

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.Ivor J.W. Oakley (Guisborough Evangelical Church
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Matthew 5:7,8
(Bible Reading Psalm 16)

The Merciful and the Pure in Heart

Introduction

Last time we looked at central Beatitude – those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied – and the remaining Beatitudes describe the result of this need being fulfilled – merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers – and the outcome is that we are persecuted. Now we are concerned with the first two of these. When we hunger and thirst, and God responds, imparting grace and power, we become merciful and also we become pure in heart.

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy (5:7)

The Bible has much to say about mercy and being merciful. What is its meaning and relation to “grace”? Grace is concerned with sin, and mercy is concerned with result of sin, our misery and the plight sin brings us into. Christ calls us to be merciful. This does not mean easy-going, or closing eyes to wrongdoing. It does not mean we are not to be concerned with righteousness, and tolerate anything. It means love for the outcast and desire to reclaim, seeing people as dupes and slaves of Satan and longing to give them Gospel and be a blessing to them. Not ridicule or scorn, but pity. When in power we are not to be vindictive. **Be imitators of God ... and live a life of love** (Eph.5:1,2). Being like God – he does not ignore sin. He dealt with it, and punished and placed it on Christ. But motive was he pitied us because saw the consequences of sin here and hereafter. Sorrow and concern for the mess men were in and desire to do something. Jesus’ own words **Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing** (Luke 23:34), and Stephen’s **Lord, do not hold this sin against them** (Acts 7:60) are words of mercy.

Mercy is not a natural characteristic; we do not naturally behave like this. We are alright to those who are alright to us, but otherwise we are too self-centred, too concerned with our rights and position and importance. Woe betide the person who gets in our way or upsets us. Revenge is delicious, being merciful is tame. We have not got a merciful nature. We of course can give helping hand and do generous acts (feeling rather pleased with self). But what we are is more important than what we do.

To be merciful is something that God must create in us when humble selves are made meek and ask for that God-like character which he must give us. New capacity for love and pity and concern. Need fruit of Spirit flowing from new birth.

But there is a problem in this Beatitude. Is it not suggesting salvation by works? If we have mercy on others, God will have mercy on us and so we shall get to heaven? And doesn’t the Lord’s Prayer say as much **Forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against you** (Matt. 6:12)? If our getting to heaven depends on our being merciful to others and forgiving others, our chances are pretty slim. What about all the times we

have not had mercy? We condemn ourselves if we are pinning our hope to that, unless we are perfect.

Forgiveness is from God's grace alone. But we have to repent. Repent of vindictiveness and lack of compassion and mercy, and become meek. So repentance makes us merciful. Furthermore, if we know God's forgiveness and how much he has forgiven us, if we understand and are grateful for it, it is unthinkable that we would not have mercy on another. When we are merciful to others, it is proof that God has already been merciful to us.

J. Wesley [writing unclear] was on ship across Atlantic with Oglethorpe on his way to become governor of Georgia. Oglethorpe found servant had drunk his favourite wine. Furious, he declared "I will have him beaten on deck and transfer him to the first men of war [writing unclear] we pass. I never forgive". Wesley said "Your honour, Then I hope you never sin". This rebuke was well put. The reply: "Alas, sir, I do sin and I have sinned in what I have said. For your sake he shall be forgiven. I trust he will not do the like again".

So when a man is merciful, he is already forgiven and accepted. And as he shows mercy to others, God continues to show mercy to him. Not need mercy in the past, but continually in present and future. Need his mercy every day of lives. Happy is the man who is able to pray "Lord, I plead your promise. By your grace I have been merciful to another, send me a helper now".

Finally on great day of judgement, we will need mercy. Saved by grace alone. But service will receive reward and that will be because of the mercy of God. The King will say **Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance.... For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink** (Matthew 25: 34,35).

