

Lesson 7

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

How to find your spiritual vision...

Matthew 5.8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Introduction

The sixth beatitude has been called the climax of the beatitudes. It is the prevailing truth to which the previous five bring us to and from it, the last two flow.

If we want to see God, this text tells us how to do it. Seeing God was the greatest yearning of Moses' heart. God had just told him that he had found favor with Him and that God knew him by name. To this, Moses pleaded, *please, let me see your glory*, Exodus 33.17-18. In Psalm 27 David longed to see God's face. And ultimately, Christians long for the day when they will see Him face to face:

Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure, 1 John 3.2-3.

What It Means to be Pure in Heart

Pure

"Pure," in Matthew 5.8 is a form of the word we use today for *catharsis*, which is a cleansing of the mind or emotions. The word Jesus uses simply means "clean." Scholars have gone on to say it describes that which is "unmixed, unadulterated, or unalloyed."³⁵ The word was used in a variety of ways in the first century world, describing soiled clothing that had been washed clean, of armies that had been purged of cowardly soldiers, of milk or wine that was unadulterated with water, or metal which has no tinge of alloy.

In Heart

The heart is the inner person, i.e., the residence of our motives and attitudes. Scripture represents it as the place where our thinking process, will, and emotions lie. From the heart can come good. But also from the heart can come bad. It is in the heart where *evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, and blasphemies* originate, Matthew 15.19.

³⁵ Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Third Ed. The New Daily Study Bible. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, p. 122.

Therefore, to be pure in heart, describes a radical inner purity and holiness. It is an internal integrity that reveals itself in our behavior. It is a conscience without offense. It is, as David described, a single-minded, undivided devotion to spiritual integrity and true righteousness.

Teach me your way, LORD, and I will live by your truth. Give me an undivided mind to fear your name, Psalm 86.11.

It describes a life of absolute integrity and transparent honesty. Focusing on God with singleness of heart is one of our greatest challenges.

Related Old Testament Passages:

- Psalm 24.3-4: *Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully.*
- Psalm 51.10: *God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
- Psalm 73.1: *God is indeed good to Israel, to the pure in heart.*

We Must Long for Purity

To God David declared:

Surely you desire integrity in the inner self, and you teach me wisdom deep within, Psalm 51.6.

Purity is to reside in the very center of our being. We must desire it. This is the point of Psalm 119. Paul desperately longed for it all the while struggling with his flesh, Romans 7.15-25. Pursuing purity is challenging because the problem of doublemindedness is real. We tend to want to serve God ...and ourselves. We want to serve God ... but the world beckons. These passages draw us toward reality:

- Luke 16.13: doublemindedness won't work. You cannot serve God ... and anything else. Money, sex, things, *anything*.
- James 4.4: a desire to be friendly with the world makes one an *enemy* of God. We are called to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts, James 4.8.

Will we have the courage to do a thorough self-examination? We might ask ourselves:

- What is the motive behind my service in the kingdom?
- Is it for selflessness or self-display? Is it for Christ or for my own prestige? Is it to meet God or is it to fulfill a habit? Is it to keep company with God or is it to further my own feelings of superiority?

External Behavior Matters Little if the Heart isn't Right

The principle

We cannot please God unless our heart is right. We can load up our lives with all sorts of good things and still be lost if our heart has not been given to God. Impurity separates man from God, Isaiah 59.1-2.

Outward acts mean nothing if our heart isn't right:

- Matthew 23.23: superficial practices meant nothing because the weightier matters had been neglected.
- Matthew 23.25-26: Pharisees pay no attention to who they are inwardly.

A high standard

Our aim is perfection, Matthew 5.48. The disciple aims to be like Jesus, i.e., God Himself. This is much different from the typical human standard which tends to make comparisons to the worst, rather than the best. The struggle is real because we often feel great temptation to feel better about ourselves when we observe others doing bad things that we do not do. This is the trap the Pharisee fell into when he compared himself to the tax collector:

The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.’ ‘But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner,’ Luke 18.11-13.

Purity in Practice

Jesus calls for our supreme effort. He is demanding our participation. Present, earthly purity is something we should possess. Despite our fleshly tendency to sin, He wants us to be as pure as we can be.

It should characterize our living

Two passages come to mind:

- 2 Corinthians 7.1: *So then, dear friends, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*
- 1 Peter 1.14-16: *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.*

Purity influences how we respond to sin

Perfection is not possible while we live in a human body. But the pure heart is never content with imperfection. And when sin comes, it presses us to:

- Find the way of escape so that we may avoid sin, 1 Corinthians 10.13. Or...
- Confess our sin after it happens so that we may take advantage of God’s complete forgiveness, 1 John 1.9.

The strong desire for purity will move us to action and never sit on our sin, minimize it, or ignore it. We want to get it out in the open before God so He will remove it.

The Pure in Heart Will See God

Intimate knowledge of and fellowship with God is given to the pure. Purity is a prerequisite for entering into the presence of God. It has been said that purity of heart cleanses the eyes of the soul so that God becomes visible. We see what we are fit to see, which comes from the desire to know. William Barclay³⁶ observes:

- Two people look at the stars. One sees only pinpoints of light. The trained astronomer identifies stars and planets by name; ship captains use them to navigate the seas to get to their destination.
- Two people are in a room filled with ancient pictures. A person with no knowledge/skill is unable to distinguish between that which is worthless and that which is of value. One may see junk ... the trained person may see a treasure.

Likewise, two people read a Bible passage. One person read ... and the words mean nothing. The other person reads and the words come alive. They can't get enough.

How strong is our desire *to know*?

Seeing God

The purer our hearts become the more we will see God in this life. The more focused we are, the more absorbed with him we are, the more we are concentrated on his being, the more we are freed from distractions ... the more we will see.

In Nature

- Psalm 29.3-4, 7: David saw God in a thunderstorm.
- Psalm 121.1-2: the psalmist declared the mountains are God's.

In Creation

- Psalm 19.1-6: the creation declares...
- Job 12.7-10: *The life of every living thing is in His hand, as well as the breath of all humanity.*
- Romans 1.20: His invisible attributes are clearly seen.

In Difficulties

- Job 42.3-5: When he paused and reflected on his difficulties, Job realized that God had been there all along sustaining him.

Face to Face

- 1 John 3.2-3: one day, in eternity, we'll see Him face to face.
- Revelation 5.12-13: won't it be amazing to see Him sitting on the throne?

³⁶ Barclay, p. 123.