

## Mercy, Purity of Heart, Peacemaking, and Enduring Persecution (Matt 5.7-12)

### I. REVIEW: ORIENTING OUR LIVES TOWARD GOD'S KINGDOM

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is the most comprehensive teaching from Jesus on what it means for a believer to partner with him in grace. This picture of a life in partnership with the grace of God is centered around the things that he calls valuable (“blessed”), the things that stand in the way of that pursuit (Matt 5.21-48), and the practices that facilitate and promote the growth of these values in our hearts (Matt 6).
- B. Jesus invites us to intentionally order our lives around these teachings. It is not enough to hear the words of Jesus and accept them, we are invited to *obey* them through intentionally pursuing cooperation with God’s grace in response to his teaching.
- C. The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus’ statement about the value-system of the kingdom of heaven. The eight “beatitudes” operate like invitations into holding and embodying the things that are truly great in God’s economy and kingdom. These are like fruits that we must cultivate by the grace of God in partnership with the Spirit’s activity in our lives. They are supernatural gifts that are given and grown.
- D. Another way to think about values is to talk about the ideas of satisfaction and fulfillment (what is the “good life”). Every society in human history has presented a picture of what it believes will provide true and lasting satisfaction (wholeness, happiness, joy, etc.) to people. Humans are hard-wired to orient our lives around what we believe will provide us the most true and lasting fulfillment. Whatever we picture in our minds as providing us ultimate happiness (money, status, freedom, etc.) will be the things we orient our actions around attaining.
- E. These eight fruits are the “litmus test” for our growth in grace and godliness. In many ways, these are the measure of our real and true impact in the kingdom of God — not the size and scope of our ministry or the number of disciples we convert/make/etc. Possessing these fruits (and seeing them grow) define a life of love and spiritual maturity that is at the heart of a life oriented around God’s kingdom.
- F. Each of these eight markers runs counter to the ways that the world defines success, growth, maturity, and greatness. Because of this, we must *intentionally* and *consistently* reorient our lives by God’s grace to see these realities as truly blessed. If our minds and hearts are captivated by the cares of this life, or by the patterns of this world (what our culture/age defines as valuable), then we will not see these realities as markers of a blessed life before God.

### II. MERCY (MATT 5.7)

- A. To be merciful is to possess a disposition that seeks to treat others with a tender spirit even in the midst of their weakness, immaturity, and sin. This is not a call by God to be casual about sin, but rather a call to walk with a tender disposition of compassion with people.
- B. Throughout the Scripture, mercy is one of the primary attributes of God’s own character. When God reveals his glory to Moses (by declaring his name), he declares that he is merciful. He is also said to take delight in showing mercy, and we are invited to see that his mercy ultimately triumphs (overcomes) his judgment.

<sup>5</sup>The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the lord. <sup>6</sup>The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious...” (Exod 34.5-6)

<sup>18</sup>Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love (mercy). (Mic 7.18)

<sup>13</sup>For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas 2.13)

- C. The mercy of God (compassion, pity) can be seen as the primary characteristic of God’s heart that provokes him to act in salvation. Throughout the Bible, there is a clear correlation between the disposition of God’s heart in mercy and the concrete acts of his mercy displayed toward people.
- D. Those who have received the free mercy of God’s saving power are joined to Christ. In walking with Christ, those who have tasted mercy are invited to *become* like him and express mercy in their lives toward others. This does not warrant or earn the mercy of God to them, but rather demonstrates that they have experienced the free gift of grace in him. Now, being freed to act toward others with mercy, they are promised to experience greater measures of God’s mercy in this world.

