

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 5:8 - 6th Beatitude



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg provides insights into the sixth Beatitude as recorded in Matthew 5:8. The verse emphasizes the purity of heart necessary to see God, and Gregg emphasizes that seeing God may not necessarily involve a literal sighting, but rather a clear vision of Him. He goes on to explain that holiness, which is often equated with purity, is the core of a person's soul that encompasses their values, affections, and thoughts, and is essential to true worship and love for God.

### Transcript

The so-called Sermon on the Mount, which Jesus taught to his disciples and is recorded in Matthew chapters 5 through 7, is one of the best-known passages in the New Testament, one of the best specimens of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, and one of the distinctive features about this sermon is that it begins with the encapsulation of Jesus' peculiar value system. In that he considers certain people to be fortunate and certain people to be blessed, whom the world would not necessarily always regard in that way. Some of the people that the world would pity, Jesus said, should be congratulated because they are blessed, they are fortunate, they are to be envied.

These statements at the beginning of his sermon, in some senses, set the tone for the rest of the sermon and much of what we find in the Sermon on the Mount is little more than an expansion on one or another of these statements at the beginning, which are called the Beatitudes. Each one begins with the words, blessed are, and then a category is specified, some group of people, people who fit some qualification, and he then says that they are blessed because, and he tells us why, he considers them to be so fortunate. We come in our studies through Matthew today to the sixth of these Beatitudes, it's found in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 8, where Jesus said, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Now, that sounds like a tremendous privilege, seeing God. Moses, who was a faithful servant of God and very much privileged, was not permitted to see God, at least not as much as he wanted to. There is a sense in which Moses did see God, he saw a vision of God, he saw what we would call a theophany, which is an appearance of God in various

forms, in a burning bush, in a pillar of cloud, and in some other forms.

But on one occasion, Moses said to God, in the book of Exodus, he said, show me your glory. And God said, no one can see my face and live. And so Moses was not even allowed to see the unveiled glory of God.

He was able to see God in some senses, and by the way, there are many people in the Old Testament who in one way or another are said to have seen God. But we must understand that it does not mean that they saw him unveiled. God appeared in many forms, in the form of even human forms at times.

In the Old Testament, we call these theophanies. He appeared in vision form. And there are a variety of ways that people are said to have seen God.

But seeing God in these cases, like seeing God in a vision, is not really seeing God directly. It's as if you were watching the President give the State of the Union speech on television. Well, are you seeing the President? Let's say the television broadcast is a live broadcast.

Everything that the President is actually saying in Washington, D.C., is being represented both visually and audibly for you to observe on your television set. Well, are you seeing the President in a case like that? Yes and no. If somebody said, did you see the President give the State of the Union address last night? If you had watched it on television, you could say, yes, I saw him.

But, of course, you didn't really see him. You simply saw his image projected to a screen. And you were not actually in the same place he was, and you could not see him.

But you saw something that was like him enough that you could truly say, yes, I saw him. So also Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter 6, says, in the year that Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. High and lifted up in his train filled the temple.

Ezekiel, in the first chapter of his book, claims to have seen the appearance of the glory of the Lord. And he saw the chariot of the Lord, and apparently one who sat on the throne who must have been God. But these are cases where these men had visions.

And a vision is not the same thing as seeing God straight on, like the angels look at him. No mortal being can look directly upon the glory of God and see him in that sense and live. But, immortal beings can.

And Jesus is making this promise that those who are pure in heart will see God. Why? Because they will become immortal beings too. They will go to heaven where the angels are.

They will see God there. They will live in his presence. And this is, you know, a sense in

which the pure in heart have a great privilege that others do not have.

Because not everybody goes to heaven. Not everyone will be able to see God in that sense. Now, there may be another sense in which Jesus indicates that these people will see God, but it's not at all clear because the term seeing God is used a variety of ways in Scripture.

