

Channels of Love and the Catheterized Heart

by Dick Woodward

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a channel of God's unconditional love to others, and the need for spiritual purification of the heart to achieve this.

Duration: 29:04

Scripture: Matthew 5:3-7, James 1:8, James 4:8, Revelation 3:15

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the Beatitudes and their significance in understanding the Sermon on the Mount. He explains that the Beatitudes can be seen as stair steps, with each one taking us closer to the top of the mountain. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding that God's love is unconditional and not based on performance. He shares his personal journey of seeking to know God in a deeper relationship and highlights the need for faith and diligently seeking God. The sermon also touches on the concept of the inner man and the recognition of one's own sinfulness.

Transcript

Welcome to the Mini-Bible College. We are so glad you have joined us here again to study the teaching of Jesus Christ our Lord in this series on the Sermon on the Mount. Our teacher today helps us to understand what it means to be a channel of God's love.

Let us join our teacher now. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

We are at the point today of discussing the beatitude which says, blessed are the merciful. This word merciful means blessed are those who love unconditionally. What is mercy? Mercy is unconditional love.

When it is the mercy of God, it is the unconditional love of God. Grace is that attribute of God whereby he gives us all kinds of wonderful things that we do not deserve. Grace is one of the beautiful words in the Bible, but here is another beautiful word, a word more beautiful than the word grace.

It is mercy. What is mercy? Mercy is God withholding from us the things that we do deserve. When you get to the judgment seat of Christ, are you going to stand before God and say, I want what I deserve, no more

and no less.

I want my rights. Give me what I deserve. I for one won't be saying that.

When I stand before God, I'm going to say mercy and grace. I need your mercy and grace. When you study this word mercy, I think it's an even more beautiful word than grace, because what do we deserve according to the scriptures? Study the book of Romans again and get the theological argument of Paul in this book.

I think you will see that one of his accepted positions, one of his basic points upon which he builds so much of his teaching about salvation in the book of Romans, is that we are not good. We are indeed sinners. Left to ourselves, we will sin.

By nature, he says in his writings, we are the children of wrath when it comes right down to it. Theologically, that's why we needed a savior. That is why God had to send his son into the world, because we are not good.

The only thing we really deserve according to the scripture is hell. Anything you have this side of hell is because of the grace of God and the mercy of God. So when the fifth beatitude says, blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, what he is really talking about is unconditional love, the unconditional love of God.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of many Bible scholars, has written an excellent book titled *The Sermon on the Mount*. I highly recommend it. If you go through that thick volume on these three chapters, it will take you some time, but if you have patience and you stick with him all the way through the commentary, you will understand the Sermon on the Mount teaching by the time you're finished.

His approach to this beatitude, blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy, is to see how it relates to the other beatitudes. Dr. Jones says in his commentary that the beatitudes can also be considered as stair steps. The first four steps take us up to the top of the mountain.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. That takes us about a fourth of the way up the mountain. Blessed are those who mourn.

That takes us about halfway up the mountain. Blessed are the meek. That takes us up three quarters of the way up the mountain.

And blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. That takes us all the way to the top of the mountain. Then the other beatitudes take us back down the side of the mountain.

When a man has been on the mountaintop with God and he has been filled with righteousness, what kind of a man is he when he comes off the mountain and starts down the other side? Is he a Bible scholar? Is he a very doctrinal sort of person, very dogmatic? Is he a Pharisee? Is he a scribe? Is he a somebody who comes off the mountain and says, I will beat you in the Bible, brother. Anything you want to know, I know more than you. Anything you want to discuss, I'll win the argument.

Is that the kind of man he is? Absolutely not. When a man has been to the top of the mountain, when those beatitudes are actually being expressed in and through him, in other words, with the result that he is filled full of righteousness, you might say he's filled full of God. When he comes off the mountain, what's

he like? He's a man who is a loving man.

He's filled with God's unconditional love, God's grace, God's mercy toward people, God's unconditional love towards people. That's the kind of man he is, a true disciple of God. It is so wonderful to realize that this word mercy is found 365 times in the Bible.

I think because God knew we'd need it every single day of the year. The majority of those references to the mercy of God are found in the Old Testament. God has always been a God of unconditional love.

