

Session 5 Mercy, Purity, Peacemaking, and Persecution

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Father, we come to You in the name of Jesus and we thank You for the spirit of grace. Lord, I ask You for the manifestation of Your grace in the speaking and the hearing of Your Word. I ask You to mark our hearts even now, Lord, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, we're continuing on our series on the Sermon on the Mount. Today we will look at the final four of the eight Beatitudes. We looked at the first four beatitudes in our last session and we'll look at the last four beatitudes just very brief in this session. And for those who are new with us, I'll give the quickest review.

Paragraph A. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement of how we're to cooperate with the grace of God. And the high point on the Sermon on the Mount is to walk in the eight Beatitudes. That's what Jesus is after, that we would intentionally focus on developing these virtues in our life.

These eight Beatitudes reveal what God is like and they reveal what God wants. We need to have our faith strengthened for grace to walk out these eight Beatitudes. We hear about faith teaching: typically it's focused on miracles or finance; but we need faith teaching to give us confidence that the eight Beatitudes are really within reach in the grace of God.

THE BEATITUDES BRING THE BLESSING OF A VIBRANT HEART

Number one. The first four beatitudes are the ones that the world sees as negative. The last four beatitudes the world sees as positive. Those are the ones we're looking at today.

Paragraph B. In each of the eight the Lord promises blessing: "Blessed are the merciful"; "Blessed are the pure." He says this eight times in a row, and there are several facets that are involved in the idea of this blessing. And the one I've been focusing on is the blessing of having a vibrant heart, a vibrant spirit, that we feel the presence of God in our heart. We enjoy the Word, we're fascinated with God, and there's an anointing of God on us when we pray. Because our natural or typical experience is to have a dull spirit, to feel spiritually bored; though we love God, the Word is boring, prayer is boring, the whole thing is boring. But we love God!

And Jesus is saying, "If you'll intentionally, consistently pursue these eight Beatitudes as a lifestyle, you'll have a vibrant heart."

Most believers mourn over and are pained over a dull spirit. They try everything but the eight Beatitudes as a lifestyle. And I want to say this: there's no other way to a vibrant heart. Every other way will be a disappointment. These eight Beatitudes as an intentional and consistent lifestyle are the only way to the blessedness that Jesus describes. It's not one of the ways; it's the *only* way.

"BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY"

Well, let's look at the first one. We'll spend more time on mercy than we will the other three. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt. 5:7). Now He's talking to people who already have received the mercy of being born again. He's talking to people already forgiven, people in the kingdom, citizens of the kingdom. And He's saying to those who have already been forgiven, who have received that introduction

to the grace of God, “There’s a greater experience of mercy in your everyday life, and it’s yours. However, it’s contingent upon you walking out mercy.”

Now the subject of this mercy Jesus is talking about is a big subject. There’s a full range of heart attitudes that are involved in this one beatitude called *mercy*; it’s a many-faceted diamond.

MERCY COMPELS US TO RENOUNCE OUR SINS AND WALK IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Now giving this mercy to people is essential to walk in blessedness, or a vibrant spirit. There’s a lot of understanding around the subject of mercy, because some folks reduce mercy to the idea that God doesn’t care about our sins: you know, “Boys will be boys.” They hear Him saying, “Hey, you blew it! I’m a God of mercy! Don’t worry about it!”

And there’s a lot of misunderstanding about mercy. The call to mercy isn’t the call to be casual about sin. I call that unsanctified mercy. Because in our receiving and our giving of mercy, we always present it with the view of strengthening people’s resolve to walk in righteousness.

Now King David understood this. In Psalm 130:4, talking about the mercy of God, he says, “Lord, with You there is forgiveness” (Ps. 130:4, paraphrased). We can receive mercy, but there’s an end goal in mind when God offers His mercy. It’s that we would renounce our sin and walk in the fear of the Lord.

Lamentations 3:22 tells us that His mercies are new every single morning. Here’s the idea: God will offer us mercy every single day to give us a new beginning every day. However, the purpose is that it would give us confidence to renounce our sin and walk in the fear of the Lord.

GOD NEVER SUSPENDS ONE ATTRIBUTE TO EXERCISE ANOTHER

There are two examples I don’t have in the notes, where Jesus offered mercy. In John 5 when He healed a man, He said, “Now don’t sin anymore. You’ve received the healing now; follow through with the meaning of the healing and walk in sin no longer” (Jn. 5:14, paraphrased).

Then when He forgave the immoral woman in John 8:11, He said this: “I’ve forgiven you. I don’t condemn you, but now don’t sin anymore” (Jn. 8:11, paraphrased). It was the same message He gave to the man He healed. God is equally as merciful as He is holy and righteous. He never suspends one attribute to exercise another. He doesn’t suspend His mercy to show righteousness and He doesn’t suspend His righteousness to show mercy, but He expresses them together. He gives us mercy that we would be emboldened and enabled to walk in righteousness. He calls us to righteousness but He knows we’re weak, so He offers His mercy. The point I’m making is that the popular view of mercy as disconnected from righteousness isn’t a biblical view. It’s mercy under righteousness.

