we do? He says, But we have used none of these rights, that the gospel would not be hindered. He said in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul implies strongly, Yes, we have rights, but we as Christians do not choose to enforce our rights or to demand our rights.

We will lay those down. But if we had no rights, then it would be impossible for anyone to wrong us. Because a wrong done is a violation of a right.

That is why right and wrong are opposites. A person has a right, it is right to do something to them. If you do something else, that is wrong.

But if they had no rights in the first place, then there is no way you can wrong them. Now, that is what justice is about. It is about protecting the rights of others and making sure you do not violate them.

God is a just God and he does not violate anybody's rights. If you have rights, of course, now before God, we do not have many rights. Because as sinners, we have forfeited our rights.

But before man, there are rights that God expects society to uphold and he expects us to observe the rights of others. It is because we have forfeited all of our rights before God by our sin that we desire and need mercy. But in terms of the society and the law and relationships, we do not always require mercy from others because we have not always wronged them and do not always need to be extended mercy by them.

But there is a difference there, of course, in our relationship with God than our relationship with other people. From God, we desperately desire mercy. From people, we sometimes desire mercy also, but we also desire justice.

And that is at least if we are decent people. Justice does not mean punishment for us because we have not done anything worthy of punishment. But mercy is something

different than justice, not of an entirely different species.

It is just an extension of the concept a little further. Because justice, as I have said, means that you do not overstep another person's rights. You do not violate their rights.

You treat them justly. But to be merciful to a person means that you go beyond that and you give up some of your rights for them. It is one thing to say, I have violated none of your rights and I have treated you entirely justly and fairly.

That is one thing. It is another thing to say, I give up all of my rights so that you can have something you do not have an innate right to have. That is what giving to the poor is.

The money you earned or that you legally own, you have the right to dispense with it however you see fit before God. The beggar has no right to your money. He cannot insist that you give it to him.

He has no innate claim upon it. But if you give him your money, that is merciful. Because what you are doing then is you are forfeiting your right to spend that money on what you would prefer and you are extending to him the right to spend that same money on whatever he prefers.

You give him a right to your money and you take that right away from yourself. That is what mercy is. If somebody has wronged you and struck you on one cheek, you have the right under the law and under all forms of justice to strike that person back.

But if instead you turn the other cheek, what you are doing is giving up your right to retaliation and extending to that person the right to hit you again, which they do not innately possess. Mercy is when you give up one of your rights so that somebody else can have a right they don't possess innately. You can see that that is not entirely of a different species than justice because both have to do with honoring the rights of others.

One has to do with not violating the rights they innately possess, that's justice. Mercy has to do with extending new rights that they don't possess at your own expense. That's what mercy is.

Now, in the Bible there are two forms of mercy that are frequently spoken of. One has to do with mercy with reference to one's guilt. If somebody does you wrong and are guilty of some injustice toward you, some crime toward you, then you have the right to take them to court.

You have the right to retaliate. You have the right to be repaid. You have the right to have them fix what they broke.

You have those rights. But if you extend mercy, what is that? That is forgiveness. With

reference to somebody's guilt and debt to you, mercy means you forgive.

You don't exercise your option of retaliation. You release them from that. You say, that's not to be an issue between us.

I forgive you for that. The debt is not a debt any longer. It has been canceled.

That is one form in which mercy is extended, in relationships especially, in terms of forgiving one's guilt. Now, if a person has guilt, they don't deserve to be forgiven. They don't have an innate right to be forgiven.

You're the one who has the right to retaliate. It's an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. That's justice, according to Scripture.

But as a merciful person, you may say, well, okay, you knocked my eye out. I have the right to knock yours out, but I will not do so. I will just consider that we are, that everything's all right between us.

There's no debt owed here. And that is mercy. That is forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a function of mercy. And there's another, very commonly spoken of in Scripture, another function of mercy, and that is in what we would just call generosity or charity to the needy. In the first instance, forgiveness is mercy extended with reference to somebody's guilt.

In the second instance, charity or generosity is mercy extended with reference to somebody's need or misery. The poor. To give to the poor is to show mercy.

To help a person who's been beaten up by thieves along the side of the road, on the road to Jericho, is to show mercy. You remember when Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan? We all know the story, so I won't retell it. But two men did not help the victim of that crime.

But another man did help him, and he helped him in very practical ways. He endangered himself. He inconvenienced himself.

He expended his own money for this man because he was in need. And when the story was over, Jesus said, Which of these men was a neighbor to the man who fell among thieves? And the answer was, he that had mercy upon him. That's the answer that was given.

He that had mercy upon him. You wonder about that reference? Isn't that Luke 10? I believe it is. Yes, Luke 10.

And so in verse 36, Jesus said, Which of these three do you think was the neighbor to him who fell among thieves? And the answer came to him, he who showed mercy on

him. So mercy is not just forgiving people, it is helping people. It is showing generosity.

That is, the Samaritan who helped the man who fell among thieves had as much right innately to ignore that man's misery as the other two parties did, but he gave up his right. He had the right to expect that his plans would not be interrupted, that he'd get to where he was going on the schedule that he planned, and so forth, and as much as any man. But he gave up that right out of piety toward God and love toward his fellow man.

And the story was told to illustrate Jesus' command, You shall love your neighbors yourself. He gave that up and showed mercy instead of demanding what he had coming to him, which was an uninterrupted, uneventful trip. But he had anticipated.

He had not beaten up the man, therefore he didn't owe the man anything. That was somebody else's doing. Whoever beat him up owed it to him to fix it.

But this man, who owed nothing, gave up his convenience, gave up his money, gave up his time in order to help the man who was in need. That is mercy, according to Scripture. There's much in the Scripture, Old and New Testament, about both forms of mercy, and interestingly enough, much of what the Scripture says on these subjects elsewhere is summarized in this simple statement, Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy.

Because the Bible tells us that if you forgive others, you will be forgiven. Remember, forgiveness is one aspect of mercy, forgiving people. You forgive others, you'll be forgiven by God.

It also says that if you are generous toward others, generosity will come back toward you. So, the merciful obtain mercy in both of these important senses. Let me turn your attention to a few Old Testament Scriptures.

Psalms 41, verses 1 through 4, says, Blessed is he who considers the poor. The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth.

You said, Blessed are the merciful. This is one of them. He will be blessed.

