



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 5:6–8; Revelation 22:4

Gospel of Matthew

“The Beatitudes IV: Blessed Righteousness and Mercy”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading this morning is again in the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, so if you have your New Testaments, will you turn with me to that 5th chapter? I want to read verses 6, 7, and 8, and then the last verse from the book of the New Testament. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 6 through verse 8. In the fourth of the Beatitudes we read:

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after 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.”

And then the one verse in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, chapter 22 and verse 4. In the description of the new heavens, the new earth, and then the new Jerusalem, the Apostle John writes in the 4th verse of the 22nd chapter:

“And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.”

May God bless this reading of his Word.

We’re turning again in our study of the Beatitudes to the fourth in the series of this melodious octave of epigrams that contain more practical morality than a thousand volumes of divinity. I must say that to attempt an exposition of the Beatitudes is to confess failure, and to question one’s sanity in making the attempt.

One of my favorite spots in the United States is the Grand Teton Mountains. And I must confess, too, that as I was thinking about the exposition of the Beatitudes, I thought of the times that I have sat in my automobile outside of the Grand Teton Park, and looked up at the Grand Teton mountain itself, and have seen the peak hidden in fleeting clouds and mist, catching only a glance of the glorious beauty of that peak every now and then as one of the clouds drifted by. And I thought of that as I attempted to write down an exposition of several of these Beatitudes of the study we are to undertake this morning.

I am sure that it is practically impossible to catch all of the beauty of these great statements with which the Lord Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount. And they are so easily misunderstood. They are often made to sound like commands to lift ourselves up by our bootstraps, and make ourselves acceptable to God. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,” often comes to be read, to be understood as, “blessed are those that are merciful *in order that* they may obtain mercy.” And even this opening one with which we begin our study this morning, “Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled,” often comes out as a command which we are, in our own strength, to undertake to fill in order that we may be blessed by God.

I must say again and again that these great Beatitudes are grounded in the grace of God. They are given to men who have responded to the good news of John the Baptist and of the Lord Jesus, and they are therefore addressed to men who have given themselves in a commitment to Jesus Christ. So, they are not intended in any way to suggest a plan of salvation.

As a matter of fact, these Beatitudes give us a description of those who have believed in the Lord Jesus. And true believers, who have already come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus, should look at their own spiritual lives in the light of the Beatitudes and ask themselves, does righteousness

characterize my life? Does mercy characterize my life? Does purity in heart characterize my life? Am I an individual who mourns? Am I truly poor in spirit? Have I entered into the meekness that is described here in one of these Beatitudes, for these are descriptions of the characteristics of the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are designed to be tests for us. And it is my own personal feeling we need these tests, and particularly in evangelicalism today.

We have been exposed to a kind of preaching of the Word of God that has glorified the act of faith, and then, has not laid sufficient stress upon the manifestations of that faith in practical Christian living. We have laid a great deal of stress, and properly so, upon the fact that our salvation rests simply upon trust in Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished upon the cross at Calvary. But we have not laid sufficient stress upon the fact that the evidences of a genuine trust in Jesus Christ are the evidences set forth in Scripture of the Christian life.

And we have no basis from the Word of God for believing that we have truly trusted the Lord Jesus Christ and his saving work if there are not evidences in our life of the kinds of things about which the Lord Jesus speaks here in the Beatitudes. It is true that we are saved by faith, but we are saved for good works. And if those good works are not manifest, we do not have any Scriptural basis upon which to say that we are saved. And consequently, it becomes a very serious matter, these things that have to do with the practical evidences of Christian living.

So when it comes to the Beatitudes, we must remember that they are grounded in grace. They are not given us as a plan of salvation. The plan of salvation has never changed. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. But these are the evidences of the life that characterizes those who have believed.