SHOWING TENDERNESS TOWARDS THE PEOPLE WHO HURT AND ANNOY US

Paragraph B. Now there are various ways to show mercy, and some of them are quite different from one another. I have several of them written there and you could add to that list, but I’m going to highlight three of them.

There are various ways to show mercy. We’re to be tender towards people who mistreat us; that’s an expression of mercy. We’re to be tender towards the people who annoy us: they don’t mistreat us, they just bother us. The

Lord says, “Be merciful!” We don’t think of mercy related to that. There are people who complain against us. They don’t always say it to our face; oftentimes they whisper it behind our backs. The Lord says, “Be merciful towards them.”

People who are different: they’re just different—they act differently, they talk differently, they want different things, and we say, “Whoa!” and we might be put back and the Lord says, “I want you tender towards them.” It takes the grace of God to do that. There’s mercy towards people who fall in scandalous sins. The Lord says, “Be tender towards them.”

HELPING PEOPLE TO FEEL ACCEPTED AND VALUED BY GOD

One of the primary definitions of mercy is showing sympathy followed with good deeds with action to people in great need. They’re suffering because of poverty. When we reach out to the poor, that’s a ministry of mercy—or to those who have a chronic sickness, or to those who are in oppression that we want to help deliver, or those suffering various trials; that in the Scriptures is called giving mercy.

Now in all of these very different situations at the end of Paragraph B—here’s the point—we’re to help these people to feel accepted by God and to feel valued by God. Part of extending mercy is to seek to convince them of how valuable they are to God and to the fact that God really does accept them if they’ll say yes to Him. However, it’s not just that God accepts them: the ministry of mercy is also to convince people that you accept them and others in the Body of Christ accept them. And when people feel accepted and helped, that’s what mercy is about.

Now the most challenging is when the people we want to feel accepted by God and helped and valued are the people mistreating us. That’s when mercy becomes up close and personal. That’s when mercy becomes costly in terms of our fleshly perspective.

BE MERCIFUL, KIND, TENDERHEARTED, AND LONGSUFFERING

Paul said, “Put on tender mercies” (Col. 3:12). Mercy is related to a tender spirit. There’s a tone about mercy that’s to be tender and to not be harsh and annoyed. Be kind; kindness and tenderness are closely related.

He goes on to talk about humility and meekness; those two things are related. Then he calls us to be longsuffering. Now of course *longsuffering* means to suffer long: we actually suffer. They bother us so much! The Lord says, “I know you’re suffering, but suffer long.” It’s real. That’s what He calls us to do.

He goes on in verse 13 and makes it really personal. He says, “Bear with them” (Col. 3:13, paraphrased), and the reason you have to bear with them is because they’re troubling you. “Some of them are complaining about you. They think you’re wrong and they’re talking about it.” At the end of the verse Paul says, “Forgive them and deal with them tenderly. You must do this.” Look at that at the end of verse 13: “You must do this to walk in the kingdom lifestyle” (ibid). It’s not optional.

TO THOSE WHO SHOW MERCY, MERCY WILL BE GIVEN

Now we start showing tender mercy in our families. Sometimes the most familiar relationships in the marriage, in the family, are the places where we can be the most presumptuous in our Christian life. You say, “Well, you know, it’s my husband, my wife, my children, my parents, my brother, my sister; I’ve known them for years and it’s not a big deal!”

And the Lord says, “No that’s the premier place to exhibit tenderness!” It’s the most challenging. Then in the workplace or on the ministry team; the people with whom you’re working closely together in the Lord. Or in the neighborhood, that guy two houses down that just absolutely bothers you. The Lord says, “I want you to have a tender spirit, be kind to them.”

“Kind? I’m just going to ignore them and look the other way.”

The Lord says, “No! That’s not it! I want you to give mercy, and if you do it I’ll see to it that you’ll experience more mercy.” You’re already saved as a free gift. However, you experience more mercy in your circumstances; on your heart you’ll feel the presence of God more, and He says, “I’ll see to it that other people give you mercy; I’ll orchestrate events to that end.” And so even as born-again believers on our way to heaven the way we show mercy will actually determine the measure that we experience in this life.

MERCY TOWARDS PEOPLE WHO LIE AND ABUSE YOU

Let’s look really quickly at three of the types of people in the long list I just gave.

Number one: The people who mistreat us. Now this is the most common application of mercy within the spiritual family. We’re all believers; we’re all working together, relating together, but some believers mistreat you—some who are close and some far away. They tell lies about you. They don’t think they’re lies. You say, “It’s not true!” They’re subtle lies but they’re untrue.

And they take your stuff! They want your position. They want some of your honor. They want to see you pushed aside and they want to be in your role whether in the marketplace, the ministry, or wherever. You work closely with them and the Lord says, “I want you tender towards them. I want you kind towards them.”