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. <sup>23</sup>“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup>When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup>And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup>So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup>And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup>But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup>So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ <sup>30</sup>He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup>When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup>Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup>And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup>And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup>So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matt 18.21-35)

- E. We seek to express mercy in a multitude of ways throughout our lives:
1. ***Tenderness with immaturity and weakness:*** How we deal with others in their immaturity and weakness demonstrates our mercy (or, on the opposite side, our exacting nature). We seek to be patient with those who are sincere but immature.
  2. ***Gentleness toward those who mistreat us:*** One of the greatest places we are to express mercy is in response to others who mistreat us (slander, reproach, opposition, sin against, etc.). Jesus calls us to bless, pray for, and do good to those who are our enemies in order that we would be like our Father in heaven who is merciful toward those who hate him (Luke 6.27-36).
  3. ***Show compassion for those who are suffering:*** We demonstrate mercy by seeking to help those who are hurting and suffering. The heart of Jesus toward the sick, the hurting, and the needy was the impetus for his healing and deliverance ministry. We seek to practice this both in physical (providing for needs, our presence, etc.) and spiritual (healing, deliverance, etc.) ways (Matt 9.36; 14.14).
  4. ***Generous grace for those who stumble in sin:*** One of the most difficult areas to practice mercy is in the face of sin (particularly scandalous sin). We are called to be merciful toward those who experience significant failures and seek to help them in tenderness. This demonstrates a heart that leads us toward forgiveness, restoration, and a willingness to let love cover a multitude of sins where necessary (1 Pet 4.8).
  5. ***Patient toward those who “offend” our preferences:*** Each and every day we are presented with a multitude of places to express mercy in the face of our preferences being offended. We show mercy toward those who annoy us, bother us, who ‘step on our toes’, but not operating toward them with a judgmental (or critical) spirit, not belittling (slandering), making fun of (sarcasm), etc.

- F. We generally give mercy to the measure that we understand the mercy we have received from God. When we are lacking in a merciful disposition in the world toward others, it is a sign that we are not experiencing (seeing clearly, savoring) the abundant mercy that God has bestowed upon us in Christ Jesus.
- G. The primary way of growing in our own experience of mercy is by seeking to cultivate a spirit of gratitude in our lives. To believe that we have it better than we deserve is not a sentimental or trite statement. We each deserved, because of our sin, to be cut off from the life and presence of God immediately and eternally. Anything that we have in this life that is less than that is evidence of his mercy toward us. Giving thanks for his abundant mercy is the key to experience his grace here.
- H. Walking with a merciful spirit requires courage and empowering by God's grace. It is a 'narrow way' that is difficult and costly. To forgive, show compassion, be gentle, etc. flies in the face of our natural reactions to criticism, resentment, and accusation. However, this way opens up to us the door of a way that leads to true freedom and true life.

### III. PURITY OF HEART (5.8)

- A. To walk in purity of heart speaks to having a *singularity* (or integrity) in our heart pursuits before the Lord. This is expressed primarily by our thoughts, our desires, and our motivations growing in purity before the eyes of God.
- B. With this beatitude (as with all of them) we must remember that Jesus is not setting up an *if-then* relationship. He is not calling for us here to *purify ourselves* and then promising that we will see him. Rather, we must understand that the beatitudes are a composite picture of a person who has encountered the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The pure in heart are also those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, etc.
- C. Jesus is inviting us to both rest in the free gift of purity that we have received in Christ through faith and to seek to bring our holiness to greater completion by pursuing conformity to his will.

<sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of

'Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Cor 7.1)

- D. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares that his disciples are to pursue having a "singular eye" in relation to God's glory, his kingdom, and his person. This means that we long for, and ask God to produce more in us, integrity of heart as we pursue the things of his kingdom.

<sup>22</sup>The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy (whole, single), your whole body will be full of light (Matt 6.22)

- E. Purity of heart consists of:
  1. **Desires:** we ask God to cultivate and conform us into having a greater "singular focus" of pursuit in our lives. We repent for selfish and worldly desires and ask God to expel them with a greater affection (Read: Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a Greater Affection").

<sup>80</sup>May my heart be blameless in your statutes, that I may not be put to shame! (Ps 119.80)

2. **Thoughts:** our thought life is one of the primary places where we seek to cultivate and walk in greater purity of heart. What we spend time “meditating” on demonstrates and gives expression to what we love, value, desire, etc. We long for our internal world to be devoted to seeking the person of Christ and his kingdom.

