

roots



Study Guide

*Part 2*



### **Matt 5:8-12**

**8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. NIV**

John Wesley preached 13 sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. Today's text zeroes in on the Beatitudes dealing with purity of heart, peacemakers and persecution. To begin this sermon Wesley says we must examine the foundation of our love for God and for others, as he explores the meaning of "Blessed are the pure in heart..." He explains that purity of heart is emphasized by Jesus throughout his teaching and that it is more a matter of heart than outward acts. This is not to say that outward acts are not important for they reflect what is in the heart, but our love for God and others must come from deep within.

Wesley also provides an interesting explanation of how it is that the pure in heart "see God," saying that by faith we will see him through our deep fellowship with him, his presence in our world, his provision of our needs, and most fully through his ordinances (prayer, searching the Scriptures, the Lord's Supper, etc.).

- What does pure in heart mean to you? What does it look like?
- What do you hear God saying to you about purity of heart?
- Why is it important to seek purity of heart?
- What helps you find that purity and maintain it?
- How might the group help you in finding and/or maintaining purity of heart?

According to Wesley, with "Blessed are the Peacemakers..." Jesus' teaching shifts from what kind of people we are to be to focusing on to what kinds of things we should do and say. He says that peacemakers are not only those who work to end and avoid strife and conflict, but in a more general sense, they are those who do good to others at every opportunity they are given by meeting both physical and spiritual needs when the opportunities arise.

- What does being a peacemaker mean to you?
- What do you hear God saying to you about being a peacemaker?
- What are some ways you have been a peacemaker? Share opportunities you have had.
- What are some obstacles that keep you from being a peacemaker?
- How might the group help you in being a peacemaker?

Finally Wesley moves into an examination of Jesus' statements on persecution, stating that although we would hope and think that people who live lives such as he has described to this point in the Beatitudes would be well loved by everyone, that is certainly not the case. The world's ways will always be violently opposed to the ways of God, and this results in persecution of the righteous. Wesley describes different forms that persecution can take,

some major (such as losing our lives), and others more minor (such as losing relationships), but he says that regardless of whatever kind of persecution we face, it should never cause us to lose our meekness, love, and kindness toward others. Jesus goes on in His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in that 5th chapter by saying: (Matt 5:38-48) "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- What do you hear God saying to you about persecution?
- How easy or difficult is it to "turn the other cheek?" To show love to those who persecute you?
- Have you ever experienced persecution as a result of your faith? If so, share how so.
- How did you respond to it?
- Jesus tells us to "be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect." How do you seek to do that?
- How might the group help you with this?

Wesley finishes his sermon with a concluding paragraph about the Beatitudes, calling them "a picture drawn by God's own hand" of the life intended for us.

- When you look at and think about your life what do you believe God intends for you?



**John 3:1-8**

**Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." 4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." NIV**

In our study for today we will be using Wesley's sermon "The New Birth" in which he explains the importance of not just going through the motions, but actually being born again and beginning to become a new person. The purpose of this sermon is to create the tension and explain what is the new birth, how someone becomes born again, and why would someone be born again. The text comes from Jesus's encounter with Nicodemus in John 3:7 where Jesus said, "**You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'**" We will be looking at and considering Jesus encounter with Nicodemus on a variety of levels.

In this sermon Wesley reconciles two great doctrines of the Christian faith: 1) The doctrine of Justification: the great work God does for us in forgiving our sin, and 2) the doctrine of Regeneration (aka the NEW BIRTH): the great work God does in us in renewing our fallen nature. They are concurrent, but in the order of thought we first conceive His wrath to be turned away and then His Spirit to enter our heart.

Wesley does it with a three point outline—the **Necessity of the New Birth**—the **Nature of the New Birth**—and the **Evidence of the New Birth**.