There's a certain hymn titled Great is thy faithfulness. That hymn was written based upon some scripture verses found in the third chapter of Lamentations. Jeremiah prophesied right before the people of God were taken off to captivity in Babylon.

They'd been taken away captive and half of them had been massacred and the young girls and women had been raped and the people had been dragged off in chains. But the prophet Jeremiah, he didn't have to go. The enemy was kind to him.

Here's Jeremiah sitting there in the holy land with all the people gone and he went to live in a little cave. It was called Jeremiah's grotto. Jeremiah sat in that grotto and lamented and lamented and lamented over what had happened to God's people.

Jeremiah is called the sobbing or the crying prophet. His prophecy, the book of Jeremiah is described as a series of sobs. That's why it's hard to outline because he didn't solve an outline form.

Jeremiah's heart is broken. He is sobbing all the way through his writing. And when he gets to the end of Jeremiah, you get this little postscript in Jeremiah called the book of Lamentations.

What does that mean? Jeremiah is crying about the captivity and all the tragedy that came with it. But in the third chapter of his sobbings there in Lamentations, he has a revelation. He says that because of what God revealed to him, he has hope.

And do you know what it was that God revealed to him there in the grotto on that hilltop? I never stopped loving you, Jeremiah, God said. Then Jeremiah became inspired and blessed and said, God never stops loving us. Great is thy faithfulness.

Thy mercies and compassions are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. God never stops loving us.

They say that several hundred years later, right there on that hill where Jeremiah built his grotto, our Lord Jesus was crucified. That hill was called Golgotha in the Hebrew and Calvary in the Latin. On that very spot where God assured Jeremiah, Jeremiah, I never stopped loving my people right there.

God poured out his unconditional love, not only for the Hebrew people, but also for the entire world. That is the mercy of God. When a man has been to the mountaintop because he is hungry and thirsting for what is right, and God has filled him with it, he is filled full of unconditional love because righteousness is love.

Love is right. Right is love. God is love.

God is righteousness. It all comes together. So when a man comes off the mountain and he begins his going experiences with God, the first of the going beatitudes is blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

The promise here, they shall have mercy. Many people understand to mean that people will show them mercy, but I think it means more than that. I think it means that they become a channel of God's unconditional love to people who need to be loved unconditionally.

Most people love conditionally. Their love for somebody is based upon performance. You do this and this and this, and then maybe I will love you.

Many women feel that they are loved that way by their husbands. Many husbands feel that they are loved that way by their wives. When you feel that somebody loves you based upon your performance, you have got to be insecure in that relationship because even though you were able to perform today, how do you know you're going to be able to perform tomorrow? If a man feels that he is loved by his wife because he is a good provider, would she still love him if he lost his job? If a woman feels that she is loved because she's a good sex partner, she cannot help but think, what if I get pregnant and I can't perform or what am I going to do when I get older and I'm no longer attractive? Will he still love me then? Sadly, in millions of cases, the answer is no.

And so the world has this tremendous problem because they know they are being loved conditionally based upon performance. I wonder if you've made this discovery yet that God is love. John made that discovery.

He tells us about it in 1 John 4, verse 16, when he says, God is love and any man who dwells in love dwells in God and God dwells in him. Before I began as a pastor many years ago, I did social work for a couple of years and I was looking to know God in a more personal way. I knew a lot of theology, a lot of Bible because of my student training to be a minister.

But I wanted to know him, God, in a relationship. I found scriptures like Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6, which says, without faith, it is impossible to please God. He that would come to him must first believe that he is God and that he rewards those who diligently seek him.

I would say to God, I believe that you are, but what are you? And where are you? Because I want to know you. And I found this scripture in 1 John 4, verse 16, where God said, I am love. And so if you dwell in this love that I am, I will dwell in you and you will know me in a deeper and more meaningful way.

In doing social work, I had an opportunity to prove this. I began praying as I went out to do my social work. You say that you are love, Father, and I have an idea that you are probably loving where people need it.

So I want to go out there, position myself between you and these hurting people. And believe me, I knew a lot of hurting people. And I would like you to pass this love you say you are through me and apply it to all the pain that they feel.

