



good shepherd
presbyterian church

The Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8; Philippians 4:8-9; Hebrews 12:14

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How can we see God? And what gets in the way of that? These are questions Jesus takes up in the beatitude – the blessing – we are going to look at today.

We are continuing in our series which focuses on blessings God gives that we are to pass on. We'll look at both halves of the blessing in Matthew 5:8 and then consider how God is inviting us to bless someone this week.

Pure in Heart

Let's start with the first half of this blessing: "Blessed are the pure in heart." What does that mean?

My first inclination was to think of "pure in heart" as innocent, maybe naïve to the sins of this world. But then I got to thinking about the imagery in scripture of believers being refined like gold or silver, where the impurities are removed by fire, by challenges, by persevering, or by the Lord. Those are two different places on a range of meaning.

It's probably closer to the second meaning, and is one way to describe the work of sanctification or "making holy" that God does in our lives. Think of it as a progression from the earlier verse about those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." (v.6) This is the

work God does in us when we pursue what He says is right: we grow in purity or holiness.

So we have in Hebrews 12:14, “Make every effort... to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” And there’s the same language Jesus uses here... that growth in holiness or purity leads to seeing the Lord. It’s part of our witness on the earth. Again, to be done in humility, not resulting in proud, puffed up “holy” people, but as the result of those who truly hunger and thirst to do what God says is right.

Philippians 2:14-15 offers some specific actions as examples of this holiness or purity:

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent [pure], children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world...”

There are several things to note there. There are some examples of holy actions (without grumbling or disputing) given as outward expressions of the inward spiritual maturity. Our usual translation says this will prove ourselves blameless and innocent, but several translations use ‘pure’ instead of innocent, and that’s probably a better choice for this word. And we see God’s purpose behind growing our purity or holiness: it is as “lights in this [dark] world.” We are to be “above reproach” in this world... again, not that we might become proud or puffed up, but so that we might bear witness to God in the midst of such confusion and hopelessness.

I think we need to understand that we will never be perfectly pure in heart on our own. Only God is perfectly pure. Only Jesus was perfectly holy in his humanity. But in following him and belonging to him we are to seek righteousness, grow in holiness, cultivate pure hearts.

Seeing God

And the result of following Jesus in this way is that we and the watching world will see God. It's a perfect example of "blessed to be a blessing" because not only will we grow in our awareness of God's presence and purpose, we will demonstrate it to others.

I am reminded almost daily now, with the election drawing near, that Christians of all stripes do not wear righteousness well. We easily enough become convinced of what we think is right, but we do not bear that in humility or share truth in love. For some number of years now we have had the twin banners of TRUTH and GRACE hanging in our sanctuary. And whether it is that pairing or RIGHTEOUSNESS and MERCY from vv. 6-7 of the Beatitudes, or the current pairing we are looking at this week and next – PURITY and PEACE – it is clear that we need to be reminded of how God desires us to engage the world.

I continue to be heart-broken at how people baptize their politics with their Christian faith – on both sides – when scripture teaches us that truth alone is not sufficient, being right is not sufficient, being holy is not sufficient. We are to pursue all those things wholeheartedly, and hopefully grow in knowledge of the truth, living of the right, and becoming pure. But we are to engage the world in grace, in mercy, and in peace... for the express reason that it shows the world what God is like. And God is all those things held together.

I'm not saying we shouldn't have a political view or hold tightly to a religious truth. I have many of both those things. But how we engage the world, our neighbors, our friends, our families with those convictions... it matters. And for the believer it matters for God's sake, for how others see God through your witness, because God says he uses US as lights in the world.

Blessing Challenge

For the blessing challenge this week, I want to challenge you to be aware of how you interact with those around you. Are you pursuing purity – that is, holiness and doing what God says is right? And are you doing so in a way that God would describe as a light in the world? The blessing in doing so is that you will see and experience God and that those around you will as well. And that is what God desires. Amen!