THE HOUSECLEANING CHOICE

Matthew 5:3-12

October 6, 2018

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:3-12 NRSV

(3)"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4)"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (5)"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (6)"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (7)"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (8)"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*“I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.”* John 10:10 (GNB)

*“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* John 8:36 (NIV)

*“While we were sinners, Christ died for us.”* Romans 5:8 (NIV)

*“Anyone who belongs to Christ Jesus has become a new person.* T*he old life is gone and a new life has begun.”* 2 Corinthians 5:17

*“God calls things that were not as though they were.”* Romans 4:17

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

*“Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.”* Lamentations 3:40 (KJV)

*“Jesus said, ‘He who has been forgiven little, loves little.’” Luke 7:47*

*“Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”* Philippians 2:12-13(NLT)

*“I came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10*

*“Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”* Psalm 32:5 (NLT)

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray` for each other so that you may be healed.”* James 5:16 (NIV)

*“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Romans 8:1 (NIV)

*God has shown us how much he loves us---it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!”* Romans 5:8 (GNB)

*“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

**Notes:**

**Choice 1: The Reality Choice:** I realize I am not God, I admit I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong things and my life is unmanageable.

**Choice 2: The Hope Choice:** I earnestly believe that God exists; that I matter to Him and that He has the power to help me change.

**Choice 3: The Commitment Choice:** I consciously choose to commit all of my life and will to Christ’s care and control.

*“All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.”* Romans 3:23

**Choice 4: The Housecleaning Choice:** I openly ***examine*** and ***confess*** my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

*“Happy are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* Matthew 5:8 (GNB)

* Jesus doesn’t want me to be ***Religious***; He wants me to be ***Real***.

*“…And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth.”* John 11:43-44 (NKJV)

*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”* Galatians 5:1 (NIV)

* The basis for a pure heart is not how good ***I’ve******Been***, but how good ***God’s******is***.

*“You have looked deep into my heart, Lord, and you know all about me.”* Psalm 139:1 (CEV)

* Remember God’s ***Kindness***

*“God’s kindness leads you toward repentance.”* Romans 2:4 (NIV)

* Remember God’s ***Faithfulness***

*“I'm convinced that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it through to completion on the day of Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 1:6 (GW)

*“I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.”* Hebrews 13:5 (GNB)

* Remember God’s ***Promises***

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* John 1:9 (NIV)

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”* Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)

*“For it is Christ who is the ‘Yes’ to all of God's promises.”* 2 Corinthians 1:20 (GNB)

**Transcript:**

We are in the fourth week of an eight-week series called Life’s Healing Choices. So before we move on, let’s do a review where we’ve been. We can sum up these first three weeks, in three short phrases: I can’t, God can, Let him. Week one was “I can’t.” the Reality Choice: “I realize that I am not God, I admit that I’m powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable.” So I can’t. Week two – God can. the Hope Choice. “I earnestly believe that God exists. That I matter to him and that he has the power to help me change.” I have hope. I can’t, God can. Then last week; week three is Let him. the Commitment Choice. “I consciously choose to commit all of my life and will to Christ’s care and control.” Let him. Let go and let God. That’s what that means. Just let go and let God.

You may be thinking, “How do I do that; how do I let God? What does that mean? How can I let God make the changes that he wants to make in my life?” That’s what leads us to the fourth choice; what we’re going to talk about today.

Let’s be open and up front here; all of us have failed, all of us have blown it; all of us have sinned and nobody’s perfect. The Bible says, *“All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.”* Romans 3:23 God knows all of your sins and God’s seen all of your shortcomings and failures.

And that is what brings us to choice #4 **The Housecleaning Choice.** **“I openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God and to someone I trust.”** We mentioned this a couple weeks ago but we are going to really focus on it today. So, you are reading this and thinking, to admit something to myself? Sure. I guess I can probably do that. To admit it to God? Yeah, maybe. It’s not like he doesn’t already know. But I am not about to just bare my soul for all the world to see.” Gods not asking you to call Bedford free press and expose your faults to the entire world. But he is asking you to be honest. God is asking all of us for honesty. He’s asking us to be honest with him, with ourselves, and the people closest to us. It’s because freedom is impossible without honesty.

The Bible says, John 8:32, *“When you know the truth it will set you free.”* Truth is the cost of freedom. But freedom is the reward of truth. Freedom is the reward of honesty; to be free from all our baggage, begins by being honest with ourselves and with God and with the people around us. My goal today is to help bring hope and encouragement so we may move forward; I want you to understand just how deeply God loves you. That is important, because when this idea of honesty comes up, we tend to get scared. “I don’t want to go into this. I don’t want to do this.” We’re afraid of it. But the Bible says, 1 John 4:18, *“Perfect love casts out fear.”* When we’re afraid of the truth, we don’t fully understand how much God loves us. If we really understood the depth of his love there would be nothing to be afraid of. That’s why I want to talk about this today; this weeks beatitude is found in Matthew 5:8.