I will be strategically placed here between this love that you say you are and all the hurt that they have. Pass this love that you say you are to them through me. I cannot begin to tell you how many wonderful experiences I had as a social worker when God proved that to me.

There were people who needed to be loved desperately, people in tragic circumstances, indescribably tragic circumstances. But as God passed his love, because that's who he is, God is love. He passed that love through me to them.

I not only experienced his love passing through me, but I sensed that union with God. He was in me, and I was in him, sensing that I was in a relationship with him and that he was actually reaching out to hurting people through me. It was truly and continues to be a wonderful experience.

That again is the context in which this teaching was given. Jesus was giving all this teaching that we call the Beatitudes to his disciples because he wanted them to be a part of his solution, part of his answer, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, where that multitude of people was concerned. You see, that's what he was really saying to them in that fifth beatitude.

What I really need is someone to be a conduit of my unconditional love to people who need that unconditional love desperately. Are you going to be a conduit of my unconditional love? Are you willing to go down there and move among that multitude with all their needs, with all their problems, with all their hurts? Are you willing to pray a prayer something like this? Father, let the love that you are pass from you all the love that you are through me and be applied to all the pain that they feel. That was the challenge he issued there in the fifth beatitude.

And I believe that is the challenge he wants to issue to you and me every day of our lives. If we did not have to earn a living, many of us would probably not even go out into the world to live among worldly people. But in his providence, we do have to make a living.

The real purpose of that job that we have that takes us out there and moves us among the lost could very well be the providence of God just to get us out there so that we could be a conduit of his love. Now we're going to take up the sixth beatitude and it forms a couplet with the fifth one. What kind of a man is it who goes to the mountaintop and spends time with Jesus? When he goes little by little, you might say, perhaps being poor in spirit takes him a fourth of the way up.

Mourning him half the way up. Meekness takes him three fourths of the way to the mountaintop. And then hungering and thirsting for what is right takes him to the top of the mountain where he is filled with what is right.

When a man has been to the mountaintop and he has been filled with what is right, what kind of a man is he? We saw in our last study that he is a merciful man. That word mercy means unconditional love. He is filled with righteousness, but that does not mean he's an old Pharisee, an old legalistic religious leader quoting scripture verses, throwing the letter of the law at people.

He doesn't come off the mountaintop like that. He has been to the mountaintop. He's been filled with what is right.

And the proof of that is when he comes off that mountaintop, he is full of the unconditional love of God, the unconditional love of Christ for people who are starving to be loved that way. Anytime a person loves you, one of the most important things you think about is their motivation for loving you. If somebody was showing you unconditional love, you probably would automatically think in your heart, what is the motive for your loving me? Why are you loving me? If somebody gave you a large sum of money, would not your first response be, why are you giving me so much money? We all do that.

We constantly check the other person's motive. That is why the fifth and sixth Beatitudes go together. Blessed are the merciful, those who are filled with the unconditional love of God.

But while they're expressing this unconditional love of God, this point goes along with it. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Pure in heart.

What does that actually mean? We could say that on the surface, it means that as they love with this unconditional love of God, the motive of their heart for loving unconditionally is pure. The fact that they love unconditionally should suggest that to us. They do not love others because of their performance.

That is the performance of the one being loved. They love them regardless of what their performance is. Remember that we compared the words mercy and grace.

Grace is when God is giving us all kinds of good things we do not deserve. Mercy is God withholding from us those things that we do deserve. Grace and mercy are like a two-edged sword.

One edge of that sword says that they do not earn the grace and unconditional love of God by a positive performance. But the other edge of the sword says that you cannot lose the favor and the blessing and the love of God by virtue of a negative performance. God loves you anyway.

Now if you love someone with the love of God, if you are a conduit of God's love, if you are a channel of God's love, then you ought to be able to say to the person you love, my love can take anything no matter what you do. I love you with the love of God and God's love is strong. It is stronger than anything you can do.

My love, which is God's love, is not fragile. It is not indestructible. I will love you anyway.

Nothing you say or do can make me stop loving you because I love you with the love of Christ and the love of God. If that is true, then it goes without saying that your motivation for loving this person with this unconditional love of God would be pure. When you get into the original language of these words, pure in heart, it is not really suggesting pure in the sense of clean or cleansed.

