



The Trinity Pulpit



It's What's on the Inside that Matters Matthew 5:8; I John 3:1-3

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I must admit that I am a chocoholic. I love chocolate! My assistant, Reenie, keeps a basket of chocolate on her desk for me to nibble on. Sometimes I ask her to hide it, but when she does, I go looking for it. Sometimes I put a note to myself on the basket about gaining weight, but it does me no good. I ignore my own note or just remove it. I am weak, I know, but I love chocolate. In the office at Christmas, many times we receive a box of chocolates. You know those boxes of different chocolates with centers that are filled with all types of ingredients, some of which are not known to the human mind. I must admit that there are times when I bite into one of the mystery chocolates and they go quickly into the waste basket. There are other times I have been known to squeeze the chocolate enough to see what was on the inside before I ate the whole piece. As much as I love chocolate, I really want to know what is on the inside before I eat it. What is on the inside really matters to a true chocolate lover.

Jesus tells us "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Jesus reminds us that what is on the inside really does matter. We are reminded that this beatitude is building on the others we have already considered; they were not random sayings but a sermon or teaching where each statement took the listener farther along the road in the consideration of what it meant to be a part of the kingdom of God.

The first three beatitudes had inward-looking instructions. Jesus is telling us to come to

grips with the fact that we are sinful humans and we need to turn to God for forgiveness. We must realize we are poor in spirit or that we need something beyond our self. We must mourn our sinfulness and our shortcomings, for then we will be forgiven and comforted. We must assume the nature of Jesus, which is to be humble before God that God might lift us up. These attitudes take us to the height of the teaching which is to hunger and thirst for Jesus and we will be filled. The result of this attitude is that we will begin to show the very character of God and what it means to be part of the kingdom of God. We will be people who practice mercy. We will be people who have a purity of heart—that is, our inward life will match our outward living. And next week, we will see that we will practice peace.

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

—Matthew 5:8

Today we are told that as we become like Jesus, we will be pure in heart for the pure in heart see God. This is one of the great promises of Scripture. To see God is an awesome promise. Now for some of us, seeing God might scare us. And to some degree it should. We need to reverence God, for God is holy, and God is other, and God is... well, God. But at the same time it should excite us. The Christian should have the desire to see and know God. That is what we want. A pure heart reveals God to us. So, what does Jesus mean by a pure heart?

Let's look first at the word *heart*. There were many words in the Greek to describe our intellect, feelings, or will. Sometimes

we think of the heart as the will which we equate with our ability to choose and to act. The heart is sometimes referred to as that will of man or woman. The heart is sometimes equated with how we feel. To be sure, in our culture, the heart has become the seat of emotion and not the seat of intellect or will. When we think about the heart in our culture, we think about romance, a strong desire, and emotions. We say things like “I don’t feel I love them anymore” or “I feel like I am falling in love.” Feeling surrounds the word for *heart*. The heart is also the symbol for the day we celebrate romance in our culture. However, in the Bible there is another word to describe emotion and that is the bowels. That is where we get our saying “I feel it in my gut.” It is the idea of feeling deep down within us. Sometimes we use the word heart to describe our thinking. However, we know that there is another word for the idea of intellect and the mind. So, how are we to look at this instruction of Jesus regarding the heart? The heart is, as William Barclay would put it, all of these things; it encompassed the whole person – their thinking, their will that makes them act, and their feelings, all make up the heart.

It makes sense to us then when we hear that we must love the Lord with all of our heart. We are to be pure in heart, for then we will see God. To be pure in heart was to be pure not only in our feeling, but in our thinking and our choices as well. We must remember that Jesus’ teaching stood in conflict with the teaching of many of the Pharisees of his day who had reduced faith in God to actions. They were concerned with their actions and with others seeing their actions. Jesus would accuse them of being dead inside although from the outside they appeared alive. He would call them “whitewashed tombs” – all nice and white on the outside but inwardly like death. In contrast, Jesus says that the pure in heart – the pure person – will see God.

What does it mean to be pure? There are really two ways to look at this word. The first is that we are single-minded, singularly focused. This week started hunting season and if you are a hunter, which by the way I am not, you look through a scope to find your target. You know that you look with a single eye through that scope, closing the

other one, so that you can be fully focused in that moment. That is what the word *pure* means: to close out everything else so that you can see only one thing. It might also be the practice of a runner at the starting line; the coach tells her to look straight ahead, to not look to the right or left but only at the finish line. It is the thought of a scientist who looks intently at an organism, equation, or formula, and in that moment, there is nothing else that comes to their thinking except that on which they are focusing. To be pure in heart is to have such a focus on the things of God. It is to be single minded.

It also means not to be mixed like an alloy – to be unmarred and unmixed. Instead of adding a substance to delude another substance, the picture of *pure* is that which is undivided by anything else. So, a pure heart is an undivided heart.

In Psalm 86, David prayed that he might have an undivided heart so that he may fear the name of the Lord. An undivided heart was David’s prayer. We know David was a man of contradictions: he lived his life in devotion to God, yet he failed miserably at times to follow God’s ways. His heart longed for God, yet at the same time he lusted and chased after things not of God. Many times his actions were those which brought God glory, and at other times his actions of sin caused himself and others great pain. There were moments when David was the pride of his nation, and there were moments when they were disappointed in him. David, like all of us, struggled with a divided heart. We want to be undivided in our hearts, but the truth is, we struggle with this desire. Paul struggled as did Thomas and Peter and all of us. Our prayer is that of David’s: “Give us an undivided heart that we might fear Your name.” To be pure in heart is to have an undivided heart. It is to long for God more than anything else. It is to be single minded and focused on God with all that we are. Is this possible? Not completely. But with God’s help it can grow in an ever-increasing manner. We can learn to be God-focused. We can learn to have the mind of Christ. We can choose to follow in the ways of Jesus. It is a process that can happen by the help of the Holy Spirit. When we choose to be single minded and God-focused, then something wonderful does happen – we see God.

