

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula
at West University Church of Christ, Houston, Texas,
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We have two righteous people in our church here who are blind. They are sweet, kind souls who love God and the church. They are Richard and Martha Welch. Richard was born blind. He has never seen. Martha was seeing until she was thirty years old and she has been blind then for the last thirty or so years. These sweet folks are quite independent. They live alone in their own apartment. They have learned how to manage their lives without sight.

Can you imagine what it would be like not to be able to see? You can close your eyes for fifteen seconds and get a good idea.

In 1982 the Los Angeles Times carried the story of Anna Mae Pennica, a sixty-two-year-old woman who had been blind from birth. At age forty-seven she married a man she met in a Braille class; and for the first fifteen years of their marriage he did the seeing for both of them until he completely lost his vision to retinitis pigmentosa. Mrs. Pennica had never seen the green of spring or the blue of a winter sky. Yet because she had grown up in a loving and supportive family, she never felt resentful about her handicap and always exuded a remarkably cheerful spirit.

Then in October 1981 Dr. Thomas Pettit of the Jules Stein Eye Institute of the University of California at Los Angeles performed surgery to remove the rare congenital cataracts from the lens of her left eye-and Mrs. Pennica saw for the first time ever! The newspaper account does not record her initial response, but it does tell us that she found that everything was “so much bigger and brighter” than she ever imagined. While she immediately recognized her husband and others she had known well, other acquaintances were taller or shorter, heavier or skinnier than she had pictured them.

Since that day Mrs. Pennica has hardly been able to wait to wake up in the morning, splash her eyes with water, put on her glasses, and enjoy the changing morning light. Her vision is almost 20/30-good enough to

pass a driver's test. [R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom. Preaching the Word Series. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001, p. 53. This story was reprinted in the Chicago Sun-Times, February 17, 1982].

We are all thankful for our gift of sight. Of all the senses we have, sight is probably the last one we would want to relinquish.

There is a far greater sight than seeing with your eyes and that is to see with your heart. Someone once asked blind and deaf Helen Keller, "Isn't it terrible to be blind?" Miss Keller responded, "Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing."

There is something far greater than seeing these things and people, and that is, seeing God. Seeing God? Yes, seeing God. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." How do we see God? Who is going to see God?

What is the heart?

The heart in the Bible is our personality: our thinking, our feeling, and our willing. It is the center of all that we do intellectually, emotionally and volitionally. The heart is the real person, the inner person.

Paul used all three senses of the "heart" in the book of Romans (1:21; 2:5; and 5:5). The same word "heart" is used of what we think, what we feel, and what we will to do. Thus, the heart is the inner person, our real selves.

The Bible says, "Watch your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 23:7). This means that the heart controls our lives.

This heart can be pure and good as we will see but it can also be evil, very evil, and full of wickedness. Jeremiah warned the people, "The heart of man is exceptionally deceitful. Who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). The nineteenth century Russian novelists, Ivan Turgenev, spoke for all of us when he said:

I do not know what the heart
Of a bad man is like.
But I do know what the heart
Of a good man is like.
And
It is terrible.

Why did Jesus emphasize the heart so much?

The OT is, of course, the word of God, as well as the NT. In the OT God reveals himself and his will for his people of that time. The OT priests were sons of Aaron. The law lays out 142 blemishes that would bar a descendant of Aaron from the priesthood. All of these defilement had to do with blemishes on the body. None of these defilement had anything to do with the inner person. All sons of Aaron were priests. They might be adulterers, murderers, thieves, swindlers, or be filled with racism or other ethnic prejudices, but they could still be priests. This emphasis on the external and the outward qualifications had been pressed so far by the Pharisees in the time of Jesus that they had neglected the inner man, the character, and had focused on the external, the appearance. Hear some of the things Jesus said about them: [read Matt. 23:25-28]

Jesus dealt with this externally-focused, outward, ceremonial religion again in Matthew 15 when the Pharisees condemned him for not washing his hands before he ate. This hand washing was not hygienic, but ceremonial. The pattern was to take two egg shells full of water and with the fingers pointed up, to let it drip down the hands to the wrist, and then to turn the fingers downward and let water run from the wrist and drip off the fingers. This made the hands ceremonially clean.

