

“The Pure in Heart” Matt. 5:8

Grace, mercy, and peace to you as we continue the fourth leg of our Lenten journey on the road from “Dust to Glory”. Our text is from Jesus’ words in **Matt. 5:8**—“*Blessed are **the pure in heart**, for they shall **see God**.*” Through the centuries, plenty of people have wanted to view the beatitudes as a kind of **ladder** that can assist you to heaven. If you’re **poor in spirit**, you’ve passed the first rung. If you’re a **peacemaker**, you’ve reached the **second** rung. If you’re **meek**, you’ve come to the **third** rung, and so on. But when we come to **Matt. 5:8**—“*Blessed are **the pure in heart**, for they shall **see God***”—Jesus suddenly pulls that ladder out from **under** us, making it obvious that any effort on our part to climb into **God’s presence** for some permanent **face time** with Him will just send us tumbling downward. Now if you don’t **agree**, feel free to use the next few seconds to raise your hand **high**, signifying to the **rest** of us here that you are the **one person in this room** who is perfectly “**pure in heart**”. (I didn’t think so.) But if **you’re** not “pure in heart”, then who **is**? Let’s find out by examining **1)** what being “pure in heart” **MEANS**; **2)** how one **BECOMES** “pure in heart”; and finally, **3)** the **RESULT** of being “pure in heart.” **First** of all, what does it actually **MEAN** to be “pure in heart”?

When we talk about the “**heart**”, we’re not always referring to that 11 oz., fist-sized hunk of pumping **muscle** in our chests. Even when a novice pounds out Hoagy Carmichael’s “**Heart and Soul**” on the piano, that’s not the kind of “**heart**” they’re thinking about, **is** it? So **also** it is in **Scripture**, where the “heart” or “**kardia**” in Greek was used **metaphorically** to represent “the center of all our motives and attitudes”.

Sadly, all of mankind has had a **bad ticker** ever since Adam and Eve put their hearts in the wrong place back in the **Garden**. In fact, that same spiritual **heart disease** was the source and cause of the greatest **tsunami** ever recorded! It says in **Gen. 6:51**, right before the worldwide Flood, “*The LORD saw how **great** the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the **human HEART** was only **evil all the time**.*” And of course, the rest is “nautical history”.

Even the hearts of the famous **Scribes and Pharisees**—supposedly the most righteous of **all** Jews—had gone bad by the time Jesus arrived on the scene, forcing Jesus to confront them **more** than once—as in **Matt. 9:4**— with the question, “*Why are you thinking **evil** in your **HEARTS**?*” And so, it’s well and good for Jesus to bless the “**pure in heart**”, but where exactly are you going to **find** one of those unique specimens of humanity? I’ll tell you in a moment, but perhaps we first should make sure we understand what that word “**pure**” is actually saying.

It’s an ancient Greek word, “**katharos**,” from which we get the English word “**catharsis**”, a cleansing of the emotions or the mind. The Latin word for “**chaste**” also comes from it—the same word Martin **Luther** used in his “*Explanation to the Sixth Commandment*” to describe a “**chaste and decent life**” free of sexual impurity. So, the word “**pure**” obviously refers to something **cleansed**, right? Don’t we think of something **pure** as something **clean**? In fact, it was used back then to describe **clothes** that had been **washed** or for **wheat** from which all the dusty **chaff** had been separated.

But **mostly**, the word was used to describe **wine** that hadn’t been watered **down** or precious **metals** that hadn’t been contaminated with **alloys**. So, what does that mean for **us**? It means that Jesus wasn’t so much referring to a **CLEAN** heart as one with **unmixed motives**—the single-minded person whose heart centers on **God** and doesn’t let the things of this world **taint** or water down one’s **relationship** with the Lord. Instead of being **double-minded**, the “pure in heart” are **single-minded**.

For example, I think most of us have heard of **Ivory Soap**. For close to a century and a half, Procter & Gamble has promoted it **for its two main properties**. First of all, it **FLOATS**, so you don't have to go searching for it in the bathwater. But secondly, it's gentle on your **skin** because it's "99 & $\frac{44}{100}$ % **PURE**"! But then, even **99.44% pure** still isn't **100% PERFECTLY** pure, **IS** it? So, the question arises once again: Just how **pure in heart ARE** you? Are your thoughts and motives so **pure**, so **unmixed** with anything **devious, ulterior, or base** that you've earned your niche among "**the pure in heart**"?

Let's play a **game**. Try to think of one thing you **do**—just **one thing** so **altruistic**—that it isn't tainted by double-mindedness or your own selfishness in the **least**. Is your church attendance 100% to meet with **God** or tainted just a **bit** to make sure others know you were **there**? Is that volunteer **service project** you finished still giving you **warm fuzzies**...that you were able to complete it when that other guy decided to **drop out**? Is that **offering** you put in the plate so **sacrificial** that you never even have to question the **amount**? Is your hymn singing so **heavenly-minded** that you never think even **once** how much better you sound compared to the pitifully-pitched **Pavarotti** sitting in the row in **back** of you?

