

See God Really Wow!

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[0 : 0 0] Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. As we continue our series of studies in the collection of sayings called the Beatitudes, I invite you to give your attention now to the most arresting one of all, to the sixth Beatitude.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Now, as I've said throughout this series, whenever we focus on just one of the Beatitudes, we need to make sure that we hear and see it in relation to all the others.

So will you once again open your Bibles to the Gospel according to Matthew, Matthew 5, verses 1-10.

Matthew 5, verses 1-10. Hear the Word of God. Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.

His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[1 : 2 5] Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you, when people insult you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you enabled Matthew the tax collector to remember your words, and to write them down accurately for us.

Will you now, in your mercy and grace, help us understand your words? But more than understand, will you help us actually live into the reality your words are describing?

[2 : 5 4] We pray this in your name and for your glory. Amen. Right on. In sync are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

This sixth beatitude is my favorite. A feeling I know many of you share. The sixth beatitude is the one I cling to most.

Why? Because of all the qualities Jesus blesses, the one I most want to have, the one I most want to be, is pure in heart.

It seems to me that if we can have purity of heart, everything else falls into place. And the sixth beatitude is my favorite, because of all the blessings Jesus promises, see God is the one I most desire.

I think this is the greatest promise Jesus ever made. To be promised the kingdom of heaven. To be promised comfort in sorrow.

- [4 : 09] To be promised the satisfaction for the hunger and thirst for right relatedness. To be promised mercy upon mercy. To be promised the name, Son of God, Daughter of God. To be promised the earth. To be promised the gold. Are all wonderful enough. But to be promised vision. They shall see God.
- It is more than wonderful. You lucky bums indeed. Everything else pales in light of this promise.
- And everything else comes into focus in light of this promise. You may have seen the article in the Vancouver Sun last Monday morning after the closing of the Winter Olympics.
- It was entitled, We'll have fun, fun, fun, till... In the article, Calgary-based sports psychologist Patricia Pitzel warned of an odd sense of loss that we were going to experience after all the joyful celebration.
- [5 : 18] The Olympics, she reminds us, is the biggest world event most of us have ever experienced. Dr. Pitzel says, I think there are some people who are going to find there is no central meaning in their life anymore.
- What they were involved in, what really gave excitement and meaning to their life isn't there anymore. See God.
- They shall see God. In the sixth beatitude, Jesus gives us the central meaning of our lives. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Now, I want to ask just one question of this sixth beatitude.
- And I want to ask one question of both parts of the beatitude. Of the pure in heart part and of the see God part. Now, this one question is going to raise a host of other questions.
- [6 : 28] And the one question is, is it really possible? Is it really possible to be pure in heart? And is it really possible to see God? Jesus says so. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- Let's work with the see God clause first. See. In what sense? See God.
- In what sense? I'm not sure. No one I read is sure. Jesus' promise in our question takes us into great mystery.
- See. See God. How is Jesus using this verb see? Literally?
- [7 : 35] Figuratively? Metaphorically? Is Jesus referring to a the so-called eye of faith? Like we sang at the beginning of the worship service.
- Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see you. Is he referring to a seeing with the so-called inner eye of worship? Or is Jesus promising the pure in heart a kind of recognition?
- That somehow they will recognize that there is a God, that this God is good, that this God is for them, that this God is present to them, that this God has come down in Jesus and dwells with and in them through the Holy Spirit.
- Is Jesus speaking here of a kind of emotional, mental cognition? Or is Jesus saying that the pure in heart, we have not said what this means yet, pure in heart, that the pure in heart will see God in the same way they see other dimensions of reality, that they will see God in the way that they see people and trees and mountains and buildings?
- If that is what he means, then the question becomes, what do they see? Is there something to be seen?
- [8 : 59] God is a person. God makes all kinds of things. Water, light, and earth, and elephants, and apples, and people. Is there somethingness to this person who makes things?
- What will they see? On the one hand, there is what the Apostle Paul writes in his first letter to his friend Timothy.

In the opening chapter, Paul speaks of God as eternal, immortal, invisible. In the closing chapter, Paul speaks of Paul who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light whom no human has seen or can see.

Yet on the other hand, there are all these puzzling, mysterious stories that we find throughout the biblical record. I think of the story of the patriarch Jacob.