Therefore mercy was shown to us first. So we show mercy as proof we are saved. He has shown more mercy to us. Alexander MacLaren described as "segments of a golden circle" (1) God's mercy, (2) Quickens mine [writing unclear], (3) Larger experience of mercy through life. Has God worked in your life? Has he made you of merciful disposition? Show you practical ways? Settled attitude? Controlled by Holy Spirit at centre of being and spring of character and source of activity? Not just good deed on surface, but settled and permanent part of character?

Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God (5:8)

One of the greatest utterances ever made by the Saviour. Statement with depth and height and extent in it. Dealing with something that begins in this life and ends in glory. Deals with ultimate end of being.

Once again we are taken below the surface (place which everyone sees and which we are anxious to keep straight) to what we really are. Part which is not seen, but is real to us, the heart. God is most concerned with the heart. Not our outer conduct, but our state within. Mind, will, emotions, centre of personality. Fountain of being and activity. This is the seat of all troubles. As man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov.

23:7). **Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander** (Matt. 15:19).

Sin has devastating effect on relationship with God, it blinds us, darkens our understanding, cannot see straight, not see God and his truth, or Christ and his beauty. Objections against God are often because of sinful state of life. Not lack of faith, but lack of obedience. Man speaks against Gospel because the Gospel speaks against man.

Need to be made pure. Need to be cleansed, changed, become like Christ. God needs to be in centre of life. But man needs to be cleansed in special way. καθαροι (τη καρδια) meaning unmixed, unadulterated. Often connected with milk (with no water in it) or wine (with no water) or metal (with no alloy). So the pure heart is single-minded. No pretence. Concerned with God alone. Our problem is a divided heart. Part wants God, part wants to please self. We need to pray with David **Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name** (Psalm 86:11). Pure hearted means undivided. Motives are pure, set on God, to do his will, to seek his glory. Genuine, single-minded, sincere. Seeks God with whole heart. Whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and men. Not wear different face depending what company we are in. No play-acting. One life, and we live it in the open.

Only to say that and realize the complete nonsense of people making selves Christians, or depending on ceremonies, education, or reforming selves. Such people urgently need the Saviour's grace and Holy Spirit's energies. Work of change which is not completed in this life. God must become our end, aim, motive, goal, power of life. Back to being poor in spirit, mourning over sin, being meek, and seeking righteousness.

But glorious result of this Beatitude – we see God. The more the heart is changed, the more clearly we see him, even in this life. To begin with we see him as never before in nature.

*“Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen”*

We see his hand at work changing and intervening in lives. We see him because life suddenly makes sense, not a meaningless jumble, but plan and purpose emerge. We see him in his Word. The Bible is no longer an ancient text or record of old civilizations. We see him in fellowship, providential care, aware of his presence and power. The more spiritually minded, the more the heart becomes single-minded, and the greater the awareness of him.

Then one day we shall see him as he is. We shall be like him. The work of changing us will be complete. **Presented before him without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless** (Eph. 5:27). See him face to face. See him as he is. In the presence of the King of Kings. Enjoy him. Spend eternity with him. Vision of God is the climax and glory and supreme wonder of Christian experience. Then we will be fully and finally and eternally satisfied. **Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face** (1 Cor. 13:12). Compared with that

supreme experience all else is total triviality and nonsense. **No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him** (1 Cor 2:9).

So we have future glorious prospect of seeing God. At present see him by faith but then see his glory and see him face to face. Enjoy him and spend eternity in his presence. Such blessedness is inconceivable. Surely this ought to revolutionize our lives and cause us to readjust our priorities and sense of values. These then ought to come right into centre of vision. **Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God** (Col. 3:1). We are meant for audience chamber of God. Being prepared for presence of King of Kings. Compared with this, all else pales into complete insignificance. Going to see God and be in his presence for countless ages of eternity. This is most momentous and tremendous thing we can ever be told.

Is this our supreme object and ambition in life? Do we think about this often? Are we looking forward to it? Are we making preparations? Or are we wasting time on things which not only do not help us to prepare but will be cause of shame when enter his presence?

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:3). Not long left to prepare. Time is short. Let's start to put first things first. Let glorious prospect determine outlook, decisions and sense of values.