

## ***I Will Become Open-hearted***

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**Life's Biggest Questions: *Who Will I Become?*** Sermon Series

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**It's all about the condition of the heart.** Obviously, it's not about the physical organ ("cardia") that pumps the blood, but about the desires, emotions and will of an individual. When our hearts are shaped to love God, we want to serve others. When our hearts are left to just love ourselves, we rebel against God's call. Pharaoh hardened his heart (and God let him). We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Paul wrote about how masters were to treat their slaves. He had no power, other than the pen, but he was trying to open hearts to love and to change the dynamics of relationships. Our hearts can be refreshed by forgiveness and love (read the Book of Philemon).

APPLICATION: Everyone wants to be happy, but happiness can't be purchased – it's found by losing oneself. The Sermon on the Mount is counter-intuitive. It is not the way we naturally think. Closely examine these four "beatitudes." In God's hands and with our open heart these conditions result in blessing. How is your "heart" in these matters?

Quick Review of WORSHIP – BELONG – BELIEVE – **BECOME**

The **Beatitudes** are part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Life in the KOG is **opposite** (backwards, upside down, counter-intuitive) of what we expect. Our culture tells us to indulge our sensual and materialistic pleasures. That is NOT what Jesus said. Look at the Beatitudes. It is counterintuitive. It is opposite to what every culture (not just ours) says and believes. Our culture says, "Be Happy." Jesus says, "Be Blessed." But unless we change and become like a child and receive Jesus into our lives, we will NOT be blessed. How do we have happiness? Buy more stuff. I drove by my old house in north Tulsa where I grew up – 5 of us lived in a 3-bedroom, 1 bath house, 1300 sq. foot home. How could we be happy? But you know what – we were! The average home size in America has tripled in the last 50 years but I don't know that bigger houses make happier hearts. Jesus never told us that the way to fill the void in life is by stuffing our belly. ***"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud***

***pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*** C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory.

### Matthew 5:1-6

*Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

In Chapter 7 of **A Practical Guide to Culture** (Stonestreet & Kunkle), an interesting concept is explored.

#1 This drawing = a **BELLY**. Paul said (Philippians 3:17-20): *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* The belly is part of our anatomy and we could not live without it. Paul is not teaching a medical class on anatomy. He is referring to the fact that we can be driven by our appetites. It is easy to be ruled by "the belly." An appetite for food, money, sex comes to mind immediately, but we can also easily be ruled by the belly of alcohol, drugs, entertainment, hobbies or our screens. Living according to our appetites promises happiness but is a short-term solution. It also creates numerous problems in other ways. Paul also called this "the flesh" and Jesus called it "the wide gate" (Matt 7:13-14 *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*) The Gentiles were often accused of living according to the flesh or the belly by the Jews. To be sure, pleasure isn't a problem. Nor is wealth inherently evil. But when we are so easily confused and deceived that pleasure and possessions will bring us happiness, we are deceived. They are false gods.

#2 = a **MIND**. The mind is supposed to govern the belly. We know what we are supposed to do and how we are supposed to live. A Practical Guide to Culture says the mind seems powerless in opposition to the belly. It says the mind is like

an 80-pound professor and the belly like an 800-pound gorilla in a wrestling match. The gorilla always wins. The Pharisees passed a lot of rules to stop the belly's hold. The belly tends to win the war. Paul knew about this as well. He said, *"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."* (Romans 7:13-16). The Gentiles tended to be ruled by the belly ("flesh") and Paul didn't want to be ruled by the flesh (the belly), he wanted to cooperate with the spirit.

#3 = **HEART**. A Practical Guide to Culture quotes C.S. Lewis in *"Men Without Chests."* C.S. Lewis wrote about "chest:" *"The head rules the belly through the chest."* Knowing right from wrong (the mind) isn't enough to stop the belly from winning. A chest is a muscle that can be developed. The chest contains the heart. As I said in the sermon journal, I think the key to the spiritual life = "it all begins in the heart." When Pharaoh hardened his heart, the war was on with God. Jesus said that where our hearts are, there is our treasure. Our money, our time, our attention, follows what we love. If you love someone, you want to do the very best you can for them. The Gentiles lived to the flesh and the Jews said live according to the Law, but Jesus wanted to change the heart. When I became a follower of Jesus, my heart changed. Then I wanted to learn about how my heart could grow stronger in love and how my heart and my head could help shape the desires of the body.

The whole key to the Christian life is to have what Dallas Willard called, *"a well-kept heart."* He wrote: ***"Those with a well-kept heart are persons who are prepared for and capable of responding to the situations of life in ways that are good and right."***

**Why** should I do this? WE will live better. We will help OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS, too.

**What** are you asking me to do? OPEN/WIDEN/DEVELOP YOUR HEART TO THE LORD.

**How** do I do this? How do we strengthen our hearts?

We are Methodists. The "Method" = a **Habit**. It is the power of automation. Do things w/o even thinking about it. We strengthen our hearts by our spiritual disciplines. We could easily be "Asbury United Habitual Church."

Prayers (Bible Study) – sermon journals.

Presence – worship. Community. With others. We cannot do it alone. (I was talking with a guy the other day who has gotten into weight lifting. He went to a gym and was on the bench lifting by himself and he was the only one in the room. The barbell slipped. He realized he could have died. He was building his chest....all by himself.

Gifts – “We make a LIVING by what we GET. We make a LIFE by what we GIVE.”

Service

Witness - We aren't just saved FROM something – we are saved FOR something. We were saved to practice expressing appreciation and love to Jesus and to Others.

<sup>6</sup> *"**Blessed** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

There are certain pathways to being blessed (and being cursed). God has told us what will lead to blessing. There are huge advantages to doing life God's way. We are on a journey. Lead with your heart. Don't stay where you are. Grow. Improve. Our appetites are good, but they should not rule us. If we want to be blessed – hunger for the right things. Who do we want to please?