“Kind! I’ll just ignore them, OK? And we’ll call it even.”

“No, I want you to show them mercy.” This is really challenging. This is demanding.

Now in the IHOP-KC world I’ve never seen mercy more challenged than when one worship leader steals another worship leader’s bass player. I mean, that’s intense! They’ll give up their boyfriend or girlfriend before they give up their bass player. That’s funny because you’re not a worship leader. I’ve seen drummers and bass players, the two highest commodities, go back and forth, and all kinds of turbulence happens. And we think it’s funny, but it’s not funny to the worship leader at all.

Well, you could think of analogies in every single sphere in life. However, just because we’re all believers doesn’t mean somehow we’re in a situation where we don’t need to constantly show tenderness—literally, not figuratively: literal kindness and tenderness.

“BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU . . . PRAY FOR THOSE WHO SPITEFULLY USE YOU”

It says in Matthew 5:44, “Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Mt. 5:44). This happens within the Body of Christ. It’s not just unbelievers using you; it’s believers using believers. And just because you’re a believer doesn’t mean that God is finished working on you.

Now when this happens we need to bless those people who spitefully use us. In our families, in our ministry departments, in the marketplace, on the worship team, in the neighborhood, in the workplace they spitefully use us, and they mean to use us. It's not accidental. And the Lord says, "I know that's how it works. I want you tender towards them. I want you to bless them."

Now a very different application of mercy is showing God's tenderness and sympathy to people who are suffering. This is a very different manifestation of mercy. This is the application of mercy that Jesus talked about in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. In verse 38 He calls it mercy where there's a man suffering on the roadside and people pass by and ignore him. They see his suffering but they ignore him. The Samaritan passes by; he sees his suffering and he crosses over the road to the suffering man. He bandages up his wounds, carries him to the inn, pays the bill, leaves the guy at the inn, and says, "I'll be back later to pay even the bill that develops."

Jesus said, "That's mercy. That's what I want you to do." It's being moved to action to help alleviate and minimize the suffering and the misery of other people. It's sympathy that takes action. You see, because a lot of guys walked by that man on the road and they no doubt had sympathy; he was bleeding and beaten and bruised and they said, "I just can't stop." Undoubtedly they felt something, but it's not mercy if there's not action that follows.

THOSE WHO TAKE MERCIFUL ACTION WILL ENCOUNTER GOD'S MERCY

Now when I look at the IHOP-KC family I see a lot of people who take action. They put action with their sympathy. And I just have a couple that come to me that I want to affirm: for example, in the last three or four years the rapid increase of the number of families that have adopted fatherless children into their home. It's remarkable. I mean, it's very God-like to do that: to take a fatherless, unwanted child into your home and make them yours for the rest of their life. That's huge! That's mercy. That's very God-like, and I have good news for you: you shall receive mercy even in this life. You're already forgiven, and we're not talking about forgiveness; we're talking about God will order that mercy comes your way. He will see to it that you experience more.

Well, you say, "I'm not called to take them into my family"; but there are a lot of families helping families. There are a lot of individuals helping families. There are a lot of singles that are helping families that are taking in children. Beloved, that's action; that's mercy.

I think of the work we do at Hope City down among the poor in the inner city. There's no financial return. There isn't much recognition at all but God sees it. You're taking action. I think of the work in the Exodus Cry in human trafficking. And I could go on and on and give a number of examples.

Paragraph C: There's another dimension of mercy different than the two I've just highlighted. It's showing tenderness to someone who has stumbled in a scandalous sin. Now all sin is serious, so what is a scandalous sin? That's not a biblical category, but what I mean is a sin that alters their life and their relationships. Some sins if you partake in them will alter your life and relationships: a marriage is over, a man goes to prison; I mean, it really alters things. The Lord says, "Be tender towards that person. Don't affirm all of the things they did, but be tender towards them. Help them have confidence with God. Show sympathy to them." Yes, they deserve it, but the Lord says, "I don't want them to get all that they deserve, just like you don't get all that you deserve, and I want you to have a tone of tenderness in your dealing with them. Be tender and strengthen them."

Paragraph C: Now we typically only give mercy in these many ways. I've only highlighted three examples and the list was longer than that. We typically only give mercy to the measure that we understand, that we've received. The reason I'm saying that is because when you look at someone that's mistreating you, you don't want to give mercy; you want to fight back. Or you're looking at someone who has stumbled in a scandalous sin and you think, "Well, that guy caused so much trouble to so many people, I'm just glad he's getting his own for awhile."

The Lord says, "No! Don't do it that way. Don't go that way."

And whenever we come up short in our mercy towards others, which I do often, the way to strengthen your mercy towards others is to meditate on the mercy you've received from the Lord. And when I see more of the truth of the mercy that I've received, it strengthens my mercy to give to others.