Why? Because he considers the poor. He's merciful. You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.

The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness. You will sustain him on his sickbed. I said, Lord, be merciful to me.

Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you. Now, notice, there is one who shows mercy to the poor. It says, God will be kind to him.

God will be merciful to him. And so, apparently, on the basis of that background, David says, Lord, be merciful to me. Apparently saying that he is one who has been merciful to

the poor in the past, and now he is the one in need of mercy from God.

And he appeals for mercy to God on the basis of that, I've been merciful to others. Now, being merciful to others doesn't earn something from God, because if you then received it from God, that wouldn't be mercy if God owed it to you. You don't buy mercy.

You don't earn mercy. But God can say this, I will show mercy to people who are merciful. I do not extend mercy to people who are not.

Now, you can be merciful all you want, and God still doesn't owe you any mercy. You can do all the right things, but because of your sin, God doesn't owe you anything but hell. Good works does not cancel bad works.

If you've done a sin and deserve to die, you can do all the good works in the world, and God owes you nothing. You cannot lay claim on anything from God because of your works. But God can say, I choose to extend mercy to some people.

And I happen to be inclined to show mercy toward those who are themselves merciful. In Proverbs 14, verse 21, Solomon said, He who despises his neighbor's sins, but he who has mercy on the poor, mercy on the poor, happy is he or blessed is he. It's a beatitude.

Basically, Proverbs says, blessed or happy is the one who has mercy on the poor. Same thing Jesus said, blessed are the merciful. It says, the next verse says, Do they not go astray who devise evil? But mercy and truth belong to those who devise good.

Okay? The person is merciful to the poor, he's happy, and mercy and truth will belong to him. He will receive mercy from God because he devises good, merciful things rather than bad things. Same teaching as Jesus taught.

In the same chapter, in verse 31, it says, He who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, but he who honors him has mercy on the needy. That is, the person who honors God will demonstrate by showing mercy to the needy. So, mercy has to do with practical assistance.

It's not just forgiving people. When we think of wanting mercy from God, generally we're thinking in terms of our guilt and desiring his forgiveness, but we need to remember that whenever we ask for any blessing from God, he owes us none, and therefore we're asking of his generosity. We're asking of his... We're a poor person asking for his help.

That is his mercy if he extends it to us on such occasions. In Proverbs 14... Excuse me, 19, 17, it says, He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and he will pay back what he has given. Now, this speaks of it as if it were sort of a debt that God owes, but we know from the fuller teaching of Scripture that this is more a figure of speech, lending to the Lord as if he owes you a debt back.

But God says this in such a way as if it's that much of a given, that just as God would be unjust if he did not repay a debt, so God is not, as it were, unjust to forget your mercy to others at times when you need mercy. The merciful shall attain mercy. But again, notice that mercy in this context has to do with helping the poor.

In Proverbs 21, in verse 13, it says, Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard. Now, that's just the flip side of blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy. This ain't wretched are the unmerciful, for they shall not receive mercy.

If you stop your ears from the cries of the poor, you will have occasion to cry yourself and not be heard. Now, see, Proverbs speak about generalities. We shouldn't understand the Proverbs to be promises of the sort that we find in some parts of Scripture.

Proverbs are observations of principle, and there are exceptions. There are people who are very unmerciful to the poor, and they seem to live their entire lives without ever needing any mercy from anyone else. Although, of course, there is another life after this.

We remember the story Jesus told of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man had a poor man at his gate. It could have helped him.

He did very little for him. He allowed the crumbs of his table, as far as we know, to be taken. We're not even told that he did that.

We're told that Lazarus was just begging for the crumbs. We're not even told he got them. But the interesting thing is the man died comfortable, but he was not comfortable after that, and we find him begging for mercy.

Send Lazarus down to dip his finger in water and put it on my tongue. I'm tormented in these flames, and he was not heard. He was not alleviated.

He was not comforted. He was an unmerciful man. That story, of course, is found in Luke 16, 19, to the end of the chapter.

In Proverbs 22, in verse 9, Proverbs 22, 9, he who has a bountiful eye, a generous eye, actually literally in the Hebrew, it's a good eye. We'll find later on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about if your eye is good or if your eye is evil. An evil eye was a Hebraism, an expression the Hebrews used to speak of a greedy person.

A greedy person had an evil eye. A non-greedy person, a generous person, had a good eye. And that's literally in the Hebrew what it says here in Proverbs 22, 9. He who has a good eye, that means who is generous, it's a Hebrew idiom, will be blessed.

That's blessed or merciful. There you go again. For he gives his bread to the poor.

The person who has a good eye gives bread to the poor. It's obvious he's a good-eyed

person is a generous person. An evil-eyed person is a greedy person, a miser.

But notice there is the same thing Jesus said. That person will be blessed. In Proverbs 28, 27, you can see there's a lot of this subject in Proverbs.

It says, He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses. So there's very clear teaching in all of these places that mercy needs to be extended to the needy. As the good Samaritan found the man who was needy, the man on the road was not a man from poverty-stricken circumstances, but he was needy.

He was certainly momentarily needy, poor, desperate. In other words, if you see somebody who has a need and your heart does not go out to them, you will not expect God's heart to go out to you when you are in need. There are many times, and I can't find them all in the New Testament because there are so many, but the New Testament frequently talks about the need to have compassion on the poor.

And in James it indicates that if you do not have compassion on the poor, you don't have a saving faith. Obviously, if you don't have a saving faith, you will not obtain mercy. In James 2, verse 14 and following, it says, What does it profit my brethren if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to him, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

If you have dead faith, that won't save you. You cannot obtain mercy from God by having dead faith. And therefore, if you see your brother destitute, and you merely speak kind words, but you do not do anything to help him when you have the opportunity to do so, this is evidence that your faith is not genuine, and you are not merciful, and you will not obtain mercy.

It says this in 1 John 3, verse 17. 1 John 3, verse 17. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his, as it says in the literal, his bowels of compassion from him, it says heart in the New King James, how does the love of God abide in him? The bowels of compassion.

The idea is that when you see someone in need, you should be moved. It's almost like your bowels are moving, according to the idiom of the Greek. But the New King James clarifies that, puts it more in our modern idiom.

