

See God

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[0 : 00] See God. They shall see God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

And surely it is the most startling of all of the Beatitudes. See God.

To be promised comfort in sorrow. To be promised satisfaction for all of our hunger and longing for right relationship. To be promised mercy upon mercy.

To be promised the name, child of God. To be promised the earth as the inheritance is wonderful enough. So wonderfully wonderful. But to be promised vision, they shall see God.

That's more than wonderful. You lucky bums. As far as I'm concerned, this is the greatest promise Jesus ever made.

[1 : 25] Everything else pales in light of it. Everything else is focused in light of it. Spirit of the living God.

We pray that in your mercy and grace, you would cause, as the words of this Beatitude, to come alive in us as never before.

For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I want to ask three questions of this sixth Beatitude.

Question one. What does Jesus mean by they shall see God? How is he using this verb see?

Question two.

What does Jesus mean by pure in heart? What does this quality, this character trait look like in everyday terms? And question three. How do I get it?

[2 : 36] How do I get purity of heart, especially on a day when I don't especially feel like I've got it? I've been arguing that the qualities Jesus blesses in the Beatitudes are not natural human qualities.

We cannot produce them in and of ourselves. Rather, they are the result of hearing and believing Jesus and His gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful are what they are because Jesus and His gospel have gotten a hold of them.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is painting a portrait of a new kind of humanity, a new humanity which emerges from the power of Jesus' gospel.

I get purity of heart by getting gospelized. So the third question becomes, why is purity of heart a mark of those who have turned around and embraced Jesus and His good news?

[3 : 45] Three questions. One, what does Jesus mean by they shall see God? Two, what does Jesus mean by pure in heart?

And three, why is purity of heart a sign that a human being has been gospelized? Question one, see God.

In what sense? I'm not sure. Just to ask the question leads us up to the edge of mystery.

In what sense is Jesus using this little verb see? Figuratively? Metaphorically?

Is He referring to a seeing with the so-called eye of faith? Is He referring to a seeing with the so-called inner eye of worship? Is Jesus promising the pure in heart that they will recognize?

[4 : 45] That they will recognize that there is a God and that this God is good and that this God is for them and that this God has come down for us in Jesus of Nazareth and that this God chooses to live in and with us in the Holy Spirit?

Is Jesus speaking of a kind of mental, emotional recognition? Or does Jesus mean that the pure in heart will see God in the same way that they see other dimensions of reality?

That they will see in the same way that they see trees and birds and houses and people? If that is what He means, then a question emerges which has pulled at my soul for many years now, namely, what do they see?

Is there some thing to be seen? On the one hand, there is what the Apostle Paul writes in his first letter to Timothy.

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

[6 : 14] Yet on the other hand, there are those curious, mysterious texts scattered throughout Scripture. I think of the story of Jacob. The one in which Jacob wrestles with a man all night long.

That story in which he then slowly begins to conclude that in wrestling with this man, he has been wrestling with God all night long. The text says, Genesis 32, 30, So Jacob named the place Peniel, the face of God.

For he said, I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved. I think of the story of Moses, the one in which his brother and sister criticize him, yet God vindicates him.

And God says in that story to his brother and sister in Numbers 12, verse 6, 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, and not in dark sayings.

[7 : 26] And he beholds the form of the Lord. Moses beholds the form, the form of Yahweh, the living God.

Is there a form to behold? Is this language merely metaphorical? What did Moses see? What? Not who, but what?

There are evenings when, after I finish whatever chores I can, that I sit in my chair or I lay on the bed and I let my finite brain wander into the vast extremes of interstellar space.

Within seconds, I'm way beyond Jupiter and Uranus, way beyond the nearest black hole. And I let myself be awed by the sheer magnitude of it all.

And then realizing that the living God is so much bigger than it all, and that the living God holds it all together moment by moment by his word, I allow the question to surface, if only for a moment, the question, what is God?

[8 : 38] Not who, but what. What are you, Lord? What is this reality that encompasses it all and yet graciously chooses to meet with me?

They shall see God. What shall they see when they see? What is it that is in this room right now? What is it that is moving in this room right now?

Another question quickly surfaces. Can we see and still live? Can human beings handle whatever is seeable of the living God?

Again, I think of the story of Moses, the one in which he cries out to God, O Lord, show me your glory. Show me your kavod. Show me your weightiness. Show me that which makes you be you. And God responds, I will cause all of my goodness to pass in front of you. I will proclaim my name, Yahweh, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

[9 : 46] But you cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live. God tells Moses then to hide in the cleft of a rock. And God says, I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by, and then I will take my hand away, and you will see my back, but my face shall not be seen.