There is a sense in which that is true, but let me explain. The Greek word here for pure in heart is catharsis. What that is really suggesting is something like this.

When you go to the hospital and you are catheterized, that is when you cannot perform the normal bodily functions and there simply has to be a way to let the waste out of your body. You're catheterized because if there's no way to eliminate the waste from your body, your whole body is going to be filled with uremic poisoning and so you have to be catheterized to let the poison out of your body. The psychologists have an expression very much like the word catharsis or catheter.

Their expression is catharsis. When someone has an emotional catharsis, perhaps they lose their temper and vent all kinds of anger that they had stored up in their mind, or perhaps emotionally they come to pieces and they break down and just cry and weep. Sometimes it even comes in the form of laughter.

Maybe they've been uptight for a long long time and something gets them laughing and they can't stop. They laugh and they laugh and even cry at the same time. The psychologists call that a catharsis.

They say that what is happening there is you're letting the poison out of your mind. You're catheterizing your brain. It is so interesting that the word here for blessed or the pure in heart is that word.

It's the word catharsis from which we get the word catharsis. What it is saying is this. Ask God the Holy Spirit to spiritually catheterize your heart and let out of your heart everything that should not be there.

Everything contrary to what God wants to be in your heart. The scripture has a lot to say about the heart. In Proverbs 4 23 we are told keep your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.

That is where everything comes from. All your actions are going to come really from what is in your heart. This is why David prayed that great prayer at the end of Psalm 139.

After addressing the God who knows him, after addressing the God who made him, after addressing the God who planned him, after addressing the God who thinks about him, he prays this great prayer at the end of that Psalm. Search me and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

See if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way of everlasting. David was wise when he addressed the one who knows what is in his heart. God, he said, God, I do not know my own heart, but you do.

Now you search my heart and then you reveal to me what you see there that should not be there because I want to walk in the way of everlasting. Jeremiah had great insight into the heart. He said in Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 9 the following.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? And then he answered his own question when he said that only God knows the human heart. Your heart is desperately wicked and above all things it is deceitful.

That is why people pay thousands of dollars to analysts because their hearts are deceitful. They deceive themselves as well as anybody else. When I went to college many years ago, I double majored in Bible and psychology.

When I finished college, I thought I knew everything. What I did not learn in psychology, I learned in the scripture and I could not wait until I started counseling people. All they had to do was meet with me.

I could solve all of their problems. But then it seemed as if everyone I met was an exception to what I had learned. By the time I had met about a thousand exceptions, one day I said to God, God, I do not know anything about people and I don't know any of the hearts of the people.

And then in my devotions I found that scripture in Jeremiah. I had known about the verse that said that our hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful above all things, but I missed that part. I missed the part that said, who can know it? The heart of man.

I had not waited for the answer. The answer was that only God knows what is in the human heart. Only God knows what's in your heart.

In James chapter 4, he was giving many commandments all at once and he was saying things like this, submit yourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. And then he said, cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

But double-minded man, he said in James chapter 1, is unstable in all of his ways. And so you had better purify your hearts in the sense of doing right and allowing a cleansing of your heart. Jesus will say in

Matthew 6, the lamp of the body is the eye.

The way you look at things, your outlook, your mindset, if the way you see things is single, if it is whole, if it is healthy, and I like the word single, if you only look at things one way, your whole body will be full of light. But if you have spiritual double vision, if you are a spiritual schizophrenic, if you see things two ways, you believe, but you doubt, you trust, but you worry. Well, James tells us, when you pray, don't be double-minded like that.

God is not going to answer that kind of prayer. You have to pray believing. You cannot be double-minded when you pray.

This is the thought behind being pure in heart. It's the opposite of double-mindedness of spiritual schizophrenia. This matter of being double-minded is actually addressed a lot in the scriptures.

In Revelation 3.15-17, we read what the risen Christ says to the church of the first century. I would rather you be hot, but if you're not going to be hot, then go ahead and be cold. Whatever you do, do not be lukewarm.

