

If you've been following along, you'll know that we are in a sermon series this summer on the Beatitudes, Jesus famous words in Matthew 5—one of the first sermons he did to start off his earthly ministry, the first teaching to come out of his mouth.

These blessed 'Blessed are...' statements that we've been spending the last almost two months unpacking, one-by-one. Statements that emphasize what the good news that Jesus has come to bring near *looks like*.

Remember, in chapter 4, Jesus starts his ministry by proclaiming that the Kingdom of heaven has come near. That's the good news. The Kingdom has come near to you.

And then He demonstrates in various ways how this Kingdom is coming. He calls disciples to him because of this. He teaches in synagogues. He heals every disease and sickness among the people. Crowds of people just start flocking around Him *because* the Kingdom has come near *in* Jesus.

Our staff, this last week, went through a devotional together where we were asked the question, "What would you do if Jesus moved into *your* neighbourhood? What would that look like? How would your life change?"

Now, of course we are anticipating Jesus to come again in a slightly different fashion than he did the first time. But it was such a good exercise for us to think about. Because imagine being one of those earlier disciples who've just encountered the human-yet-somehow-not-only-human Jesus.

He's tangible. He's right there. You get an audience with Him. Thinking about that for a while made me understand a bit more why the disciples literally dropped everything to follow Him. Just to be with Him, all the time.

And isn't that what we long for, ultimately? To actually see Jesus?

Heaven's realities are near to us in the person of Jesus. And He's explaining, now, what it looks like when that heavenly Kingdom breaks through you and I, when Jesus' Kingdom takes over: Poverty of Spirit. Mourning—yes, it's a sign of the Kingdom. Meekness. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Mercy.

And this week, maybe the most (seemingly) intimidating of them all, pure in heart.

Read Beatitudes (verses 1-2, then separately).

What does Jesus mean by 'pure in heart'? That sounds like a rather high bar. Pure in heart. Completely innocent, it sounds like. Completely clean from any temptation or sin. My heart is geared always in the right direction. Undivided, untainted. I'm pure, holy, innocent.

Sounds like a tall order. And it is a very tall order; but not in the way we might think.

Perhaps it reminds you of Psalm 51: “*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*” The word in Hebrew is very similar to the Greek, both words meaning clean or pure.

To be clean in Scripture has this sense of being completely innocent from sin—which was a common theme. The goal in the Old Covenant—and the goal still today in many religious circles—is to be ritually clean, guiltless. You don’t want to carry any sense of guilt before God.

But look at David’s cry here to God. He’s not asking that God accept his many sacrifices and wipe away any of David’s sins because of anything *David* has done. As if here’s my payment, God; now make everything better.

“Create *in me* a pure heart,” said David. The whole psalm, actually, is about God having *mercy*—which we spoke about last week.

Have mercy on me, O God,
*according to your unfailing love; (there’s that word, *hesed*, which we touched on last week...)*
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions. – get rid of them
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

He’s putting all the weight on *God’s mercy*. You do it, God. As if that’s the *only* thing that he can actually hope for. Sacrifices won’t do it. Being a good person won’t do it. Saying yes to all the good spiritual and moral things won’t do it. It won’t make him pure. He needs *God to do it*.

Earlier in the Old Testament, the Lord instructs Moses that the Israelites are to keep the Sabbath as a sign between them and Yahweh so that they would know that He is the Lord *who makes them holy*.

In other words, God alone can make us pure. God alone can make us clean, and innocent, and guiltless, and holy.

So when Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” He’s not asking you to find purity for yourself. He’s pointing to the poverty of spirit that David has in regard to his own sin, and how he mournfully holds that brokenness before God with meekness and hungers for his relationship with God to be made right. His sole focus and devotion is on the Lord.

David is demonstrating what it looks like to long for the Kingdom to come near.

Blessed are you when you ache for purity of heart to be *given to you by God*. When your idea of cleanliness or innocence isn't based on how well you've achieved religiosity on the outside but how deeply you've allowed the Kingdom of God to pierce you internally.

Later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees—or rather he's rebuking them, he's lamenting over them (it's very dramatic), and at one point He says to them:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean,” (23:25-26).

Clean. Pure. It's the same word that Jesus uses here.

The Pharisees—as we see in the gospels—had become experts in appearing put-together. Like they had all their ducks in a row with God. Righteousness was simple. Do what the law required, and the transaction was secure. You do this for God; He does that for you.

Not only does Jesus come in and say, “You’ve got it all wrong; that’s never actually what God wanted,” but He also identifies what the clear pitfall is when that kind of thinking takes over.

“You are like whitewashed tombs,” he says to them later in verse 27. You put all your effort into being shiny and put-together on the outside, expecting people to respect you and revere you and look up to you because of your put-togetherness, but you're dead on the inside.

Harsh words, but this is how seriously Jesus takes this conversation. Don't you dare try to usurp the giving away of purity from God. It is not yours to give. Holiness and cleanliness and right-relationship with God are not yours to give.

The Pharisees thought it was. And they exemplify perfectly—maybe this was their role in God's kingdom purposes—to be the prime example of what happens when we fall into ‘religiosity’ and think that holiness and purity depends on us.

Herein lies the great issue: that of hypocrisy. When our inclination—and sometimes obsession—with looking the part, playing the good Christian role, appearing that we have all the right morals only washes the outside rather than transforming us within.

We see this played out all the time, most obviously on a global scale with current national leaders. You want to talk about a whitewashed tomb, you don't have to look very far.