**1) The Necessity of the New Birth: Why must we be born again?**

From the very beginning God created man in His image to enjoy relationship and fellowship. He gave man everything he needed. God's one command was that the man and woman were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of course we know the rest of the story as Eve fell to the temptation of the serpent and ate from it and in turn Adam took the fruit and ate as well. We are told in God's Word that in Adam we all die, so every one that is descended from him comes into the world spiritually dead. Thus we all stand in need of regeneration/new birth. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, "**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**"

Paul says in Romans 3:21-24 tells us why we must be born again: ***“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”***

- Do you think that most people understand that they are sinners standing in the need of God’s grace?
- Do you think that people in general believe that they must experience new birth in Christ?
- What do you believe are some of the obstacles to believing that it is necessary?
- How would you explain new birth, in Christ, to another?

## **2) The Nature of the New Birth: How must one be born again?**

Looking to Paul he tells us in Romans 10:8-13: ***“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”***

- What do you hear Paul saying about what we must do to be born again?
- What does this mean to you?
- How would you respond to someone who says, “I know that I am okay with God because I am a good person?”
- Is being good, good enough?

## **3) The Evidence of the New Birth: To what end is it necessary to be born again?**

How would you respond to the question – is it necessary to be born again?

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18a, ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...”***

- What do you hear God saying to you concerning becoming a new creation in Christ?
- What are some of the evidences of that “new creation”? That you see in yourself? That you see in others?
- What can you do to grow in holiness – to continue to show evidence of new birth in Christ in your life?
- How can the group help you?

# July 18 - Week 7

## The Marks Of The New Birth - How Can I Tell If I Have Been Born Again?



### **John 3:1-8**

**3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." 4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." NIV**

This study continues from last weeks and explains what someone who is born again begins to look like with a heart of faith, hope, and love. For this study we will be using Wesley's sermon "The Marks of the New Birth" as the starting point. This is the fourteenth of "Wesley's 44 Standard sermons which is based on a text from Jesus' late-night conversation with Nicodemus on John chapter 3 verse 8 where Jesus said, **"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."**

John Wesley called himself a "man of one book," meaning that he based what he taught and preached and how he lived on one book—the Bible. But when the need arose, Wesley would talk about things that Scripture didn't talk about. In the sermon "Marks of the New Birth," he mentions at the outset that the new birth doesn't really require a definition, since scripture doesn't give one. People, on the other hand, need one, because the definition can help them see if they've moved onto God's path or not. So Wesley gave one.

Since, in Jesus' famous conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 (the passage where we get "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."), Jesus said to him that no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again, Wesley asserts in the beginning of this sermon that it's really important for us to know exactly what that phrase means. He also equates being born again with other similar phrases in Scripture: being born of God and being born of the Spirit. He then goes on to describe the three defining characteristics of those who have been born of God: their lives display faith, hope, and love. We find these three being talked about quite a bit in the New Testament. Today we will look at and consider their connection and how Wesley considers them as marks of the new birth.

**1—FAITH:** Faith is both a belief in things that are true about Christ and a personal conviction of their effects upon each of us as individuals. Wesley preached a whole sermon on salvation by faith. It is important for us to be mindful that faith is more than intellectual consent that Jesus is God's Son. The call is for us to remember that true faith involves making changes in our lives based on the reality Jesus and the life He calls us to live. We no longer

look out for just ourselves, but rather open our hearts and lives up in a way that God now occupies them. While we know that sin still remains in our lives, we believe that it cannot rule us any longer as we show our faith as we repent, seek forgiveness and seek to live differently yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

- The writer of Hebrews tells us: **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** What does that mean to you?
- Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:7: **“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”** What does this mean to you? What makes it easy? What makes it difficult?
- How would you describe/share faith with another?
- What do you do to grow in your faith?
- What do you hear God saying to you about faith?
- How can the group help you grow in your faith?

**2—HOPE:** Hope is assurance from the Holy Spirit that we are God’s children and as such we have joy now as well as a joyous future to look forward to. Wesley says that our life of faith helps develop and strengthen our hope. We could hope in our own abilities or even the ability of others, but we know that’s a false hope. Instead, we hope in the promise God gives. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are children of God, adopted as heirs with Christ. The Spirit testifies against spirits of fear, bondage and hopelessness that label us as lost and worthless. Hopelessness could be like acid, eating away at our faith, but hope works against that erosion as we continue to live lives of faith. At times it can be easy for us to look at our lives or the world around us and be tempted to give up hope. But the hope we receive through faith in God disagrees and insists God will prevail, whether now or in a life to come.