It's like your heart is moved toward him. If your heart isn't moved, or if your heart is inclined to be moved, but you shut it, you cut it off, you don't extend action from it, and you don't help, then how can you claim to have the love of God in you? Jesus, over in the Sermon on the Mount elsewhere, in Luke's version, I'd like you to turn there, if you would. Luke chapter 6 says this, in verse 37.

This is in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, as found in Luke. Luke 6.37 says, Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will men put into your bosom.

For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. Now, that's an expansion on the Beatitude. The merciful shall obtain mercy.

Be merciful, and you will obtain mercy. What kind of mercy? Well, if you are merciful in your judging, then God will be merciful in judging you. If you don't condemn, that's being merciful.

If someone does something worthy of condemnation, but you don't condemn them, you forgive them, then God won't condemn you, he'll forgive you. If you give to others, it will be given back to you. You see, both aspects of mercy are in this same verse.

The aspect of forgiving, and the aspect of generosity. And they are, in every case, saying exactly what he says. The merciful shall obtain mercy.

What you do is what will be done back to you from God. The measure you use to dish it out to others is the measure God will use to dish it back out to you. Choose your measure carefully, because it will be used.

In your treatment of others, choose your actions carefully, and do exactly what you hope God might do to you, because it's guaranteed that he will. He will do to you what you do to others. Now, on this matter of forgiveness, that passage in Luke brings that point up.

We've been talking about showing mercy to the poor, and by the way, we can always be financially secure, I believe, if we are always generous to the poor. But I do believe that generosity has to be tempered with wisdom, too. I mean, there are times when if you gave to every person who asked you, you would end up giving to some people who have no need, or who are wastrels, or people that God himself does not want to have given to.

I mean, the Bible says, he that will not work, let him not eat. That's God's mandate. And you would then have less resources to give when you find somebody who really does have need.

I believe that a Christian must be disposed toward generosity because they are innately merciful. I think the Christian must be a person whose character is overflowing with mercy. And every time you see a need, you need to consider, I would like to help this need.

What can I do? Is there something I should do? Is there something I can do? At the same time, you have to realize the world is full of needs, far more than you will personally be

able to address. And therefore, you need to decide, where does God want me to expend the few resources I have? There are so many needs. And my time, and my money, and my talents are so sparse.

I should choose to give to those that I believe are accomplishing something, or that have the need the most genuinely, or that I just feel God's Holy Spirit is strongly leading me to give to, rather than just say, well, I'm just going to give to the first radio evangelist or television evangelist that says they need a million bucks to stay on the air. That's not always a good stewardship. The church says, well, we need some money because we're going to have a Halloween party, and we just don't have enough money to buy the refreshments.

That's not something I would particularly feel inclined to give to. People ask for money all the time, who don't have genuine needs, or maybe they need it for something, but the project is not a legitimate project. And so, being merciful is essential.

Being wise in your dispensing of God's resources that he's given you is also a biblical concept. Now, as far as the other aspect of mercy, forgiveness, it's the same way. If you forgive others, you'll be forgiven.

If you don't forgive others, you won't be forgiven. The merciful shall obtain mercy, and the unmerciful shall not obtain mercy, in this respect either. In Matthew 6, which is later on in this same sermon, Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray, and one of the petitions in the well-known prayer that Jesus taught is in Matthew 6, verse 12, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Now, I'm not sure why the word debt is used. Some translations say, forgive us our transgressions. Is that what they say? But debts is a good word.

This is what it means here. It means that something is owed, but perhaps is unable to be paid. And when you consider forgiveness in the biblical sense, it is very helpful to consider it in the light of debts owed.

Because sometimes when people say, well, I know I should forgive so-and-so, but I just can't bring myself to forgive them. They just have hurt me so bad, I just can't forgive them. That is not correct.

And in all likelihood, the person who is saying that is thinking of forgiveness as a feeling. And it may be well argued that one cannot always change their feelings, at least immediately, towards somebody. It may be that every time you think of somebody who has wronged you, there's a bit of a hurt there.

There's a bit of an anger even that arises that you have to put down. That is a feeling of bitterness. Now, that is not good.

Although, I think most human beings, even the most virtuous, can say that feelings do not always come and go at your bidding. Feelings are often intrusive things and stubborn things. And you may wish you could forgive, but you don't find yourself feeling any forgiveness.

But it's very helpful for Jesus to tell us that forgiveness of somebody's sin against us is sort of like forgiving a debt. Because the forgiveness of a debt is an official transaction that has nothing to do with feelings. If you borrowed from me a thousand dollars, which that would be a good trick since I don't have a thousand dollars, but if you borrowed from me a thousand dollars and you gave me a slip of paper that says, I owe you a thousand dollars, and you signed it.

Holding that slip of paper means that I hold a debt. I hold your debt against you, basically, until you pay it back. But if you came to me and said, I can't pay that debt.

I don't know that I'll ever be able to pay that debt. I've just fallen into terrible circumstances. I have a whole lot of debts, and a lot of those creditors are coming down and they're going to take my house, they're going to take everything from me.

Could I be released from that debt? Would you forgive me that debt? If I said, well, if I considered it and said, well, okay, I will do that. And I said, I take the, I owe you, and I just tear it right up. And it doesn't exist anymore.

There's no more debt. Now, there may still come times later that in my feelings, I kind of wish I had that thousand dollars back, or I even wish I hadn't lent it or whatever, but my feelings are irrelevant. I've canceled the debt.

You are forgiven. And if I find myself wishing I hadn't, then I need to forgive my feelings. Because I've made a decision, and I must stand by my decision.

Once that decision is made, it is made. Once the I.O.U. has been eliminated, it's gone. There's no debt.

And forgiveness means that you cancel the debt that you were holding against somebody. Somebody treated you wrongly. Somebody offended you.

And you've been holding it against them in your emotions. And when you forgive them, you say, before God, I am canceling that person's indebtedness. They owe me nothing.

I am not going to, I'm not going to treat them as if they have wronged me or cost me anything. Now, I may not always feel that I've forgiven them, but I decide to. It's a decision I make.

It's a matter of the will. And anyone can do that. Anyone can make a decision and say, okay, I'll tear up this I.O.U. It may be really hard to do it because I really wanted that

money back, but I can say, well, that's just a decision I'm going to make.

I'm going to toss that right in the fire there. It's over. No debt.

You're forgiven. And that is, in less tangible terms, what is required every time somebody offends you or wrongs you. You have to cancel their debt.

