

## IN PURITY

12<sup>th</sup> April 2015

### Matthew 5:8 and Psalm 24

Let me ask you a question? Do you consider yourself as someone who is big-hearted or maybe warm-hearted – perhaps you are a little cold hearted or are you even hard-hearted. Whatever your answer I suspect we all understand what we mean when we think about our heart in this way. Because today we're concentrating on: "Blessed are the pure in **heart**, for they will see God" – Matthew 5:8

Jesus is very interested in our heart, he has a real concern for what's going on inside. You see compared to the inside of our hearts it's relatively easy to look good on the outside and being seen to do all the right things. Coming to church regularly, volunteering and helping others, giving our money and being a good Christian person – don't get me wrong there's nothing wrong with this. But what Jesus is saying in this beatitude is what really matters is what's going on inside. What's happening deep down in our heart.

So let's test this...do you answer the phone? The customer phones up and we're as nice as pie to them but as we put the phone down our heart speaks – "What a stupid idiot, or why didn't the silly fool know the answer to that"! On the outside we look great but on the inside our heart reveals a very different view. And it's that view Jesus is concerned about. Cleaning up our act on the outside is not enough – cleaning up our heart is what really counts.

So let's unpack this a bit. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God gives us a focus on four words, 'pure', 'heart' and 'see God' so to help us concentrate on this let's consider these four questions...

1. What do our hearts reveal?
2. What is it to see God?
3. What is it to be pure in heart?
4. How are we to respond?

#### 1. What do our hearts reveal?

In Matthew 23:27-28 Jesus reveals the hearts of the religious leaders of that time: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness".

So if that's what Jesus thinks of the religious leaders of that time what does he think of us now. With that in mind this beatitude challenges me because my heart is truly what I am (there is no mask there at all, all the acting is removed). Two weeks ago Ruth and I went away for the weekend with six friends to the Isle of Wight. I felt quite made up when during the course of a conversation one of them commented on how I was always so easy going and able to have a laugh. That was until Ruth corrected them – she's known me for over 34 years and understands my heart better than anyone. She knows what I'm like in private, when I'm tired, when I'm grumpy – when I'm definitely not easy going or able to have a laugh. But that's okay because deep down in my heart in the secrecy of my own thought and feeling, nobody (not even Ruth) knows but... God does! And what we are at the invisible root matters as much to God as what we are at the visible branch.

In 1 Samuel 16:7 it says: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"

In Matthew 15:18-19 Jesus say: "the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander".

Theologian John Piper puts it like this: *"The heart is utterly crucial to Jesus. What we are in the deep, private recesses of our lives is what he cares about most. Jesus did not come into the world simply because we have some bad habits that need to be broken. He came into the world because we have such dirty hearts that need to be purified"*.

And so this morning as we hear Jesus say to us "Blessed are the pure in heart" .....we're probably all thinking – 'well that's fine but how on earth am I ever going to be really "pure" in my heart – in my instance I can't even fool Ruth so I certainly can't harbour any notion of fooling God! But just imagine the outcome.... If more and more people we're pure in heart then society and the world would be a much better place - it will change our lives, it will change society but the actual goal is much higher – listen again to what Jesus says "Blessed are the pure in heart for **they will see God**". We will see God. And seeing God is the great goal of being pure. So...

## 2. What Is It to See God?

Have you ever been to see the doctor? Sometimes instead of an actual appointment you're given a consultation over the phone. But it's never quite the same as actually sitting with the doctor face to face. You see I don't phone the reception and ask to see the doctor from a distance or can I see a picture of him or her. What I want is an appointment. But when I get that appointment I know I've got to make an effort to get myself down to the surgery, I don't want to be late and usually I sit there in the waiting room feeling a bit apprehensive. Then I get the call – I always knock on the door and I have an instant respect for the doctor and nearly always refer to him or her as doctor. When I meet face to face I can see the doctor, I have an actual appointment with him or her – it matters, it's important. I'm there in the doctor's presence.

So what is it to see God? Well first and foremost it means being admitted to his presence. With the doctor – once in his or her presence I instantly feel a sense of respect. Well with God it's going to be much more than that – seeing God means being awestruck by his glory—by a direct experience of His holiness. And in this life as we grow in purity of heart we see glimpses of Him in many ways throughout our lives. For example...

- Those moments when we witness the awesomeness of God in his creation around us.
- In scripture, as we embrace and hear his voice.
- In prayer as we open ourselves to his grace and Will.
- And in service as we humbly seek to bring glory to Him.
- Also at conversion – As we honestly, passionately and authentically seek God we discover Him calling us and in a sense then 'see' Him, not merely as Creator, but as our Lord and Saviour”.

I remember when I was confirmed it dawned on me for the first time – this real tangible sense of God and being completely overwhelmed by what I can only describe as a touch of God's presence and sobbing uncontrollably for a few moments in a complete sense of joy.

