

Blessed are the Pure in Heart, for they Will See God – Matthew 5:8

Dove soap is 99 44/100ths percent pure... That is the ad line that is meant to cause us to trust this product and buy it. We like the idea of purity. And because of that, we might be tempted to ask, so what is in the other 56/100 of a percent?

When we do the laundry, we would not think we had succeeded if the clothes were “almost” clean. Somehow I got ink on the collar of my bathrobe, and so I washed it, trying to get it out. I used special cleaning agents, I washed the robe twice and I still have a little trace of ink on it. When Lise got home, she said I should have used hairspray to get it out – sigh, I was all out! Though my bathrobe is nice and clean I am not completely happy because there is still a little trace of blue on the collar. Almost clean is not quite good enough.

Jesus is saying in the sixth Beatitude, or the sixth key to the blessed life from the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5, that a heart almost clean is not good enough either. The blessed person, the one walking in the closest fellowship with God and experiencing His grace is the one who is pure in heart:

**Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.**

### 1. What is Purity?

A quick study of the Greek word used here in the text is helpful. The word used is *katharos*, and was used in several ways:

- a. to clean, as in to clean your clothes. Yes, even in Jesus’ day the whites should be white and the colours coloured, with no stains or spots! And Jesus gave his life so that we could have clean lives – not partially cleaned, not covered up sin, but fully cleansed – pure.
- b. It was also used to describe the winnowing process – be it cleaning the chaff from the grain, or going through the ranks of an army and sending home all those who were fearful, cowardly or ineffective so that only the strongest and best soldiers remained. It is clear that there must be something removed from our lives, our hearts, if we are to be pure before God.
- c. It was also used to describe wine that was not diluted with water, or metal that was not mixed with other metal, but was pure. Jesus is calling his followers to live with unmixed motives or allegiances. We are to be set on one purpose, and only one, and that is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to show that love in service to Him and others. We are not part time Christians, followers of Jesus when it is convenient or it suits our needs... instead, all that we do we do in response to our love for Jesus. We do not try to serve Jesus and the world at the same time. Our allegiance is undivided.

## 2. What is to be purified?

It is important to note that Jesus says that it is the heart that is to be purified. Too often we think it is about the externals – our performance, our actions, our religious observances.

That is what the religious folk called Pharisees of Jesus' day did. They were very careful to attend church, give money to the church and the poor, they ate the right things and avoided the wrong things, they said nice prayers and hung out with the nice people of society. They worked hard to purify the outside – and Jesus said of them:

Matt 23:27 "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.

Obviously Jesus was not impressed with their attempts at being pure on the outside while ignoring what was going on inside their hearts. Jesus says,

### **Blessed are the pure in heart...**

Of course Jesus is not saying the organ we call a heart needs to be removed, scrubbed and returned within the chest cavity. The heart stood for all that was within a person – not just feelings, though it did include this, but also the intellect and will.

This goes to what motivates us – why we do what we do. Is it out of love for others, or hope of gain for ourselves. Is it to show kindness to the hurting or to get applause from those looking on? Are we motivated by anger, or thoughts of revenge, or do we truly seek justice and restitution?

As I think of the pure heart – which also speaks of a pure mind – I cannot help but think of all the impure ways our minds can be corrupted today. Images of sexuality and violence and greed inundate us constantly. I would hope that Christians would heed the Apostle Paul's words:

whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Jesus said his followers will always have a pure heart – pure motives, no hidden agendas, no deception. Nothing to hide.

This means the heart must be right – changed from its natural selfishness to a heart that beats for others. Compassion, sympathy, love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, forgiveness,... this is what

characterizes the heart of the Christian. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

### 3. Is it possible?

I do not know about you, but I want a heart like this – a pure heart. I want to live my life set on one goal, and one goal alone – to love and serve Jesus. I want to be a person without guile or any deception.

Is it possible – in this life? Many folk will say, you can be forgiven of your sin and guaranteed a place in heaven by putting your faith in Jesus. But do not expect to be made pure in this life. That only happens in heaven.

But I hear Jesus say, “Blessed are the pure in heart...”. This means he sets before us something that can be attained now. Jesus never teases us or misleads us. He would not call us to something that was impossible. He would never say, “You must fly to church each Sunday and not take a car... just spreads your arms and flap and you will fly to church.” He would never say that because it is impossible.