This interim ethic—and we have called it an interim ethic because it was given to the apostles and other believers who lived in anticipation of the coming Messianic kingdom upon the earth—is a ladder of light, a linked chain, which sets forth the evidences of the new life and the characteristics of the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

The first of the Beatitudes is found in the 6th verse, and it is a beatitude of righteousness: “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Again, I want to just, for a moment, notice the contrast of this beatitude with the beatitudes of the world that are somewhat related to it. I think if the world were to attempt a group of beatitudes and relate one of them to the beatitude of righteousness, they would say, “blessed are they who do their best, or blessed are they who work hard, for God always accepts sincerity.” And what a difference there is between that kind of beatitude and the beatitude the Lord Jesus speaks of.

Incidentally, you will notice in this beatitude, the Lord Jesus says nothing about achievement. He doesn't say anything about that. In fact, it's just the opposite. It's blessed are they who hunger and thirst after something that they do not have. So in this Beatitude, there is no achievement at all. What we have here is our Lord speaking of a kind of emptiness that leaves men unable to work. So, we do not have here, then, a beatitude in which achievement is suggested, but rather, lack of achievement. But this very lack of achievement our Lord Jesus commends in this case.

Now the world finds it very difficult to grasp the Sermon on the Mount, because its principles are so directly contrary to the principles of the Word of God. The world being a stranger to the grace of God in salvation, is interested in city streets and city parks and other admirable, philanthropic works, and considers these to be adequate exhibitions of true faith in God. And consequently, the world cannot understand the expressions of the heart of the Word of God who may cry out, as the Psalmist did, “as the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, my God.” So, this is something that is entirely foreign to the world.

So the Psalmist, in his expression, and the Lord Jesus, in this expression of the fourth beatitude, are just as far from the world's expressions, as—I've put in the notes—as Punjab is to a Carolina hillbilly. We have something here that is so foreign to their thinking that they cannot grasp it at all.

What is the Lord Jesus speaking of when he speaks about hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Now of course, we know from the study of the Scriptures that men were created in

original righteousness. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden in original righteousness, and they had a massive kind of blessedness that grew out of a proper relationship to God.

And we also know from the teaching of the Word of God that in the future we shall have a perfect blessedness in righteousness, and it lies before us right at this moment. So we began in righteousness, and we shall conclude in righteousness. We began in blessedness and we conclude in blessedness. But what about the interval between the past and the future? And that is the time that the Lord Jesus has in mind when he says, blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

This attitude of hungering and thirsting after righteousness I want to stress for a moment or two. The other beatitudes, I have said, suggested the attainment of certain stages in Christian living. We read, for example, blessed are the poor in spirit, for that represents an attainment. Then we read, blessed are they that mourn; well that represents an attainment. Blessed are the meek; that represents an attainment. But here we come to those who long for a certain goal. And yet, there is a sense in which this Beatitude may be the very best of them all, because everyone may have it.

One might say, it's very difficult for me to [be] meek. I'm not really sure that I am poor in spirit, and as for mourning, I'm not at all sure what that means. But when we come to, blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, why everyone, it would seem, can have that.

Now I know you don't expect me, an old-fashioned Southerner, to say anything good about Abraham Lincoln. [Laughter] But after all, I do think that we ought to be as non-controversial as possible, and so I want to introduce at this point an illustration of one of our great presidents.

Some years ago, I made a personal study of Abraham Lincoln's life with a view to his faith in Jesus Christ, wondering if he was a true Christian. It was after a series of other studies I had done after attending a university, and I had made a study of Stonewall Jackson, as you might expect, being a Southerner and an admirer of Jackson, and especially because I knew that he was a Christian—a very strong, predestinarian Christian (that is, a biblical Christian) who believed in election, believed in predestination; a strong Calvinist. I've always thought that he was probably the greatest general we

have ever had in our armies in this country. And the foreigners still study, as you well know, the campaigns of General Stonewall Jackson. Jackson had on his staff one of the great theologians, Robert L. Dabney. He had him on his staff in order that he might have theological discussion while he was carrying on his campaigns. He was an outstanding Christian man.

