

Sermon 8, Blessed are the Pure in Heart, Matthew 5:8

Purity consists in two things; rectitude of mind, a prizing holiness in the judgement (Psalm 119:30); conformity of will, an embracing of holiness in the affections (Psalm 119:97). --Watson

The hypocrite's tongue may be silver, yet his heart stone. --Watson

But he who is sincere, his inside is his best side.--Watson

let us try ourselves whether we are pure in heart. Do we avoid the least apparition of sin?--Watson

Proposition: Strive for purity of heart, because without it you can never be blessed with a sight of God.

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Introduction

“What do the Scriptures principally teach?” Asks the Shorter Catechism. “The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” This is the Beatitude we have all been waiting for. This one sums up, in a sense, everything you need to know. It covers our duty--that we must have a pure heart--and it covers something about God too: that He is totally pure and cannot abide the impure. Do you want to be pure? Do you want to be the kind of person that can see God? And if you don't want those things, how might this sermon speak to you? Well, it will be of interest to you for information. You can learn what God requires. You can hear about Christian belief. And you can compare your own standard of life to God's standard. Why do you approve of your own heart's impurity?

Well, rather than spending more time telling you why this sermon could be valuable to you, I want to show you this morning that you ought to strive for purity of heart, because without it you can never be blessed with a sight of God. Let me explain to you what I mean when I say this.

I. A Pure Heart Is Unmixed and undefiled

We are a lot more familiar with the concept of purity than we are with many of the other concepts in this Beatitudes. Think of the recent scandal in Flint, Michigan. What was the problem? Impure water. And similarly, when Christ pronounces the pure in heart blessed, we have a good instinctive grasp of what that kind of purity might be.

A. It Has One Goal, James 4:8

The first kind of purity is a lack of mixture. The apostle James clearly teaches that being “double-minded” is opposite to purity of heart.

1. “Mixed Motives”

We have a phrase for this in English. We talk about “mixed motives.” What do we mean by that? When we say that we spoke kindly to the family member we don't get along with from “mixed motives,” what do we mean? That some were good and some were not so great. In the same way, when we see “100% pure juice” on a bottle, then we know that the contents are not a mixture of water and corn syrup, or even 96% juice mixed with food coloring and protein powder. When we think of a “pure” substance, we think of something that is only *one* substance, not laced or mixed or contaminated with any other kind of substance. We like this kind of purity in our food, in our metals and minerals and supplements, and in the motives of our politicians.

Well, someone who is pure in heart has a heart that only has one thing that it wants. A pure heart is undivided. It doesn't sort of want God and sort of want sin.

2. Love for God Is Incompatible with Love for Idols, Matt. 22:37

That's why Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart! Notice that He didn't say to love with “most of your heart,” or “the vast majority of your heart,” or “virtually all of your heart.” Oh no. You are to love with *all* your heart. Your heart must be pure. It must not be mixed with love for Satan, for this world, for your spouse and your children. Indeed, Christ demands that we hate father and mother and brother and sister. Why?

Not because we are to hurt those people, but because God must be the one passion of our life. If you're a Christian, you're only allowed to love your mother with reference to God. You must love her because you love God better, rather than love her in competition with your love for God. Your love for anything and everything in this world must have reference to God, must love all those things *for the sake of God* and not God for their sakes.

So in other words, a heart that's divided between God and the second-best thing in the world (call it Lucifer, the greatest and highest of the angels; or if your sins take a more intellectual approach, call it philosophy, that intoxicant of the mind; or if your sins take a more hedonistic approach, call it pleasure, the intoxicant of the body) is not acceptable. It's not a heart that loves God, well, wholeheartedly. To be pure in heart is to will one thing--to will that God be all in all.