And it's not, of course, entirely clear the sense in which Jesus means it. He might mean that we will see God in some other sense than literally. Of course, this would not rule out the idea of a literal viewing of God when we join him in heaven.

And the Bible makes it very clear that we shall see him in that way. But, even before we go to heaven, those who are pure in heart may see God in ways that others do not. After all, God is active in our world.

It is possible to see his fingerprints, as it were, to see his activity and recognize that that's him. It's possible for two people to hear or see the same event, and one of them can see God in it and the other cannot. Because God is in it.

When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, they certainly didn't see God anywhere in that situation. At a later date, though, Joseph demonstrated that he did. He said to them, you intended evil against me, but God meant it for good.

That means that Joseph, his heart was pure. He did not have bitterness and resentment. He was able to look at the circumstances where no one else could see this, and he could see God there.

But if your heart is polluted, if your heart has got a root of bitterness, if you're full of resentment and anger, and you're not looking at God, but you're looking at only the circumstances, you will not be able to see God as others can. And this may be the sense in which Jesus meant that they shall see God. After all, it says in Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows forth his handiwork.

Or as Paul put it in Romans chapter 1, he said, the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being manifested in the things that he has made. Now, what these verses are telling us is that as you look at the creation around you, you see the handiwork of God. The heavens are screaming out that God is there, and that God is great, and that God is mighty, and that they're declaring the glory of God.

But not everyone can hear it. Not everyone understands what they're saying. There was an occasion in John chapter 12 when God audibly spoke to Jesus, and spoke some specific words to Jesus that are recorded for us.

And it says, there were witnesses there, and it says, some said it thundered. Others said an angel has spoken to him. Now, it's interesting, because here God actually spoke

audibly, and lots of people heard it, but some actually understood it as words, and even attributed it to an angel speaking.

Others just heard it as if it was a thunderclap. You can see the glory of God, or you can look at the same evidence and not see the glory of God. And it just depends on where your heart's at.

You see, atheism does not arise out of some kind of pure scientific approach to things. Atheism arises out of an impure heart. And that's made very clear in the book of Romans chapter 1, that those who declare that there's no God, they simply have had to rule God out of their lives and out of their consciousness by their commitment to their evil ways.

They don't want there to be a God, because if there is a God who made them, then by the same token, that God owns them. And if God owns you, then he has the right to tell you how to live. He also has the right to judge you and penalize you if you don't live the way he tells you to.

All of this is just too much for the conscience of certain people who love their sin, and therefore it's much easier just not to believe in God at all. However, belief in God is an obvious thing to those who are not trying to justify sin in their lives, and therefore it is possible for two people, one who's pure in heart and one who is not, to see the same evidence and not see the same thing. When Paul said the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen being manifested in the things he has made, obviously they are clearly seen not to everybody.

Some people can look at the same molecule of water or at the same stars in the heavens or at the same astonishing phenomenon in biology or something and not see God there at all. And others can see God all over it. Now, there is that sense, in addition to the fact that those who are pure in heart will see God when they go to heaven.

There's a sense in which purity of heart enables us to see God in places that others cannot see him here and now. And what a blessing it is, really, to be able to do so. Those who have this benefit of seeing God in everything are certainly not consigned to life in an abandoned universe.

They never have to feel quite alone because they can see there's someone with them. There is someone here, and he may not be visible to the naked eye, but he is known and seen in the things that he's made. And so a purity of heart is one of those things that qualifies a person or entitles or enables a person to see God in some ways that others cannot.

But what is it that purity of heart means? What does it mean to be pure in heart? Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Well, this statement of Jesus is not really original with him any more than the other Beatitudes are. Jesus never claimed

originality about these things.

Back a few Beatitudes back when he said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. He was simply rephrasing one of the statements in Psalm 37, 11, which says the meek shall inherit the earth. Well, if the Bible says the meek shall inherit the earth, then Jesus can say, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Likewise, the idea that the pure in heart will see God, or rather that one must be pure in heart in order to see God or to approach God, comes from the Old Testament as well, also from the Psalms. Over in Psalm 24 and verse 3, the question is raised by David, Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? Now, the hill of the Lord was where the tabernacle was, and the idea is, who may approach God? Who may come into God's presence and commune with him? Not just everybody. In fact, the answer is given in the next verse.