This promise that we will see God is like the other promises of the beatitudes – a promise for now and for the future. When we are pure in heart, we begin to see God right now. What do I mean by that statement? I mean that when we begin to be single minded about God and to live undivided lives, we begin to see God at work all around us. When we are focusing on God, we see God.

For example, when someone is healed of a disease, even when it is the result of medical care, science and ingenuity, we see God at work. We believe that God is the giver of all good things. The fear of God is the beginning of all knowledge. God is the one who has granted knowledge so that we can be blessed by those who can heal by the work of their hands. So, when someone says they were lucky they caught it in time; we say God was at work.

When we are blessed to be at the beach, in the mountains, or on the lake and the sun is rising or setting on another day, we see the beauty of this world; others around us speak of Mother Nature or the beauty of nature, but our thinking does not stop at that statement. We see beyond the creation to the Creator. When we witness the changing of the leaves, we might know scientifically the reason for the season's change, but our minds quickly go to God and we exclaim "This is my father's world."

*This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
his hand the wonders wrought.*

When an event happens to us we have a choice on how we will view it. Some will say "You were lucky" or "You were unlucky." Some will say "That makes no sense. There is no rhyme or reason to living." Yet, for those of us who will choose to be single minded and live with undivided hearts, we see God. We see God at work in every situation bringing good for those who love

God and are called to his purposes.

In his book *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey recalls the movie *Awakenings* starring Robert Deniro. The movie was about the miraculous work of Dr. Oliver Sacks. Dr. Sacks discovered the drug L-DOPA. This drug had a miraculous effect on the brains of those who were suffering from severe Parkinsonism and another encephalitic sleeping disease. Many of the patients had lived their lives in a rigid and frozen state for years, unable to speak or communicate. However, this drug caused almost immediate awareness. It caused people who had not lived in years to live again. The results and reactions to this sudden awakening were interesting. For some, it was a moment of fear; they were almost dizzy and overwhelmed by their new feelings and abilities. Some could not cope with this new moment of clarity and ability. Others, however, embraced it with all they had. One man named Leonard embraced his awakening with all of his might. He read Dante's *Paradiso*, visited Manhattan at night, touched flowers and leaves with astonished delight, and typed a 50,000 word autobiography in three weeks. He described his awakening in spiritual terms. He felt saved, resurrected and reborn. He says that it was a moment of grace. The only tragedy of L-DOPA is that it only worked so long. After a few months, the drug lost its effect and the patients went back to their previous condition. However, for a moment, for a time, they were awake to their world.

Quoting Joan Chittister, Yancey writes,

Everything we are, everything that is said to us, everything that happens is some kind of call from God. In fact, everything that happens is God's call to use either to accept what we should not change or to change what we should not accept so that the presence of God might flourish where we are... finding God is a matter of living every minute to its ultimate.

Yancey comments "If you can live through a moment, you can live through a day and how you live your days is eventually how you live your life."¹

When we are pure in heart something happens in our lives. We have an awakening to God. We need not worry about how we are going to see God

tomorrow all we must do is choose to see God today. If we can see God in this moment, then we will see God today; eventually our lives become filled with the presence of God.

To be pure in heart leads us to see God today. Yet, it also has a futuristic promise. Those whose hearts are undivided will see God. John writes that what we will become is yet to be made known, but someday we will see Him and we will be like Him. So, with this futuristic promise we must purify ourselves even as Jesus is pure. The concept is one of an aim and a goal. Because as a child of God – and that is what we are – we know we are moving toward something magnificent. We are on a journey to meet God face to face. What we will be ultimately is still unknown, but when we see Jesus we will be like him. So, we live lives that are pure. We live single-minded and undivided lives so we might be like Jesus.

We know that in this world what we see of God is just a glimpse. It is still a mystery; it is still as Paul would say “through a glass darkly.” Yet, here is the promise: one day we shall see him and in that moment we will be like him. One day after seeing God here and now we will see God face to face. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. When we are single minded and live lives undivided we will see God at work all around us and we will see him one day face to face.

I want to close today with a prayer by Crystal Godfrey.

*Lord, put in me a new spirit
Remove my heart of stone
And give to me a heart of flesh
That trusts in You alone
Oh, That I may fear Your name
Each day right from the start
Oh, Lord, please give to me
An undivided heart.
I want a gaze that never waivers
Or loses sight of the goal
To keep it's focus on obeying You
With mind and body and soul
Help me to walk in submission to Christ*

*In whole and not in part
Oh, Lord, please give to me
An undivided heart.
I want Your joy to be my greatest strength
Your salvation my impassioned praise
Your holiness to be my way of living
For all the rest of my days
Keep me steadfast in doing Your work
And following the course that You chart
Oh, Lord, please give to me
An undivided heart.
Teach me to daily die to self
And to spend much time in prayer
That I may be discerning of those around me
And treat them with genuine care
I want to be totally true to You
To wear your righteousness as my mark
Oh, Lord, please give to me
An undivided heart.
I want to live the time You've given me
Committed fully to Your purpose and call
Lord, consume me with Your awesome presence
Cause me on my knees to fall
And bow to Your desire for my life
Let no circumstance keep us apart
Oh, Lord, please give to me
An undivided heart.
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Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ❁

¹Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World, What on Earth are We Missing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2003) 55-57.