Jacob wrestles all night with a man. But in the middle of this wrestling match concludes that he is wrestling with God. And the text says, in Genesis 32, so Jacob named the place Peniel, the face of God.

[10 : 13] For he said, I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved. I think of the story of Moses, the great leader of the Exodus.

This story where he is confronted by his brother and sister, but vindicated by God. And God says of Moses to his brothers and sisters, hear now my words, if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make myself known to him in a vision.

I shall speak with him in a dream, not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord.

Moses beholds the form of Yahweh, the living God. Is there a form to behold? Is this just metaphorical language?

There are times when I'm able to finish whatever chore I have in the evening, that I sit in my chair or lie on the bed, and I let my finite mind run through the vast extremes of interstellar space.

[11 : 29] I just love to do this. And before I know it, I'm way beyond Mars and Jupiter and Neptune, way beyond the closest black hole.

And then I let myself be awed by the sheer magnitude of it all. And I become aware that the living God is much greater than it all.

And that the living God holds it together moment by moment. And then, for just a moment, I allow a question I usually keep hidden to surface. What are you?

Not who are you, but what are you? What is it that makes you be you? What is the reality that transcends everything yet graciously condescends to meet with us?

They shall see God. What are they going to see? What is it that is in this room with us now? What is moving among us?

[12 : 42] Another question quickly surfaces. Can we see and live? Can human beings see whatever is seeable about God and still live?

Again, I'm thinking of Moses. Another story of Moses. Is the one where he cries out to God, show me your glory. Show me your kavod.

Show me your weightiness. Show me what it is that makes you be God. Everything in me echoes his prayer. Show me your glory. And God responds, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you.

And I will proclaim my name, Yahweh, in your presence. But you cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live. God tells Moses to hide in the cleft of a rock and then says, I will cover you with my hand until I pass by.

Then I will take my hand away and you will see my back, but my face shall not be seen. No human can see me and live. And yet, Jesus says, they shall see.

[13 : 52] Is Jesus thereby implying that Moses was not pure in heart? Is Jesus saying that the no human in no human shall see me and live is impure human, but a pure human can see and live?

Is this the point that is being made to the apostle John on the island of Patmos? I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men and women and God shall dwell among them. There shall no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and his bondservants shall serve him and they shall see his face.

Revelation 22, 4, the best verse in the Bible. They shall see his face. In the new creation, has something happened to human beings that enables them to behold dazzling glory and raw strength and still live?

What is clear is what is developed for us in the gospel according to John. John begins his story of Jesus on this note. No one has seen God at any time.

[15 : 14] The only begotten God, referring to Jesus, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained God. He has exegeted God. He has made God known.

And then as we read on in the gospel of John, we hear Jesus saying things like, When people believe in me, they do not believe in me only, but the one who sent me. When they look at me, they see the one who sent me.

One of Jesus' disciples says, Show us the Father and it will be enough. Jesus responds, Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father.

The unseen has become seeable in Jesus. Thus the apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians can make the great claim of Jesus Christ that he is the visible expression of the invisible God.

And in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, God who said, Light shall shine out of darkness is the one who has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

[16 : 21] In Jesus of Nazareth, infinitude is focused. In Jesus, the living God takes on a face. Or is it that in Jesus, the face is manifested in such a way that we can look and not die.

Well, this affirmation raises another question. A very practical question. Where now is the face of Jesus so we can look into that face and see the face of infinitude?

Apparently, it is not very far away. Not at all. For remember what Jesus said to a group of disciples who were wanting a clear vision?

Pointing to a group of children, Jesus said, Whoever receives one child like this in my name receives me. And whoever receives me does not receive me but the one who sent me.

Is Jesus saying that we will see the face of Jesus in the little child who is demanding our attention in this little one who is interrupting our grand schemes?

[17 : 41] My grandson lives downstairs and I like to look in his face. Am I seeing the face of Jesus in this little one?

And then the face of God? Is that what Jesus is telling us? In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus speaks of being hungry and we feeding him.

Of being a stranger and we welcoming him. Of being sick and we nursing him. And then he has us respond, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you a drink?

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? And Jesus says, the king will answer and say to them, truly I say to you, to the extent you did it to one of these my brothers and sisters, even to the least of them, you did it to me.