*“Blessed (Happy) are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* The first thing I want you to notice is what it doesn’t say. Jesus did not say “Happy are the religious in heart”, he said, “happy are the pure in heart.” Some of the most unhappy people I know are religious in heart. They’re just miserable, and won’t be happy til everybody is as miserable as they are.

You know people like that? Their whole life is a bunch of rules. All those rules are Don’ts. They believe the Christian life is a bunch of “Don’t do this, Can’t do this, No, No, No.” They lead you to think this is what a Christian life is all about. But it’s not. The Christian life is not about *don’t*. The Christian life is about *do*. It isn’t about *can’t*. It’s about *can*. The Christian life is not about *no*, it’s about *yes*. Jesus tells us inJohn 10:10, *“I have come in order that you might have life--life in all its fullness.”* Not that you might have religion, but that you might have life, life in abundance.

**Jesus doesn’t want me to be *religious*. He wants me to be *real*.** In John 11 we read about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. “…[Jesus] cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (44)The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." John 11:43-44 NRSV” In this story there’s a truth that we need to realize and discover. Jesus calls for Lazarus to come forth, and Lazarus came from the grave with both his hands and his feet bound; he was in graveclothes and his face was covered with a cloth.

This is important here, catch the symbolism, because nothing that binds you up and keeps you from fullness of life, nothing that trips you up as you try to follow Jesus, nothing that covers you up and keeps you hidden from the rest of the world; none of that can withstand the life-giving power of Jesus Christ. When you give your life to Christ, Jesus brings you from death into life, just like Lazarus. But there are still things that keep you from fulfillment in your life. But there are things that bind us up, that hold us back, that restrict us, Things that keep us from finding or reaching our full potential in life. old ways of thinking, old behavior patterns, addictions, all of that kind of stuff. There are the masks we hide behind because we don’t want people to see the real me.

Jesus says I want to set you free from all of this stuff. It’s not just enough that I’m bringing you from death into life, but I want to bring you into freedom. And he does it through his people. through His church, through us. Look at the end of that passage. “*Jesus said to them…”*  Who are the “them”? “Them” are the disciples, his followers. Jesus said to his followers, *you* loosen him and *you* let him go. Jesus does it through his people. That’s why small group life is so important. That’s why it’s so important for all of us to be in relationship with other followers. That’s what Celebrate Recovery is all about. people helping other people to walk into freedom. Jesus says to his followers, to us here this morning, “loosen and let him go.”

Jesus doesn’t say, loosen and load them with a bunch of rules and restrictions. He says let him go. Galatians 5:1, *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”*  It’s not to bind us up and restrict us. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Then in John 8:36, *“If the Son has set you free, you will be free indeed.”*

Back to our beatitude *“Happy are the pure in heart.”* Not the religious in heart. You say, “That sounds great but how is that possible to have a pure heart? Because I know me and when I look at me, I don’t see a whole lot of purity here.” It’s important to understand that we cannot make our own heart pure. Good behavior does not purify the heart. But a pure heart will change your behavior. Repentance is not what you do in order to receive forgiveness. Repentance is what you do because your forgiveness has already been paid for.

Romans 5:8 *“While we were sinners, Christ died for us.”* He didn’t wait for us to clean up our act. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. The only way to have a pure heart is through the blood of Jesus Christ, purity of heart is the gift of God’s grace. You cannot earn it. You cannot buy it. The only way to get a pure heart is to surrender to him. Give your life to Christ.

That’s what the commitment choice was all about we talked about last week. You commit your life to Christ; you receive his gift of forgiveness and of a pure heart. That is how God sees you right now. He sees you right now as having a pure heart. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17 *“Anyone who belongs to Christ Jesus has become a new person.* [Has become, not will become, has become a new person.] *The old life is gone and a new life has begun.”* And Jesus says *“Happy* [or blessed] *are the pure in heart, because they will see God.”*

You’re still wondering, “How can I have a pure heart when there’s all of this stuff in my life?” How is that possible? Honestly, my mind, my hands, my mouth are all so far from pure.” I’ll let you in on a little secret. I struggle with these doubts and thoughts as well. You think you’re the only person in this place who is fighting temptation? You think you’re the only person in this place who struggles with temper You think you’re the only person do things you shouldn’t; or say things you shouldn’t say; or think things you shouldn’t think? There’s nobody here without struggles, who still doesn’t have to fight temptation, confess sin and repent. We are all in the same boat. We are all broken, maybe in different states of repair, but we are all broken. This is so important for us to understand.

