

Now You're Getting It: Pure Hearts

Matthew 5:8



While attending a wedding for the first time, a little girl whispered to her mother, "Why is the bride dressed in white?"

Her mother thought for a moment about how to answer that one. She didn't really want to get into the whole conversation on purity. So she came up with the best answer she could think of and responded, "Because white is a happy color, and today is the happiest day of her life."

Now it was her daughter's turn to think about that. And after a few moments she asked, "So why is the groom wearing black?"

Today we are getting into a conversation about purity, although perhaps a bit of a different angle on what it means to be pure.

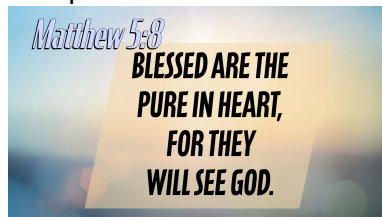


Purity is the topic of the next in the Beatitudes that open Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And so purity is a part of this foundation for this sermon that contains the blueprint for a life of following Jesus Christ.

To put that a simpler way, this is pretty important stuff.

And yet, some of it seems so very difficult. It's hard to admit we are poor in spirit. It's hard to be meek when we'd rather show strength. It's hard to be merciful when compassion and forgiveness isn't our first impulse.

It might be hardest yet, though, to be pure.



Which brings us to Matthew 5:8. Let's read that before we move on:

*⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

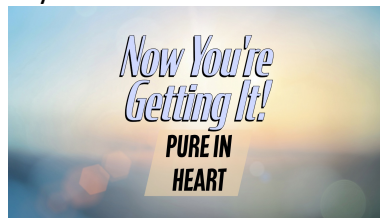
Blessed are the pure in heart. When you have a pure heart, that is when you're getting it. That is when you're understanding what it is to be Christian.

That sounds easy, but this is a hard one to grasp. It's hard for a couple reasons.

First, it's hard because the closer we get to Christ, the more we shine a light on all the parts of our heart that are anything but pure.

So on one hand, if we are actually getting closer to God, we're doing it right. But on the other hand, at the very same time, we're made aware how far we still are from Him.

It's also hard because we know, as humans, from the very beginning, we have been bent towards sin. We have been offered salvation by an ever-loving, ever-merciful God, and yet so often we choose to live our own way.



At this point, I think we have to ask ourselves is this even an achievable goal? If we know our hearts are prone to be impure, can we ever make them right?

Add to that that the closer we get to making them right, the more we realize they are wrong, does this become a goal post that will always be on the move, always be shifting away from us?

Are we just chasing this pure heart like a dog on a race track trying to catch that fake rabbit that always runs away?

Well, the good news is that there is an answer to this.

The bad news is that I think that answer is in Greek.

Literally.

As I'm sure you know by now, I like to delve into the original Hebrew or Greek text and see what these original words were trying to convey. Sometimes, to understand what is being said, it helps to know what was actually said.



Today's word is *katharos*. For us, it translates as "pure." And certainly it means to be clean or blameless or unstained by guilt.

But there's another use for this word that I think we need to pay specific attention to today, because that same word *katharos* was also used to refer to something that had been made pure by fire or pruning.

I hardly think it's coincidence Jesus uses this word when John the Baptist told the world he would come to baptize us by the Holy Spirit and by fire.

I hardly think it's coincidence Jesus uses this word when he also talks about the vine and the branches, and the importance of pruning the branches so that the bad branches are taken away and the good branches bear even richer fruit.

And here he is, talking about the importance of having a pure heart - or if we carry through this translation of being purified by fire or pruning, having a heart and a spirit made pure by Christ.



What I'm driving at is this: when we're finally getting it, when we're finally understanding this life in Christ, it's not that we have figured out how to be pure. It's that we have figured out the only way to be pure is through Jesus Christ.

That means we must relentlessly pursue Christ. We must always go to Christ first in all things. No matter what you are going through now, no matter what you feel is coming your way, no matter how big or how trivial it seems, we always go first to Christ.

It also means we surrender to Christ in all things. It does us no good to go to Christ for everything, only to keep on discovering that his way is not our way and then go and do it our way anyway. No, when we go to Christ, we must also surrender to him.

And it means that in all things, we glorify God. When we pursue Christ, when we surrender to him, anything that comes out of that is not of us. A purified heart, a purified spirit, knows that any and all praise isn't directed at us for our own efforts. Praise is always and only God's.

And really that just leaves us with how this leads us to seeing God. And for that, I think I'll leave it to someone who can explain this better than I feel I could.



Charles Spurgeon was a popular and influential Baptist preacher in London during the mid- to late-1800s.

During his life, he wrote sermons and delivered them with an authority that completely captivated his audience – and many of those sermons are still read to this very day. You may have seen some quotes of his appear in various modern-day devotion or theology books.

I want to share one of these quotes with you now, one that is very relevant for us today:

“The man whose heart is pure, will be able to see God in nature. When the heart is clean, he will hear God's footfall everywhere in the garden of the earth in the cool of the day. He will hear God's voice in the tempest, sounding in peal on peal from the tops of the mountains. He will behold the Lord walking on the great and mighty waters, or see him in every leaf that trembles in the breeze. Once get the heart right, and then God can be seen everywhere. To an impure heart, God cannot be seen anywhere; but to a pure heart God is to be seen everywhere.”

I think we can sum that up by saying when our desires and our motivations and our reasons are driven by going to God and surrendering to Him and glorifying Him, we begin to see His presence and His plan all around us.

When our hearts and our spirits are not pure, we are blinded by our own selfishness. We are driven by our own machinations, and so that is all we can see.

We cannot see God when we are not looking for Him. A pure heart seeks God. A selfish heart does not.

Let me give you one more illustration about how this looks, one that might fit our lives in a very specific way.

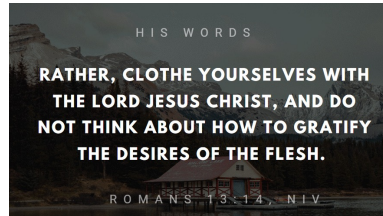


St. Augustine of Hippo, who at this point was not a saint just yet (and actually not yet a Christian), spent his first thirty years resisting his mother Monica's Christian witness in his life. He would actually pray, “O God, give me purity – but not yet.”

He was too busy with his own pursuits and his own desires.

But one day in his garden, he was having a moment of emotional despair. As he wrote later, he heard the sing-song voice of a child repeating the Latin phrase “*Tolle, lege*” – which means “take and read.”

Interpreting this as divine command to open his book of scripture, he wrote that he ceased his weeping and crying and opened his Bible to a random passage. Where he landed was Romans 13: 13-14, which reads:



¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Augustine was never the same again. Where once he prayed for purity on his own terms, he now began to pursue Christ. He started surrendering to Him. And he would spend the rest of his days glorifying Him.

I think we all know what it is to be putting off the life God calls us to live because we’d rather do it our way. And God is indeed calling us into a purified life with Him.



While having a pure heart is a sure indicator that we are finally getting it, it’s also nothing we can do on our own. Like all the Beatitudes before it and (spoiler warning!) the ones that remain, we are lost if we think we can do this on our own.

Thank God we’re not asked to do that!

Thank God that we are not only invited, but that we are required to go to Him for these things.

Thank God for giving us a pure heart, for purifying us into a people that are finally understanding the life He calls us to live.

And all of God’s people said...