You have to say, I forgive you. I forgive them. And having done so, that doesn't mean your feelings about them will immediately evaporate or be transformed into warm feelings, but it does mean that whenever a feeling of resentment comes up toward them, you have to remind yourself, that person owes me nothing.

That person's been released from that. And eventually, if you hold to your decision, your feelings, I believe, will inevitably conform. Feelings can change more slowly than choices.

Choices can be made in an instant. Feelings sometimes have to come around the long way. But if you hold to your choice, if you hold to your resolve, the feelings, I believe, inevitably follow.

And if they don't follow, you still have to just rebuke those feelings and ignore them and reprove yourself for holding anything against someone when you've actually forgiven them. And I do believe that eventually, if it's a genuine choice to forgive, that you'll find they're forgiven in your feelings too as time goes by. Jesus said we should pray to God, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, those who owe us.

That's forgiveness in general. Now, it's stated in terms of as if it was a financial debt. But forgiveness can be a financial or simply emotional debt.

And after he teaches that prayer in Matthew 6 and verses 14 and 15, he says, For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. That's nice. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

That is a promise also. If you do not forgive others, then God will not forgive you. And why are you even a Christian? But that you're counting on the mercy of God.

You're counting on his forgiveness. If he hasn't forgiven you, you're not going to heaven. What's the point of being a Christian at all if you're not going to be forgiven? Therefore, it is an absolute anomaly to find a Christian who feels justified in holding a grudge or being offended or having bitterness towards somebody who's wronged them.

It can't be. It cannot happen. If it happens, that person is forfeiting forgiveness from God.

It's not a light matter with God that he forgives you. It costs him a great deal. He doesn't plan for you to take that lightly, and he doesn't expect you to think you can get away

with being unmerciful when you're counting every day on his mercy toward you.

There are many places where Jesus affirms the same thing, namely that if a person does not forgive others, they will not be forgiven by God. In Mark chapter 11, a different setting, a different context, but same teaching, Mark 11, 25 and 26, Jesus said, And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may be also able to forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Same teaching, just as clearly as before. Don't know how many times Jesus would have to say it to get it across, or to make it good doctrine. A lot of people say, Well, I thought we were saved by grace.

You bet we are. Saved by grace, but Jesus tells you the conditions of grace. You can't have grace if you don't have grace.

You can't have mercy if you don't have mercy. It's that simple. I mean, it sounds like it's so obvious it doesn't even need to be said.

You can't have mercy if you don't have mercy. If you don't have mercy on others, you don't have mercy from God. You can't have grace if you don't have grace toward others.

That is biblical. And I don't know how many times Jesus would have to say it. Now, the dispensationist, this is one of those teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that makes them say, Well, the Sermon on the Mount is not for this dispensation.

It's not for Christians. It's for Jews during the Kingdom Age. Because Jesus said there that you can't be forgiven by God if you don't forgive others.

But in our present age, that's not how God deals with us. Because over in Ephesians 4, they say, Ephesians 4.32, Paul said, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. Now, here's the point the dispensationist tries to make.

Paul says that we should forgive others just as God has forgiven us. That means God's forgiveness comes first, and because he has forgiven us, we should be forgiving to others. Whereas Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount is you have to forgive others, or else your Father will not forgive you.

It seems to make our forgiving others first, and God's forgiveness of us contingent upon that. They say both statements can't be true. Therefore, Paul's statement applies to the dispensation of the Church, and Jesus' statement applies to a different dispensation, and that's one reason they don't believe that the Sermon on the Mount is for Christians.

They think it's for Jews and another dispensation. What an absurdity. It seems obvious to

anyone who's not trying to prove such a ridiculous point that both statements can be true.

God will forgive me as I forgive others, and I forgive others because he forgives me. It's not as if forgiveness is something that happens one time and never again. See, that's another problem with their thinking.

They think that Jesus, when he died for your sins, paid for all your sins past, present, and future. I agree with that, but what they say as a result of that is you don't need to be forgiven anymore. After one time you've been forgiven, you don't have to be forgiven anymore.

But that's ridiculous. Some have even said... I heard a person call into a radio show recently who said the Christian authors who was dispensationalists said that you should never ask God for forgiveness again after you've been saved for anything. Don't ask for forgiveness for anything you do because you've already been forgiven of all your sins past, present, and future.

This ridiculous idea totally comes from the idea that salvation is a legal transaction merely as if God put a whole bunch of money in the bank to cover all the debts you'll ever have and then he goes away and there's no relationship expected. He's done the deal. Now you're in there.

It seems clear that people attracted to that theology are people who aren't very attracted to God because the more attractive, genuine gospel is salvation comes through a relationship with God. Not through God just putting money down on all your debts for the rest of your life and going away. It comes from relating with God.

Walking with God. Knowing God. And when you know somebody and you offend them, you apologize.

You ask for forgiveness. And that happens a lot with our relationship with God. And we need forgiveness often.

And people... We need to forgive people often. And yes, now that we've been forgiven by God it is incumbent on us to forgive others. As God in Christ has forgiven us.

But it's also true that the mercy we desire from God on an ongoing basis is conditional on our disposition to be merciful to others on a continuing basis. If we do not have such mercy then God will not have such mercy toward us. That's what Jesus teaches us.

Check this out over in Matthew 18. I'm sure it's familiar to you but on the same subject Jesus gets real emphatic. Frighteningly so, actually.

In Matthew 18, verse 21. Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brothers

sin against me and I forgive them? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times but up to 77 times. Or some translations say 70 times 7. That's what this is, I'm sorry.

This is 70 times 7. Some say 77 times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

But as he was not able to pay his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and that payment should be made. The servant therefore fell down before him saying, Master, have patience with me and I will pay you all. The master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt.

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii. And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat saying, Pay me what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him saying, Have patience with me and I will pay you all.

And he would not. But he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servant saw what had been done, they were very grieved and came and told their master all that had been done.

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay him all that was due him. And then Jesus said, So shall my heavenly Father also do to you.

If each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses. Man! Notice this. What came first? Who forgave who first? The king forgave the servant first.

Therefore the servant was expected, having obtained mercy, to extend that mercy that he has obtained. He is supposed to have mercy because he has received mercy. You receive something, you have it, right? If God has given you mercy, then you have mercy.

And that should show in your relations with others. But listen. The master said, Should you not have had compassion on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you? That's what Paul says.

Forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. But, don't you see, the parable also says that I will not forgive you now because you did not forgive. He re-imposed his debt.

He had forgiven it. Now you might say, Well, you can't do that. If someone cancels your

debt, you can't re-impose it.

This was a king. Kings can do what they want to do. It's true in our society.

If someone cancels your debt, it's a legal transaction. You walk away free and they can never re-impose it. But this is a king in this story.

And that changes everything. And the king can do anything he wants to do. And he says, Okay, I forgave you, but I've changed my mind.

You are not a forgiving, forgiven one. Therefore, you will no longer be a forgiven one. I will put you into prison with the torturers until you repay all your debt.

And Jesus says, That's exactly what my father will do to you. If you do not forgive from the heart, not just a shallow verbal saying, I forgive you, but from the heart. You have to forgive everyone who has wronged you.

Now, anyone who finds this severe, anyone who finds it asking a great deal, God's asking a great deal here. He doesn't know the kinds of injuries I've sustained from someone. And my forgiving them is just a very difficult thing.

Anyone who finds that difficult simply has never gotten a revelation of the immensity of the debt that is owed to God, that he has forgiven. In the parable, the two debts were compared this way. One owed, what was it, 10,000 talents, millions of dollars, never payable in any way, shape, or form.

The other person owned 100 denarii. That's not a small amount, but it's like 100 days' wage. It's less than a year's wage.

It's certainly way less than millions of dollars, the 10,000 talents. And what the parable shows is that the man who was unforgiving was not just unlike his master in kind, but it wasn't just that one man was forgiven, but he didn't forgive another man. It's that he was forgiven so great a debt, and yet he wouldn't forgive so small a debt.

And the message of the parable is in addition to the merciful show of mercy is that the reason it is so inappropriate for us not to forgive somebody is because what we have been forgiven is so immense by comparison to anything that someone could possibly do to us. Any offense done to us is finite. But an offense done to an infinite God is infinite.

And therefore, if somebody has never been broken over their own sinfulness, never realized how horrendous their sin is before God, and exulted in the sense of sins forgiven with God, that person might find it that God's asking an awful lot, that He requires you to forgive everyone that's ever wronged you. But that person also may not have ever really repented, because repentance means you agree with God. You change your mind to think the way God thinks about sin.

And if you think that your sin is a small matter, repentance is not adequate. Your repentance is not thorough. You don't agree with God yet.

You haven't changed your mind yet about your sin. And once someone has done so, they realize that if every person on earth wronged them in every conceivable way for the rest of their life, it would not ever be equal to the wrong done God by you or by me. And the greatness of our forgiveness is unfathomable, whereas we're never called to forgive anyone that much, because we'll never be wronged as much as God is wronged by us.

In James 2, remember I told you that James has many echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in it. James 2.13 says, Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. He's just rephrasing this beatitude.

Blessed are the merciful, they shall attain mercy. Judgment will be without mercy to the person who has shown no mercy. That's a pretty severe statement.

The Bible is not a feel-good kind of a book. It's a serious book about the real issues of eternity and life and death and condemnation and forgiveness. So, blessed are the merciful, because they shall obtain mercy.

They and only they. Those who are unmerciful shall not. And mercy can take the form, as I said, of generosity toward the needy.

It can take the form of forgiveness toward the guilty. Now, just as I said about the generosity toward the needy, there is a sense of responsibility here. It's not just a flagrant, promiscuous kind of a thing.

It's not just that every time there's a needy person, you do whatever it is they want you to do for them. And lots of times people are, you know, they don't have a sense of what their real need is anyway, because they don't know God. And they may need food, and you may do well to feed them, whether they know God or not.

But they may have other things they think they need, which they don't need. And there may be genuine needs out there for more worthy purposes that you should save what you have for. That's stewardship.

That's called stewardship. Likewise, when it comes to forgiveness, there's a certain amount of responsibility to be exercised there too. We should be, as Jesus made it clear, ready to forgive at any moment.

Inclined to forgive. Desirous to forgive. In fact, Jesus said, when you stand praying, forgive.

While you're there, praying. Just forgive, if you have anything against anyone. Your heart should be always disposed to forgiveness.

Jesus on the cross, when he said, Father, forgive them. They do not know what they do. He was talking about people who had not in any way shown repentance or remorse about what they had done, but he forgave them.

Likewise, Stephen said, Father, do not lay this sin against their charge. They had not repented, but his heart was merciful toward them. He was forgiving them even while they were committing their act.

But we need to realize too, there's another aspect of forgiveness the Bible teaches, and that is that you may have a heart disposed to forgive people, and you may indeed choose to forgive them, but that doesn't mean that all things are well in the relationship, again, because you have been kindhearted toward them or because you've decided to not hold something against them and you've decided not to allow any bitterness or resentment to be retained or any offense to be taken by you. Because the person in question might not be any different after they've been forgiven by you than they were before. And when somebody has wronged you, it interferes with your ability to trust them.

It should not interfere with your ability to love them or to have mercy upon them, but it does interfere with your ability to trust them. Because, you see, the world thinks of trust in a real kind of shallow, contentless way. We just got to trust that all things will turn out okay.

We just got to have faith that everything will be okay. Why? Why should we? I mean, what are we believing? What is this trust based upon? I don't know. We just can't give up hope.

We just have to always believe. I mean, you'll find eternal optimists out there who don't even know God. And they're always talking about the need to have faith and be positive and think well and hold out hope and so forth.

They've got all kinds of faith. And these are the same kind of people that if you show any suspicion about their behavior or motives, they say, what, don't you trust me? My first wife had many affairs and yet she was offended that I didn't trust her. I said, don't you trust me? No, I don't trust you.

Why should I? Tell me why I should trust you. People almost hold it against you if you don't trust them when in fact your distrust for them means that they are the ones who have failed to earn your trust. If somebody has shown themselves to be loyal, faithful, truthful and a person of integrity, you trust them intuitively.

You trust them effortlessly. The fact that you don't trust somebody either means that you are paranoid or that they have not behaved in such a way as to convey to you that they are a trustworthy person. If you are paranoid, of course, that's your fault.

You might be just overly suspicious of all people. If you're paranoid and suspicious, then probably don't trust anybody. But if you trust lots of people, maybe most people, but you don't trust that person, that's an indictment of them, not of you.