<sup>97</sup>Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Ps 119.97)

3. **Motives:** we ask God to shine his light into our motivations behind our behaviors and pursuits. We desire that our motives are rooted in God’s glory and his will, not in our own selfish ambitions, desire for comfort, or personal preference.

<sup>12</sup>Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. <sup>13</sup>Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. (Ps 19.12-13)

- F. To be *pure in heart* is a foretaste of possessing the “greater righteousness” that Jesus invites his disciples to embody (cf. Matt 5.20). This means that we seek to grow in sincerity before God and not behave in a way that demonstrates hypocrisy (play acting, different than weakness).
- G. **They will see God:** The promise that is given to the pure in heart is potentially the greatest promise contained in the beatitudes. The pure in heart are promised that they will see God himself. This is the goal of human existence, and is what we were ultimately created for.
  1. We **see God in this age through the eyes of faith:** those who are in Christ Jesus have been given “spiritual eyes” to apprehend by faith the truth of God’s existence, his goodness, his revelation, and his redemption in Christ. We behold *now* in truth, although it is dim (2 Cor 3.18; 4.18).
  2. We **see God in the age to come through sight:** there is a day when we will behold God face to face. Throughout history the church has called this reality the “beatific vision”. This is being welcomed into full participation of the life of God and experiencing the satisfaction, blessedness, and satisfaction of what you were created for (Rev 22.4).

#### IV. PEACEMAKERS (5.9)

- A. Jesus invites us to live in a manner that seeks to avoid creating strife and works toward bringing redemption, reconciliation, and repair in a broken and fractured world.
- B. As those who have received peace in Christ Jesus, we are called to live out pursuing peace in every area of our lives. This is more than just seeking to be kind, courteous, or friendly. This is seeking to *proclaim* and *invite others* into the “shalom” of God himself as he works to bring redemption and restoration in Christ.
- C. Peacemaking is demonstrated in several ways:
  1. Partnering with Christ in the ministry of reconciliation: We give witness to the peace-making power of the gospel by giving bold witness to the message of salvation in Christ.

<sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup>by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup>And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. (Eph 2.13-17)

<sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5.18-20)

2. We pursue growth as peacemakers by living quiet and orderly lives that seek to embody God's design, his wisdom, and his character in the places where he has put us (family, friendships, church, vocation, etc.).

<sup>1</sup>and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, <sup>2</sup>so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

<sup>3</sup>Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— <sup>4</sup>but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. (1 Pet 3.3-4)

3. We pursue peace over time in response to wounded and fractured relationships. This requires time, energy, patience, and a commitment to truth.

<sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceable with all. (Rom 12.18)

- D. Peace cannot be sought at the expense of truth and righteousness. This is not meant to invite us to a false sense of peace that comes at any price (i.e., "cheap peace"). Jesus himself did not do away with truth as he sought to bring ultimate peace to the world.

<sup>34</sup>Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword (Matt 10.34)

- E. The call to seek to make peace in the world does not mean that we will experience the fruits of peace in every relationship or every context. There will be places where we will not experience peace until we see God face to face and he establishes his kingdom of peace that will know no end. This invites us to a posture of patient, humble longing and lament as we seek to embody and inhabit God's peace in our own lives.

## V. ENDURING PERSECUTION (5.10-12)

- A. Jesus establishes one of the values of his kingdom are those who endure persecution and hardship because of faithfulness to his name. This beatitude is stated twice at the end — first as a simple statement like the other seven, and then it is expanded and applied to a corporate "you all".
- B. Persecution takes many forms in this life: physical, societal, verbal, emotional, etc. The tactic of the enemy to bring persecution upon the church is often found in seasons where the church is walking free of deception and seeking to stand firm on the foundation of Christ.
- C. Jesus teaches his disciples to *expect* persecution and to not be surprised when fiery trials come against them. Peter promises that for those who walk through seasons of hardship, trial, and opposition, there will be an increased experience of the spirit of glory.

<sup>12</sup>Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Pet 4.12-14)

- D. Jesus invites his disciples to respond to persecution with humble and joyful confidence. This is a supernatural grace that God gives to his church to stand firm and endure in the face of immense trial and difficulty.

<sup>41</sup>Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. (Acts 5.41)