

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

WHAT DOES PURE MEAN?

In our time, pure never means absolutely pure, it means relatively pure. **Ivory Soap** still advertises itself as “99 and 44/100% pure,” which is to say, a little bit impure. **24 carat gold** is assumed to be 99.95% gold, with a small amount of other materials mixed in. The purest gold ever produced, in Australia in 1957, was 99.9999% gold, but not truly pure. In the United States, “gold” can have as little as 41.7% actual gold and still be advertised as “gold.” **My favorite bottled water, Dasani**, says right on the bottle that it is “enhanced with minerals for a pure, fresh taste.” It works, I really like how it tastes, but it isn’t actually pure H₂O; it’s “enhanced.”

But here, in Matthew 5:8, pure is means pure. In the context of Scripture, God Himself is the standard against which purity is measured, and so pure means absolute purity, and not just almost pure.

(WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PURE IN HEART?)

So then, what does it mean to be pure in heart, or more literally, “pure to the heart”? It means purity in our innermost being, purity of nature. The focus is not on our actions – “blessed are those who do pure things” – but on our innermost being – “blessed are those who are pure in nature.” It means having an unmixed, unpolluted, undivided heart.

In Matthew 23:25-26 Jesus rebuked the Pharisees. They focused all their attention on their behavior, on doing the right things. Jesus says,

Matthew 23:25-26 (ESV) – 25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. **26** You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.”

Of course, Jesus isn't speaking about cups and plates, is He? No, He is talking about these men; THEY are the cups and plates in the illustration. They worked hard to cleanse the outside, by controlling their behavior through rigorous rules and regulations, by ritual washings, and strict observance of the Law and their traditions. But they did nothing to change themselves on the inside, in their hearts; their natures remained impure and unclean. In the verses that follow Jesus compares the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones. Changing outward behavior is like embalming a corpse; it makes it slightly more presentable, slightly less horrifying, on the outside, but does nothing about the deadness within.

The coronavirus gives us a good modern-day illustration of this. For months now we have been encouraged to be diligent about washing our hands and using hand-sanitizers. It's said that 80% of exposure to coronavirus is from your hands. Now, if you haven't been infected with the virus, regular hand-washing might prevent infection – there's always that 20%. But for those who have been infected, hand-washing isn't going to help. The virus is already inside of you; washing the outside won't change the inside.

Well, sin is exactly the same way. We can change our behavior in small ways, but we can't change our nature.

(THE NATURE OF THE SINNER)

This is because we are born impure, with natures already infected by sin. We are septic at the moment of conception.

Some people with coronavirus are asymptomatic; they have the virus in their system, but they aren't sick; they have no symptoms. And even for those who are sick, symptoms don't prove whether it is coronavirus or not; other illnesses have the same symptoms. The only way to know whether someone has – or had – coronavirus is to do a test.

No one with sin is ever asymptomatic; we always reveal our sin through our actions. But the ultimate proof of sin is not symptoms, but the test that God conducts. He compares us with His own holy nature, and guess what? We are ALL sick with sin. Some *seem* to be asymptomatic, don't they? They are really good people, from our point of view. Others seem to be so sick with sin that they are disintegrating where they stand. Outward behavior changes from person to person. But we are all equally infected, equally sick with sin.

Genesis 6:5 remains true today.

Genesis 6:5 (ESV) — 5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

That was before the great flood. Afterward the Lord said,

Genesis 8:21 (ESV) — 21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma [of Noah's sacrifice], the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for **the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.**"

Notice that Yahweh says "the intention of man's heart IS evil from his youth." This is being said about Noah, his wife, their sons, and their wives. The flood did nothing to change their natures, and they still faced the judgment of God.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 remains true as well.

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV) — 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

No one can understand their own heart, their own nature, because the heart they try to understand is deceitful and desperately sick. We can't understand anyone else for the same reason. But there is One who understands.

Jeremiah 17:10 says,

Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV) – 10 “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

God searches our hearts and tests our minds, and sees exactly who we actually are.

SO, IS THE PROBLEM CLEAR YET?

We have this promise, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God, and it is wonderful promise, a fantastic promise. But no one is actually pure in heart, are they? Jesus says in Matthew 15:19,

Matthew 15:19 (ESV) – 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Our hearts are the LAST place anyone would expect to find purity, and yet it is precisely there that Jesus demands purity.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ. God is holy, and created man innocent. Adam sinned and died spiritually, and all of his descendants inherited his fallen nature. It is impossible for us to change our own nature; Jeremiah 13:23 says that it would be like a black man changing his skin color, or a leopard changing its spots. The penalty for sin – both acts of sin and our nature of sin – is eternal punishment in hell. But the Triune God determined before creation to save a people for His own eternal glory. The Father chose a people from the mass of condemned humanity. The Son died as a substitute for those chosen people. The Holy Spirit works in those whom the Father chose, for whom the Son died, to regenerate them, convince them of their need for a Savior, grant them faith in Jesus, take away their sin and guilt, join them with Jesus on His cross, raise them with Jesus in His resurrection, and grant them repentance and new obedience to God. We cannot

change our own nature in the slightest, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit undertook the miracle and wonder of changing sinners into saints, making us new creatures who can and do begin to live according to that new nature. And even though we remain in these old bodies, and still struggle with sin, we are promised that the Father will complete His work in us (Philippians 1:6), the Son will save us to the uttermost extent of time (Hebrews 7:25), and the Spirit will fully transform us into the image of Christ (Second Corinthians 3:18).