3. True Religion Is Heart Religion

And thus, in seeing what God requires of us, we see that true religion is the religion of the heart. Jesus doesn't bless those with good manners, or good lives. He blesses those who are pure on the inside. Thomas Watson points out that Aaron was supposed to wash the insides of the sacrificial animals, and so it is with us: we are supposed to wash our insides too. We are supposed to be clean and undivided within. I'm glad if your outward conduct is respectable and upstanding--but I don't take it as a clear characteristic of the Christian. The Christian has a single heart, that only loves God and everything for the sake of God. This leads to the second part of this point: a pure heart is not only not internally divided; it is also free of impurity.

B. It Is Clean, Psalm 24:4

It is this verse which is the single closest OT parallel to this Beatitude. Here, we see David proclaiming the same things James does: a pure heart and clean hands go together. Who is this person? He is the one who does not lift up his soul to vain idols and who does not tell lies. The pure in heart person is ruthlessly honest.

1. It Longs for Purity, Especially of the Tongue

A pure heart hates sin because sin defiles. Sin corrupts. Sin makes yucky. We all dislike filth; we all hate stepping in dog poop. Well, that's the attitude of the pure heart toward sin. It has no more desire to sin than you or I do to dive into the septic tank. The Beavers recently retired their septic tank and connected to the city sewer here in town. But I can promise you that, even though no new filth has flowed into that septic tank in almost a month, none of us would want to go in there. Well, that's the attitude of the pure heart toward sin. It loathes it!

The particular sin mentioned in Psalm 24:4, and in many other places like Ps. 32 and Ps. 51, is the sin of lying. Have you ever thought about the doubleness that lying always involves? It is a split between what you believe to be true and what you say you believe to be true. It is a gross impurity within the heart. And so long as you're coddling even one sin, you're indulging in it. The Lord has worked with me on this one a lot. If you tell someone that you didn't do x when you did in fact do x, you're lying. You're making your heart impure. You're corrupting your mind. You're making it impossible for God to dwell with you. This is especially the case when

you are lying about whether you committed some sin. You are polluting your heart. You are corrupting your heart. You are making it impossible for you to see God because every lie, every polluting sin, obscures your spiritual vision and indeed all your spiritual senses.

2. It Abhors Sin, Especially Idolatry

Well, not only does a pure heart hate lying; it abhors all the polluting work of sin, especially the pollution that idolatry brings. Idolatry pollutes the heart, if only by making your heart stony like your idols. Imagine going to the cardiologist and being told, “You have a rare condition called cardiac mineralization. Basically, parts of your heart muscle are fossilizing, right within your chest. Your heart is literally turning to stone. Your circulation will eventually shut down and you will die.”

“What can I do, doc?” I can bet that you would ask that question, nearly panicking, and if the doc told you that three months in Ohio at the Cleveland Clinic would save your life, you would drop everything and go. Well, worshipping idols makes you like those idols (Ps. 115:8). It takes your heart and starts making it stony. No longer is your heart pure and fleshly, five pounds of gleaming muscle. Instead, it is partly like whatever you worship. You probably aren’t tempted to worship a rock, but maybe you worship a car. Maybe you worship entertainment. Maybe you worship porn. Maybe you worship ease and comfort. Well, your heart is turning into those things as you worship them. Its spiritual senses and capabilities are fading even as we speak.

3. It Results in a Pure Life

But notice what else David says: a pure heart produces clean hands. If you have a pure heart, you stop using your body to do evil things. I hope you’ve all seen *Macbeth*, and remember Lady Macbeth lamenting that her hands will never be clean, that the blood of King Duncan cannot be washed. Macbeth himself says that all the water in the ocean could not wash his hands of that blood. But a pure heart does eventually cleanse the hands too. A pure heart keeps you from ever doing impure things with your hands. Remember, the idea is not that as long as your heart is good you can do whatever you want. Sincerity is not the whole shooting match, the only thing God requires. No; right actions are necessary for having a right heart. Clean hands and pure heart are mutually dependent on one another.