The Jews were devout and sincere in seeking God through ceremony.

One Jewish rabbi was arrested by the Romans and only given a couple of bread crusts and a cup of water for a meal. Instead of drinking the water, the rabbi used the water for ritual purification, saying that he would rather die than go against the traditions of the fathers.

[Haddon Robinson, The Christian Light and Salt Company: A Contemporary Study of the Sermon on the Mount. Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1988, p. 75].

This was a man-made tradition, not a God-given law. Jesus refused to be bound by man's human, religious ceremonies. Jesus told the Pharisees plainly, [read 15:17-19]

This is why Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:17-19). We cannot our Pharisee the Pharisees. We would not want to anyway because they are going in the wrong direction.

Now, you may be saying, “We would never do what the Jews did—trust in external righteousness.” Is that right? Ken Chafin of the Southern Baptist Convention once asked his seminary students this question, “What does it take to be a good Christian?” He got five different answers: First, a good Christian attends Sunday school and training union. Second, a good Christian goes to the worship services of the church. Third, a good Christian goes to prayer meeting. Fourth, a good Christian tithes and gives to the church. Fifth, a good Christian wins somebody else to Jesus.

If you look at these things, four of the five have to do with organization, ritual, ceremony, with where you are and what you do on Sunday morning. There’s nothing wrong with these things, but are they sufficient? You could do all these things and only be a Christian for a couple of hours a week on Sunday. These are good things but they do not get to the heart of what it means to follow Christ.

[The above story is from Haddon Robinson, The Christian Salt and Light Company, p. 74].

A man may be religiously respectable. He may be a Bible-reading, church-going, tithing religious leader and yet not be a man of God because the thoughts of his mind and the desires of his heart are not from God.

This is among Protestants but our Catholic neighbors do not get off easy either. Haddon Robinson grew up in New York City. He says that some of his Catholic friends went to confession in anticipation of a wild weekend. They confessed not only past sins but also those they planned to commit. They probably did not have the approval of the priest or the church to live that way, but they trusted external religion. [The Christian Salt and Light Company, p. p. 77-78].

Jesus said we must love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The Pharisee who came to Jesus by night asking questions was told, “You must be born again of water and Spirit or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus emphasized a spiritual rebirth. God gives us a new beginning, a new heart when we turn to him, confess our sins, and submit to baptism which consummates the new birth process. Some six hundred years before Jesus, Ezekiel in the OT spoke of a new heart that God would give his people. Hear him in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 11, verse 19, “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you.” Ezekiel speaks of this new heart and new spirit again in chapter 36, verses 25-26 [read verses]

What does a new heart cost? A new heart costs \$864, 700 to “procure, transplant and maintain with immunosuppressant drugs.” [New York

Times Magazine, May 16, 2010]. Yet the most lasting heart transplant one can receive is the one Jesus performs on you when you surrender your life to him. You will receive a new heart that will never expire, never fail, and never need replacing. When a person is reborn spiritually, that is, when he believes the claims of Jesus are true, trusts his heart to Jesus, turns from his sins, and is baptized into Christ, then this person is spiritually reborn. This means that only God can create the new heart. David prayed, “Create a new heart in me, O Lord,” and Ezekiel said that God’s Spirit would cut off the flesh and that the spiritually dead would live once more by the power of God.

You cannot create your own new heart. Only God can do that, but you can cooperate with God. The Bible says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” The Bible says, “Cleanse your hand, you sinners, and purify your hearts” (James 4:8). God cleanses us; God makes us new. God give us the new birth. But in all this we must cooperate with God by desiring his will to be done, and with our whole hearts, turn to God. The Bible says, “Make every effort to be holy; for without holiness no man will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

So you can see that Jesus took a radically-different approach than the Pharisees did. Jesus wanted to cleanse people’s hearts out of which all evil things arose.

What does it mean to be ‘pure in heart’?

