

The Messiah Has Come
Week 13
Matthew 5:7-8
“The Transformed Life”

Introduction

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! **2 Corinthians 5:17**

According to the latest survey, nearly seventy percent of Americans claim Christianity as their religious faith. Think about that for a moment... *seventy percent!* If that were truly the case, then if only half of us won just one person to Christ, then America would be 100% born again, poised and ready for the rapture! But sadly, we know that there is no possible way this number is anywhere near the actual number of true regenerated Believers in this country. For if it were, we would not be inundated with such filth and moral decay all around us.

The problem with American faith is simple. Most of it isn't saving faith. As an old preacher I used to know would say, "if your religion hasn't changed you, then you'd best change your religion." So how is it that so many claim to believe in Christ, and yet, so few demonstrate it by their transformed life? Well, I'm so glad you asked! It all comes down to a matter of "*inoculation*".

A few months back, Sandi and I went and got ourselves a flu shot (Oh happy day!). We ended up getting the flu anyway, so... so much for that. But I digress. When the doctors give you an injection to protect against a virus, what they are actually giving you is a weakened, (watered down, if you will), version of the virus, so that your body can develop an immunity to it before you are exposed to the real thing. When you've been inoculated against a certain strain of the flu, for example, you are given a less potent version of that same strain, and therefore (in theory), when you are exposed to the real flu, it will have little or no effect on you whatsoever.

That is exactly the problem with so-called modern Christianity. People have been inoculated with just enough "*pseudo-christianity*" that they become immune to the real thing. They surround themselves with teachers who deal in a watered down version of the truth. No repentance, no requirements for holiness, no transformation of the inner person, just an outward facade of faith with nothing underneath. Jesus was all too familiar with religion that does not save. He knew all about faith that was based on certain religious rituals and observances, that in reality was only "skin deep". The Sermon on The Mount was preached in order to confront those who had been inoculated with a false religion that was preventing them from experiencing a genuine walk with God.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity.” **Matthew 23:27**

As we have studied previously, the "beatitudes" that begin the Sermon on The Mount are actually a progression of things that take place due to a genuine saving faith. First, a person is exposed to the holiness of God and sees themselves as wretched (poor in spirit). This in turn leads to a genuine brokenness over our sinful condition (blessed are those who mourn). This causes us to humble ourselves and cry out to the Savior for mercy and forgiveness (blessed are the humble), which leads us to long to be led and fed by the Good Shepherd Himself, forsaking our paths in exchange for His (hungering for righteousness).

The next two beatitudes that follow the first four have to do with the changed nature of one who has surrendered themselves to Christ. To be in Christ is to be transformed in our way of thinking and our manner of behavior. In short, we stop acting and thinking like *us*, as we are transformed by The Spirit's power, enabling us to think and act more like *Him!* As we have heard many times in this congregation, this process is known as "*sanctification*", and it is the proof-positive, if you will, of a genuine saving faith, for you cannot stay where you are and go with God.

So let us look together at the next two beatitudes that speak of our transformation, when we have had a genuine encounter with The Risen LORD. "Blessed are the merciful and the peacemakers." Or for the purpose of our discussion today, Happy are the Sympathetic and The Sanctified.

Happy Are The Sympathetic (vs. 7)

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Matthew 5:7

To be filled with God's Spirit is to become more and more like God. His nature begins to take hold within us, and He starts to change our hearts. It is this process of sanctification that Christ begins to address in these later beatitudes. When we cry out in brokenness and humility to God, then He responds with mercy and grace. We are forgiven simply when we reach out to Him and ask for His forgiveness.

Mercy and grace go hand in hand but they are different. When God has mercy upon us, it simply means that we are not getting what we deserve. It is God's mercy which delivers us from the penalty from our sins.

For the wages of sin is death...

Romans 6:23a

So when God spares us from our sin's penalty, He is showing us mercy. And then there is grace, which is getting something which you do not deserve. And that is explained in the last part of this famous verse in Romans.

...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD.

Romans 6:23b

So in His mercy, God spares us from the death we have earned, and in His grace, He grants us eternal life, which is a gift that we certainly do not deserve!

Now, on to the beatitude. Those who have experienced the mercy of God will have a desire to show others that same mercy. We become forgiving, as we have been forgiven, for it is impossible to be filled with The Spirit of God and not feel His sympathetic compassion for others. Matthew's gospel records a parable of Jesus in which a debtor had been forgiven a great debt, and yet refused to forgive a paltry sum in return.

For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought before him. Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything." Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan. That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, "Pay what you owe!" At this, his fellow servant fell down and started begging him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back." But he wasn't willing. Instead, he threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed...

Matthew 18:23-30

Jesus went on to tell of how furious the king was when he heard of this wicked servant's lack of sympathy for his fellow servant. After all, this man had been forgiven a massive sum that he could never have afforded to pay back, and yet, he refused to forgive the debt of a tiny sum that was well within this poor man's ability to pay. The point of the story is simple: If God has forgiven us for all the wages of our sin because of His great mercy, then is it not our responsibility to forgive others their much smaller offenses against us? Of course it is! Because we have been shown mercy, and God's merciful Spirit is living within us, then we too must be distributors of His mercy. Why? Because we have a changed nature, and therefore, being sympathetic to others becomes a normal part of our existence.

Jesus said that we would not only become sympathetic, as He is, but doing so would also bring us happiness. Have you ever been at odds with someone for a long time, and then by some miraculous event you were reconciled? If so, do you remember how good it felt to lay those old grudges aside and resume the friendship? Then you understand what it means to reap the rewards of being merciful! For when you do not forgive, it is not only the one who offended you who suffers, but you as well. As the old saying goes, "Before you embark on a journey for revenge against your enemy, remember to dig two graves."