**The basis for a pure heart is not how good you’ve been. The basis for a pure heart is how good God is.** It’s based on God’s character not yours. It’s based on God’s actions, not yours. It’s based on God’s goodness, not yours. Good behavior does not purify your heart. But a pure heart will change your behavior. So my question is what does your heart want? Deep down inside, what does your heart want? Do you want to see God in your life? I think you do. The reason I think you do is because you’re here.

Psalm 139 says, *“You have looked deep into my heart, Lord, and you know all about me.”* God knows all about you. He knows that you really want to be free. He knows that you want him to purify your heart. So surrender to him. He promises if you surrender he will purify your heart. It does not happen overnight. It is a process. It’s a lifelong process. And you have a role to play in that process. So do God’s people who are around you; a role to play in that process in your life. Your role is surrender. Your role is to practice what you already know. Don’t worry about what you don’t know; practice what you already know. Your role is to cooperate with God in becoming what you already are.

The Bible says in Romans 4:17, *“God calls things that were not as though they were.”*  He sees you right now in Christ as already having a pure heart. So you are cooperating with him in becoming what you already are. Let me explain that to you. Let me give you a word picture. There is a famous statue in Italy, Michelangelo’s David; when asked how Michelangelo did it? He said, “I just cut away everything that wasn’t David.” All we see is a big block of stone, but Michelangelo saw David in there. He cut away everything that wasn’t David. So David became what he already was in the mind of his creator.

It’s the same process with all of us. God has already declared your heart as pure. He sees you in Christ as having a pure heart; work with him in the process of becoming what you are. The cutting away, smoothing out rough edges, and then polishing you up; God does it through you and through his people. If you fall down in the process, get back up. If you fall down again, get back up again. This is where God’s people come in. You need people around who love you, who love the Lord, to help you get back up.

When you fail, when you sin, when you fall - confess it, repent, and move forward. If the people around you do not know the type of help you need, how can they help? If you are like me, when I fail, when I mess up, I want to hide from God. Don’t ever let sin keep you from God. When you do, you’re just playing into the devil’s hands he wants nothing more than to separate you from God and isolate you from fellowship. In God; you find forgiveness, mercy, hope and healing and the strength to get back up and move forward; don’t run from God.

1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* Don’t misunderstand me here. God is not soft on sin. He’s not some oldtimer, winking his eye saying, “No big deal.” It is a big deal. He hates sin. Sin separates us from him. It’s the reason Jesus had to die for us. *He loves you,* and promises to forgive you and to make your heart pure. Don’t run from God when you sin; run to God, receive forgiveness and the strength to get up and keep moving forward.

Back to this fourth choice. This idea of examining our hearts and confessing our sins. Lamentations says *“Let us search and try* [or test] *our ways and turn again to the Lord.”* Why does the Lord want us to search our ways; to search our hearts? Why does he want us to take this kind of inventory? There are a couple of reasons, first, I can’t know the fullness of God’s forgiveness until I grasp how undeserving I am. Luke 7:47*“Jesus said, ‘He who has been forgiven little, loves little.’”*  It’s equally true that he who has been forgiven much, loves much. If I don’t see the wound then I won’t recognize the healing. If I don’t see the need, then I won’t spot the miracle when it takes place.

Second reason for this kind of heart search. Much of our continuing struggles, and behaviors are tied to poor choices in the past. They’re the result of things, either that we did, or that were done to us, and those are the things that still shape; our character, behavior, shaped our lives. We need to be unwrapped from the graveclothes, loosed from the things restricting us, and holding us back from fullness of life. There are hurts to be healed, habits to be broken, and hang-ups to get over.

Paul writes in Philippians 1:6, *“He who began the good work in you is faithful, and he will complete the work he started in you.”* God wants to do this in your life, but he needs your cooperation. You may think, if it’s all forgiven then why can’t I just carry on with my life? That’s not how it works. Philippians 2:12-13 *“Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”* You work out what God is working in. You need to demonstrate on the outside what God is doing on the inside. Just like David emerges from inside that rock that gets cut away. God wants that. God does this cutting away, this freeing work, through his people. As others help you. As we help each other; following the Lord.

As I said before, it doesn’t happen overnight. It’s a process. There will be times we feel like the harder we work, the more there is to do; that God keeps piling more stuff on us, but he isn’t, he is taking things away. We cannot heal a wound until we expose it and cleanse it. You might be thinking that I don’t know everything you are dealing with and you would be right, but God knows, he sees your hurts, struggles, suffering; and if you allow him, he will take care of you. You may be thinking I’ve done this before, it didn’t work, I’m afraid it’s too late for me. I’m here to tell you it is never too late. If you think you’re too far gone for God, you’re just what he’s looking for. Jesus said, Luke 19:10 *“I came to seek and to save the lost.”* He’s come to heal you and make your life right. You cannot realize God’s forgiveness until you know your need to be forgiven.