GRATITUDE FOR HAVING RECEIVED MERCY FUELS OUR HEARTS

Now we've received mercy in a number of ways, far beyond what we perceive. Now we all know we're forgiven. And we all know we have those two or three issues we're still struggling with, and every now and then we mess up on them, but a lot of times we don't. And the Lord would say, "Yes, all of that's true but I'm in perfect holiness and there are many areas of your life that are tainted with pride and brokenness and darkness that you don't even see. And I'm giving you far more forgiveness than you have any awareness of. And I'm blessing your circumstances far better than you think."

And we think, "You are?" It looks like things aren't going that well. Well, I just remind you and I remind myself that the house or apartment you live in, the car you ride in, whether it's yours or not, the role that you have is all mercy. Most people in the world don't have what the poor in our nation have. For most people in history that would be called *wealth*. If we took all of the human beings of human history the poor in America would be wealthy compared to a majority of those in human history. My point is, we're getting so much more even in our circumstances than we perceive.

You say, "Well, but I work for it!"

And the Lord says, "Yes, but I gave you the ability. I put you in a setting where you could go to school and I gave you the opportunity to make the money after you got the education. I give you all of that."

A lot of people don't have that school; they don't have that ability, and if they did they don't have the opportunity to get the money. And so even though you built the ministry, you built the business, you bought the house, so much of that was mercy beyond what you deserved. And so when I lose my way on showing mercy to people, I take a step back and I lock in an intentional way and I begin to meditate on how much I've been forgiven, and I can't get the full measure of it. However, if I focus on it I see more than I normally see. There's more in my life tainted with darkness of pride and ambition, more than you know and more than I know, and the Lord is being very gracious. And whatever level of circumstance we have, it's really more than we ever could have deserved if all the information was on the table, because if all the information were on the table we deserve judgment. We don't even deserve that house or business we have that we don't like.

Therefore, gratitude for having received mercy fuels my heart, and it will fuel your heart to show mercy to other people.

Paragraph D. Now here's the issue of perception, I'm just going to take a moment on this. Justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is receiving what you don't deserve; we all get that.

GOD HAS GIVEN US AND OTHERS EVERYTHING THAT WE DESERVE AND MORE

Now here's the point: God always gives you at least justice, always, because He's a just God. He has never acted less than perfectly, ever, in all of human history, not once. Whatever forgiveness you have, and whatever life circumstance, I promise you it's at least what you deserved in the positive sense. When God measures all of your dedication, and all of your labor, how hard you've worked and how dedicated you are to Him, you're getting more than you deserve. No one has ever come up with less than what they deserved and then charged God with lacking justice.

Now here's the problem. We get what we deserve. That's a fact in the positive sense: we get what we've labored for, what our dedication to God deserves. However, here's where the problem comes in: God always gives mercy; He gives beyond that. And the problem is that in our perception He gives the guy next to you more mercy than He does you. The guy next to you got what he deserved plus more; you got what you deserved plus more, but the more is different. And so we look at the plus more and we say, "How dare You treat me this way?"

And God says, "No I gave you everything that you deserved. You've just got a wrong perspective. You're comparing the amount of mercy you've received to the amount of mercy the other guy receives and you're mad and now you have a sense of entitlement. I haven't shown you any injustice at all; I've given you everything you deserved and more. You just want *your* 'and more' to equal his 'and more.'" And the Lord says "No, that's My business, to give mercy more than you deserve according to My wisdom."

In Matthew 21, the parable of the vineyard, that was the issue. The guy worked for twelve hours and went to get his pay; the other guy worked one hour and he got the same pay. He says, "Wait! I worked twelve hours and got this amount, and he worked one hour and he got the same amount."

And Jesus said, "Yes, but I agreed to pay you that exact amount for twelve hours and you got it. You got everything we agreed on: perfect justice. You're troubled because someone else got more than justice; they got mercy in addition to justice." And when we compare, instead of having gratitude that we really have received more than we deserved, it gets us into a negative, complaining spirit and we feel a sense of entitlement. And that entitlement short circuits our ability to give other people mercy. When we feel ripped off by God or by God's people, we can't show mercy to other people; we're shut down.

And so Jesus says, "If you'll go through all of the spiritual exercises to refocus on truth, and get the right perspective—don't compare but rather have gratitude for what I gave you, that it's beyond what you deserve—you'll have an overflow of mercy to show other people." He's saying a whole lot in this one, simple beatitude. It's called *mercy*.

THE MEASURE OF OUR ANGER IS THE LACK OF OUR UNDERSTANDING

Paragraph E. The measure of gratitude you have is the measure of the understanding of how much you've received. You've received more forgiveness than you really think and you've received more blessing in your

circumstances than you really think. Study that and your gratitude will go up. The measure of our anger is the measure of our lack of understanding of what we've received.

HE DELIGHTS IN MOLDING US INTO THE INSTRUMENTS OF HIS MERCY

God delights in mercy (Mic. 7:18). God loves to show mercy, but here's the issue that I'm focusing on: He wants us to delight in showing mercy. Now we delight in receiving mercy. I love mercy. I love the stuff that's way beyond what I deserve. I love it. However, the Lord says, "I want you to receive it and like it, but I want you to be a vessel of mercy that delights in giving it."