And then I made a study of Robert E. Lee, in order to discover whether Lee was a Christian or not. I was rather surprised, I must say. I think General Lee was a Christian, but, not the kind of Christian that Stonewall Jackson was. And Lee expressed his faith, but it may interest you to know that he never joined at any church, or at least we have no record that he was an actual member of any church, though he attended, very faithfully, an Episcopalian church.

Lincoln is the most interesting of them all in this respect, that it's practically impossible to determine with any certainty whether Lincoln was a Christian. But there is one thing that is true of Lincoln, and that is that in his later years he became interested in spiritual things. And he has made some statements that indicate that he was a true—I mean a true, not just in the world's sense—a true seeker after the knowledge of God. And it is, of course, my hope that Abraham Lincoln did become a genuine, evangelical Christian.

But there is an account of his seeking and of some comments that he made with reference to his search for truth. He once said, in the latter years of his life, “I've been reading the Beatitudes, and can at least claim one of the blessings therein unfolded: it is the blessing pronounced on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” So I do hope that one of our great American presidents did become a Christian, and it's certainly true that this is one beatitude that we all can have: blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Now this is an amazing beatitude when you think about it. We, of course, find it very difficult to understand the depths of it because, well, if we are hungry, we just walk into the kitchen, and we usually find something. It's very easy. I dare say there is not a person in the auditorium who has really ever known what it is to be truly hungry. And of course, if we wish a drink a water, all we

have to do is walk over to one our spigots, turn on the faucet, and we have a glass of clear and clean water.

To understand this beatitude, we must live in the east, when almost everyone—the great majority of the people—lived right on the threshold of true poverty. And consequently, they were right on the borderline of starvation, and it was always difficult to find water. And consequently, to say, blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, is to express a deep and restless and terrible and unconquerable passion for something. And this kind of hungering and thirsting after righteousness is that which the Lord is speaking about here

It is the movement of an individual to a single goal; the satisfaction of a single need. And so, it becomes a kind of unconquerable passion for something. It's not a very common thing. And consequently, the Lord Jesus singles this out as expressive of the attitude of a true Christian. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness.

I wonder if I could say a word by way of exhortation to you. Is it true that you know what it is to be hungry and thirsty for the righteousness of our great God? Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are just as anxious for that right attitude and that right action, that right thinking, as a man who is desperately needy for food and drink. That's the description that the Lord Jesus gives of the attitude of the person concerning whom this fourth beatitude is written. Now the aim of this thirstiness and this hunger is righteousness. There are two kinds of righteousness. There is the righteousness that is imputed to us when we believe on the Lord Jesus, and there is the righteousness that is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit throughout our Christian life. Everyone who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins, has received the gift of righteousness.

Every single individual, whether small or great, who has truly believed the gospel message that Christ died for sinners, and who has received the benefits of that work, has received in those benefits a righteous standing before God. So if you are a true believer in Jesus Christ, you stand before God righteous and justified; declared righteous, through the redemption that is in Christ

Jesus, whom God has set forth a satisfaction, through faith in his blood, so that every single Christian—every one, small and great—is right before God, declared right.

But now, that’s the imputation of righteousness. That is something that is reckoned to us upon the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. Impartation of righteousness is something else; that’s the work of sanctification. And it is the work of the Holy Spirit, to bring those who have received this standing in righteousness to a state in which righteousness characterizes their thoughts and their actions. That’s the doctrine of sanctification. That, incidentally, is the work the Holy Spirit constantly carries on in the life of everyone of us, even the little children, who have believed in the Lord Jesus, and stand just before God, are the recipients of the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And incidentally, he does not stop his ministry. It is just as sovereign in its activities and in its workings as was the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ. So just as we are brought to faith in Jesus Christ by God, so having come to him, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us, and then he constantly works in the hearts of all believers, and he will carry out his work successfully. It’s one of the great doctrines of the Word of God, that we shall be sanctified. Every single one of us shall reach that place of sanctification.