The word “pure” is used in the Greek literature (the NT was written in Greek) to mean “without mixture, consisting of one quality or substance, single, unmixed, unadulterated, unified and whole versus fragmented and divided.” The literature speaks of pure wine not mixed with water, pure wheat not mixed with chaff. So when Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” he means much more than being pure in matters of sensuality. He goes far deeper.

He means that we do not bring mixed motives and divided loyalties to our relationship with God. He means that we have a pure, unmixed devotion to God. James referred to this when he said, “Purify your hearts you double-minded” (James 4:8). Have you ever tried to talk to someone who keep smiling and talking while at the same time they are looking around and behind you at other people and things? They are really not interested in you; they only see you as objects or means to an end. That’s the way we treat

God sometimes. And that's scandalous. "Pure in heart" means focus, absorption, concentration, sincerity and singleness.

So, then, when Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart," he meant, "How spiritually happy are those that are single focused whose thinking, feeling and willing are committed to God."

How does this work out in life?

Perhaps the best way to see this is to look at the lives of Saul and David in the OT. Saul was physically appealing. He was strong, tall, and an attractive man. Israel wanted a king so God chose the best possible choice for them: Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was anointed by the prophet Samuel and God gave him the Holy Spirit to turn him into a different man, that is, to work a radical change in his inner self. Saul was even known to prophesy and be thought of by the people as a prophet. Saul led Israel and won some mighty victories against the Philistines and other enemies of God's people.

Saul began to more and more trust in himself rather than in God. In I Samuel 13, he was impatient and would not wait for the coming of Samuel to offer a sacrifice and he offered it himself. This was wrong and against what Samuel had told him to do. Because of this sin, God rejected his dynasty and said that no son would follow him to the throne of Israel. Saul became a rash man and issued some rash decrees to his army, like the one telling them not to eat on a full day of battle. He tried to kill his son, Jonathan, for eating some honey that day.

Samuel brought God's message to Saul that he should go and utterly destroy the Amalekites. Saul fought the Amalekites but instead of doing what God said do, Saul saved the king alive and some of the best of the cattle, sheep, oxen, and other valuables. When Samuel confronted him, he said he did it because the people wanted him to. He claimed he had good intentions of offering these things in worship to God and of showing off the king as a trophy of war to encourage the Israelites in their battles. Samuel told Saul he was totally wrong. Samuel said, "To obey is better than to sacrifice and to listen to God is better than animal sacrifices." God then rejected Saul from being king and began to look for a man after his own heart.

God found that man in David, the youngest son of Jesse. When Samuel came to Jesse's house, Jesse brought all his seven sons before Samuel, thinking that one of them would be the next king. "No," Samuel

said, “God does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart.” So finally, Samuel said, “Do you have any more sons?” Jesse said, “Yes, but he is the youngest, a shepherd, and he is now out tending the sheep.” Samuel had the shepherd David brought before him and anointed him to be the next king.

David would have to wait at least ten years before assuming the throne because Saul, the incumbent, was not about to give up his powers. The rest of Saul’s tragic downfall is told in the book of I Samuel. Twice he tried to kill David by pinning him to the wall with a spear. David fled for his life and for the next ten years Saul chased David like a dog chases a flea. Saul’s life moved tragically in a downward spiral. The Spirit of the Lord departed from him and he lived and made decisions on his own without God. Samuel would see him no more. Saul was like a pilot-less ship or airplane headed for ruin. On the eve of his final battle on Mt. Gilboa, he was so desperate for spiritual help that he consulted an illicit witch to try to contact the dead Samuel. The next day, Saul died by committing suicide as his army is decimated by the Philistines.

Saul started out good and strong but his personality turned evil, selfish, revengeful, egotistic, and disobedient. He ended up living without God and dying at his own hands. Here then is the story of a man whose loyalties were divided. He listened to the people rather than God. He sought spiritual help from others besides God. He ruled harshly and impetuously and directly and deliberately disobeyed God. His heart was divided between himself, his people, and God. He could not serve two masters. He ended up following his own ways that led him to death and destruction. No one who lives a life like that can please God.