Is Jesus saying that we see his face and then the face of God in the face of the marginalized of the world? You know that this is the secret of the joy that Mother Teresa found in her ministry in Calcutta.

[19 : 00] She saw in the face of the discarded infants and discarded elderly the face of the lover of her soul. Is this what Jesus means by see God?

That the pure in heart are going to recognize and embrace the living God in the ordinary? Or is there more? Children, after all, are not Jesus.

Yes, he comes to us as they come to us, but they are not God. The hungry and the stranger are not Jesus. Yes, he comes to us as the hungry and the stranger come to us, but they are not God.

So is there still another kind of seeing? And what will we see when Jesus fulfills his promise?

I do not know. But whatever it is that Jesus is promising, I want it. Whatever is involved in this verb see, I want it.

[20 : 13] what is clear is that what we will see is more beautiful than anything he has ever made.

The beauty of his handiwork can't hold a candle. The beauty himself. Let us now work with the pure in heart clause.

apparently the human heart sees what it has the capacity to see. So what does Jesus mean by pure in heart?

And is it really possible to have it, to be it? In the Bible, the word heart does not refer only to the organ pumping blood, but the word heart refers to the very center of the human person, to the seat or the home of human thinking, human feeling, human willing.

Heart means center. This word pure that Jesus uses is the word catharos from which we get catharsis. It means to be clean.

[21 : 27] It means to be unmixed, unalloyed, unadulterated as in pure gold or pure maple syrup. pure in heart therefore means unmixed at the center, unalloyed at the center, unadulterated at the center.

Oh, Jesus, please make it so. Now here is where it is very important to remember that in the Beatitudes Jesus is not describing eight different kind of kingdom people.

one who is poor in spirit, another who is meek, another who mourns, and yet another who is pure in heart. Rather, Jesus is describing eight qualities of the same person.

All of these kingdom qualities are true of everyone who comes into the kingdom. And the order in which Jesus presents them is not accidental.

I believe it's very intentional. Jesus does not begin with pure in heart, partly because it would discourage us, right at the beginning. But he does not begin with pure in heart because it needs to be heard and seen in light of all of the other qualities he first blesses.

[22 : 43] Let me say that again. He doesn't begin with pure in heart because pure in heart needs to be seen and heard in light of all the other qualities he blesses before that.

Therefore, pure in heart, whom Jesus blesses, are also poor in spirit. I should say that they are first and foremost poor in spirit.

They know their own spiritual poverty, which means that pure in heart does not mean perfect, and they know it. I just took a ton of bricks off of your heart.

So I'm going to say it again. The pure in heart whom Jesus blesses are also poor in spirit. They know their own spiritual poverty, which means pure in heart is not perfection.

perfection. The pure in heart whom Jesus blesses also mourn. They mourn over the sin in the world and the sin in their own heart, which means the pure in heart have not arrived, and they know it.

[24 : 01] The pure in heart whom Jesus blesses are also meek. They know they cannot make it on their own. The pure in heart whom Jesus blesses also hunger and thirst for right relationship, for righteousness.

They know they're not yet righteous, yet they crave for it, which means again, the pure in heart does not mean perfect. Are you with me? You see that? The pure in heart also are merciful.

Their own poverty of spirit, their own grieving, their own hunger and thirst create a tenderness toward and sympathy for other wounded people.

The pure in heart understand and feel the common human struggles, failures, and I see this purity of heart in many of you. Now, what is helpful is to also look at how this word pure in heart is used in other places in scripture, and of particular help is the Psalms, and of particular help is Psalm 24.

In Psalm 24, verses 2 to 3, we read this. Psalm 24, 3 to 4, sorry. Who may ascend the hill of Yahweh? Who may stand in his holy place?

[25 : 15] Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who have not lifted up their soul to falsehood, who have not sworn deceitfully. You can see there that pure in heart is coupled with not lifting the soul to falsehood, not swearing deceitfully.

This suggests to me then that purity of heart has to do with integrity. Blessed are those who have integrity at the center, who know how easy it is to be deceived, who know how easy it is to play games with reality, and who therefore crave truth.

They seek the truth, they face the truth, they tell the truth, they live the truth. This is why J.B. Phillips years ago rendered the sixth beatitude blessed are the utterly sincere, or as John Stott puts it, their whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and others.

