

See God? Really? Wow!
Pure in Heart
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Series: The Beatitudes: People in Synch
Title: See God? Really? Wow! (Pure in Heart)
Text: Matthew 5:8

“Blessed are the pure in heart , for they shall see God.” As we continue our series of studies in the collection of sayings we call “The Beatitudes,,” I invite you to give attention to the most arresting one of all, to the sixth Beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” See? See God?

Now, as we have noted throughout this series, when focusing on just one Beatitude we need to hear and see it in relation to all the others. So, will you again open your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5, verses 1-12.

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

3"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

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

9"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

"Right on, in Synch are the pure in heart for they shall see God." This sixth Beatitude is my favourite. I know many of you feel the same way. The sixth Beatitude is the one I cling to the most. Why? Because of all the qualities Jesus blesses, the one I most want to have, the one I most want to be, is "pure in heart". It seems to me that if we can be "pure in heart" everything else falls into place.

And the sixth Beatitude is my favourite because of all the blessings Jesus promises, "see God" is the one I most desire. As far as I am concerned, this is the greatest promise Jesus ever made. To be promised the Kingdom of heaven; to be promised comfort in sorrow; to be promised satisfaction for hunger and thirst for right-relatedness; to be promised mercy for mercy' to be promised the name "Son of God", "daughter of God": to be promised the earth, to be given gold are all wonderful enough. But to be promised vision? "They shall see God"? It is more than wonderful. "You lucky bums indeed." Everything else pales in its light. Everything else comes into focus in its light. Maybe you saw the article in the Vancouver Sun last Monday morning, the day after the closing of the Winter Olympics. It was entitled "We'll have fun, fun fun 'til..."(3-1-20 A15) In the article Calgary-based sports psychologist Patricia Pitsel warned of the "odd sense of loss" we would feel this week after the joyful celebrating. The Olympics, she reminds us, is the biggest "world event" most of us will ever be a part of. Dr. Pitsel says "I think there are some people who are going to find there is no central meaning in their life anymore. What they were involved in and what really gave excitement and meaning to their life isn't there anymore."

"See God." "They shall see God." In His sixth Beatitude Jesus gives us the central meaning of life. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

I want to ask just one question of the Beatitudes. And I want to ask the one question of both clauses of the Beatitudes. Of the "pure in heart" clause, and of the "see God" clause. The one question will raise a host of other questions. The one question; "Is it really possible?" Is it really possible to be "pure in heart"? Is it really possible to "see God"? "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

Let us work with the "see God" clause first. "See". In what sense? See God? In what sense? I am not sure. No one is sure. Jesus' promise brings us into a place of great mystery. "see God" How is Jesus using the verb "see"? Literally? Figuratively? Metaphorically? Is He referring to a seeing with the so-called "eye of faith"? As we sang earlier "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. I want to see you?"

Or, is Jesus promising the pure in heart that they will somehow "recognize" that there is a God, that this God is good, that this God is for the, that this God is present to them, that

this God has come down in Jesus, and dwells with them and in them by the Holy Spirit? Is Jesus speaking of a kind of mental-emotional “cognition”? Or is Jesus saying that the pure in heart will see God in the same way they see other dimensions of reality? That they will see God in the same way they see people and trees and mountains and buildings?

If that is what He means then the question becomes “what do they see?” Is there some “thing” to be seen? On the one hand, there is what the apostle Paul writes in his first letter to his colleague Timothy. In the opening chapter Paul speaks of God as “eternal, immortal, invisible” (1:17). In the closing chapter, Paul speaks of God “who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; when no human has seen or can see” (6:25)

Yet, on the other hand, these are all those puzzling, mysterious texts scattered throughout the whole of the Biblical story. I think of the story of the patriarch Jacob, the story in which he wrestles with “a man” all night long (Genesis 32:22-32). As the story unfolds, Jacob concludes that he had actually been wrestling with God. The text then says “So Jacob named the place Peniel (ie the face of God) for he said, “I have seen God face to face yet my life has been preserved”. (Genesis 32:30)

I think of the story of Moses, the great leader of the Exodus, the story in which he is confronted by his sister and brother but vindicated by God. God says to Moses’ sister and brother: “Hear now My words; If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with my servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord.” (Numbers 12:6-8)

Moses beholds the form? The form of Yahweh, the Living God? Is there a form to behold? Is this merely metaphorical language? What did Moses see?