On the other hand, David trusted in God. He loved God. He praised God. While Saul’s heart was divided, David was God-focused. He listened to God. He lived for God’s glory. David gave praise and glory to God during all the time Saul was chasing him. Hear some of his words from the psalms:

“I will give thanks unto the Lord with all my heart” (9:1)

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer” (19:14)

“Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart” (26:2)

“When you said, ‘Seek my face,’ my heart said to you, ‘Your face, O Lord, I shall seek’” (27:8)

“The Lord is my strength and my shield, my heart trusts in him”
(28:7)

David was a man after God's own heart. Does this mean that David was sinless? No. But even when he sinned, he turned back to the Lord and prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

David repented and returned to the Lord. His heart was not sinless but it was pure in the sense that it was singularly God-focused. He loved God. When he did wrong, it grieved him terribly. He cast himself on God. The difference between Saul and David then is this: Saul was divided in his loyalties, Saul was focused on his reputation and what people thought about him. Saul wanted to make a good impression and maintain his status. He left God to follow his own pursuits. David, on the other hand, wanted God's will done in his life. He prayed, he praised the Lord, he confessed his sins, and he came back to God when he sinned. He had a singular heart, a heart for God. His motives, his affections, his will, and his intellect were committed to God. Thus, David's heart was pure in that sense.

God looks deeper than the outside actions. He searches our hearts. He judges more on the inside than the outside. He looks to the motive, thought and intents of the heart.

Last week, Judy and I were privileged to have two of our grandchildren visit us. Presley is two years old but she has a "take-charge" personality. She wanted to help me with everything I did. She meant well, and I love her for trying. When I watered my tomato, squash and pepper plants in the garden she wanted to hold the hose, or tip the water bucket over onto the plants. When I carried a two-gallon pail of water to the young pecan trees, she wanted to hold onto the handle as we walked. When I built the kids a sandbox, she handed me the screws and put her hand on the drill as I screwed them in. Presley meant well but as you know she was not really of any constructive help but I appreciated her efforts, motives and desires.

This is exactly what God does. He does not judge the superficial goodness or the superficial badness that we do. He goes deeper into the soul and probes as a heart surgeon.

What does it mean for us to be 'pure in heart'?

It simply means that nothing means more to us than God. "Purity of heart is to have a one-track mind with regard to the will of God. Nothing must be a rival to our love for God, even if it is something good. . . a pure heart has one intention: to have one's will shaped by the will of God." [Jerry Mercer, *Cry Joy! Say Yes to Life That Satisfies*. Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1987, pp. 94-95].

This means that we want Christ more than anything. Hear Paul in Col. 2:6-7: [read]

This means that we have the mind of Christ. Jesus was humble, so if we have his mind, pride will not dominate our lives. Jesus was loving, so if we have his mind, hatred and bitterness will not rule us. Jesus was forgiving and understanding, so if we have his mind we will be merciful toward others. Jesus was unselfish, so if we have his mind, we will put others above our selfish interests.

Jesus loved God, read and memorized his word, prayed often, and regularly attended synagogue services to worship and fellowship. If we have the mind of Jesus, we will want to pray, read the Bible, and be with God's people. This means that we can be freed from the grasping mind of the world.

Money, fame, power, and control will not rule us. Christ rules us. Things are gifts from God to be used, not to be loved and worshiped. You can hold a penny so close to your eye that it can blot out the sun. Our lives are not cluttered with the desire to grow rich.

When our hearts are pure, we care about the homeless, the underprivileged, the dying, the diseased, the lonely, and the lost. When our hearts are pure then we will listen to these words from Paul: [read Phil. 4:8-9].

Here are some questions we should ask ourselves:

- What do you think about when your mind slips into neutral?
- How much sympathy do you have for deception, no matter how skillful?
- For shady humor, no matter how funny?
- To what do you pay constant allegiance?
- What do you want more than anything else?
- What and whom do you love?
- To what extent are your actions and words accurate reflections of what is in your heart?
- To what extent do your actions and words constitute a cover-up for what is in your heart?