No human may see me and live. Yet, Jesus says in this beatitude, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see.

Is Jesus thereby implying that Moses was not pure in heart? Is Jesus saying that no human in the phrase, no human may see God and live, is impure human?

But a pure human could see and live? Is this the point of what was revealed to the Apostle John on the island of Patmos? And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.

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

[11 : 04] In the new creation, has something happened to human beings that enabled them to behold the dazzling beauty and the raw glory of God and still live?

still the question remains, what shall they see when they see? What is God?

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

The only begotten God, referring to Jesus, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. He has made God known. And then as we read the rest of the gospel of John, we find Jesus saying things like this.

When a person believes in Me, he does not believe in Me only, but in the one who sent Me. When He looks at Me, He's looking at the one who sent Me.

[12:13] Philip said to Jesus, show us the Father and it will be enough. And Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? The one who sees Me sees the Father.

The unseeable has become seeable in Jesus of Nazareth. Thus the Apostle Paul could say in his letter to the Colossians that great claim that Jesus Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God.

And Paul could go on to say in the second chapter of Corinthians, God who said, light shall shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

In Jesus of Nazareth, infinitude is focused. In Jesus, the living God takes on a face, enabling the impure to look at that face and still live.

What a privilege those first disciples had. Did they have any clue of what a wonderful privilege it was? Face to face with the face.

[13:28] They really were lucky bums. That affirmation raises yet another question, a practical question.

Where is the face of Jesus now so that we can see in that face, the face of the infinite? Where? Apparently, not very far away.

Not far at all. Remember what Jesus said to a group of disciples who were longing for a clearer vision? Pointing to a group of children, he said, whoever receives one of these little children in my name receives me.

And whoever receives one of these little children does not receive me, but him who sent me. Is Jesus saying that we can see his face in the face of these little children who keep interrupting our grand schemes?

Remember what Jesus also said in his parable of the sheep and the goats? Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you a drink?

[14:39] Lord, when did we see you a stranger and invite you in and naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to you?

And the king will answer and say, truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers or sisters of mine, even to the least of them, you did it to me. The point?

We see the face of Jesus and therefore the face of God in the face of the world's marginalized, which is the secret of the joy Mother Teresa has in her ministry.

She sees in the face of the discarded infants and the discarded elderly left to die the face of the lover of her soul. Is this what Jesus means by they shall see God?

That the pure in heart will come to recognize and embrace the Holy One in the midst of the ordinary? Or is there still more? Children, after all, are not Jesus.

[15:45] He comes to us in the children, but they are not God. The homeless and the hungry are not Jesus. He comes to us in them, but they are not God. So is there still another kind of seeing?

Which brings us back to, is there something to be seen? What will the pure in heart see when they see God?

Question two. What does Jesus mean by pure in heart? What does this quality look like in everyday terms?

In the Bible, the word heart refers to the human center, to the very center of our humanity. The heart is the seat of feeling and willing and thinking, the very center.

In the text, the word pure means unalloyed, unmixed, unadulterated, unadulterated, as in pure gold or pure maple syrup. Pure in heart, then, means unmixed at the center, unalloyed at the center, directed toward God at the center.

[17:04] Now, here is where it is so important to remember that in the Beatitudes, Jesus is not describing eight different kinds of people, some who are poor in spirit, some who mourn, some who are meek, some who are pure in heart.

Rather, Jesus is describing eight different qualities of the same persons. The eight qualities are interrelated, and the order in which Jesus preaches them is not arbitrary.

I believe it's very intentional. Jesus does not mention pure in heart first, because it is defined by the qualities which precede it.

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

They know they are spiritually bankrupt, which means the pure in heart are not perfect, and they know it. Are you with me? The pure in heart are also those who mourn, who grieve over their sin and the sin of the world, which means the pure in heart have not arrived, and they know it.

[18 : 15] Are you with me? I'm preaching grace to you. The pure in heart are also meek. They know that they cannot get their life together on their own.

The pure in heart are also those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They know they are not yet righteous. They crave to be righteous. And again, that means then the pure in heart are not perfect.

The pure in heart are also merciful. Their own poverty of spirit, their own grief, their own hunger and thirst creates a tenderness toward and a sympathy toward people, other people.

The pure in heart understand and they feel the common struggles and the common brokenness of humanity. The point is then that this unmixedness at the center is a very earthy quality.