Now the Scriptures also say that we already have that position, for we are saints, every one of us. I know it’s very difficult for you to think of me as Saint Lewis, but nevertheless [laughter] that’s what I am. And it surely is difficult for me to think of some of you as saints, but nevertheless [more laughter] that’s what you are if you have believed in the Lord Jesus. That’s our position. But the work of the Holy Spirit is that work of sanctification in which he brings us into conformity with the Lord Jesus, and he will succeed.

Now I want to make a very strong statement that I hope is not misunderstood. But there is no way in which we can prevent him from accomplishing his task. Now, what I mean by that is this: that he will accomplish his sanctifying work. Now, of course, I don’t know why any Christian would want to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is just as sovereign—the work of sanctification—as the work of salvation. And every one of you in this audience who has come to faith in the Lord Jesus

will surely grant with me that it was a sovereign work of God that brought you to faith in Jesus Christ. It was a sovereign God who made you unwilling people, at one point in your life, willing to respond. And you do not trace that change of heart to yourself—surely you don’t. You wouldn’t want to fall into the hands of the Pelegians, would you [laughter]? You trace that to God, of course.

Now, the work of sanctification is just as sovereign. He’ll just as surely bring it to completion. Now it’s true, there may be quite a difference between the characteristics of some of the saints between the time the Lord comes. Some of them may have manifested little of the evidence of the life that they possess. They may have resisted and fought the work of the Holy Spirit. But when the Lord Jesus comes in the air and catches up the church to meet him, every single one of them is going to be sanctified. There may be a greater change in some than others at that time, but God will complete his work, and every one of his saints is going to be sanctified.

Now when the Lord Jesus says here, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness”—he’s talking about the aim that a true believer should have in his life the goal of the imparted righteousness. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after practical righteousness, after conformity to the person of the Lord Jesus. Blessed are they who desire to have the fountain of their being cleansed from the impurity of pollution that characterizes us, even after we have come to know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.

Augustine spoke of the first imputed righteousness when he said, “Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” But the true Christian does not stop being restless for righteousness, having obtained imputed righteousness, he longs for the impartation of a greater measure of imparted righteousness in his Christian life. And I think we could put, over the whole of the Christian life that description. It is from the human side, a longing to possess more and more of the righteousness that characterizes our great God. And if deep down in your heart you do not wish to be righteous, then you should have some questions about the reality of your decision for Jesus Christ.

Why is this such a blessed thing to hunger and thirst after righteousness? It almost seems to be a paradox, too doesn't it? Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled—after all, what do hunger and thirst bring? They usually bring pain. The man who is terribly hungry, who needs something, is in pain. And the man who is thirsty is in pain. And yet, the Lord Jesus calls this pain a blessedness. Why?

Because the man who has this hunger and thirst for righteousness has come to understand right values in his Christian life. He formerly put sweetness for bitterness, and he put darkness for light, and light for darkness, and bitterness for sweetness. But now, having come to the possession of the relationship with God that transforms life, he's come to see things in their right place. And therefore, he has come to right values in his Christian life.

And further, if a man is truly hungering and thirsting after righteousness, then in that very hunger and thirst after righteousness, those other hungers that we often have—the hungers of lust, wrong ambition, various types of passions after wrong things—these things naturally die out as the hunger and thirst after righteousness consumes the Christian man.

And furthermore, he is delivered from the delusions that often characterize the Christian. I think—I hesitate to say this about the Lord Jesus—but I do feel that from the practical standpoint and from the standpoint of his human life, there was probably no other human being that ever hungered and thirsted after righteousness as our Lord Jesus did himself, apart from sin.

Did he not say, for example, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work?” In other words, he was so consumed with the will of God that he could speak of that as his very food. That's an expression of true Christian living. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

There's a wonderful statement that Mr. Spurgeon makes in one of his messages, and I want to read it to you, because I think that we sometimes lose the force of this. We often look at something like this and its very difficult for us to arise above self-trust. It seems to me that this is one of the things that characterizes most of us, and even to the last of our earthly days there is a measure

of self-trust and the delusion of it in our lives. “The man who has, however, come to understand that he has been saved by grace, and now hungers and thirsts after righteousness, has come to understand the futility of self-trust.” And Mr. Spurgeon, after a discussion of this, says, “Spiritual hunger and thirst are wonderful teachers of the doctrines of grace and very speedy dispellers of the illusions of pride.” It’s true; hungering and thirsting after righteousness are wonderful teachers of the doctrines of grace, for we do learn that we cannot, we cannot, we cannot of ourselves please God.