You make me want to throw up. Back in the Old Testament, 1 Kings 18, verse 21, Elijah had that great shining hour on Mount Carmel when he challenged the people of God, how long will you be torn between two opinions? If the Lord is God, then follow him. And if Baal is God, then follow him, but do not be torn between two opinions.

So Jesus is saying, as he gives us these very important attitudes about life, you want to come to the mountaintop and be filled. And when you are filled, when you come off that mountaintop, you're going to be full of the unconditional love of God. And if it is really the unconditional love of God coming out of your life, then your heart will be pure when you love.

You will not love with false motives. You will not love with some personal motive of what you're going to get out of it. You will simply love.

It will come out of your heart. It will come out of your life. In order to make sure it is the real thing, if you decide that you're going to be one of the merciful, one of those who loves with the unconditional love of God, ask God to catheterize your heart of everything that should not be there.

Pray every day, God, if there's anything in my heart, but your love for your people, for this world, catheterize it from my heart. Take it out of my heart. Jesus had a lot to say about the heart.

In the seventh chapter of Mark is the teaching where he rebuked the religious establishment for several things. First of all, they had this righteousness that was external. We talked about that a couple of sessions ago.

They criticized him when he ate without doing a ceremonial cleansing. They used to scrub up like surgeons do getting ready for surgery. Now that ritual of cleansing was not in the Bible.

It was in the rules they added to the Bible. The religious leaders felt these rules were an interpretation and an application of the Bible. But these things were not really in the Bible.

So Jesus himself did not do all the scrubbing up before he ate. When they criticized him for that, he rebuked them and said, you are so concerned about the external. Your concern is about the outer man.

You don't realize that the really important part of a man is the inward man. He put it this way. Do you not understand? Can you not see that what goes into the body will not harm your soul? Then he added, it's the thought life that pollutes.

For from within out of men's hearts come evil thoughts of lust, theft, murder, adultery, wanting what belongs to others, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, and all other kinds of folly. All these vile things come from within and they are what pollute you and make you unfit for God. That is found in Mark chapter 7 verses 18 through 23.

What Jesus was saying here, and he said it very often, was something like this. It's what is on the inside that is important. That is where you need the miracle.

That is where you need to be changed. If any man is in Christ, Paul says, he is a new creation. Where is he a new creation? He's a new creation within.

David realized that in Psalm 51 after he had sinned so grievously. In the first part of Psalm 51, David is praying, oh God, show me the truth about myself. Show me the truth about this hidden man, this inner man.

What is in me that made it possible for me to sin so grievously? Sins like adultery and murder and lying about it and covering it up. How could that happen to me, oh God? And then he gets God's answer. He says, behold, look at me, I am a sinner.

I was a sinner when I took shape in my mother's womb. I was a sinner the instant I was conceived. That's my problem.

And when he sees that the problem is internal, he prays that great prayer of Psalm 51 verse 10, create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me. What a beautiful prayer for all of us to pray. You see, it's out of the heart that the issues of life come.

It is what is in the heart of man that determines what is going to come out of the man. Jesus said in Matthew 12, 34, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. You can tell what's in a person's heart by what's coming out of his mouth.

If they're always talking about themselves, then that is what's in their heart. They are selfish in their heart. Our actions reveal what is really in our hearts as a person.

The more you are a channel, a pipeline for this unconditional love of God, the greater your capacity is to be a channel of the love of God. And while you are a merciful conduit of God's unconditional love, it is important that you love with a pure heart. It is the people who are merciful with a catheterized heart, a heart catheterized of all the evil that should not be there, who are really going to see God in the sense that they see God work.

They will see God work through them. They will see the unconditional love of God flowing through them to the lives of people. And they will see that unconditional love touch the lives of people, absolutely change the lives of people, bring other people to Christ with the result that they too will become a new creation.

They will see old things pass away, all things become new, and they will watch God work as he puts a new heart within those people. And he performs the act of creation in the heart of those people. And then they

too will become channels of God's mercy and love with pure hearts.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Until next time, God's many blessings upon you and that new creation in you. They say that practice makes perfect.

So let us be of the mind to practice what we are learning from the Word of God in our everyday living. Now until we meet again, may the one true God give you encouragement and peace and his spirit of courage as you follow Jesus Christ, so that all you say and do will glorify our God and Heavenly Father.

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