There is no obligation upon you to trust anyone. Trust means that you believe that they are honest. Trust means that you believe that they are reliable.

Now, a person who is your enemy is to be loved, but not necessarily trusted. God loves sinners, but He doesn't trust them all. That's why repentance is necessary for a relationship with God.

You can't have a relationship unless there's mutual trust. God loves the world. He loves sinners.

He's not willing that they should perish, but He doesn't trust most of them. But if a person genuinely repents and says, God, you are right, I'm wrong, I've lived a life of sin, I want to live a life of righteousness and holiness, then God says, okay, I see that, that's genuine, I'm going to trust you with that. I'm going to say, I can believe you about that.

I see the sincerity there. I'm willing to enter into a relationship where you trust me and I'll trust you. Now, God's trust in us is not as great as ours is of Him because He's more trustworthy than we are.

But if He can't trust us at all, if we've never even made any motions of repentance, why should He trust us at all? Why should He invest anything in us? Now, this is something that, I'm not just speaking with human wisdom, the Bible makes it clear that God does not forgive if we do not repent. Why? Because repentance means that we acknowledge we're wrong and want to do different and we're sincerely going to try to be trustworthy from now on. We've betrayed His trust by sinning and we're not planning to do that anymore.

We want to avoid that if possible. We want to do everything we can to not break trust anymore. If somebody comes to you who's done you wrong and says, listen, I just realized how terrible that was I did, I don't ever want to do such a thing again, please forgive me.

You forgive them, you can trust them again. Because you say, okay, they realized that was wrong. They've acknowledged that's wrong.

They've said they don't want to do that anymore. That's good. Now I can extend a little trust for them.

But if somebody stabs you in the back and never shows any remorse, never indicates that it was even wrong in their opinion, then you can have no assurance that they won't do it again without remorse. I mean, if they have no remorse about it the first time,

maybe they don't think that kind of thing's wrong. Maybe they'll go around doing it every time you turn around.

You can't trust them. You can love them. You can say, Father, forgive them.

They don't know what they're doing, or maybe they do know what they're doing, but I forgive them anyway. But forgiving them in my heart is one level. Trusting them again, having a full restoration of the relationship is a different matter.

It takes the thing a step further. And that degree of forgiveness to the point where the whole trust in the relationship is restored, Jesus taught, is not done automatically. Just like you don't give automatically to everyone who asks you, because that could turn out to be really terrible stewardship.

Likewise, you don't extend a full restoration of relationship to everybody who wrongs you automatically, although you want to, and you do take measures to try to make that happen. Jesus said this over in Luke 17. I know this is familiar to you to some extent, but just so we know what it means to be merciful and what it does not necessarily mean.

In Luke 17, Jesus said in verse 3 and 4, Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. He didn't say forgive him.

He said rebuke him. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him.

And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day he returns to you saying, I repent, you shall forgive him. Now, notice the condition here for forgiveness is repentance. If your brother sins against you, you need to hear him repent.

If he's not volunteering, then go and speak to him. Go rebuke him. And then he will repent.

If he doesn't repent, then that implies that brings different dynamics into the situation. But if he repents, you forgive him. Now, what's the difference here between this forgiveness and that which he says when you stand praying and you say, I mean, if you have ought against anyone, forgive them.

There's no repentance required there. I personally believe that this is the difference between forgiveness in the heart and formal forgiveness. Formal forgiveness means that from now on there will be no more suspicion.

We are going to proceed in this relationship as if nothing has happened because I believe that you are repentant. And I am not going to hold the past against you for the rest of your life and make that, you know, be a big burden over your head. I'm going to forgive you for that.

But only because you have changed your mind and you say you won't do those things anymore. Now, if a person will not repent, you still forgive them in your heart. But there is no formal restoration.

There can't be. There isn't in God. God doesn't restore anyone to relationship with himself just because, just because they're there and just because he was in Christ.

What's it say? God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding their transgressions against them. Jesus died for the sins of the world. He forgave the world in his heart.

But he cannot have a formal restoration relation with them unless they repent. There are two levels here of forgiveness. God is disposed toward mercy.

God has done all that he can to extend mercy until a person repents. He can do no more. And there can be no formal forgiveness, no formal restoration of relationship.

Well, of course, there in Luke 17, Jesus just says, if your brother repents when you're with him, forgive him. He doesn't say what to do if he doesn't repent. But we're fairly familiar, I'm sure, with the passage where Jesus does say what to do in that case.

In Matthew 18, in verse 15, Jesus said, moreover, if your brother sins against you, that sounds just like the other passage in Luke 17, if your brother sins against you. Now, in Luke 17, Jesus said, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. Here he says, moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.

That's rebuke him. Between you and him alone. Okay, it should be private.

If he hears you, that's if he repents, you've gained your brother, you've forgiven him. Okay, so far, Matthew 18, 15 is essentially identical to Luke 17, 3 and 4 in its content. Different wording, same scenario.

But verse 16 goes beyond that. But if he will not hear you, that's if he doesn't repent. You've rebuked him, he doesn't repent.

What do you do then? Just give up on it? Hold it against him? No, you take with you one or two more that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

In other words, you don't restore the relationship. If he cannot be brought to repentance, you don't consider him a brother. You go through various steps, whatever you can, to convince him that he needs to repent.

You go privately first because if he'll repent then, then the matter doesn't have to be extended to the attention of others at all. His little sin can remain a secret between you

and him alone. But if he won't repent, it can't remain a secret.

You've got to extend the circle of those aware of it somewhat so that he can be confronted by a larger group. And if he doesn't hear them, take it to the church itself. And if he doesn't hear them, then he's given up any right to privacy about the matter.

And he is also, of course, given up the right to be treated as a brother. So, Jesus indicates that you don't end up formally forgiving everybody. You need to, for the sake of your own heart and your own spirit, forgive.

You need to make sure you do not allow any resentment, any grudge or any offense to be retained on your part. That's what's required. But if the person will not repent, you need to do what God does.

Try to get them to. Gently at first, with greater threats later on. But even God can't get everybody to repent.

And you can't make everyone repent. And if God can't get someone to repent, He can't get them into a relationship with Him. And they'll go to hell.

And if you can't persuade someone to repent, then there's limits to what you can do. You can't formally have that relationship anymore. They have to be treated like a tax collector or a heathen.