But He did say, “Blessed are the pure in heart...”

This is one of the great mysteries of God’s power and grace. God can take our hearts, no matter how messed up they may start, and He can make them pure. Listen to what the early church reports God is doing in the first century church:

<sup>8</sup> God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. <sup>9</sup> He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (Acts 15:8,9)

The God who spoke creation into being, who knit each of us together in our mother’s womb, who holds the stars and planets in their courses, can and will change our hearts through the power of His Spirit within us.... If only we will let Him.

The purification of our hearts begins when we repent of our sins and invite Jesus to come into our lives and forgive us all of our sins. Each of us must do this – it is the only way we can come before a holy and righteous God. We must accept his gift of forgiveness and cleansing through Jesus. It is the sin in our lives – the wrong we have done – that keeps us from God. So God provided a way for our sin to be forgiven by Jesus dying on the cross of Calvary, taking our place, and then Jesus invites us to be set free from the dominion of sin by inviting Him into our lives as Lord.

What a wonderful day when our sins are forgiven and cleansed from our lives. But Jesus' work has just begun in us. God's ultimate goal for us is that we would be like Jesus. But we have a heart problem, and even the heart that loves Jesus can still be selfish, unloving towards others, carrying grudges and a host of other things that are anything but Christ like.

God reveals these things in our hearts that are displeasing to him – not so much the actions we do but our very disposition. So we pray with the Psalmist,

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:10-12)

And as we pray that prayer God works in our hearts a transformation, making us clean and pure before him. Our heart's compass will be set right, and it will always point us to Jesus. We will learn to love the things that Jesus loves as the Holy Spirit works within us.

Will it mean we will never make another mistake? No. Indeed, we are still very much human and prone to errors in judgment. That will be with us until we enter heaven itself. Hopefully as we grow and mature we make less mistakes, but there are no guarantees on that.

But even in our failures our hearts are set on doing right – there has been no deception, no hidden agendas, no hypocrisy. Our hearts are true...

And we do not praise ourselves for a pure heart – it is not something we did – we did not work hard to achieve it, or discipline ourselves into it, or discover some special method to get us there. It is the Holy Spirit's work within us and to him be the praise. As we surrender, he purifies.

Can God really give us a pure heart – today? I hear echoing in my soul the words spoken to a young maiden named Mary who was about to carry in her womb the Son of God, and give birth to the Saviour of the World:

“For nothing is impossible with God.” Luke 1:37

#### **4. The Promise**

For those who will invite God through the Holy Spirit to purify their hearts, God promises them a most wonderful thing – they will see God.

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

A young man attended a small group meeting where people were encouraged to share their questions and concerns about the Christian faith.

“I went into the woods one day,” this man began, “and I sat down on a sandy patch of ground and I said to God, “God, if you will destroy that pine tree that I am looking at I will believe in you.”

I sat there a long time, but nothing happened. Now if there was a God, why didn't he reveal himself to me when I asked him to?”

Many people are like this young man, sincere about their desire to know if there is a God – sincere in their desire to see God – but mistaken in how they approach him.

**Like many people today the young man wanted God to reveal Himself on his terms, but God does not work like that. God reveals Himself to us on his own terms, and the most amazing thing is that when we look into the face of Jesus we are looking into the face of God. Do you want to see God? Then look into the face of Jesus.**

And who has been given the privilege of looking into the face of Jesus? The pure in heart. As God works in our lives, purifying our hearts by faith, our eyes are opened to see who Jesus really is. Today we see by faith, but one day – maybe soon – we will see Jesus face to face as He returns to take us home. On that day.... **“Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (God)” (Phil 2:10-11)**. On that day – Muslim, Jew, Atheist, Buddhist, New Ager, Christian will see Jesus for who he truly is, and bow before him.

We need not wait until that day. Today we see by faith and know Jesus is Lord and we worship him who died to make our hearts pure. Today we hear His promise that

Today, the choice has been given to us – to live with a pure heart, or a heart still in need of Christ's cleansing touch. We can be blessed by asking the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts by faith, or we can struggle along in our own strength trying to be a good enough Christian.

God wants to change us at the core of our being – the heart. Someone has said that if you want the streams to give good water then you must cleanse the fountain – it's source. That is what God is wanting to do in us today.

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