

"this is God's Word"

The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:8
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10 February 2008

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

Let's remember what the Beatitudes are. They are not commandments, though they speak with authority. They are not requirements, though they define the kingdom of heaven. The Beatitudes are encouragements. The Beatitudes are the congratulations of Jesus, who wants us to walk with a spring in our step and sparkle in our eye and hope in our hearts because God has set us apart to himself and given us graciously everything worth having forever. ✓

The kingdom of this world has its own congratulations to pass around and its own promises of reward. Each of the (beatitudes) congratulations of Jesus can be turned into its photographic negative, like this:

Congratulations to those who feel entitled, for they grab whatever they want.

Congratulations to the carefree, for they shall be comfortable.

Congratulations to the pushy, for they shall win.

Congratulations to the greedy, for they shall climb the food chain.

Congratulations to the vengeful, for they shall be feared.

Congratulations to those who don't get caught, for they shall look good.

Congratulations to the argumentative, for they shall get in the last word.

Congratulations to the popular, for theirs is the kingdom of this world.

Is that what you want? Lots of people do want that. Our world exerts itself massively every day to enforce a whole way of life based on a whole worldview against Christ. But if your heart recoils from that and you want a place in the lovely kingdom of heaven and you're willing to come under the rule of Christ, then he wants you encouraged. God has set you apart to himself. God is including you in the renewal of this whole world. What is the gospel? It is the good news that God has not forsaken us in all our evil but the King has come, and through his death and resurrection the promised renewal of all things has finally been set in motion. The good news is that this world is not spinning out of control but heaven is moving in and taking over with powers that evil cannot stop. That is what's happening here on the platform of human history. That's the real story. And through union with Christ, God has included you on the inside of this mega-miracle. Whatever your life may be right now, your future is as bright as the promises of God. Yours is the kingdom of heaven, you will be comforted, you will inherit the earth, you will be satisfied, you will receive mercy, you will see God, you will be called sons of God, yours is the kingdom of heaven. So we see that the Beatitudes are not handy tips for improving your week; they are the enduring promises of Christ, because you have stepped over the line to join him by faith in a whole new world so beautiful only God can accomplish it.

Now when we come to "Blessed are the pure in heart," we might be thinking, "Oh shucks. I was just getting on a roll here with poverty in spirit and mourning and meekness, and so forth, just getting the hang of it, and now Jesus completely defeats me with 'Blessed are the pure in heart.'" We

think, "No way can I be pure in heart." But he means what he says, and we must not think, "Well, I'm okay with poverty in spirit, I feel some mourning now and then, I'm improving in meekness, I'm attracted to righteousness, and who wouldn't want to be merciful? But pure in heart? I can't do it. I'll have to take a pass on that one." We cannot say that – not if we want to see God. The Beatitudes are not a menu to choose from. They are one coherent, multi-perspectival portrait of the human profile that belongs in the kingdom of heaven. So Jesus has for us here in this Beatitude a great gift. He has for you and me purity in heart. Let's not tell him he's asking too much. Whatever he asks, he also gives. Let's receive it together.

① What is purity (and impurity) in heart?

② What does it mean to see God?

The Old Testament helps us understand what it means to be pure in heart. In Psalm 24 we read,

③ How can we be pure in heart?

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not lift up his soul to what is false

and does not swear deceitfully. Psalm 24:3-4

Lifting up our souls to what is false is giving our lives to empty things, and swearing deceitfully is pulling back on our commitment to God. What then is a pure heart? It's telling ourselves the truth about God. It's getting real with God, being decisive about God and not turning back. In 1846 Søren Kierkegaard wrote his famous essay, "Purity of Heart is To Will One

Thing.” The pure in heart are sinners. But what's pure about them is this.

Their foremost thought is not "I want Christ and _____," because

whatever goes in that blank always ends up robbing Christ and turning our

hearts around to "I want _____ and Christ." *their foremost thought is, "I want Christ."* The first time Jesus

speaks in the gospel of John, do you know what he says? He asks a

question: "What do you want?" *that is the question of our lives.* (John 1:38, NIV). The pure in heart have a

clear answer to that question. They know what they want. They are not

sitting on the fence. Their love for Christ is wholehearted.

They are sinners. But

I looked up this word “pure” in my Greek lexicon. It was used in secular Greek to describe clear water, metal without alloy, serene emotions, open space, an obvious meaning. Purity in heart is not divided but sincere toward God.