So, this is what Jesus teaches on mercy, showing mercy. We must extend mercy to the needy in the form of generosity and charity. We have to extend mercy to the guilty in the form of forgiveness and not condemning.

And thus we have the teaching of Scripture on that. I want to talk about one other beatitude. We don't have a real long time, but we do have enough time probably to give it some attention.

Matthew 5.8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The pure in heart is a term that comes from the Old Testament. Like so many of these beatitudes, most of them are a restatement of something in the Psalms.

It's an interesting thing. Jesus and David had a lot in common. And that's not any accident.

David was a type of Christ. And many of the Messianic Psalms were where David seemed to be complaining about his own mistreatment at the hands of people. And yet they end up being secondarily or maybe even primarily a prophecy about Jesus being mistreated.

You've probably noticed that in the Psalms. Many of the Psalms are said to be Jesus speaking when they're quoted in the New Testament. But in the Old Testament, it's David speaking and seemingly about himself.

But that's because David was a type of Christ. And much of the teaching that Christ gave, David had already given. David was a man after God's own heart.

And as such, he was centuries ahead of his generation in terms of understanding what was on God's mind. You know, in an age where all the Jews were commanded by God through Moses to offer animal sacrifices, David understood that that wasn't really that big a deal to God. He said the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

In Psalm 40, David said... I can't quote him exactly, but he said in sacrifices for sin and offerings, you had no pleasure. Let me see if I can read that to you. Verse 6, Psalm 40, verse 6. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire.

My ears you have opened. Offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said, behold, I come.

In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O God, and your law is within my heart. In other words, God didn't care so much about the animal sacrifice as He cared about what was in the heart.

The will to do the will of God. The desire to do the will of God. In the heart, that was a sacrifice that God would not despise and desire.

Now, David was therefore a spiritual man in an age of ritual religion. And that's what Jesus was. Jesus was a spiritual man, teaching spiritual things in an environment of ritualism and religiosity.

And so much of what Jesus taught was radical to His hearers in His environment, but it was not new. A thousand years earlier, David said many of the same things. Now, Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Now, if you look back at Psalm 24, I think you'll find the place that Jesus is alluding to. Psalm 24, verses 3-5, says, Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord, or who may stand in His holy place, He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully, he shall receive blessing from the Lord. Blessed are the pure in heart.

This person has a pure heart. According to verse 4, he receives blessing from the Lord. Verse 5, And righteousness from the God of His salvation.

So here's the blessed pure in heart. He shall receive blessing from the Lord. Jesus said it.

Jesus blessed him. Blessed are the pure in heart. Now, this man sees God.

Why? Because he ascends to the hill of the Lord and he stands in God's holy place. Who can appear before God? Who can come into God's presence and commune with Him?

Well, those who have clean hands and a pure heart can do that. So Jesus said, blessed are those who have a pure heart.

They will see God. They will commune with God. They will know God.

What is a pure heart? A pure heart, well, the word pure means undiluted, uncorrupted, unpolluted. If you have pure anything, it means there's nothing else except the thing itself. It's not a mixture of other things.

It's all one thing. A unified heart. In another place, David prayed, Lord, unite my heart to praise your name.

A heart that's one thing, united, one focus. Well, what is that focus? What is the single thing? Remember, Jesus said to Mary and Martha, actually said to Martha, as Mary was trying to get him to persuade Mary to help out in the kitchen, he said, Martha, you're worried about many things, but only one thing is needful. Only one thing is needful.

And Mary has chosen that one thing. The heart has to be set after one thing and one only to be pure. Otherwise, it's mixed.

And the heart, of course, is not the blood pump under the fifth rib that it's talking about. The heart is a metaphor for your center of your desires and your will and your motivations. When the Bible says, as he thinks in his heart, so is he, the context in that proverb means as he is motivated in his heart.

What he's motivated by is what really is the issue and not what he's saying with his mouth. And the heart is the seat of the motives. Well, what is a pure heart then? What motives belong there, unmixed? Well, if you look at David's Psalm 27, we'll find out.

Psalm 27, verse 4. David said, One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek, that alone. Now, he says more than one thing here, but apparently all this is one thing put together. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Now, isn't that the same thing as who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord, who shall stand in his holy place? That's what David desired. That I might dwell in the house of the Lord all days of my life. That I might behold the beauty of the Lord.

He said they shall see God to inquire in his temple. What David said is there's one thing that is my motivation in all that I do, and that is that I might stand before God, that I might commune with God, that I might have access to God. In other words, my relationship with God is my one obsession.

And nothing else motivates me like my desire to maintain a clear channel of communication with me and God, to be pleasing to Him to the point where He always

welcomes me into His holy hill, into His temple, that I can meditate there, that I might dwell in His house all the days of my life and behold the beauty of the Lord. That's the pure heart. You see, both Psalms, Psalm 24 and 27, David talks about the privilege of coming to God's house and remaining there, standing in His holy place.

And in Psalm 24, he says, the one who can do that is one who has a pure heart. And in 27, he says, I'm one of those people. I have one thing in my heart, one thing only, and that is this desire.

The point here is that those who want to see God must have one desire, and that is the desire to see God. Those who want to commune with God and dwell with God must have one thing that motivates them, one only, and that is the desire to communicate and commune with God. It says in Hebrews chapter 11, He that would come to God must first believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of what? Those who diligently seek Him.

Now, if we say He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, what is the reward to those who diligently seek Him? Well, He must be the reward. If I said, I will reward those who diligently seek money, you'd assume that the reward is going to be money, because that's what you're seeking. If God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, then the reward must be finding Him.

And in the context of that statement in Hebrews, what is that? Is that Hebrews 11, 6, I think it is? It says, those who would come to God, He that would come to God, must first believe that He is and must first believe that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, which means that you will not approach God, first of all, unless you do believe that your diligent efforts at seeking Him will be rewarded by success. Furthermore, God will not allow you to approach Him unless it is your diligent desire to do so, to find Him. That is, He that would come to God, He that comes to God, must believe that He is.

That's Hebrews 11, 6, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The one thing that constitutes a pure heart is a pure desire to please God, to be such a person as can communicate with God with no obstructions. Now, those people shall see God.