There are evenings when, after finishing whatever tasks I can, I sit in a chair or lie on the bed, and let my brain wander into vast expanse of enter-??? space. Within seconds I am way beyond Mars and Jupiter and Neptune, way beyond the nearest black hole. I let myself be awed by the sheer magnitude of it all. And then, realizing that the Living God is so much bigger than it all, and realizing that it is all help together, moment by moment in His word, I allow the question to surface, if only for a moment, the question “what is God?” Not “who” but “what”? What are you Lord? What is this Reality which transcends it all and yet graciously chooses to meet with us? “They shall see God”. What shall they see? What is in this room right now? What is moving among us right now?

Another question quickly follows. Can we see and live? Can human beings handle seeing whatever is “see-able” of God? Again I think of the story of Moses, the one in which he cries out to God “Show me Your Glory” (Exodus 33:18). Show me Your “Kabod”, your “weightiness”, show me that which makes you be God! My heart echoes Moses’ prayer “Show me Your Glory”.

God responds, "I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My Name, Yahweh, in Your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. But you cannot see My face for no one may see me and live." (33:19-20) God then tells Moses to hide in the cliff of a rock, and says "I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen." (33:22-23) "No human may see Me and live." Yet Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see." Is Jesus thereby implying that Moses was not pure in heart? Is Jesus saying that the "no human" in "no human may see Me and live" is impure human but that a pure human can see and live? Is this the point of what is revealed to the apostle John on the Island of Patmos? "And I saw a New heaven and a New earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men and women, and God shall dwell among them. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His bondservants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face" (Revelation 21:1-3; 22:3-4)

In the new creation has something happened to human beings, which enables them to behold the dazzling beauty and raw glory and live? What is clear is what is developed for us in the Gospel according to John: John begins his story of Jesus on his note: 1:18. "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God (referring to Jesus) who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained God" He has made God known (1:18)

As we read on in Scripture we then hear Jesus say things like, "When people believe in Me, they do not believe in Me only, but in the One who sent Me. When they look at Me, they see the One who sent Me." (12: 44-45)

One of Jesus' disciples Philip says to Jesus, "Show us the Father and it will be enough." Jesus responds, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? The One who has seen Me has seen the Father." (14:8-9) The unseen has become see-able in Jesus.

Thus the apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians, makes the great claim that Jesus Christ is "the visible expression of the invisible God." (1:15) And in his second letter to the Corinthians Paul writes: "God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness', is the One who has shown in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (4:4,6)

In Jesus of Nazareth infinitude is focused. In Jesus, the Living God takes on a face is it in Jesus the Face of the Living God made manifest? Enabling the impure to see and live? This affirmation raises yet another question, a practical question. Where is the Face of Jesus now so that we may behold in his Face the Face of the Infinite? Apparently not very far away. Not far at all. For what did he tell His disciples who longed for a clearer vision?

Pointing to a group of children, he said “whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me does not receive Me but the One who sent Me.” (Mark 9)

Is Jesus saying that we see His face in the face of the child who cries out for attention? In His parable of the sheep and the goats Jesus speaks of being hungry and we feeding Him, of being a stranger of us welcoming Him, of being sick and we nursed Him then Jesus has us respond:

“Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty, and give You a drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked and clothed You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You”? And the king will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent you did it to one of these My brothers and sisters of Mine, even to the least of them you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:3)

Is Jesus saying we see His face and , therefore, the face of God, in the face of the world’s marginalized? This is the secret to the joy Mother Teresa found in her work in Calcutta: She saw in the face of discarded infants and discarded elders, the Face of the Lover of her soul.