When he says, Who may stand in his holy place? The answer is given in verse 4. This is Psalm 24, verse 4. He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol. Now, having a pure heart was an essential qualification, if you wish to be one of those who could ascend to the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place. In other words, if you wish to be granted access to God.

Therefore, having a pure heart is essential if one wants to see God in any positive sense, that word. Now, by the way, I should clarify, everyone at some point in the future is going to see God, at least briefly. Because Jesus is going to return, he's going to raise the dead, he's going to call all men to judgment.

And every man will stand before God and give account of himself to God. But for many, that will be a brief exposure, and it will not be a friendly or blessed one. The blessedness of seeing God only accrues to those who are on good terms with God.

And thus, those who are pure in heart. So we need to understand what it means to be pure in heart. The writer of Hebrews may well have had this particular beatitude in mind when he wrote in chapter 12 and verse 14, Pursue peace with all men and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

If you don't pursue peace with all men, interestingly, the next beatitude is, Blessed are the peacemakers. We'll come to that. But those who pursue peace and those who pursue holiness are pursuing that without which no one will see the Lord.

Do you hope to see God? Well, are you pursuing peace with all men and are you pursuing holiness? Let's think of that second thing first. Holiness. What is holiness? Well, holiness has a wide range of usage and meaning.

But one of the meanings of holiness certainly is purity. Purity and being undefiled. God is holy.

He is pure. He is undefiled. So must we be if we want to see the Lord.

Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart. They shall see God. Well, the word pure means unpolluted or unmixed.

When you want to purchase something, some food item that doesn't have any preservatives, or doesn't have any extraneous stuff added in the manufacture of it, you look for the word pure or 100% or something like that. You don't want mixture. You want the real thing.

And to be pure in heart means there's no mixture there. Now, even that, of course, doesn't tell us everything we need to know about the meaning of the term. But it seems to mean this.

When it says, Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who have not lifted up their eyes or their hearts to an idol, it tells us that the person who has a pure heart has no mixture of idolatry in their heart. God has their whole heart. You see, one of the first commandments, the first of the ten commandments that God gave is, You shall have no other gods before me.

And if a person is a worshiper of God, but also worships other things or gods, then their heart is not pure. It's defiled. Their heart is, there's mixture there.

Remember, Jesus said what the great commandment is, You shall love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength. This all your heart is what is meant by lack of mixture. If you are a lover of God, if you are a worshiper of God, he must have your whole heart.

If there is something else there besides that you love, then you will not be able to serve him purely and wholly. Your heart will not be pure. It will be defiled with other idols.

Remember, Jesus said later on in the Sermon on the Mount that you cannot serve God and mammon, meaning materialism or money. He says you can't serve two masters. To be pure in heart means you've surrendered your whole heart to God, and he is the only person you're worshiping, the only being that you worship and are committed to, and any other idols have been removed.

Now, to have a pure heart does not mean that you never have an impure thought. There are many ways in which the Bible uses the word heart and mind interchangeably, but not always. The mind is often just the stage upon which thoughts pass and play themselves out.

These thoughts may originate from your heart, or they may originate from outside. For example, God can introduce thoughts to your mind, and what's more, the devil can introduce thoughts to your mind. We know that the devil introduced a thought to Peter's

mind when he tried to persuade Jesus not to go to the cross at Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16.

Jesus spoke to Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan. You're an offense to me. You are not minding the things of God, but the things of man.

What was in Peter's mind, whatever it was, was put there by Satan. Even Job's wife seemed to have the thought put into her head to tell Job to curse God and die, since that's the very thing that Satan had said he was going to persuade Job to do, and now we find that suggestion coming directly from Job's wife. It is entirely possible for wicked thoughts to be suggested to the mind by the enemy, or even by other people.