God isn’t asking you to make a promise that you cannot keep. He’s asking you to receive a promise that only he can keep. God promises forgiveness. He never breaks his promises. He loves you. This is the pathway. This is the process to get there.  *“Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

Do you want a pure heart? Do you want to see God at work in your life? Do you want to see God there? Do you want freedom? Then you have to let the Lord set you free. It begins with being honest to God. When you know the truth, it will set you free. It requires examining your life and admitting your faults to yourself, to God, and to people that you trust; and allow them to help you through the healing process.

Look at these next two verses. In Psalm 32, the psalmist has been wrestling with guilt and hiding from God. In verse 5 and he says, *“Finally I confessed all my sins to you and I stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord and you forgave me. All of my guilt is gone*.*”* And then in James 5:16 we find, *“Therefore* *confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.’”*

This is a lot to think about so far. I know that this is heavy stuff. But I want you to think about it before we go on with the rest of the message. Think about this idea of becoming what you already are, of stepping into freedom, how God wants to set you free from things holding you back or tripping you up, the things that you’re hiding behind. This kind of honesty with yourself and God and other people can be scary. I want you to know how deeply God loves you. If you understand that he loves you, you don’t have to be worried about it. Why be afraid of God when he loves you? Don’t be afraid of the consequences. He’s paid for them.

Just step into the freedom that God offers you. As you think about making this choice, as you share with others whether in small group, Sunday school or just in conversation, I want you to remember three things. First, **remember God’s kindness.** *“God’s kindness leads you toward repentance.”* Romans 2:4. It’s not his anger, but His kindness leads you towards repentance. *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Romans 8:1 And Romans 5:8 *“God has shown us how much he loves us-- it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!”*  Remember God’s kindness.

Second, **remember God’s faithfulness.** Remember his faithfulness. *“I am convinced that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it through to completion on the day of Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 1:6. And in Romans 8:38-39 *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation,* [not any addictions, not any hang-ups, not any problems, not any sins, nothing] *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Romans 8:38-39. And God’s promise *“I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.”* Hebrews 13:5 Others may give up, they may walk out the door. But God says I’ll never leave you. I’ll never abandon you. I will not give up on you. He’s not ashamed of you. Remember his kindness, remember his faithfulness and…

Third, **remember God’s promises.** *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* 1 John 1:9 He says, *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”* Ezekiel 36:26 *“For it is Christ who is the ‘Yes’ to all of God’s promises.”* 2 Corinthians 1:20.

I want you to take courage. God is at work in you. He’s already started this process. He already sees you as having a pure heart. He has announced a pure heart in you. He’s got you in process of becoming who you are. You don’t have to be afraid. Follow him into it. Expect the freedom God has for you. And make the Housecleaning Choice.

As we turn our hearts to the Lord, we remember Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but it took his friends to set him free. Today, ask God a question; ask him two questions. He will answer you. Ask him, what do I still need to be set free from? And, who do I need to talk to that can help me to step into freedom? Ask God those questions right now. What do I still need to be set free from? And, who can I talk to that can help me find freedom?

You may be saying, I don’t even know where to begin! There’s so much. As we go to prayer; have you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ? Have you committed your life to him? Have you asked him to forgive you and come into your heart, come into your life? I’m going to lead us all in a prayer, here in a moment. But as I pray, I want you to pray this in the quietness of your own heart.

Say, Lord, I know that I have hidden some things in my heart. I’ve denied many truths about my life. I’ve hidden from you, from myself, and from other people. Lord, you know what’s inside me. Help me to see it too. Lord, search my heart and reveal to me the secrets in me. Shine your light into the darkness, into the shadows. Show me what’s in there. Lord, I confess to you that I have sinned, that I am a sinner. Sometimes I sin in ignorance. Sometimes I do it deliberately. And I’m sorry. I want you to know I’m sorry. I’m sorry for things I’ve done that have hurt you and have hurt other people and that have hurt me. I’m tired of running and hiding from you. So Lord, I’m turning my heart to you today. Lord Jesus, forgive me. I open my heart to you and ask you to save me. I ask you to come into my life to set me free, purify my heart and show me how to live life the way you want me to; bring me from death into life. I give my life to you. I surrender myself to you. Lead me into a right relationship and put me on the right path, to live life in its fullness; the way you’ve always meant for it to be? I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.