Now everyone delights in mercy; we rejoice over the gang leader that met the Lord at the altar call, and we all say, "Glory to God! The mercy of God!" and we all rejoice in that mercy, but there's a lot more to mercy than that.

In Romans 9, Paul calls it "vessels of mercy" (Rom. 9:23). God wants you to be a vessel of mercy to other people, to be a supply of His mercy to other people. Now here's the problem: the guy mistreating you, God has a redemptive plan for him. God wants to show mercy to that guy mistreating you, and He wants to show the mercy through you. He says, "Not only do I have a plan for your enemy; I will use you to win him to My mercy. Isn't that amazing?"

"Well Lord, how about letting me touch his kids or something? Not him directly!"

And the Lord says, "No, no, I want you to be a vessel of mercy of My heart; a conduit to show it to that guy. However, you have to delight in mercy the way I do."

Paragraph G. Well, if you do it, you'll receive more mercy. You'll experience more mercy at the heart level. God will actually allow you to experience far more than you deserve. I mean, we're already receiving more than we deserve, but that measure can increase. We can have mercy in our circumstances that increases, and mercy in the way people relate to us.

The Lord says, "I'll orchestrate your life in such a way that I'll raise up people who respond to you in mercy because you've given mercy to the needy, the fatherless, and all the many categories of the needy. You've shown mercy to the people who mistreat you, especially the ones who are on your worship team and the ones nearest to you in your family: you're tender with that spouse, or that child, that parent, or that sibling. You have tenderness when they don't deserve tenderness. I will raise up people who will be tender toward you." Wow, I love that.

Well, we've spent most of our time there. Let's go quickly through the final three beatitudes. Top of Page 3.

"BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD"

This is a beatitude we approach with a sense of awe and wonder. I mean, this has to be the mountaintop itself. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8). There it is; that's the high point: they see God.

Now to see God means to have living understanding by the anointing of the Spirit of God and to experience God; to live with a fascinated heart; not to live spiritually bored like most believers live. They love God but they're bored in their interactions with God in the Word and in prayer. Now they like His presence, particularly

if the music is good, because sometimes they confuse the music with the presence. However, Jesus is offering the human race the ability to live with a fascinated spirit, but He puts a very clear condition: they have to walk in purity.

He's talking to believers now. We're in the kingdom, we're on our way to heaven, and we have salvation as a free gift. He says, "Now do you want more than the experience of forgiveness in this age? Do you want to live fascinated even between now and when you meet the Lord?"

We say, "Yes!"

And He says, "Well then it's critical that you develop a pure heart."

LUSTFUL DESIRES DIMINISH OUR CAPACITY TO EXPERIENCE GOD

Now I have here three areas involved with purity: morals, motives, and methods. Now we all know about morals: having purity in our morals in thought, word, and deed. This goes beyond being pure in deed, because here's the issue: there are fleshly lusts; and lusts are more than immorality. There are a number of categories of lusts that are germane to every human person. These lusts that we're born with war against our ability to experience God more, even as believers. I mean, we're on our way to heaven; we have salvation, but we want to experience more between now and then. However, there's a war to diminish and defile and shut down our hearts in a spiritual way.

Jesus tells us, "These lustful thoughts and feelings defile you, and they diminish your capacity to experience God" (Mk. 7:21-23). You're still saved; you're still born again, but they hinder your spiritual capacity. They defile you, meaning they hinder or diminish your capacity to experience and enjoy God as a born-again believer.

We have to resist those lusts. Now that's a private battle; no one really knows what we're doing if we don't walk it out with a deed. And the Lord says. "Yes, but it's not an issue of getting caught or getting away with it. It's an issue of you wanting to experience Me more, and this is the only way to do it."

It's not an issue of faking out the people around us. Beloved, I want a fascinated spirit. I mean, there's nothing more exhilarating than God.

PURITY IS SEEKING TO GIVE PEOPLE MORE THAN WE TAKE FROM THEM

Well, purity is more than an issue of morals. Purity touches motives in our relationships. We can walk free of immoral behavior and pursuits but have motives that aren't pure in our interaction with people. In just one sentence, as I say in the handout, "Purity is to seek to give to people more than we seek to take from them, to receive from them."

It's our natural bent in a relationship to gain the upper hand. There's a person working for you in the marketplace, or in your ministry, or in a friendship; it's germane to humans to want to get a little more than they give. And Jesus says, "That's not pure! Seek to give more than you receive" (Acts 20:35, paraphrased).