The mind is simply the area where thoughts are introduced and either shoved off and rejected or entertained. But the heart is really the core of a person's soul and of their will and of their affections and their values and so forth. And therefore, there are thoughts that come to your head that reflect what's in your heart, and there are thoughts in your head that don't reflect what's in your heart.

For example, you may have a temptation to do some horrible thing at the very moment that you're praying sincerely to God for purity of heart. Well, where's that prayer coming from? That prayer is from your heart. Well, where's the thought coming from? Well, I'm not sure where the thought's coming from, but it's at least a possibility that's being suggested to you by the enemy.

You can have an evil thought enter your head without that necessarily reflecting impurity in your heart. In fact, the best way to know whether your heart is pure in a time when there's such a suggestion made to your head is to observe your own reaction to the thought. If an evil thought comes to your head and you are not appalled by it, then your heart must not be at odds with it.

It must be a thought that reflects what's in your heart. If, on the other hand, some evil thought is suggested to your mind and you're appalled and you hate it and you wish it were not there and you try to think of every way you can to get rid of it, it is clear that it is not resonating with what's in your heart. Your heart is who you are.

Your thoughts may or may not resonate with who you are, depending on whether they originate with you or from outside. It's quite clear that another human being can suggest something to you that you'd find absolutely disgusting. Well, so can the enemy.

The only difference is he's invisible, and when he suggests something to your mind, you may be tempted to think that you're the one who had that thought. You're the one who originated that idea. But if you have that kind of disgust and sense of being appalled by the thought, then it does not reflect what's in your heart.

Your heart may be pure, and the very fact that you find such an evil thought so

disgusting may be the best evidence that your heart is pure. In any case, do not mistake a lustful or evil thought that comes to your mind as an evidence that your heart is not wholly the Lord's. Your heart is wholly the Lord's if He is your whole pursuit, if nothing matters to you but the will of God.

Now, when I say nothing matters to you, I don't mean to say you don't have any other desires that come along, but the thing that you make your decisions based upon, you're committed to make your decisions based on your obedience and love and worship of God Himself. And your heart is His. If your heart is wholly His, then you are pure in heart.

Now, it is necessary to explore different ways in which the heart can be deceptive. In Jeremiah, we read that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Of course, this is not describing a Christian's heart.

This is describing the heart of the wicked Jews of Jeremiah's time who were rebellious against God. Their heart was wicked. The Christian has a new heart.

In fact, in Ezekiel chapter 36, God promised that when we become Christians, God will take out of us the wicked, stony heart that's there, the hard heart, and replace it with a soft heart and put His Spirit in us. In Jeremiah 31, God says that He will write His laws and His ways in our hearts when we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ. So that if you are a Christian, then God has done a work in your heart.

He has cleansed it of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ, and He is changing the orientation of your heart. At the same time, though, it is not impossible for you to drift away, for your heart to become wicked. It is possible to neglect the grace of God.

In Hebrews, we're warned not to be led astray by a wicked heart, an evil heart of unbelief, in strain from the living God. This is, of course, an exhortation that is made to people who are Christians. It's important that we check our hearts from time to time, just like you would check the water coming out of your tap before you drink it, especially if you had reason to believe that it was, from time to time, polluted.

You'd check the water every once in a while before you drink it. So also, you need to check your heart. It says in 2 Corinthians chapter 13, examine yourselves and see whether you are in the faith.

And you need to look at your heart from time to time. Don't be too introspective. That can be counterproductive.

But you do need to be aware that your heart can become impure. And without holiness, and without pursuing peace with all men, without purity of heart, no one will see the Lord. This is what Jesus taught.

This is what the Bible teaches, generally. Next time, we'll take the next beatitude, which



is, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. I hope you'll be able to join us for that lesson as well.

Thanks for joining us today. We'll continue our study through Matthew next time.