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

There is yet another facet of this truth that Christ addressed within this very same sermon. And that is, that God will be as merciful to us as we are to others.

For if you forgive others their offenses, your Heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.

Matthew 6:14-15

Now, I do not know about you, but I desperately need God's forgiveness. So I cannot afford to hold grudges against those who offend me! I need to be merciful, so that I can continually receive God's mercy.

It is important to understand the context of Christ's message here. He is not saying that we receive God's *salvation* mercy, because of how we show mercy. There is nothing that we can do to "earn" the mercy of God that comes from a broken sinner crying out for forgiveness. Just like in the parable we discussed earlier, the man was forgiven of all his debts because he begged for mercy, not because he was merciful. What angered the king was the way that he did not, in turn, share the same mercy that he had been given.

Make no mistake, **we are saved by grace through faith alone (*Ephesians 2:8*)**, and it cannot be earned by our goodness. But once we have been saved The LORD requires us to show that same mercy and grace to others as He has shown to us. And when we do not, as His own children, He will discipline us accordingly. It is in this sense that Christ tells us that God will forgive us, as we forgive those who trespass against us, that the merciful will be shown mercy.

To be transformed from within is the living proof that a person has The Spirit of God, as opposed to some superficial religious experience which does not save. If Christ is truly "on board your ship", so to speak, then so too will be His merciful nature. And we are commanded to share His mercy with others, so that they too may come to believe in Him. And as Christ has said, being merciful to others will ensure that God continues to be merciful toward us! And that is why we are *happiest* when we are merciful!

Happy Are The Sanctified (vs 8)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Matthew 5:8

Without holiness, no one will see The LORD (*Hebrews 12:14*). Jesus would go on to preach in this very same sermon, that unless our righteousness exceeded that of the Pharisees, we would not enter into the kingdom of heaven (*Matthew 5:20*). And here He proclaims that only those who are "pure in heart" will ever see God. The word here for "pure" in the Greek is "*katharos*", and it is from this word that we derive the English "*cathartic*". The word carries with it the meaning of being cleansed through purging. In order for us to have a cleansed (pure) heart, it must be purged of its human sinful nature. Listen to what *The Bible* says about a man's heart.

The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable — who can understand it?

Jeremiah 17:9

Not only are the hearts of men evil, but they are also *incurable*! So how can a person clean his heart, purging it from sin so that it can be pure? The simple answer is that you can't. But Jesus can! Just a couple of verses before, Christ had said that those who were being transformed by His Spirit would "***hunger and thirst for righteousness***" (*vs. 6*), and not only would they hunger and thirst for it, but He would see to it that their hunger and thirst for it was satisfied. And as a result of this craving and subsequent filling of the righteousness of Christ, those who are His will obtain a "pure (purged) heart" and will in fact see God with their own eyes!

How can this be? One might ask. It is because of the *sanctifying* work of The Holy Spirit within us. The transformation begins when we are broken and humble, crying out for God's mercy and grace. Then we are transformed, changed from the very inside out. And God Himself begins the process of purging us from all unrighteousness, until we are remade in the very image of Christ. Always remember that not only is your salvation a work of God, so then also is your transformation. For:

...He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6b

God always finishes what He starts. And He didn't just call you to salvation. He will complete it by remaking you in the perfect image of His Son. And this work will "come to completion", as it says in Philippians, when Christ returns and you are standing in the very presence of God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will **see** God!

To find out how we are "purged" by God, we need look no further than **John Chapter 15**, where Christ commanded His disciples to "remain in Him" and they would in fact be cleansed.

I Am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. You are already clean because of The Word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me. I Am the vine: you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. John 15:1-5

Did you catch the progression in that passage? When we start out on our journey with Christ, we begin to *bear fruit*, meaning that people will begin to see His goodness and righteousness coming out in us. Then The Father begins to "*prune*" us with The Word of God. The things that we used to do, and even enjoy, are *pruned away* as we are being more and more conformed into the image of Christ. Our hearts are being made clean little by little, day by day, and as a result, we bear even "*more fruit*" of righteousness (**vs.2**). This cleansing is brought about by "*remaining in Christ*" through prayer, mediation of His Word, and even through the accountability that comes from congregating together as Believers. The end result is that we are purged all the more until the point that we bear "*much fruit*" (**vs. 5**)! Once again, rest assured that God will finish what He has begun in us! So you do not have to make your heart pure on your own, my friends. Christ will see to it that it is done. For as He told His disciples, "**...you can do nothing... without Me.**"

So, in His sermon on the mount, not only does Christ reveal to us our need for salvation, and how to go about obtaining that salvation, but He goes on to say how that salvation is worked out within you. This is what is revealed to us in the beatitudes. And they are intended to point us to The Savior for everything that we need in order to be pleasing to God. So instead of some superficial religion that relies upon ritual and outward observances to a list of demands, Christ offers us a relationship with The One True God that will transform us from the inside out. You can try to do the "right thing" for the wrong reason, or you can have your heart transformed, so that it yearns for all that God desires for you. So which will it be, a dead faith which cannot save, or a path of life everlasting and being transported from glory to glory in relationship with *The Holy God*, allowing His mercy and purity to come out in you as you reach out to this fallen world? *...For this is what a true follower of Christ will be found doing when He returns.*

This is why you are also to be ready, because The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing his job when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. Matthew 24:44-47

May He find us ready when He comes again. Showing His mercy and holiness to a world that is desperately in need. Happy are the *Sympathetic* and the *Sanctified*!

TRUTH!!