Let me quote again from John Piper: *“Virtually all of our spiritual sight in this life is mediated to us through the Word of God or the work of God in providence. We "see" images and reflections of his glory. We hear echoes and reverberations of his voice. But there will come a day when God himself will dwell among us. His glory will no longer be inferred from lightning and mountains and roaring seas and constellations of stars. Instead our experience of him will be direct. His glory will be the very light in which we move and the beauty of his holiness will be tasted directly like honey on the tongue”.*

So as Jesus says: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God” – this means being admitted to His presence, not just kept in the waiting room. Being helped and comforted by His grace and being awestruck with a direct experience of His glory. But it is only through God's grace freely given to us through Jesus that we will ultimately see him face to face. And this we have—in part now, and fully in the age to come.

### 3. What is it to Be Pure in Heart?

So what is to be pure in heart? In our reading from Psalm 24. V 3 & 4 provide a close parallel to the beatitude we are looking at today: “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and **a pure heart**, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false”.

Swearing by what is false means telling lies under oath. Dishonesty comes easily, especially when complete truthfulness could cost us something, make us uncomfortable, or put us in an unfavourable light. But ultimately dishonest communication hinders relationships. Without honesty, a relationship with God is impossible. If we lie to others, we begin to deceive ourselves. God cannot hear us or speak to us if we are building a wall of self-deception.

By contrast – how greatly God values honesty! A pure heart is a heart that has nothing to do with falsehood. It is painstakingly truthful and free from deceitfulness. Deceit is what we do when we **will** two things, not one thing.

- We will to do one thing and we will that people think we are doing another.
- We will to feel one thing and we will that people think we are feeling another.

That is impurity of heart. Purity of heart is to will one thing, namely, to "seek the face of the Lord" as we read in verses 5 & 6 of our reading. "He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob".

Now take a look at James 4:8 "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and **purify your hearts**, you double-minded". Just like Psalm 24:3&4 there is reference to both clean hands and a pure heart as preparation for drawing near to God, or "ascending the hill of the Lord". But notice how the people are described who need to purify their hearts: They are referred to as "double-minded". In other words people who will two things not just one thing. The impurity of double-mindedness is explained in James 4:4 "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God". Being double-minded is having a heart that is divided between the world and God, like a wife who has a husband and a lover. Purity of heart on the other hand is to will one thing, namely, full and total allegiance to God. And of course this is exactly what Jesus teaches. In Matthew 22:37 where he says: "Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind". Not with part of your heart. Not with a double or divided heart. That would be impurity. Purity of heart is no deception, no double-mindedness, no divided allegiance.

Here's another quote from John Piper: *"Purity of heart is to will one thing, namely, God's truth and God's value in everything we do. The aim of the pure heart is to align itself with the truth of God and magnify the worth of God. If you want to be pure in heart, pursue God with utter single-mindedness. Purity of heart is to will that one thing"*.

#### **4. How are we to respond?**

So, how do we respond? I don't know about you but I know that I am not pure in heart. I live out my life revealing what I hope looks good to the world while on the inside my heart is actually doing something else – I am 'double-minded'. By contrast Jesus says the pure will see God. The pure in heart will be granted entry to his presence, and worship him in the glory of his holiness, and be comforted by his grace.

But where does that leave me and you. Because we know we mess up, we know we're not pure in heart. In Proverbs 20:9 it says: "Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"? In Matthew 19:25 the disciples (who lived with and followed Jesus first hand) are recorded as saying: "Who then can be saved?"

But before we beat ourselves up too much also remember this. Purity of heart does not mean perfection. In 1 John 1:8 it says: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us".

Let me quote from two more theologians. First John Blanchard: "There is nothing in the Bible – let alone in this Beatitude – which gives anyone the right to claim sinless perfection on this side of the grave". Now another theologian Arthur Pink from the last century who said: "One of the most conclusive evidences that we **do** possess a pure heart is to be conscious of and burdened with the impurity which still indwells us". Well here is the good news! In Matthew 19:26 which follows on immediately after the disciples said "Who then can be saved" - Jesus provides the answer. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

You see this is not about what we can do to ensure we are blessed and see God. Rather this is about what God in his grace is already doing in our lives and we merely need to open our hearts and accept this free gift. Because God creates **a purity for us** and in us so that we can pursue purity. The wonderful thing about all of this is because of God's grace (his overwhelming love for you and me) we are able to seek that gift. In Psalm 51:10 we hear David pray: "Create in me a pure heart, O God". In God's grace we must seek the same gift of a pure heart with the same prayer and look to Jesus... "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good". (Titus 2:14) And the response of our hearts to God's act of creation and Christ's act of sacrifice is a single-minded faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

So let me bring this to a close...in Acts 15:9 it says: "He purified their hearts by faith". In this life, if we are sincerely and with all integrity following Jesus then as God's people we are gradually "being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor 3:18). That transformation will be instantaneously completed when we see our Saviour face to face and in doing so become like him. Because God is the one who purifies the heart, and the instrument with which he cleans it is faith. Therefore, "Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart" (Proverbs 3:5). Will this one thing. And you will see God. Amen.