Can we be more specific? Yes, we can because the term pure in heart is used in other places in the Bible, in other places where more definition is given. And of particular help to us is Psalm 24, verses 3 and 4, which we read at the beginning of the worship service.

[19 : 23] Listen again. Who may ascend into the hill of Yahweh? Who may stand in His presence? Good question. Answer, those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who have not lifted up their souls to falsehood, who have not sworn deceitfully.

You can see then that in Psalm 24, purity of heart is paralleled with not lifting one's soul to falsehood, not swearing deceitfully, which means then that purity of heart is all about integrity.

Blessed are those who have integrity at the center. The pure in heart are those who know how easy it is for the heart to be deceived and how easy it is for the heart to deceive.

The pure in heart, therefore, are always craving the truth. They seek the truth. They want to speak the truth. They live the truth. They tell the truth. Thus, J.B. Phillips renders Jesus' sixth beatitude, blessed are the utterly sincere.

Or as John Stott puts it, their whole life, public and private, is transparent before God and transparent before others. The purity of heart are not perfect.

[20 : 45] It's just that they know they cannot hide anything from God, and so they bring all of their decisions, they bring all of their emotions, they bring all of their attitudes, they bring their fears, they bring their dreams into the presence of God's searching light.

One of the regular prayers of the pure in heart is the last sentence of Psalm 139. Search me, O God, and try my heart. Know me, and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there is any hurtful way in me.

They pray this way because of the first line of Psalm 139, which is, O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. There is no escaping the presence of God.

There is no escaping the intimate knowing of God. And the pure of heart know this, and they open up the whole of life to the searching, healing presence of God.

Congratulations, says Jesus. They, and they alone, will see. Question three. Why, then, is this integrity at the center, this transparency of heart, a mark of the gospelized?

[22 : 01] Well, what's the gospel? What is the gospel? Listen again. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. The gospel is the announcement of a great fact of life.

It is time for the world beyond to break into this world. It is time for heaven to come down to earth. It is time for the inbreaking of God's new world order.

And it turns out to be a new world order of light. Light which dispels the darkness. Light which invades and perfades all of the dark corners of this deceitful world.

It is time for the inbreaking of the rule of God. And it turns out to be a rule of truth. Truth which breaks the spell of the lie. Truth which sets the captives free. John Stott is right.

So many of us are so miserable because we have spun around us a web of lies. So much so that we can no longer tell what is real from what is make-believe. The gospel is the announcement of a

new fact.

[23 : 04] A liberating fact. The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light. The truth has broken through the web. And it turns out that the light and the truth are a person.

Jesus himself is the light and in him there is no darkness at all. Jesus himself is the truth and in him there is no deceit at all. And when we turn around and embrace him he begins to expose and then begins to free us from lies about ourselves and lies about God.

He awakens in us an abhorrence for hypocrisy and manipulation. He quickens in us a passion for integrity at the center. And this passion is not our doing.

This fire is not our doing. It is ignited and fanned into flame because the king of glory is coming in through the uplifted gates. The pure in heart are what they are because they have welcomed in purity himself.

You see? A conversation between St. Francis of Assisi and a certain brother Leo I think captures this sixthly attitude.

[24 : 21] Francis and Leo were walking down the road noticing that Leo was very depressed Francis turned to him and said, Leo, do you know what it is to be pure of heart? Of course, said Leo, it means to have no sins, no faults.

No weakness to reproach myself for. Ha, 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 pure of heart.

Leo, listen carefully to me. Don't be so preoccupied with the purity of your 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 of heart. And once you've turned to Jesus, don't turn back. Don't look at yourself. Don't 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, and compassion of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 25] The pure of heart praise him from sunrise to sundown. Even when they feel broken, feeble, distracted, insecure, and uncertain, they are able to release it into his peace. It is enough that Jesus is Lord.

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

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 the Holy One.

You alone are the Lord. That is what it means to be pure of heart. And it doesn't come by your efforts and your threadbare resolutions. Then how, asked Leo. Simply hoard nothing of yourself. Sweep the house clean. Sweep out even 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, the infinite patience, and the tender love of Christ.

[26 : 28] Jesus is Lord. That suffices. The desire for holiness is transformed into a pure and simple desire for Jesus. Leo listened gravely as Francis went on and then found himself step by step flooded with a strange peace.

The desire for holiness turns out to be a pure and simple desire for Jesus. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

See God? Blessed are those who have left behind their preoccupation with how well they are doing or not doing and are instead simply captivated with Jesus of Nazareth.

Blessed because they are seeing God. They are seeing God.