But even more insidious is the way that this plays out on a personal level. When we think we're in control of our own purity, we care way too much—for example—about what we look like, what

others think, what's proper. We talked about this a lot when we did our Galatians series last year. When we look for outward approval more than inward holiness.

For example, but how many of you, when you were preparing to come worship this morning, worried about what to wear?

Now, let me be clear: if you desire to dress a certain way because your heart desires to show devotion to God in that way, that's a beautiful thing. But we need to be aware that this can easily become Pharisaical if it's just about looking the part, and what others expect.

I'll tell you right now, Jesus doesn't care about your clothes. Why? Because that self-critique we put on ourselves we *will* put on others. Jesus doesn't care about your clothes; He cares about your heart.

How many of you have come to worship feeling guilty about something, and felt like you needed to go to church to make up for it? Or you haven't been in a while, and so you should probably go.

Are we just trying to play a part? To try and *behave* like a disciple and impress Him with how well we can do that? Or are we seeking to have our minds renewed and hearts re-oriented so that we actually *become* a disciple?

We care so much about what we look like—on all levels. And yet ironically, we actually 'look' best when we stop worrying about our looks altogether. How put-together we are. How put-together our lives are. How put-together our homes and relationships and marriages and daily practices are.

Pursuing right-relationship with God is not a matter of appearances. It's what's happening to us on the inside. Like David bringing his poverty before God. When we start feeling and seeing inward change. When we can actively point out that we are not the same person we were yesterday.

That's when we know the Spirit of Jesus has gotten a hold of us. When we can sense that He is giving us a greater and deeper recognition of His purity and holiness within us.

This is why Paul says in the letter to the Philippians, that you can be "*filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.*" Righteousness *comes through* Jesus Christ. Holiness *comes through* Jesus Christ. Inward cleanliness and purity *comes through* Jesus Christ.

You do not earn it. You cannot mimic it, or fake it, or dress like it, or in any way demonstrate that your put-togetherness is indicative of it. That's not how it works.

This is why, says Jesus, it is the pure in heart—those who long for this kind of purity of heart—who will see God.

What does He mean by ‘see God’? Well, scholars debate over whether we should take this phrase metaphorically or literally, but I think we can do both.

Metaphorically, seeing is knowing. It’s understanding. We talk a lot about being ‘seen’ by one another. It’s colloquial or familiar language to speak about being ‘seen’. Do you feel seen? Do you feel heard? Do you feel like people see you for who you really are?

It’s such a gift to someone to truly see them, to let them feel seen. But Jesus is emphasizing that what you really need is not so much to be seen by others but to see God.

Do you see *this* God that we’ve been talking about? Do you know Him? Would you recognize His face (ie. his character)? And if not, or you’re unsure, what kind of god is it that you *are* seeing? What does this god ask of you or demand of you? What expectations are placed on you because of what this god apparently wants?

I want to encourage you this morning to cast that god away. Because it’s not Jesus.

Look again at David’s prayer:

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; -- This isn’t about guilt.

you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. – any kind of atoning for your guilt doesn’t interest Him.

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; -- that’s what He wants.

a broken and contrite heart

you, God, will not despise.

David speaks here like he knows who God is. He sees Him. And he knows that God won’t despise a broken and contrite heart, because what is that? A heart that *knows that it’s empty*, and that it needs to be filled by the purity that can only come from God

And so Jesus’ words can wash over David and say to him, “Blessed are you, pure in heart. You *see* God.” You know Him. You understand Him.

We will not be able to truly *see* God, or understand Him—the Kingdom will not make sense to us; the new creation won’t feel like home to us—unless we understand that purity of heart is gift.

Eugene Peterson interpreted this verse in Matthew 5 like this: “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.”

When our minds and hearts are put right—put in rightness with God through Jesus—then we won’t just anticipate seeing God’s face on that glorious day when His holiness covers the whole earth, but we will see it *now*. Because we will know Him. We will know where to find Him.

But what if Jesus is speaking here about *literally* seeing God? What then does this phrase imply? Because within the context of Scripture, this is a rather wild thing for Jesus to say.

In 1 Timothy, Paul speaks of God as being “*eternal, immortal, invisible*,” (1:17). You can’t see Him. And in chapter 6 he speaks about God, “*who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see*.” (6:16). You can’t see Him.

And this is true throughout Scripture. For instance, if you know the story of Moses, you might remember that at one point in Israel’s journey through the wilderness, Moses pleads with God to show him His glory—to assure Moses of His presence with them.

And God says to Moses, “*...you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.... When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen*,” (Exo. 33:20-23).

Face, in Hebrew, is actually the same word for presence. Moses was given assurance of God’s presence, but the fullness of that presence, of that glory, was not revealed. So even Moses only “saw” God in a limited way.

By this point, it should be fair to assume that no human is able to literally *see* God in all His glory.

Why then, does Jesus tell His disciples in John 14 that, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*,” (John 14:9)? Why then does Paul say in Colossians that Jesus is “*the image of the invisible God*,” (Col. 1:15)? We’re not talking partials here. He *is* God’s image, God’s glory, God’s presence.

Why? Because Jesus *is* the face of God. Which is why in Revelation, in the picture of the new creation, it says this: “*No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads*,” (Rev. 22:3-4).

We will see His face. His actual face, in fullness of glory. Glory upon glory.

What *exactly* will that look like? We don’t know. But as a fellow preacher put it, whatever Jesus is promising here, I want it. Whatever is involved in *seeing* God, I want it.

And so, create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Because this is what I want. Mold within me the purity and innocence of Christ. Count me among the blessed.

Because I want to see you.