And so consequently, the hungering and the thirsting in a spiritual sense, and the consequent sense of futility and failure that grips us, apart from the Lord Jesus and his enabling power, is a wonderful teacher of the doctrine of the grace of God. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled by God. This is a work of grace.

Now there is a second beatitude that we want to look at. It is the fifth: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” You’ll notice in these remaining beatitudes that we have here in the list of them, the thoughts of our Lord turn to the relation of others to those of whom he is speaking. And again, we have something that we must contrast with the world.

Is this some more bootstrap religion, which characterizes the world? Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy? The world says, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Or, do unto others before they do unto you; that is generally the attitude of the world. Is that the point of this: blessed are the merciful, *in order that* they may obtain mercy?

This very often intrudes into Christian thinking. You’ll have individuals stand in Christian pulpits all over this country and say that we ought to tithe, because if we tithe, we’ll find that we are profitable in our businesses. That’s not biblical religion. That’s not biblical truth to say that we should tithe in order that we be blessed materially in our businesses. But there have been many businessmen who have been deluded by that kind of teaching.

Now I know that I made a very controversial statement. I’m not sure of what you have been taught in matters like this, but I only ask you to do this. If you will read through the New Testament some day—or days—and look for the word “tithe,” and notice, particularly, it’s situation in the New

Testament, and the teaching with reference to it. You'll discover that in the New Testament we are not told that our giving is to be related to the tithe at all. The tithe was an Old Testament income tax. Everybody had to give ten percent. Now if he wished to give, in the Old Testament, he gave over and above the ten percent; “tithes and offerings,” the Old Testament speaks about. So there is no such thing in the New Testament as a command that Christians should tithe. Now, if you like to give ten percent, you can do it, but don't speak of it in the language of the Old Testament, for the Old Testament spoke only of that which everyone had to give as a tithe.

In the New Testament, we give as God has prospered us. That may be two percent, that may be five percent. It may be ten percent, it may be fifteen percent, and twenty percent and twenty-five percent, and so on. In other words, giving is related to gratitude for that which Jesus Christ has done, and it is free. It is as God has prospered us, and as we appreciate the things that Jesus Christ has done.

But the world has the attitude, “do this in order to get that.” And so we are told, businessmen, if you tithe, God will bless you, and you can expect not only not to lose, but your profits shall rise. And so here is a new insight into economics. And so you give more than ten percent, or ten percent at least so that your profits may rise, so that at the end of the year your balance statement may show that you've had significant growth this year to which you can attribute to the fact that you have tithed. How far that is from biblical teaching.

And this Beatitude, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy, is not designed to teach us that if we show mercy, then we may expect to be blessed. Or do this, and you will get that. Notice the connective between the clauses. Blessed are the merciful—not in order that, but, for—they shall obtain mercy.

What is mercy? Mercy is unmerited favor to the miserable. It leads to the weeping eye for the mourners about us. It leads to the forgiveness of the offenses that have been committed against us. It leads to the pity that a true Christian should have for the souls of men.

I’ve often said—and I truly believe it—I don’t think there is anyone in this audience who believes the doctrine of divine election as I do. And they’re probably a group of you who are immediately saying, “I do think you believe it, Dr. Johnson, but not quite as strongly as I do.” That’s perfectly all right. I believe this doctrine with a great deal of conviction. And I think, furthermore, that it is one of the most important doctrines in all of the Word of God, for it is the original decree upon which our salvation is based. And therefore the doctrine of election is of the greatest and most fundamental significance for us.

