

June 28, 2015

THE PURE IN HEART

Matthew 5:1-12

Mercy is what purifies us. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God!* This proclamation goes beyond ritualistic regulations. There were 142 physical blemishes laid down in the Law that could disqualify a man from the Hebrew priesthood – those who entered into the Holiest of Holies to see God – but the heart never enters the list. Jesus looks beyond the outward ritual to the inward witness. Purity of heart implies a lifestyle, and, a state of mind. Jesus is thinking of more than just not being dirty or polluted. He is not just referring to our use of language, but these things are included. Jesus is getting to the *heart* of the matter.

By *heart* is meant thoughts, desires, motives, attitudes – the whole personality or inner person. Jesus also said that *where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*. If your treasure is clean, unmixed, single – as in pure gold – your heart will be clean, unmixed, and single. If you aim at too many treasures, your heart will be a mass of confusion.

Jesus proclaims the Pharisees' woefulness due to their hypocrisy as they *cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity*. He says, "*First cleanse the inside... that the outside also may be clean.*" (Matthew 23:25-26)

Toward the end of His Sermon on the Mount, He tells disciples to "*enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who find it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few!*" (Matthew 7:13-14)

Jesus says that *a sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit*. (Matthew 7:18) He's talking about the inward witness the inner being. This is what determines the truth of our status before God! Jesus would not want us to live an unexamined life. We must ask God, "*Create in me a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within me.*" (Psalm 51:10)

And God's promise in Jeremiah I that He will "*write His law upon our hearts,*" to make it a part of who we really are, "*and no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!' for they will all know me....and I will remember their sin no more.*" (Jeremiah 31:33-34) They shall obtain mercy!

God's promise in Ezekiel: "*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean...A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you.... And I will deliver you...*" (Ezekiel 36:25-29) Again, purity gives rise to mercy!

But... think for a moment about how purity is scoffed at today. Purity has always been promoted rather superficially. It's not just for Catholic priests and nuns. Purity is, to us today, to the secular mind, something that can only be pursued by a lifetime of effort, dedication, and commitment. And it is. But these are natural fruits of faith. This secular perspective comes to us because we picture purity as *perfect* innocence, *complete* freedom from guilt. It is, but isn't that the Kingdom of Heaven too? We picture purity as a vision of consuming judgment where the grain is winnowed from the chaff, and the chaff is burned with fire. It is, but we receive the blessings by the grace of God. Pure grace!

I want to proclaim that purity can be something a little more within our vision. Perhaps it's to have a clear conscience, to have a single direction, pure motives. Soren Kierkegaard published a treatise

entitles *"Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing."* Purity of heart is a sincerity of purpose. Too often we aim for the impressive instead of the true. The impressive is not always the true. And too often we suffer from the *rewards* disease, where we desire the truth for the sake of the reward, rather than for the truth's sake. Purity is the sincerity of single-mindedness, willing one thing. We are impure when we are insincere and double-minded.

Our double-mindedness is condemned by Jesus as He proclaims the fulfillment of the Law. It's not only, *"you shall not kill,"* but, *"You shall not be angry."* Adultery is a sin, but so is thinking it in your heart. Jesus says, if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better to lose a part of your outward self than to lose your whole self, your real self, your heart, your soul. (Matthew 5:17, 21-23, 27-30) Jesus expresses the urgency of pure intentions, pure thoughts. They are more important than our outward qualities that only *seem* good.

Jesus says, *"Let what you say be simply 'yes' or 'no.' Anything more than this comes from evil!"* (Matthew 5:37) Purity is this sort of singleness of mind. It has no confusion, no double standards, no mixed morals, and no compromises. Too often we compromise our faith simply by blurring our vision with desires that fall short of God's truth.

THEY SHALL SEE GOD

Having to keep our eyes on two masters at once makes us cross-eyed. Our vision goes out of focus. Neither image is clear. But the eyes of the pure in heart are single. Having focused on one object, their sight is unimpaired. Having our lives in focus we can better concentrate on the truth of our vision.

Do you see God when you look at your own heart? God is there. Do you see God when you look at the hearts of others? God is there as well. What impedes your vision of God? Do you *have* a vision of God? Are you *seeking* a vision of God?

Realize that what we see depends on more than what our eyes perceive. It also has to do with *how* we look at things. For the average person, to look at the sky at night, there's only a mess of stars, and it may look wonderful, beautiful. But to an astronomer, the stars become a map, a source for navigation and direction.

Purity of heart can give us a whole new way of looking at things. Where there are no conflicting loyalties, no mixed, hypocritical intentions, then there is a greater determination. Perhaps we will begin to see things as God sees them, as an extension of His creative self, the way a potter is known by the pots.

People will be seen as God's likeness. When Saul had lost the Spirit due to his disobedience, and Samuel came to anoint God's new chosen ruler, God told him, *"The Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7) *We must now regard no one from a human point of view!* (2 Corinthians 5:16)

When we become pure in heart, we will begin to look upon God's creation and see the trace of His touch. Rain can be seen as God's cleansing power. Flowers can be seen as God's smile. Wind can be God's whisper... or God's shout. Stones can be God's power. People can be seen as God's servants, God's gifts. Everything can begin to reveal God.

When we become pure in heart, we will have a purer system of values. Willing one thing, our wills will become God's will. We can let God work through us, and we'll feel it. We'll see ourselves

differently. *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.* Purity. Vision. Mercy. Love. You see the vision of mercy is a vision of God!