The psalmist prayed for this inner condition: “Unite my heart to fear your name” (Psalm 86:11). Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Paul said, “This one thing I do:

forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal” *(not personal goals)* (Philippians 3:13-14). The psalmist prayed, “There is

nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Psalm 73:25). All these voices

are saying to Christ, “I am a sinner, but you are my Savior. And you alone

have my heart. If you fail me, I’m damned. But I’m not going anywhere

else. You’re the only hope of the world, and you’re everything to me.” That

is purity in heart. Paul called it “a sincere and pure devotion to Christ,” just like a wife's unshared, unmixed love for her husband (2 Corinthians 11:3).

So if that's purity in heart – devoted love for Jesus – then what is impurity in heart? Impurity in heart says, "One of these days I'm going to become decisive for Christ. One of these days I'm going to do something significant for him. One of these days I'm really put my oar in for Christ down at my church. I really am. But not just yet. There are other things I have to take care of first. But I'll get around to it. After all, I'm a serious Christian." What step of obedience are you putting off? What compromise are you accepting? What sin are you excusing? What lie are you telling yourself? If you stay there, there is a reason. The reason is, your heart is impure. You don't really love the Lord. And when your heart stays in that condition, what comes of it? Jesus starts to become remote and unreal to you, the Bible becomes dull, prayer is a chore, worship is lifeless, church is a weekend option along with soccer practice (but beneath soccer practice in terms of emotional priority), and no unbeliever asks you to explain the hope that is in you because your hope is the same as their hope – not seeing and enjoying God but marginalizing God and using him when he comes in handy. When our hearts backslide into that condition, he turns his lovely face away. He knows when he isn't wanted, and he withdraws his presence. Divided hearts are unfit for the presence of the King. Divided hearts are not just intellectually indecisive; they are impure. But the Holy Spirit loves to visit the heart that says, "What has become of me? I've been unclear too long. It's time for a change. Beginning now, other things are going to have to adjust. But I'm going to rearrange my life around Christ and his cause. I'm going to take concrete action today. No more indecision. Jesus is the Friend of sinners, and I want him." Blessed are the pure in heart. They may be messy on the outside, but they love Christ.

*What
goals, other
things X
(100% of the
center of the
world?)
Well, what
if you
actually
GOT it?
but not
Christ?
What a
disaster!!

unclear;
indecisive

back to Christ, my heart is so broken, so

disappointed -
I want to
go back
and

In Luke 7 a prostitute came into a dinner party where Jesus was a guest. The Bible says, "Standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head [part of the equipment of her trade] and kissed his feet and anointed them" (Luke 7:38). She was so forgiven, she loved Jesus. Her heart was pure, and she got close to him. *and he loved her up close. He let her get close.* But the Pharisees criticized him for receiving her love. They were pure on the outside, but their hearts were dirty with pride.

② What does it mean to see God?

I saw the Beatles once. Seeing them was different from hearing them on the radio. Seeing is experience. It's participation. It's being there. There is something special about a face-to-face encounter. It's better than an email or a phone call. Seeing moves us toward intimacy. And God wants that for you and me, with him – amazingly.

The pure in heart see God. They're the only ones who see God, they're the only ones who want to see God. The others are thinking, "Sure, I want God in my life. Don't want to go to hell. But I don't want too much of God. I don't want him to take over." But what does it mean to see God?

Two things. First, the pure in heart will see God in heaven. The Bible says, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

"We shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). "They will see his face"

(Revelation 22:4). Our eyes will meet, and we will enter into unimaginable intimacy with God. This is the most stupendous thing ~~that has ever been~~ *even*

said to ^{*sinners*} ~~human beings~~ – fearful as we are of the future and weighed down by our past. But the gospel says that we are going into the audience chamber of

the King of kings, that we are now being prepared for his presence.

Compared with this, what else ultimately matters? If that deepest place within you, the truest you that not even your sins can deny – if your heart loves Jesus Christ, you will see him, and no one will ever take him away from you.

Secondly, the pure in heart see God even now. He comes to us through the Holy Spirit and displays his glory to our hearts with a vividness we do not fully understand but we do experience. Jesus said, "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). The Bible says, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). When we are exposed to Christ in the gospel and we feel the weight of his glory, ^{and a hush comes over us,} we are seeing Christ and fellowshiping with him. And that's where transformation comes from. The Bible says that the God "who said, 'Let there be light,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). The gospel turns his face to us, and by God's power we gaze and glory and love and receive his power to follow Christ.