And I am sad to say that there are some Christians who profess to believe the doctrine of election, and they profess to believe it in such a way that it seems to have chilled their love for the souls of men. And I want to say that if we believe the doctrine of election in such a way that it chills the love of Christians for the souls of men, then we have not believed the doctrine of election properly. It is true, not a single person shall ever come to Jesus Christ and be saved who has not been elected. But I want to say this, that they will come through the instrumentality, when there is human instrumentality, they will come through the instrumentality of Christian men whose hearts are warm and vital and loving and zealous for the souls of men.

And if our doctrine of election is such that it has chilled our love for the souls of men, then we need to get down upon our knees and hunger and thirst for a little more righteousness. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

One of the great, outstanding features of the Christian faith is that one of its by-products has been the mercy of Christian men. We have no evidence, for example, of the existence of hospitals until the Christian era. Hospitals are traceable, many feel, directly to the Christian faith. And I have a quotation or two in the *Believer’s Bible Bulletin* to give additional evidence with reference to that.

The Lord Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Now, the chief reference of that statement is to the future. He is not speaking so much about today as he is about the future. And the Apostle Paul, in one of his epistles, the last one, 2 Timothy, makes a statement that I think refers to this particular beatitude’s teaching. In 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 16, the Apostle

Paul speaks about a man by the name of Onesiphorus. Not Onesimus, but Onesiphorus. This man is referred to, so far as I know, only in this epistle, and we read here in verse 16, “The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.” That’s what the Apostle Paul refers to, “mercy in *that day*.” And it seems to me that this particular reference is the reference that suits most admirably this second of the Beatitudes we are studying this morning: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” The reference is to the future. But it is also true that those who are merciful today do obtain the mercy of the Lord today.

Now we come to the final beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Generally speaking, religions are very content with outward moral reformation. Christianity alone, so far as I know, claims to cleanse the springs of evil, claims to touch the hearts of men. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

The world’s beatitude? Well, the philosophers, for example, say, blessed are the virtuous. But virtue is just as far from purity of heart as a skeleton is from a live and vital person such as you are. Purity in heart is just as far from virtue as it is possible to be. And Epicurus’ happiness—happiness—is as far from the reality as that which is plastic is as far from that which is real. When the Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” he touches the inmost springs of the individual.

He says the pure in heart are blessed. What does it mean to be pure in heart? Well the word “purity” means unalloyed, unadulterated. And the reference surely is to an unalloyed condition with reference to our motives and with reference to our deeds. Purity in heart, therefore, is something else that teaches us the necessity of the doctrines of grace. No man, naturally, has purity of heart. Purity of heart comes as a gift from God.

As a matter of fact, it comes as a gift from God on the basis of faith. In the fifteenth chapter of the book of the Acts, the Apostle Peter speaks and says, “And put no difference between us and

them, purifying their hearts in faith.” So that purity of heart comes to us through faith, and it comes to us as a gift of God.

The Jews read this beatitude as “blessed are the pure in ceremony.” Blessed are the pure in the raiment that they wear, for they must wear certain raiment. Blessed are the pure in the food that they partake, and we must not fall into similar types of things. When we talk about Christian things, and say “blessed are the pure, we must think of purity in heart, not purity in the kinds of garments we wear, or the kinds of foods that we eat, or the kinds of ceremonies that we go through. In Christianity we have that which touches the springs of a man’s being.

Now the Lord Jesus says, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. You’ll notice these two principles that are so important. First of all, purity is necessary for illumination. One of the reasons we cannot see is because of our sin. The [noetic] effects of sin—the way in which sin has affected our minds—prevents us from understanding spiritual truth. That’s why when you preach the gospel to people, they sit and listen, they hear the same words that you do, but you understand and others do not. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

No man truly appreciates the atonement of Jesus Christ until he has been brought by the Holy Spirit to the place of need, and his affections and his insight have been made alive by the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit. And so as the Holy Spirit opens the heart of a man through the work of regeneration, giving him new life, so that he begins to see, then he understands that the work of the atonement is the thing for which he’s been longing. And not until the Holy Spirit opens our eyes are we to understand and appreciate atonement. We cannot understand and appreciate regeneration. I say to you, you must be born again, and apart from the Holy Spirit that’s nonsense. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.

