# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“God Blesses Those Whose Hearts Are Pure”**

**Matthew 5:8**

 **February 19, 2023**

This morning we continue our series on the Sermon on the Mount by taking a closer look at the sixth of Jesus’ eight beatitudes: “God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.” I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 5:1-10

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them. “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

“God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.” Biblically speaking, the heart is the control center of your life. It’s where your will is constantly at work, sifting through everything that your thoughts and senses bring to it in order to decide what to do, to determine how to respond. With our sense of sight we behold a piece of chocolate cake. That seeing triggers a series of thoughts about chocolate cake. On the one hand, we know we would really enjoy eating it. On the other hand, we know that it’s not good for our waistline. So, with the input it has received from seeing and then thinking about chocolate cake, the heart needs to make a decision how to direct the body to respond. Pick it up and eat it, or walk away. And, the more we both like chocolate cake and want to lose weight, the stronger the battle in our heart between two wills: the will to enjoy chocolate cake and the will to enjoy a trim figure. However, if our desire for chocolate cake is much stronger than our desire to watch our weight, it’s not much of a battle. Chocolate cake will win every time. Conversely, if our desire for chocolate cake is much weaker than our desire to stay on a diet, the chocolate cake will easily be left where it is.

The pure in heart are those who are wholehearted in their determination to follow God’s will, even when their own will desires something different. Instead of following Jesus half-heartedly, rather than making decisions with a divided heart, the pure in heart are determined to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. Those who are becoming like Christ are becoming like him in his wholehearted devotion to his heavenly Father. In their purity of heart they say with Jesus, “Not my will by thy will be done.”

Robert Munger was a Presbyterian pastor who wrote a little pamphlet titled: “My Heart – Christ’s Home.” Once we have asked Jesus into our hearts, how much of our heart are we willing to let Jesus take charge of? Using the image of a home with different rooms, Munger imagines us deciding which rooms are offered to Jesus, and which we want for ourselves. Does the kitchen, where we decide about chocolate cake, come under his guidance? What about the den where we have our big screen TV – do we welcome him in and ask him about what we should watch? Or the library which contains many books including the Bible – is it open and being used, or sitting forgotten on a shelf collecting dust? And, are there closets with hidden things in them, skeletons we don’t want him to have anything to do with?

The pure in heart are those who say to God, “All of my heart belongs to you. I hold nothing back.” Lauri and I celebrated Valentine’s Day this past Tuesday, an opportunity to affirm our love for one another, to say once again to each other: “You have all my heart.” Neither of us needs to worry that the other has given to someone else what belongs to us. We rest in the confidence that we belong to each other, wholeheartedly.

Those who are pure in heart, whose whole heart belongs to God, can rest in the confidence that God is going to bless them no matter what comes their way. Isn’t that what Jesus promises in this beatitude? The Bible is filled with amazing stories of people who faced some very hard times, but God blessed them through those hard times because their hearts were with God.

Noah’s heart was with God, in spite of the ridicule he faced while constructing the boat God had commanded him to build, and God blessed him by saving him and his family from the flood. The three young men in the book of Daniel - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – were wholeheartedly devoted to God, and when they were thrown in the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to the idol, God blessed them by saving them from the flames. Just this last Wednesday evening at MidWeek we looked at the story of Esther, a woman whose undivided heart gave her the courage to approach the king, even at the risk of her very life. She was blessed and saved the life of her people, the Jews. They all rested in the confidence that no matter what might happen because of their decisions, as long as those decisions followed the will of God for them, they would be blessed. Their hearts were pure and they saw God’s amazing promises come true.

Let me close by suggesting two things each one of us can do to move toward purity of heart. First, pray and ask God for help. Remember how we’ve said that each of these beatitudes has its foundation in the first beatitude: God blesses those who realize their need for him. To be pure in heart, you and I need his help. Like David when he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” we confess that only God can change our heart. Second, trust that God’s way will always be better than our way. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.” There is that phrase again: “All your heart.” It’s not that our understanding of a particular situation is worthless; after all, God gave us our minds with which to think things through. But, trusting in God means that regardless of what my mind comes up with, God’s way will always be best.