You know, it happens all the time: young people come to me and say, "The Lord is redirecting me to another ministry"; and I'm always on their team to help them to land somewhere that's better for them at that season of

their life. Our leadership team is all in unity on this; we want everyone, not just our young people but our whole staff, to go where it's best for them to go in the will of God. Our goal isn't to keep them here; our goal is to see them with confidence in the will of God, wherever in the earth that is. I don't look at a person and say, "You're a good singer; stay here." I look at a person and say, "You're a son of God, a daughter of God; you may have a different assignment in a different city and that's my commitment to you."

And when I began to do it differently the Lord said, "That's impurity." And so you can be free of any immoral pursuits but live in impurity in this way.

And sometimes I do it wrong, and then I have to realign myself with God. That's called *repentance*. You line back up and you do it continually; Jesus calls that *purity*.

You know, I'm looking at the word *methods* right now. I talk to people, and it's common for them to brag about how they manipulated or distorted the information to get the better deal. "Man, I had this house and I sold it; I had the car, I had the ministry opportunity, I went there and I actually got more because they didn't know this and I did that."

And I say, "You know what? You may fake out the person and get the better deal, but you'll never fake out God the Holy Spirit, never."

We can get a better deal and actually lose out with God. We're to be of the people who, if we're dealing with an unbeliever in business, we give them the best deal. We don't hide as much information as possible and then hope they won't catch it until they sign the deal. That's impurity. Impurity isn't just an issue of morals and motives; it's actually the methods of how we walk out business and ministry and relationships with people.

PURITY GIVES US AN INCREASED CAPACITY TO EXPERIENCE GOD

Paragraph B. They'll see God. This is the most awesome reality. They'll have an increased capacity to experience God. The big challenge in my life and in yours is our small capacity to experience and feel and understand God. And we want to get rid of all the diminishing power and influences to increase our capacity. This is what it's all about.

Paragraph C. Jesus said, "This is the purpose of eternal life: that they would know Me; that they would know God" (Jn. 17:3, paraphrased). Knowing, seeing, and experiencing God are all the same thing. This is the point of eternal life: to encounter God in this age and in the age to come; that's the high point.

Now Life is a person, and His name is Jesus. Sometimes we think eternal life means eternal existence in the garden of Eden in heaven. Beloved, eternal existence in paradise isn't life if Jesus isn't there interacting with us. It's still eternal existence and paradise, but if we're not interacting with God it's not eternal life. Jesus told us in Matthew 5:8 that the whole point is to see God. This beatitude points to that reality.

Paragraph D. There's no substitute for purity, none. The writer of Hebrews talks about purity, or holiness; you can use the two words interchangeably. "Without holiness, no one will see God" (Heb. 12:14, paraphrased)—not even a believer in the kingdom; without pursuing purity you won't increase your capacity to feel, encounter and understand God at the heart level. You can have theological knowledge but your heart won't be moved by it.

Purity doesn't earn us revelation but it positions our cold heart before His fire.

“GOD IS LIGHT, AND IN HIM THERE IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL”

Paragraph E. This is a really important point here. “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). None! There's zero darkness in Him; Jesus has zero darkness in His being. Light and darkness can't mix in the realm of the spirit.

And so when I talk about seeing God, this is more than just head knowledge; I'm talking about heart understanding. We feel, encounter, and understand Him. We will only see God to the degree that we think like God, in purity of motives, morals, and methods. We need to think like He thinks. This is the big challenge in our life, but the more we're committed to it the more we will see Him, because without purity we won't see Him.

The last thing I want to do is fake you out so you think, “I'm walking radically with God,” and be secret living that way over on the side, and spend the next twenty to thirty years with a dull spirit, spiritually bored. Now what benefits that? “Well, everyone thinks I'm radical for God but my spirit is dull. I'm bored with God. I love Him but His Word is boring. His presence is boring. Prayer is boring. I'm always looking for something to do.”

The Lord says, “You pursue purity and we will get rid of that problem of spiritual boredom.”

THE TWOFOLD DIMENSION OF BEING A PEACEMAKER

The next beatitude: “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Now there's a twofold dimension to the peacemaker. “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Paragraph A. One facet of being a peacemaker is to avoid creating strife by our own pride and selfishness, our own choices and our insistence on things that come from our pride. When we avoid bringing into relationships things that break the relationship, that's called being a peacemaker. That's facet one. And the second facet of being a peacemaker is the hard work, and it's hard work to repair and restore relationships. It takes time to hear people's hearts to honor them properly. It takes time to repair relationships.

Now peacemakers are rare, because often the peacemaker gets nothing out of it but the joy that they've been pleasing to God and they've helped the people to get together. Often they get nothing directly out of it. Now peacemakers see the value of investing the time and the energy to bring peace between two individuals, within families, between families and within families; between races, between ministries, in the marketplace.

Now we've all done the work of peacemaking at various times over the years, if you've been in the kingdom for a few years. Here's what I've found: many times peacemaking is not only time-consuming; it's risky. You know, I pour in fifty hours over six months getting two guys to dwell in peace together. Now remember, the beatitude before it is purity, so you're pursuing peacemaking that's based on purity, so you're insisting on dimensions of purity in the process. Well, neither of them like it. They want to be impure and get all the stuff. And so I've done this, and I'm sure you have, too: you pour in lots of months, lots of hours, and they're both mad at you and they're still mad at each other.