II. A Pure Heart Is a Requirement for Seeing God, Hebrews 12:14

But Jesus doesn’t stop with demanding that your heart be pure. In addition, He promises a reward. The pure in heart are blessed because they will see God! Now, why is this a requirement? Because God Himself is pure. Holiness cannot dwell with unholiness. Or to put it differently, defilement and cleanliness cannot coexist. You cannot mop a dirt floor. No matter how much cleanliness you try to produce, you only end up defiling the mop water. Similarly, you cannot track iniquity into heaven. God’s presence repels all sin. Mr. Bill Hill, who was here for the ordination, told me how he played golf a few months ago. When he revealed that he was a seminary student, his fellow players started to apologize for their foul mouths. Well, if a lowly seminary student can remind people that they need to shape up, imagine what the presence of the God of the universe does!

That's why you need to shape up and I need to shape up. Purity is a requirement for seeing God. Holiness is a requirement for seeing God. And so this asks for the question: Are you pure? Are you holy? Do you live up to what you know you ought to be? Do you keep the commandments of God? Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself? This Beatitude wasn't uttered so you could go away and say, "Purity of heart is optional. Purity of heart would be a nice addition to my current lifestyle, but is by no means a necessary one." No! Purity of heart is mandatory.

III. Seeing God Is What You Were Created For, Psalm 17:15

Why do I say that? Because you were made to see God. Three worlds can't fill your soul. You were created with an infinite hunger. We've talked about it before in this sermon series. Only by being in the presence of God can one be satisfied. That's why the Psalmist says that when he awakes, in heaven, he will be satisfied with God's likeness. That is, gazing upon God he will be filled. He will find his purpose.

A. To Be Admitted to His Presence

If you were in fact created to enjoy God forever, well, let me ask you how you think that works. Let's talk in human terms for a moment. Think of a friend you just really enjoy--someone you love to be around, someone who motivates you to excel, who gives you stimulating things to think about, who keeps you laughing, and saying, "Wow, I never thought of that." I hope we all have someone in this world that we just really enjoy. If you're truly blessed, you might have two of these people, or even three. Well, how do you enjoy that person? *By being with him or her.* You can enjoy the person at a distance, in part, through video phones, regular phones, letters, text messages, and other communication media. But nothing is as good as being in the presence of that person.

When you want to make an appointment to see your doctor, you aren't asking to look at a picture of him, or hoping that you get to see her standing on a hillside 800 yards away. What you want is to be admitted to the doctor's presence, to meet with him and talk about your condition. Well, so it is with seeing God. By seeing Him, Jesus means being admitted to His presence--standing before Him, as we talked about in Jude 24. This is the goal of the whole OT. Who can stand in God's holy place? Who can see God? Well, it's the one who's pure in heart. David knew that, and Jesus is simply repeating it, with the addition that the man is blessed who gets to see the true and living God.

B. To Be Awestruck by His Glory, Job 42:5

When Job finally saw God, he was awestruck. He had heard about Him, but seeing Him was altogether different. Seeing Him was exactly what he needed. Think about it. When your heart's spiritual receptors are jammed, covered with sin, do you easily get awestruck by God's glory? No! You're blinded by the world's glory. A 70-inch TV is enough glory for you in that kind of sinful condition. But when your heart is pure, when you're getting those spiritual signals loud and clear, you can even in this life be awestruck by the glory of God.

C. To See Him by Faith, Hebrews 11:27

Further, to see God is to perceive Him by faith. Moses endured as seeing the invisible God. Moses by faith perceived the glory of the living God, and rejoiced in it. It motivated him to leave Egypt and to endure 40 years of burdensome leading of a complaining and wicked people. This kind of sight of God is available today, right here in worship. But it can only be had by those whose pure hearts are receptive to God's word. An impure heart can't trust like this, can't give itself over to unbridled trust that God will prevail despite everything.