[from D. A. Carson, The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987, p. 25]

These are big orders. It would be impossible to do these things if we were relying on our own strengths. That's why the apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" [Phil. 4:13]. God has not

given us a new heart and then left us to live on our own. No, the Lord promises, “I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world” [Matt. 28:20].

This beatitude challenges me more than any of the others. I recognize that I will always be a needy person.

After thirty years in the Christian life, Paul still called himself “the chief of sinners” (I Tim. 1:15). The more we become aware of our need, the more we become aware of him; and the more we become aware of him, the deeper grows our need and longing for his filling, his mercy, his very face. We never need less of him. . . . The closer we get to him, the more aware we become of sin. Out of this awareness comes poverty of spirit, mourning over sin, dependence on him, and hungering thirsting for righteousness. As we receive mercy, the more mercy we show, and greater grows our desire to be pure. The purity is not sinless perfection but a cleansing that comes through the process of getting closer to God. As we go through the process, we truly see God.

[Haddon Robinson, The Christian Salt and Light Company, p. 78].

What does it mean that the “pure in heart will see God”?

God is the immortal, invisible, eternal loving Spirit who is our creator, sustainer, protector, and judge. Mortal man cannot physically see God. All the OT occurrences of where men are said to see God mean that the person saw God’s glory, not God himself (John 1:18).

Man has always longed to see God. Philip said to Jesus, “Show us the father and that will suffice.” That’s all he wanted. Jesus replied, “Philip, don’t you understand? He that has seen me has seen the father.” God reveals himself in Jesus of Nazareth. Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. That’s who God is and what God looks like: Jesus.

Seeing God means that we perceive, understand and sense the reality of him. We experience God. We see God the way that Moses saw God. When Moses left Egypt, “he saw him who was invisible” (Heb. 11:27). We have relationship with God. We see God at work in our answered prayers. We see God at work in his providence guiding our lives. We see God at work in controlling the events of the nations. We see God at work in nature. We see God at work in other people’s lives.

To see God means that the vision between God and us is not blurred. Someday, of course, in the world to come, the Bible says that [read Rev. 22:3-5].

The imagery here is profound. The throne (presence) of God is gracious to those who fall down before it. God's name (His essential reality) will be written on their foreheads (showing relationship with God and their witness to him). Night (death) will be abolished. The light of God (eternal life and blessing) shines on the worshipers.

[Jerry Mercer, Cry Joy, pp. 97-98]

This is the hope of the world's religions—to know and see God. To us who are Christ followers, the Bible says that we shall see God face to face. I don't know all that means or how it will be accomplished. Jesus said, "You have neither heard the voice of God nor seen his form" (John 5:37). Does that imply that God has a shape? No mortal can look on God and live but in the glorified state we will not be mortal. We will have a resurrected body like Jesus' own body. The Bible says, [read I Jn. 3:2-3].

We see God's work now; we will see him in a greater degree and a fuller comprehension in the world to come. The apostle Paul said, "Now we see in a mirror darkly but then face to face." (I Cor. 13:12). Compared to this, everything else fades into insignificance. The blessedness of worshiping and serving God forever in the glory world is inconceivable. It is beyond our imagination. We are destined for that. You and I are preparing now for an audience with God. We are going to see God and enjoy him forever. This means then that the greatest concern of our life is to have a pure heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

I opened today by telling you the story of Mrs. Pennica's receiving her sight. The irony of it is that her surgeon, Dr. Pettit, said that "surgical procedures available as far back as the 1940s could have corrected the problem." Mrs. Pennica lived forty of her sixty-two years sightless years needlessly blind!

You do not need to be spiritually blind. God's surgery for curing spiritual blindness has existed for two thousand years. The procedure is radical and 100% effective because God is the physician. You must be born again. To see God, you must have a pure heart. To have a pure heart, you must be born again.

Do you believe and trust Jesus today to forgive your sins and make you a new creation in Christ? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust his

sacrificial death on the cross for your cleansing from sin? Do you turn from your sins? Do you wish to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior? Do you want to be baptized into a relationship with Christ, to give all of yourself totally to God? If so, come now while we stand and sing.

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