Is this what Jesus means by “see God”? That the pure in heart will recognize and embrace the Holy One in the midst of the ordinary? Or is there more? Children, after all, are not Jesus. Yes he comes to us in their coming to us. But they are not God. The hungry and strangers are not Jesus. Yes, He comes t us in their coming to us. But they are not God. So is there still another kind oof seeing? And do the pure in heart “see” when Jesus fulfills His promise? I do not know. But whatever it is Jesus is promising I want it. Whatever is involved in “seeing God” I want it. What is clear is what we see is more Beautiful than anything He has made. The beauty of His hard work cannot compare with Beauty Himself!

Let us now work with the “pure in heart” clause. The human heart “sees” what it has the capacity to see. So what does Jesus mean by “pure in heart?” And is it really possible to have it, to be it?

In the Bible, the word “heart” does not only refer to the organ that pumps our blood. “Heart” refers to the center of the human person; to the home, or seat of human feeling, thinking and willing. The word “pure” in Greek is the “katharos”, from which we develop the English word “cathater” or “catharsis”. It means to be “clean”. It means “un-mixed, un-alloyed, unadulterated.” As in pure gold, or pure maple syrup (Dan McCullough)

“Pure in heart”, therefore, means unmixed at the center, un alloyed at the centre, unadulterated at the center. O Jesus, please make it so!

Now here is where it is so important to remember that in the Beatitudes Jesus is not describing eight different kinds of people: one who is poor in spirit, another who is merciful, still another who is pure in heart. Rather, Jesus is describing eigth qualities of

the same person. The eight Kingdom qualities are all inter-related. And the order in which Jesus presents them is no accident. I believe the order is very intentional. Jesus does not begin with “pure in heart” because it needs to be heard and seen in light of the qualities which precede it.

Thus, the “pure in heart” who Jesus blesses are also “poor in spirit”. I should say, they are first and foremost poor in spirit. They know their own spiritual bankruptcy. Which means that “pure in heart” are not perfect and they know it. The “pure in heart” whom Jesus blesses are also “those who mourn”. They grieve over their sin and the sin of the world which means the “pure n heart” have not arrived and they know it. The “pure in heart” whom Jesus blesses are “meek”. They know they cannot make it on their own. The “pure in heart” also hunger and thirst for righteousness but crave to be so. Again, this means that “pure in heart” does not mean “perfect”. The “pure in heart” are also merciful. Their own poverty of spirit, grief, hunger and thirst, create a tenderness toward and sympathy for their fellow humans. The “pure in heart” understand and feel the common human struggles and failures. I see this “purity of heart” in so many of you.

It is helpful to look at how the term “pure in heart” is used elsewhere in the Bible. Of particular help is the way it is used in the Psalms, and in particular, Psalm 24.

Psalm 24, verses 3-4. “who may ascend into the hill of Yahweh? And who may stand in His holy place? They who have clean hands and a pure heart... who have not lifted up their souls to falsehood, and have not sworn deceitfully.”

In this text “purity of heart” is elaborated as “not lifting one’s soul to falsehood” and “not swearing deceitfully.” Suggesting that “purity of heart” has to do with integrity. “blessed are those who have integrity at the center.” Who know how easy it is to be deceived, to play games with reality. Who, therefore crave truth: who seek truth, face truth, tell truth, live truth. Thus J. B. Phillips renders the sixth Beatitude as “blessed are the utterly sincere.” Or as John Stott puts it, “Their whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and others.” (Christian Counter-Culture, 49)

The “pure in heart” are not perfect. It is just that they know they cannot hide anything from God. So they bring their thoughts, their emotions, their fears and dreams into the light of God’s truth and grace.

One of the regular prayers of the “pure in heart” is the last verse of Psalm 139. “Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there is any way of pain in me.” They pray this way because of the first verse of Psalm 139: “O Lord, You have searched me and know me.” There is no escaping God’s presence and God’s intimate knowing of us. The “pure in heart” know this and open up the whole of life to God’s searching, cleansing, healing light.