The pure in heart are not perfect. It's just that they know they cannot hide anything from the all-seeing God. So they bring all their thoughts, their emotions, their fears, and dreams into the light of God's truth and grace.

The regular prayer of the pure in heart is the last verse of Psalm 139. Search me, O God, know my heart, try me, know my anxious thoughts, and see if there's any way of pain in me.

[26 : 46] They pray this because of the first line of Psalm 139, O Lord, you have searched me and known me. There is no escaping God's presence, there's no escaping God's intimate knowledge of us, the pure of heart, know that, they open up their heart to God's searching, cleansing, healing light.

Congratulations, says Jesus, you're going to see God. So how do we get this purity of heart? How do we get this integrity and transparency at the center?

Ready? we get it by getting Jesus. We get it by getting his gospel, or better yet, by Jesus getting us, and by the gospel getting us.

It is time, says Jesus, it is time for the kingdom of God 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 truth to invade every sector of life. As Matthew says, just before recording the Beatitudes, quoting the prophet Isaiah, the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light, and the light turns out to be a person.

[28 : 11] The truth is a person, and when this person gets a hold on us, he begins to expose all the lies about ourselves and about God.

He awakens an abhorrence in us for hypocrisy and manipulation, and he quickens a passion for integrity at the center. Do you see?

The pure heart become what they become because purity himself has taken hold of their heart. as philosopher Peter Kreft puts it, we attain purity of heart, not by imitation of Christ, but by incorporation into Christ.

We attain purity of heart, not by imitation of Christ, but by incorporation into Christ, the Christ who has perfect purity of heart.

heart. When the disciple Peter first met Jesus, he became aware of how impure he was, and he fell at Jesus' feet, and he said, depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.

[29 : 25] Stephen Walshmith, who is a playwright in Calgary, has written a little brief sketch on this scene, and Stephen has Peter say to Jesus, go away from me, Jesus, because I will make you dirty.

And then Stephen has Jesus say to Peter, no, you will not make me dirty, I will make you clean. That's how you get it.

I want to conclude with a conversation that St. Francis of Assisi had with one of his fellow monks named Leo. They're walking along the road, and Francis recognizes that Leo is very sad, very low, maybe even depressed.

And so Francis says to Leo, do you know what it means to be pure in heart? Of course, said Leo, it means to have no sins, no faults, no weaknesses to reproach myself for.

Ah, said Francis, now I know why you're sad. We will always have something to reproach ourselves for. Right, said Leo, and that's why I despair of ever arriving at purity of heart.

[30 : 38] Francis says, Leo, now listen to me carefully. Do not be so preoccupied with the purity of your own heart. Turn and look at Jesus. Admire him.

Rejoice that he is what he is. Your brother, your friend, your Lord, your Savior. That little brother is what it means to be pure in heart. And once you've turned to Jesus, do not turn back and look at yourself.

Do not wonder where you stand with him. The sadness of not being perfect, the discovery that you really are sinful, is a feeling much too human. It even borders on idolatry. Focus your vision outside yourself on the beauty, graciousness, compassion of Jesus Christ.

The pure heart praise him from sunrise to sundown. Even when they feel broken, feeble, distracted, insecure, uncertain, they're able to release it into his peace. It is enough that Jesus is Lord.

After a long pause, Leo says, still Francis, the Lord demands our effort and fidelity. No doubt about that, replied Francis, but holiness is not a personal achievement.

[31 : 42] It is an emptiness you discover in yourself. Instead of resenting it, you accept it and it becomes the free space where the Lord can create anew.

To cry out, you alone are holy, you alone are the Lord, that is what it means to be pure of heart. And it doesn't come by your Olympian efforts and threadbare resolutions.

Then how, asked Leo? Simply by hoarding nothing of yourself. Sweep the house clean. Sweep out the attic, even the nagging painful consciousness of your past. Renounce everything that is heavy, even the weight of your sins.

See only the compassion and infinite patience, the tender mercy of Jesus. Jesus is Lord, that suffices. The desire for holiness is transformed into a pure and simple desire for Jesus.

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

[32 : 45] blessed are those who have turned away from preoccupation about how well they are doing or not doing, and instead are simply captivated with Jesus of Nazareth.

For they are seeing God, especially when he gives his life for the end of the world.