Paul writes in Romans 5:2-5: **“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”**

- What do you hear God saying to you here about hope?
- How has hope in God sustained you? How have trials and/or suffering helped to produce hope in your life?
- We are told in God’s Word that we are to be prepared to give an account of our hope (1 Peter 3:15b). How would you explain the hope you have to another?

**3—LOVE:** Love is the greatest of all, and consists of our love for God and for everyone around us. It comes from a life of total obedience to God’s commandments and desires. When it comes to this third mark things get a little complicated. Most of us have a hard time defining love, although we can give some basic characteristics. It includes emotions, but it’s a lot more than just a feeling. It demands actions, but they have to come from a loving motivation. Wesley reminds us Jesus puts love at the core of the two greatest commandments—**Love God** and **Love Neighbor**. It is the kind of love that calls us to give from the depths of ourselves – it comes from the core of who we are in Christ. This final mark of the new birth shows when our love is given to God and our neighbor that it’s not given to success, or the good opinion of other people, or material goods, or pleasurable experiences.

- What do you hear God saying to you about love? Love for God? Love for others?
- What are some of the obstacles that tend to get in the way of loving God? Of loving others?
- How do we overcome these obstacles?
- Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13 writes: ***“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*** Why do you suppose he says that love is the greatest?
- How would you share about the love of God with another?
- How are you seeking to grow in faith, hope and love?
- How can the group help you?



**Phil 3:7-14**

**7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. NIV**

It is important to remember that Christian Perfection is not living a sinless life, but rather being able to be made perfect in love of God and neighbor. Wesley preached that “A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin.” Wesley did not, however, believe in an absolute “sinless” perfection, and he repudiated those who taught that Christians could achieve such a state.

In his sermon “Christian Perfection” Wesley bases it on Paul’s words in Philippians chapter 3 verse 12: Just after he says his goal is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. Paul says, **“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”** Christian perfection is also called sanctification. While some believe it is an instantaneous, a second work of grace, others believe this work is gradual and progressive between conversion and death (glorifying grace).

The question we come to wrestle with is – “Can we really be perfect?”

- How would you respond to that question?
- When Paul talks about “pressing on to take hold of that which Christ took hold of him, what do you think he meant?
- What are some ways that you press on to grow in your faith?

Wesley summarizes his affirmations in his sermon through four points:

**1. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.**

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:13, **“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”**

Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:18-19, **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you**

**from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."**

- What do you hear God saying to you about the sacrifice Christ made for the forgiveness of your sins?
- Do you think we take seriously all that Christ has done for us or do we in our daily living of life take it for granted?
- What might we do to keep what Christ has done for us and the forgiveness of our sins in the forefront of our thinking?

## **2. No one can say I have not sinned; I have no sin to be cleansed from.**

Paul tells us in Rom 3:23, "**There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...**"

John tells us in 1 John 1:10, "**If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.**"

- What do you hear God saying to you about sin?
- Do you think we acknowledge our sin and seek forgiveness or do we tend to try to sweep in under the rug?
- What keeps us from acknowledging our sin?
- What steps do you need to take to lay your sins before the throne of grace?

## **3. God is ready to forgive our past sins, and save us from them.**

1 John 1:9-10, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**"

- What do you hear God saying to you here about forgiveness?
- How have you experienced God's forgiveness in your life?
- What is it that keeps us trapped in our past sins - that which keeps us from claiming the forgiveness found in Christ and moving forward?
- How would you share God's forgiveness with someone who is trapped by their past sins?

## **4. We need not continue in sin because we have an advocate with the Father—the Holy Spirit gives us the power to resist sin.**

Does this mean that once we accept Christ and receive the forgiveness God offers us through His sacrificial death and resurrection that we never again deal with sin? By no means! But it does mean from that time on we have an advocate in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome it and be conquerors. It means that we have the ability through the Holy Spirit to continue to grow stronger and stronger in our walk with Christ as we grow in sanctification.

- What do you hear God saying to you concerning your growth in your walk with Him and overcoming sin?
- What are some ways/practices that help you grow in your walk with the Lord and overcome sin?
- How can the group help you to grow? 10