All of the things that are copies of Christianity—the formalistic, liturgical-type of service in which everything is directed to the shell of the thing and not to the kernel—express the fact that

apart from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we do not understand. Purity of heart is necessary for illumination.

I read the story this past week of a minister who called on a woman who was sick. And he thought he should read a text in Holy Scripture in order to comfort the woman before he left. And so he picked up her Bible—don’t know why he didn’t have his own. (Perhaps he did as I do, sometime, leave it in my car.) But anyway, he picked up her Bible, and he looked for some promises. And he noticed by the side of some of the promises to which he turned the letter “p.” He said, “What does that p mean?”

She said, “Why, it means precious.”

And then he found another promise that he wanted to read to her, and he said, and he looked and beside that one there was “t” and “p.” He said, “What does t and p mean?” (It has nothing to do with Texas and Pacific, incidentally).

She said, “That means, tried and proved.” She had come to the experience of that particular truth. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. They have come to the understanding of spiritual truth, and have proved the truths of the Word of God.

There is a law of action and reaction here, too, because, as the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit comes, and we see things in the Word of God, then having seen things in the Word of God and having therefore come to see God in these things, we have been brought to greater enlightenment, and the greater enlightenment brings greater sight, and so the more we see, the more we come to understand God. And the more we understand God, we see in Scripture so that this works as a beautiful kind of spiral that leads us to the true knowledge of God. I’m not surprised that the ultimate destiny of the Christian is they shall see his face. And in seeing him, shall understand him.

The Beatitudes, as I’ve been saying, have a present and future application. Most of the stress rests on the future. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled, and in the future we shall be truly righteous. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain

mercy, and we shall obtain the ultimate mercy of the presence of God. And blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. And that’s a reference, ultimately, to the future, when we see his face. But in the meantime, there are beautiful expressions of parts of these blessings to us now.

Robert Louis Stevenson, in one of his stories, has an interesting incident in which some people were out in a boat, in the midst of a storm. It was a rather small boat. And in the midst of the storm they became very fearful about what was happening, and one of them said he would creep up to the deck and take a look and see how things were.

And he crept up to the deck, and he came back not long afterward and he said, “It’s all right. I’ve just seen the captain’s face.”

Now as Christians, we do not, at the present, see our great captain’s face, but we know that he’s there. And consequently, through the trials of life and through the struggles of life, and through the tragedies of life, we can be sure that we have someone as skipper of his boat who does not abandon his post, and every now and then, he gives us beautiful little expressions of his presence, so that we know he is there, and we see him who is invisible, but the great sight is still ahead of us in the future.

Unfortunately, there are some of you in this audience who perhaps shall never see God. You shall never see God because you are not pure in heart. You have not come to understand what it is to be pure in heart. You’ve not really come to understand that it is by faith that our hearts are purified. As Peter said, you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And if you have never believed in him, and are therefore not yet pure in heart, you shall never see God. But there is still opportunity for you. The Lord Jesus died for sinners. That atonement has been accomplished, and those who have come to the realization through the Holy Spirit that they are sinners and under divine condemnation may come. And so you may come, each one of you. Come. Come to our Lord Jesus, who’s offered an atonement for sinners. Come and receive everlasting life. Come and believe. Come and become a son of God. Come and be justified.

Come and receive the purity of heart that makes it possible for us to begin the Christian life. May God give you grace to come.

And may you come not as a lover of love. So many people in the 20th century are lovers of love. But may you come as an object of the grace of God. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are thankful to Thee, O Lord, for the privilege of the exposition of the Word of God. We thank thee for these great expressions of truth through the Lord Jesus. And we pray that they may grip our hearts.

Give us, O God, to hunger and thirst after righteousness. To be merciful. To know the meaning of purity in heart, that we may see his face.

And now may grace, mercy and peace be with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.