

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

Matthew 5:8

⁸ Blessed are those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

A Christmas blessing.

Here is a Beatitude spoken by Jesus Christ, near the beginning of his ministry. It is from the longest of his speeches. We call it his Sermon on the Mount, delivered near the Sea of Galilee. The purpose of this sermon is to tell us what it means to live as a follower of Jesus and to walk in the Kingdom of God, now and for all of eternity. Here is what Jesus said: *⁸ Blessed are those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.* Blessings are a core concept in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, God promises the Israelites their own land, lots of descendants, and God's blessing. The notion of God blessing people was a very powerful concept to the people of biblical times. The idea of God's blessing leverages a common practice of the ancient world, wherein a father would bless the son who is to inherit from him. This was how a father could guarantee that a son would prosper and be financially secure. Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, when Isaac was late in life and almost completely blind, was tricked by his younger son Jacob into blessing him instead of blessing the older brother, Esau. That's how

powerful the notion of blessing was in the biblical world: a blessing from your earthly father could determine the entire future of your life - and likewise, a blessing from God could determine your eternal future.

The Beatitudes, delivered at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, call on a key cultural and religious element of the people to whom he is talking. If you want my blessing, Jesus says, this how you must live. How can you be blessed? How can you be a follower of mine and walk in the Kingdom of God now and for all of eternity? Have a heart that is pure.

When I was sixteen, I was a box boy in a Supermarket in southern California. Some people say bag boy or bagger. Once a year, at Christmas time, we were sent around the greater neighborhood that surrounded the store. The boss chose Christmas because he thought that people would be gentler with us at this time of year. He counted on this because we were paid to look in alleys, ditches, and backyards for stolen shopping carts. They didn't have wheel locks on them back then, and so theft was a very serious problem. I would come back with perhaps twenty carts. One day, just before Christmas, I happened to poke my head over a brick wall into someone's backyard. I saw a cart there. So, I hopped the wall. First, I looked to see where the gate was, so that I could make a quick escape. Then I ran toward the cart. An older woman opened the back sliding

glass door and stepped into the backyard. “Who the hell are you?” she yelled. I pointed at my red vest, red bowtie, and name badge. I said that I worked for the grocery store and was just getting rid of the shopping cart for her. That’s what we were taught to say. She yelled at me to get the you-know-what out of her yard. We were told to never argue with anyone. I said, “Yes, ma’am,” and turned back toward the wall. Then she said, in a much nicer voice, “I’m sorry, son, you’re just trying to make a little money.” I turned back to her, smiling and nodding. She said, “I was just decorating our Christmas tree, and here I am, cursing at you. I’m sorry. Let me help you with the cart.” It turned out that the manager of the store was right: people were nicer at Christmas time. Minutes later, as I was rolling the cart down her driveway, she took my hand and said, “Bless you.”

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the person who told us what we need to do if we want to live in his kingdom: have a pure heart. A pure heart is given over completely to living by the principles that he demonstrated: humility, kindness, compassion, empathy, discipline, generosity, and love. So, when you leave here after this brief service, please hold those principles in your heart.

By the way, the next year, when I went back to that woman’s yard, she wasn’t there. The new owner said she had passed away. I am confident that I know where she is right now.