Now, the doctrine of seeing God in Scripture is a complex one because sometimes we read no man can see God, no man has seen God in any time, and other times it says, and so and so saw God, and he saw God, and those people saw God. And, in fact, Jesus said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. So, there's a lot of senses in which the Bible talks about seeing God, some mutually exclusive of the others.

For example, Moses said, God, show me your glory. And God said, no one can see my face, not even you, Moses. Yet, on another occasion, He said, if I speak to a prophet, I'll speak in a dream or a vision or something, but my servant Moses, not so with him, I will speak face to face.

And the similitude of the Lord shall he behold. So, there's obviously mixed messages here about seeing God. What I understand the Bible to teach is that no man in our mortal state could survive a sight of the unveiled glory of God.

It is simply too brilliant. It is too radiant. His glory is too great.

But, He can veil His glory through various ways. He can veil it in the flesh of Jesus so that people could see God in Him. He could veil it in a cloud in the days of the tabernacle.

He could veil it in a temporary human form as the times when Abraham saw God in a human form, what we call a theophany. There are different ways in which God can be seen if He veils Himself. No one has ever seen His unveiled glory while in the flesh.

Of course, when we die, we go to be with Him and we'll see God quite plainly and quite directly at that point. But, as I understand the Scriptures, there are two senses in which the pure in heart shall see God. One is ultimately.

When we go to heaven, when we die, we will see God there. We will be able to see Him. There will be no further obstruction to our view.

We'll dwell in His presence and we shall look upon Him. But, there's another sense in which the Bible talks about us already seeing Him. It says in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18, that we are beholding the glory of the Lord.

With unveiled faces, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord. But, it is as in a glass, that is, as in a mirror. It's a vague image.

1 John 3 says, in either verse 2 or 3, it says, Beloved, now are we the sons of God. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. We don't see Him fully, but the more like Him we are, the more we see Him as He really is.

In the Old Testament, David said, to the pure you will show yourself pure. To the depraved or the corrupt, you shall show yourself something else. I forget what the word was there.

It's a psalm I don't have memorized. But, it indicates that the more pure you are, the more like Him you are, the more you can see Him accurately. Your vision of God is conditioned upon your likeness of God.

And so the pure in heart, those who are fully pure in heart, will be the ones who see Him the best. They shall see God. Now, it says something very much like that in Hebrews 12 also.

Although the word pure is not used, the word holy is used. And it seems very obvious that holiness requires and involves spiritual purity. But in Hebrews 12, in verse 14, the

writer said, Pursue peace with all men and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

It's interesting that the very next beatitude Jesus gives is, blessed are the peacemakers. The pure in heart shall see God and the peacemakers shall be called the sons of God. Here it says, pursue peace with all men and holiness.

Sort of combining those beatitudes, as it were. Without which no man shall see the Lord. So seeing the Lord requires that we pursue one thing, that our hearts are purely motivated by one thing, not a little of that and a lot of something else, or not a lot of that and a little of something else, but pure.

You know, later on in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus points out that the Pharisees, although he doesn't always name them as his target, it seems clear who they are, that they're hypocrites, that they do religious things and there may even be some measure of desire in their heart that they'd be right with God, but they have other rewards they're seeking, besides just the reward of God's favor. The reward they're seeking is the favor of man. It's very hard to remain oblivious to the approval of man, even if you're a very godly, spiritual person.

Once you are truly spiritual, there will be people who notice this and commend you for it or treat you especially, and then you begin to sense, you know, that people admire me, people think well of me, and so forth, and then that begins to feel kind of good for people to feel good, to like you and think well of you, and then there's that desire to maintain that image in their sight, even if you're having a bad period, a bad spell. Maybe a time when you're actually growing lukewarm, but you don't want anyone to know it because people view you as a spiritual person. Eventually, if you compromise your spiritual integrity enough in those kind of situations, you can get to the point where you're pretending all the time.

And you don't even know you're pretending because you find that it's gratifying enough just to be thought of as a spiritual person. It's not that you don't have any desire at all to be right with God, but it's become so polluted by the desire for people to think of you as somebody who's right with God. And all the original humility is gone.

All the original hunger for God is gone. All there is now is maintaining the facade. This is what the Pharisees did.

I don't know if they at one time earlier in their life, some of them really loved God. I imagine some of them did. But for the most part, they'd become hypocrites.

And Jesus later in the Sermon on the Mount points this out. He says this in Matthew 6.1, Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them, otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do your

charitable deed, do not sound the trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets.

And in verse 5, And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets. And in verse 16, Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with the sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces. In every case, he says of them, they have their reward.

He says that in verse 2. He says that in verse 5. And he says that in verse 16. These people have their reward. Remember what it says, He that would come to God must first believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

What reward does a person want who is diligently seeking God? He wants God. He wants God's approval. He just wants to be right with God.

That's all that matters. That's his reward. But some people get to a place where they want another reward.

They want man's approval. They want men to think of them spiritually. And they have it.

The hypocrites have it. They earn it. And they receive it.

And they have it. And what Jesus is saying is, listen, these people have the reward they're seeking. They want man's approval.

They want people to think of them as spiritual people. And sure enough, people do think that. So they have the reward they want.

The saddest thing about them is that they have all the reward they're going to get. Because if you do not seek the approval of man, if you go into the privacy of your closet to pray, if you do not advertise the fact that you are fasting, if you do not let everyone know the generosity of your gifts that you're giving, if you do these things not to please men, not to impress men, but to please God, then your reward will be different than the one that they're seeking. They have the one they want.

Yours is yet to come. Yours is on the other side. Great is your reward in heaven, he says.

And so, the pure in heart are the ones, I think, who are, I think Jesus is identifying a condition that is deliberately distinctive from that of the current religious person in his day, whose heart toward God was mixed. If there was even anything left of desire toward God, there was a great deal, nonetheless, of desire to appear to be godly, to appear to be one who stands in God's holy place, but whose heart was not really pure at all. And, of course, Jesus went on to teach about the need to keep your heart pure in areas like adultery and in murder, not to have the anger, not to have the lust.

The pure heart is a very hard thing to maintain, and it's something that needs to be

given much attention. It says in Proverbs chapter 4, Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. And the heart has to be kept pure, because like a garden that's not weeded carefully, eventually all the kind of wrong things grow there and take over.

And then there's no vision of God. We need to quit there. We have a couple more Beatitudes left in this series to cover, plus we have the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, which we'll be getting around to as the series progresses.