Or let's make it **really** personal. Let's say one day I manage to preach a really **good** sermon—now don't **laugh**; miracles could still **happen!**—and some sweet soul **praises** my message as I greet them on their way out the church door. Do you honestly think I can divest myself of **every possible vestige of pride** or modicum of **selfish satisfaction**? In fact, the preacher and author of Pilgrim's Progress, **John Bunyan**, knew the problem **firsthand**. The story goes that he was told by a parishioner that he had preached "**well**" that day, to which Bunyan insightfully responded, "*Yes, the devil already whispered that into my ear as I was coming down the pulpit steps.*"

Prov. 20:9 asks **rhetorically**, "*Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart and am pure from sin'?*" **Jer. 13:23** reinforces the obvious answer with **another** rhetorical question: "*Can a leopard change its spots?*" Jesus Himself said in **Matt. 5:48** at the end of this **same sermon** in which He utters the beatitudes, "*Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*" Let's face it: **100% purity** is God's standard for the heart, so what's "**the 'Way'**" to become **truly** "pure in heart" before a pure and perfect God? Jesus **told** us when He said "*I am the Way...no one comes to the Father except through Me!*"

However, the Scribes and Pharisees seemed to think **INNER purity** came by **OUTER actions**. But Jesus **reversed** things and warned them in **Matt. 23:26** that they were **first** to clean the **INSIDE** of the cup and the dish, so that the **outside** may become clean **also**. In other words, even the **best actions** for the **best reasons** still won't make one **pure** if your **heart** is wrong with the Lord.

For ages monks have felt that physically **and** geographically removing themselves from the cares and distractions of this world would purify their hearts, but the problem of **impure hearts** isn't so much with the **world AROUND us** as the **worldliness WITHIN us**...from which we can never escape by merely by living in **isolation** away from our fellow *hoi polloi*.

Okay, then what **is** it that truly makes you "**pure in heart**"? In essence, it all comes down to this: there are only **two kinds of religion**—the religion of **human achievement** and the religion of **divine accomplishment**—the religion of the **head** and the religion of the **heart**. But the only **true** one is **HEART religion**, based on the **HOLY SPIRIT** implanting the purity of Christ **Himself** into our hearts by grace through **faith** in Christ Jesus. When He imputes **Jesus'** righteousness into our hearts, purity comes along **with** it. It's just another example of a gracious God Who always **provides** the same things that He **requires**, and Who not only has provided the method to **BE** pure through His **Son** but also to **LIVE** pure through His **Spirit!**

Jesus said in **John 15:3**, "*You are already pure because of the Word I have spoken to you.*" The Holy Spirit works through the **Word**, so the closer you are to **God's Word**, the more **likely** you are to reflect in **YOUR** heart what's also in **GOD'S** heart!

Yes, sinners that we **are**, we **DO** often fail to be **single-minded** toward God, so in our Lenten Epistle lesson, James reminds us to *“purify your hearts, you double-minded!”* And we **DO** that in **Christ**, because in our **hearts** we know we’re not just saved for some future **heavenly** purity but also for a present **earthly** purity, as **well**, that will **attract** others to Christ rather than push them **away!**

So then, what’s the ultimate result of being **“pure in heart”**? Jesus **tells** us: You get to see **God!** How great is **that!!** But I thought Moses was told in Exodus 33 that no man could see the face of God and **live?** Evidently, a truly **PURE heart** still makes that uniquely **possible**, because the Greek word **“autos”**—the word for **“only”**—is used with it, meaning that kind of intimate knowledge **OF** and fellowship **WITH** God is reserved **ONLY** for the pure in heart. Even better yet, the literal translation of this beatitude promises, *“They shall be continually seeing God for themselves.”* In other words, this is no **one-time event!** The pure in heart find themselves fellowshiping with God **every day**. Maybe that’s why **John 6:47** tells us that everyone who believes **HAS** eternal life—**present tense...right NOW**. When the Holy Spirit purifies our hearts in **baptism**, we **already** begin the process of living in God’s daily presence. We begin to see and to comprehend God with new spiritual eyes **every day!**

Even though it’s a common assumption that people only see what they think they’re **able** to see, some people still seem able to see even **more** when they don’t allow **OBSTACLES** to block their **view**. Where I used to have a little vacation home in **Lake Havasu, Arizona** or even now at my home in **Pine Grove**, you can go outside at night and look up into the **sky** without the interference of **streetlights** or **other** ambient lighting and be able see **so many more stars** than in **other** locations. And yet, if an **astronomer** were standing **next** to me, he’d probably see more **yet...and** even be able to **name** many of them. The same is true for the **pure in heart**. Less **distracted**, more **spiritually focused and in tune with God’s divine will**, they’re better able to see God **continually** working in their lives, blessing them with **“second sight”**, so to speak.

I think it was back around **Advent** time this past year I mentioned that one of my favorite poems and Christmas carols is, *“In the Bleak Midwinter”*, by Christina Rossetti. In it she describes the Nativity of Christ and asks: *“What can I give Him, Poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a wise man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him? I’ll give Him my HEART!”*

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Ultimately, these are words of promise already **begun** to be fulfilled in our lives from the day of our **Baptism**. True, they remind us of our constant need for spiritual **transformation**, for **continual** cleansing, and most of all, our need to give Christ our **undivided attention!** But they also show us our **daily**, as well as **eternal destiny**, pointing to the moment when the struggle will be **over** and our spiritual heart transplant **complete!**

So, I guess that in the **end**, these beatitudes are like a ladder **after** all, and every blessing a **rung**. However, it’s not a ladder by which **we** ascend into God’s presence, but a ladder by which **Christ** descends to **US** and graciously grants us His **blessings...His beatitudes**. So may God bless **YOU** as you simply **“come as you are”**, offering even your **IMPERFECT** heart to Jesus...yet knowing that He can bless and **transform** it into a truly **PURE** heart.

In our Savior’s Name, Amen.