“Congratulations! Says Jesus, “For you shall see God.”

So how do we become “pure in heart”? How do we get this “integrity” and “transparency” at the center? Answer? By getting Jesus! By getting His Gospel or better by Jesus getting us! By the Gospel getting us!

“It is time”, Jesus says. “It is time for the Kingdom of heaven to come near.” It is time for the world beyond to break into this world. It is time for heaven to come down to earth. It is time for God’s new world order of truth to invade and transform every sector of life. As Matthew says just before recording the Beatitude quoting the prophet Isaiah: “The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light.”

And it turns out that the light is a Person! Truth is a Person! When he gets a hold on us, He begins to expose all the lies about ourselves and God. He awakens an abhorrence for hypocrisy and manipulation. He quickens a passion for integrity at the center of our being.

You see? The “pure in heart” become what they become because Purity Himself has taken hold of their hearts! As philosopher Peter Kneeft puts it: we attain purity in heart NOT by imitation of Christ but by the incorporation into Christ, the Christ who has perfect purity of heart.” (For Heaven’s Sake, 169)

When the disciple Peter first met Jesus he became aware of how impure he was. He fell down at Jesus’ feet, crying out , “Depart from Me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (Luke 5:8)

Steven Walschmidt, an actor from Calgary, wrote a short play on that scene. He has Peter say to Jesus, “Go away from me Jesus, because I will make you dirty.” To which Steven has Jesus say, “ No, Peter.. you will not make me dirty... I will make you clean.”

I want to conclude with a conversation St. Francis of Assisi had with a fellow monk, one Brother Leo. As they were walking together Francis noticed that Leo was quite low, maybe even depressed. So Francis asked, “Leo, do you know what it means to be “pure in heart?”

“Of Course. It means to have no sins, faults or weaknesses to reproach myself for.”

“Ah, “ said Francis, “now I understand why you’re sad. We will always have something to reproach ourselves for.”

“Right,” Said Leo. “That’s why I despair of arriving at purity of heart.:

“Leo, listen carefully to me. Do not be so preoccupied with the purity of hear. Turn and look at Jesus. Admire Him. Rejoice that he is what He is – your Brother, your friend, you Lord and Savior. That, little brother, is what it means to be pure of heart. And once you have turned to Jesus, do not turn back and look at yourself. Do not wonder where you stand with Him.

“The sadness of not being perfect, the discovery that you really are sinful, is a feeling much too human, even borders in idolatry. Focus your vision outside yourself on the beauty, graciousness, and compassion of Jesus Christ. The pure of heart praise Him from sunrise to sundown. Even when they feel broken, feeble, distracted, insecure, and

uncertain, they are able to release it into His peace. A heart like that is stripped and filled – stripped of self and filled with the fullness of God. It is enough that Jesus is Lord.” After a long pause, Leo said, “Still, Francis, the Lord demands our effort and fidelity.” “No doubt about that,” replied Francis. “But holiness is not a personal achievement. It is an emptiness you discover in yourself. Instead of resenting it, you accept it and it becomes the free space where the Lord can create anew. To cry out, ‘You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord,’ that is what it means to be pure of heart. And it does not come by your Herculean efforts and threadbare resolutions.”

“Then how?”, asked Leo.

“Simply hoard nothing of yourself; sweep the house clean. Sweep out even the attic, even the nagging, painful consciousness of your past... Renounce everything that is heavy, even the weight of your sins. See only the compassion, the infinite patience, and the tender love of Christ. Jesus is Lord. That suffices...The desire for holiness is transformed into a pure and simple desire for Jesus.”

Leo listened gravely as he walked along beside Francis. Step by step he felt his heart grow lighter as a profound peace flooded his soul,” (quoted By Brennan Manning in *Lion and Lam*, 181-182)

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” See God? Blessed are those who have left behind the pre-occupation with how well they are doing and are simply captivated by Jesus of Nazareth for they are seeing God!”