D. To See Him with the Mind's Eye

Well, this is the beatific vision properly so called. This is how you will enjoy God in heaven--an intellectual beholding, by which you understand an amazing amount of who He is. We will see the glory of God, and love it. That sight will transform us, for we shall see Him as He is. We will never grow tired of feasting our mind's eye on the overflowing, ever-renewing glory of God.

Let me preach about a sunset for just a second here. Only God is rich enough to create the mind-blowing beauty of a sunset each and every day, and then pull it all to pieces and start over the next day. The sunset is never the same. It's always different. You never say, "Well, I saw a sunset last week, and I'm not even going to look this week because it's going to be the same old thing." God doesn't do reruns.

Well, if a "throwaway" work of God is that glorious, that fresh and new every time, then how satisfying will be the sight of God Himself?

E. To See Him in Christ in Glory

We can't see the Father; no man has seen Him at any time. But God only begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has exegeted Him. He has declared Him! Do you want to look on the face of your Savior? Do you long to see Jesus and delight in Him? Do you want to be with Christ where He is, in the mansion He is preparing for everyone who's pure in heart? You will be able to see Jesus. He's a man like you. He's entirely visible. He's solid. He's human and warm and real. You will see Him in glory.

IV. Application: Strive for a Pure Heart!

So based on this message, what should you do? Well, strive for a pure heart. Yes, I know that none of us loves God perfectly. All of us have divided hearts and mixed motives. All of us have the pollution of sin in our hearts. The EPA would declare every one of us superfund sites that need massive cleanup before we could ever be certified "pure." That's me. That's you. James exhorts us to purify our hearts, though. For the believer, this kind of purification is possible.

For those of you who are not believers, I would urge that you think about the fact that you were made to glorify and enjoy God. This is not a joke; this is not a weird religious claim; this is public, testable truth. It is simply factual that you are designed to see God, to live in His presence. If you don't want to do that, why not? What's more attractive than God? What idol do you love today? What is it about impure hands that you prefer over God? Why do like lying better than truth? Whatever your reasons are, I can promise you that they're not going to satisfy

you. Come and talk to me about it afterward. And right now, as you listen, think about whether you really would prefer to submit to the truth, whether you really want your heart to be cleansed.

For you see, cleansing is possible. Macbeth was wrong. The murderer's hand can be washed as white as snow.

A. Study the Word of God, John 15:3, 17:17; Ps. 119:140

Already, Jesus says, you can be clean through the word He has spoken to you! It is the word of God that sanctifies--that is, that makes holy, cleansing the defilement of sin. God's word is pure, and it purifies.

Believer, are you studying that word? Do you read it avidly, daily? Do you listen to preaching, here and in the car and on the radio at home? Do you want the purity that only the word can bring?

B. Believe in the Cleansing Blood of Christ, Acts 15:9, Zech. 13:1

A fountain has been opened to cleanse everyone in Jerusalem--that is, in the church. That fountain is the blood of Christ. God cleanses the heart, and He uses the instrument of faith to do it. As He did for the Gentiles long ago, giving them the Spirit and cleansing their hearts by faith, so He can do with you. No matter how dirty your heart is, believe that if you submit to His way of salvation, God will purify it.

C. Pray for a Pure Heart, Ps. 51:10

Do you want a clean heart? Then ask God to purify it. He cleansed David; He will cleanse you. Christ died to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works.

D. Purity and Impurity are mutually exclusive!

Finally, remember this: purity and impurity are mutually exclusive. I say this even though it's obvious. Pure water with a drop of cyanide in it is not pure. Pure air with mustard gas is not pure. A heart with Christ in it drives out sin, but a heart where sin is lodged drives out Christ. Yes, in this age our hearts are mixed. All true Christians have indwelling sin. But the purity should be winning; God should be cleansing your heart by faith. If He's not, then you need to examine yourself. Do you want the blessing of seeing God? Are you pursuing every means you can to be pure in heart? If you are, then Jesus promises that you will see God. Amen.

Closing hymn: There Is a Fountain