I say, “Well, there you have it! I won't do this again!”

And the Holy Spirit whispers and says, “No, the very process you went through is honoring to Me and it’s like Me. I’ve been pursuing billions and they say no clear to the end of their life! It’s like Me to do it. Don’t quit doing it because they’re both mad at you.”

The Lord could say, “That happens to Me all the time. I pursue them their whole life and they all end up mad at Me, but I’m a peacemaking God; that’s why I sent my Son.”

Paragraph B. Well, in terms of your not wanting to bring strife into a relationship related to our own pride: part of being a peacemaker is to refuse to be argumentative or contentious. Don’t push your own agenda at all costs. As much as it depends on you, walk in meekness and tenderness and you’ll bring peace to situations.

Paragraph C. And so you’re not confused by peacemaking, it’s not peace at any price, because this peacemaking was qualified before purity. We want peace on God’s terms; that’s what we’re aiming for. Therefore we don’t compromise truth and righteousness in our peacemaking. So sometimes the peacemaking turns against us. And that brings us to the final beatitude: persecution.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile”—speak evil of you—“and say all kinds of evil falsely against you for My sake. . . . “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Mt. 5:10-12). Why? Because your reward is in heaven? No, because “great is your reward in heaven” (v. 12).

Because sometimes in the pursuit of purity in your own life and the pursuit of seeing purity in the lives of others—that’s called *peacemaking*—there’s a violent resistance against it. Not everyone wants God’s ways, and so it’s a paradox, because the very apostles who brought the ways of God to the nations and brought peace to many people were the very ones who experienced persecution.

Paragraph A. Now Jesus blesses any who endure persecution—here’s the key thing—with a rejoicing spirit. Remember verse 12: He says, “Rejoice!” Now I give some definitions of persecution here in the notes.

THE PROCESS OF PERSECUTION PRODUCES CHARACTER

Paragraph B: What Jesus is doing in this passage is warning us that persecution does exist, and then He’s telling us how to respond to it. There are three blessings I’ve identified here that come out of persecution. There are more than three but I just highlight three.

Number one: the process of persecution produces character. Here’s what happens: we’re taking a stand for righteousness. That’s the key phrase, by the way, in verse 10: persecuted for the sake of righteousness, or persecuted for His sake. This is an important point: it’s not being persecuted for fleshiness or foolishness.

Now I’ve taken a stand for righteousness. And I’ve taken a bold stand for righteousness over the years and I get someone that persecutes me. Everyone has had this experience if they’ve been in the kingdom for a few years. “All who desire to love godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Everyone who takes an open stand for purity will incur the anger of others. If you talk about the truth of Jesus and what He represents, you’ll be persecuted both within and outside the Church; so don’t be troubled by it. Every believer will experience that if they take a stand for truth and purity and they talk about it.

WE HAVE TO STAND FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH TENDERNESS AND HUMILITY

Well, so I take a stand for righteousness and someone resists me. The Holy Spirit whispers, “Ask Me: are there any blind spots in the way of your standing for righteousness?”

Now I don’t like to ask Him that question. I like to have a certain attitude towards the guy persecuting me. The Lord whispers, “Ask Me if there are any blind spots.” Because that guy can be mostly speaking false things against you, but there are still blind spots in our heart. Because it’s not enough to take a stand for righteousness; we have to take a stand for righteousness with tenderness and with humility. You can preach righteousness without tenderness, with a harsh and proud tone.

And so the Lord says, “Ask Me,” and every time even on the occasions where what is being said is totally false the Lord points out, “Look at the way that you spoke on righteousness, the tone you had, the pride you had, the lack of tenderness, the lack of meekness, the lack of wisdom. You didn’t say it as clearly as My Word says it.”

“Oh! You mean I produced part of the problem?”

“Yes, but don’t worry about it because that guy has a wrong spirit; but I’ve used him to show you blind spots; blind spots in your wisdom and blind spots in your character.” Beloved, the guy persecuting you who reveals blind spots is a free research team. You’re not paying him anything and he’s giving you high level information about yourself that you can’t see. You refine your message so that it’s wiser and more in line with the Word. And you humble your spirit. It’s truly awesome, it really is, because you can’t see that part of your blind spot without the persecution, without the adversary.

BE THANKFUL FOR YOUR ENEMIES, FOR THEY ACCELERATE YOUR GROWTH

I remember when this first came to me some years ago when I was talking to some guys. There are a number of guys on the radio who have said some less than nice things about us. And one guy was just saying these horrendously false things. They were not remotely true. One guy said, “Let’s pray in the name of Jesus and just shut this radio program down!”

And we were like “Yeah! Glory to God, let’s all get together and shut this thing down so the world can see how right we are! They need to see how right we are!”