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How can we be pure in heart?

The Bible explains how, at three levels. First, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). He's talking about conversion. When we obey the truth of the gospel by putting our faith in Christ to be our Savior, that decision alone cleans out a lot of junk from our

hearts. God gives us new hearts. Have you purified your heart by obeying the good news that you give nothing to God but he gives everything to you? Have you received the Lord Jesus Christ with the empty hands of faith?

and on
knows of
grace?

Secondly, the Bible says, "Purify your hearts, you double-minded people" (James 4:8). This speaks to us believers. Are we wholehearted or double-minded? But we wonder, "How on earth can I be single-minded in my focus when I have a job and a family and a gazillion other things demanding my attention? This is impossible!" No, it's not. What's impossible is seeing God with one eye on the things of this world. Here is how you purify your heart. Augustine said to God, "He loves you less who, together with you, loves something which he does not love for your sake."¹ What did he mean by that tongue-twister? He meant that we can love God himself, first and foremost, every moment of every day, whatever we are doing as long as it's the will of God. So, you get up and take a shower not just to wake up and become presentable but as an act of gratitude to God and for his sake. You eat your breakfast to energize yourself to live for God. You work through your day not to become some "big deal" in people's eyes but to honor God and serve others and finance the work of the gospel. You drive home and trust him with all the uncompleted tasks of your day and thank him for the humbling reminder that only God can hold your life together. You have dinner with the family and love and enjoy them and laugh and pray, to raise up leaders for the glory of God in the next generation. You relax that evening in some way that strengthens your heart in Christ. You go to bed and make love to your spouse, because God wants you to bless him/her. And you sleep, trusting in God to watch over you.

¹ Henry Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, page 202.

Every moment of every day is about God and for God and in God. We purify our hearts by directing our intentions in all things toward ultimacy in God, and we never allow a single moment of life to be trivialized as something unconnected with God. Why? Because he loves us, and we love him.

And nothing in our culture teaches us to see life this way. This is far from good news from heaven - God clarifies, God redeems, God blesses all of life.

Thirdly, the Bible says, "Everyone who hopes in him purifies himself, as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). We don't purify our lives in hopes that God might notice and give us a break. It's the opposite. God has promised us everything. He has united us with Christ. Our eternal happiness is secure. We will miss out on our heart's deepest desire only if Christ is robbed of his victory. And it's that strong confidence that motivates us and keeps us alert and determined. Here is how the gospel teaches me. I'm like an old wild west town inside. Ortlundville has some nice neighborhoods, but other parts of town are run by gangs. I'm the sheriff of this town, and things get a little crazy sometimes because one sheriff can't manage all the bank robbers and cattle rustlers and pick pockets and drunks. But the President in Washington has heard about it and telegraphed me that he is sending in the cavalry. His own son is leading the charge, and they're on the way. What he wants from me is to stay on the job until the cavalry arrives. So I'm walking down main street with my six guns loaded at my side and whenever one of the bad guys sticks his head out of the saloon door or wherever I blast him. I can't beat them all. Sometimes I get wounded. But no way am I giving up and handing this town over, and no way am I cutting deals with the bad guys. The President made me a promise. He who has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure.

and he never loses.

The Bible says, "The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth, that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely his" (2 Chronicles 16:9). It's not about being sinless; it's about being completely his, because his promises are so wonderful. Is your heart completely his? Are you structuring your life with Christ-centered intentionality? Or is your heart divided? Jesus Christ loves half-hearted, indecisive sinners, but he does not leave them that way. Why? Because of who he is. Jesus Christ is wise enough and good enough to make your whole life work, ^{when} if he alone is at the center. Look at Christ in his glory, in his love, in his wisdom and promises and all-sufficient goodness to sinners. Come to Christ. Close with Christ. Give your heart to him completely. If you will, he will forgive you and love you, and you will love him, and he will become wonderfully real to you. Jesus said to that sinful woman who trusted him, "Go in peace" (Luke 7:50). You can go into your week in peace, in shalom, in wholeness. Will you trust Christ enough to hand yourself over to him completely? Will you say to him, "Thank you for loving my divided heart. Everything that's been blinding me to you – take it away. But you are the one I want." Will you make that declaration to Christ this evening? If you will, you will see him, and he himself will be enough. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."



Jim