

Beatitudes: *Blessed Are the Pure in Heart* - week 7

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - June 14, 2020

(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson's *Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*)

We're continuing our series on the Beatitudes drawing from the book by Rev. Darrell Johnson, *The Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*.

I want to begin with a question that sorta gets at the point of this Beatitude and this sermon. *"Is the Christian life about avoiding sin or about enjoying God?"* While a focus on sin has been predominant in a lot of Christian teaching, it's not the primary point of the Christian life. Drawing close to the heart of God is. In fact, that's what Jesus is on about in this Beatitude.

Today we are considering, Matthew 5:8, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

Jesus is blessing those who have left behind the preoccupation with how well they are doing. He's blessing those *lucky bums* who have left behind any obsession with their sin. St. Francis of Assisi once wrote about this to a fellow monk who was depressed by his own sin. He wrote, *"Sweep out the attic... Renounce everything that is heavy... See only the compassion, the infinite patience, and tender love of Christ."* When we are grabbed by the gospel of God's love shown to us in Jesus, any obsession with our own sin is, thankfully, replaced by a pure and simple desire for Jesus. **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

You know, of all the qualities Jesus blesses, I think purity of heart, *dropping the preoccupation with how well are doing*, is most desirable. And then the reward of “seeing God” is equally desirable. Everything else pales in comparison to these. We *lucky bums* get to enjoy the *compassion, infinite patience, and tender love of our Heavenly Father* clearly seen in Jesus. Let us put everything else aside, even the weight of our sins, and enjoy this relationship we were created for.

Rev. Darrell Johnson writes that “*seeing God*” is the greatest promise Jesus ever made. To be promised the kingdom of heaven, to be promised comfort in sorrow, to be promised satisfaction of our hunger and thirst for right-relatedness, to be promised mercy for mercy, to be promised the name “son of God” or “daughter of God,” or to be promised the earth, they are all wonderful enough. But to be promised “they shall see God”: everything else pales in comparison.

I think I could stop the sermon there and we could just think through when we’ve seen God, when we’ve experienced God’s healing love and grace, when we’ve enjoyed God’s presence. But I want to ask a question some may be thinking, “*Is it really possible to be pure in heart?*” and that leads to, “*Is it really possible to see God?*”

Let us then consider the phrase “see God,” “see” - in what sense? I am not sure; no one is sure. Jesus’ promise brings us into a place of great mystery. And that’s OK.

We know Jesus says, **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”** (John 14:8-9). The unseen has become see-able in Jesus. So much that the apostle Paul can make the great claim that Jesus Christ is **“the image [the visible expression] of the invisible God”** (Colossians 1:15). Of this Rev. Darrell Johnson writes, *“In Jesus, infinitude is focused. In Jesus, the Living God takes on a face.”* This then raises another question, a practical question: *Where is the face of Jesus now, so that we may behold in His face the face of the Living God?*

Well, apparently, it is not very far away. 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 Him who sent Me”** (Mark 9:37). Jesus is saying that somehow we see His face in the face of the child who cries out for attention.

And in Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus speaks of being hungry and us feeding Him, of being a stranger and us welcoming Him, of being sick and us nursing Him. Then Jesus has us respond, as the disciples did, **“Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?”** The King will answer and say to them, **“Truly I say to you, to the extent you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me”** (Matthew 25:37-40).

Jesus is here saying that somehow 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 faces 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 ordinary people?

But is there more? Yes, He comes to us in their coming to us, but they are not God. So is there still another kind of seeing? And what do the pure in heart “see” when Jesus fulfills His promise? We do not know. It is still a mystery. But whatever Jesus is promising, what is clear is that the beauty of humanity cannot compare with seeing the One who Created us!

Now what does Jesus mean by the “*pure in heart*” clause. And is it really possible to have it, to be pure in heart? “Purity of heart” has to do with integrity. Integrity at our center. Psalm 24 talks about it. Psalm 24 helps us say, ***“Blessed are those who have integrity at the center.”***

Note now: nowhere does He say the “pure in heart” are perfect or have to be perfect. It is important to remember that in the Beatitudes Jesus is describing eight qualities of the same person of whom Jesus' gospel has come upon. Therefore, the “pure in heart” do not have to be perfect. For they know they are “poor in spirit,” the first Beatitude. That is they are spiritually bankrupt before God. They're

lucky bums who know know they don't need to hide anything from God and they have nothing with which to buy the Kingdom. This is good news, God knows us and He's not obsessed with our sin, so we don't need to be either. *We lucky bums get to see God.*

The "pure in heart" are then living *in sync* with the real kingdom of God's love and so they bring their thoughts, they bring their emotions, their fears and dreams into the presence, into the light, of their Heavenly Father into the light of God's love and grace. The "pure in heart" open up the whole of their life to God's cleansing and healing light without fear. **"Congratulations,"** says Jesus, **"for you shall see God!"**

So, this sounds wonderful: how then do we become "*pure in heart*"? This isn't something we can generate in ourselves, after all. How do we get this integrity, this transparency at our center? By getting Jesus and knowing the loving heart of His Father! By getting His gospel. Or, better yet, by Jesus getting us! By His gospel getting us! By the Father's love getting us! He comes to us after all, like the Father in the Prodigal story ran to meet and hug and kiss His lost son.

The "pure in heart" then have become so, *not by perfection*, but by living in the presence of our Heavenly Father and knowing that He sees them as loved children. The "*pure in heart*" have heard Jesus' message, "*It is time*"

and they're leaping for joy, for they know that He's leading them to His Father's heart.

"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 to earth. It is time for God's new world order of mercy to invade and transform every sector of life. As Matthew says just before recording the Beatitudes, quoting the prophet Isaiah, **"The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light"** (Matthew 4:16; Isaiah 9:2).

It turns out that the Light is a Person! And when He gets a hold on us He begins to expose all the lies about ourselves and about God. And we begin to want integrity in our center. When the disciple Peter first met Jesus, he became aware of how impure he was: his poverty of spirit. He fell at Jesus' feet crying out, **"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man"** (Luke 5:8). But good news! Jesus is saying to us, *"No, you will not make me dirty; I will make you clean."* We need that. We need that gospel truth. We need to know Jesus' presence makes us clean.

In conclusion, blessed are those who have left behind the preoccupation with how well they are doing and are simply captivated by the presence of Jesus. For they are seeing God!

Thank you, Father. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.