And I said something that was like a word of wisdom that bypassed my brain. The best stuff I ever say just bypasses my brain, and I’m the first one to hear it. And I said, “What?” I mean, the few best things I’ve said over the years were things I didn’t think about beforehand.

Now there’s a warning on that, because I’ve said a bunch of other things I didn’t think about, and they turned out badly. However, this is what I said:

“If God takes this guy off the air, He will allow three more to replace it, because we’re in need of adversaries.”

The man says, “Yeah, that’s right!”

And I said, “Ouch! I just rebuked *me!*” I said, “What?” It struck me that that was the wisdom of God. And I could just imagine God saying through my own words, “Son, you’re in need of adversaries, because your

adversaries show you your pride and they refine your wisdom. When everyone agrees with you, you'll never see that stuff."

And I said, "Oh, You mean I might as well give up the dream of one day having a ministry with no one against us?"

And the Lord's answer was, "You'll never have that in this age, never, ever but you're in need of it. And so, hey, it's not such a bad deal: you become wiser and more humble. That's not so bad, and the guy did it for free."

I mean, you have to pay a lot of money to go to seminars. That's cute, but it's real. I'm saying something that's real, though it's OK to laugh at it.

WE CAN WASTE A GOOD TRIAL BY HAVING A BAD SPIRIT

Number two. Another thing Peter said this in 1 Peter 4:14. He talked about bearing reproaches. Believers and unbelievers are saying wrong things about you, and unbelievers and believers will talk bad about you if you take a stand. Peter said this: "The Spirit of glory will rest on you" (1 Pet. 4:14, paraphrased) in that season that you're taking a stand. I mean, you take a stand in your whole life, but in that season where you're being reproached in a false way, meaning they're reviling you, Peter said, "The Spirit of glory will rest on you in a heightened way." However, this depends on our response, because if they're speaking against us and we have a critical, defensive attitude, and we're not showing mercy, if we're striking back and not rejoicing but complaining about persecution, the Spirit of glory doesn't rest on us.

We can waste a good trial by having a bad spirit. I've had a few times over the years where people were resisting me in a really intense way and I was responding by the grace of God in a right way and there was a heightened sense of glory of God on my soul. Then I've heard far more intense examples of this from brothers I've talked to who have been in the underground church in China and in places that have suffered persecution. They said, "When they were beating us the Spirit of glory was on us!"

Now I know that in a small way in the rebuke and the reproaches; but that's very small compared to someone hitting you and beating you. However, while it's true that the Spirit of glory will rest on you, you can't be defensive, depressed, answering back. You have to rejoice that you're worthy to stand with the Worthy One. If you don't do that, the glory doesn't touch you and you don't feel it.

JESUS WILL REWARD US PERSONALLY FOR THE REPROACH WE BEAR

Paragraph three. You get great rewards forever. The exchange rate is so high. We stand with Jesus. Now Jesus is the One who's saying this in verses 10 to 12. He says here in verse 12, "Your reward is great" (Mt. 5:12)! He says, "How do I know your reward is great? I'm the One who's personally going to reward you! And I won't forget! I know what you're going through; I went through it in my three and a half ministry."

However, here's what Jesus is saying: "I will reward you far beyond what you could ever imagine, because you stood with Me and it moved Me that you stood with Me. No one was standing with you; even in the church they were coming against you. You had no one to defend you, but you stayed loyal to what I put in your heart and it moved Me. And I'm really rich so I can pay really well; it's not a problem. I want you to know about how I feel about the way you loved Me."

This is amazing, but we really need to lock into this because the Spirit of glory comes on us now but the rewards are given to us then.

Paragraph C. We have to stand. It's about being persecuted for righteousness' sake or for His sake, He says in verse 11. And so whenever we're being resisted by a believer or an unbeliever, always pause and ask the Spirit to reveal blind spots in your own character and your own wisdom. Because often it's partially persecution and partially I'm contributing to the problem. And other times people are persecuted or they're resisted because they're drawing attention to themselves. They even take a stand for righteousness, but they're not doing it for Jesus' sake. They're doing it so that they can gain a reputation to show how radical they are. They're doing it for themselves.

They say "Well, it's for righteousness sake!"

But Jesus says, "Well don't forget verse 11: do it for My sake too." And the guy is taking a bold stand because he wants the reputation for being the one guy who's more committed than everyone else. And the Lord says, "No, really, that's a fleshly stand you're taking."

Or they draw attention to themselves in extreme ways that are fleshly: letting everyone know how dedicated they are. They say, "I'm the guy!" And then people resist and they say, "I'm being persecuted," and the Lord says, "No, you're being persecuted for your sake."

And I care about it because I've been persecuted for my name's sake over the years and that's a waste of energy and pain. Because I don't have any rewards to give me for it. I want to be persecuted for His name's sake and, that means real righteousness with tenderness and meekness in it.

Amen! Let's stand!

MINISTRY TIME

You know, as you're standing I'll pray this blessing from Acts 5:41: "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).