It is by the Gospel that we are made pure. To be sure, the purity that God demands has been yet been made true of us. We remain contaminated by sin. But the Triune God will have His way and finish His work, and we shall be pure.

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

(WE WERE MADE TO SEE GOD)

Let me say this clearly: we were made to see God. Genesis 2-3 shows God in intimate relationship to Adam.

In Genesis 2:7 God personally makes man of the dust of the ground, and breathes into him the breath of life. This is a personal, intimate act of action.

In Genesis 2:8-9 God personally plants the Garden of Eden and causes everything that was beautiful and edible to spring up there.

In Genesis 2:15 God puts the man in the Garden to work it and keep it. This is nothing less than partnership. God created Adam and planted the Garden. Adam had two responsibilities in the Garden. He was to work it. The Garden was not self-perpetuating; God made it to need and respond to Adam's labor. And Adam was to keep the Garden, which means to guard it and protect it. At the time, of course, there didn't seem to be anything to guard the Garden from; the serpent doesn't enter the picture until Genesis 3. But the word "keep" does tell us that Adam was not merely a laborer, but carried personal responsibility to guard God's Garden against anything that would harm it or defile it.

In Genesis 2:18-23 God personally created woman from the body of the man. He said “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” The word “helper” does not mean an inferior; God Himself is called our helper in Psalm 70:2. A helper is simply someone who contributes to the efforts of another in fulfilling a task. What God gave Adam to do could not be fulfilled if Adam was alone. The words “fit for him” mean a corresponding opposite. Any person could be a helper, but only the woman could be a corresponding opposite. Adam and Eve were not mirror images of one another, but were made to fit one another physically, emotionally, and in every other way. She possessed what he lacked; he possessed what she lacked. This was all by God’s personal design. He made us as we are, carefully, lovingly, purposefully, for His glory and our good. Eve was God’s gift to Adam, and Adam was God’s gift to Eve. He lovingly made them for each other.

In Genesis 3, in the aftermath of the fall – in which Adam failed to keep and guard the Garden – God came walking in the Garden.

Genesis 3:8-10 (ESV) – 8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. **9** But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” **10** And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”

Think about what we are told here. Adam and Eve could hear the footsteps of God because He took on physical form to be with them. They recognized His footsteps, which means that He had come to them before. They hid themselves from His presence, which is something they had never done before. Adam confess that he was afraid because he was naked, which is something that had never mattered before.

Perhaps this was only the second time God came walking in the Garden; perhaps He had walked with them dozens of times. We don’t know. But we do know that

they had never been terrified before, never hid themselves before. They had always gone to Him, listened to Him, spoken to Him, enjoyed His presence and His fellowship.

Because of Adam's sin they were put out of the Garden, and would never see their Creator again. The Lord made it clear to Moses in Exodus 33:20, "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live." But while man could no longer see God, he could hear from God. Noah heard from God, as did Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, and others. God's private words to these men became public words to His people, and He spoke volumes to them through His prophets, and ultimately through His Son.

CAN WE SEE GOD TODAY?

No. The Garden is closed to us. We can't see God because of our sin and guilt and mortal flesh. Our Creator no longer comes walking to us where we may see Him with our eyes. **But He has spoken to us richly and wonderfully:**

Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV) — 1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Like Adam and Eve, hiding in the bushes, we can hear the Lord as we listen to and read His Word with faith, as the Holy Spirit gives us ears to hear and eyes to see.

God knows that we cannot see Him, and that's one reason Jesus came:

John 1:18 (ESV) — 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Jesus' disciples longed to see God, and on the night of Jesus' betrayal Philip said,

John 14:8-9 (ESV) — 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." **9** Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still

do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

No man can see God and live, but Jesus Christ brings us right up to the edge of the cliff. He shows us what the Father is like. He speaks to us the words of the Father. **Because of God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ, First Corinthians 13:12 is true:**

1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV) – 12 For now **we see** in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now **I know** in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Now, it's true that we see only dimly, and that we know only in part, but the fact remains that we do see, and we do know. No unbeliever sees what we see and knows what we know, as limited as our sight and knowledge are.

And we have this promise given to us through the Scriptures, the Word of God:

1 John 3:2 (ESV) – 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because **we shall see him as he is.**

When who appears? When He appears. Who is He? I have always taken it to be Jesus, but the words of Scripture are clear: Beloved, we are GOD'S children now ... when HE (God) appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see HIM (God) as He is. What does it mean that we will be like God? It means that we will be like the Son of God, Jesus Christ. But that comes through seeing God.

When we are glorified, we will see God as no creature has ever seen Him. We will see Him to the greatest extent that any creature could ever see Him. I believe that we will see Him in a way that even the holy angels cannot see Him. They cover their faces (Isaiah 6), but we will see Him face to face, seeing Him as He is. We will see God as Jesus Christ in His glorified humanity sees Him. The Man Christ Jesus does not shrink from the Father in terror; neither shall we.

Beloved, Revelation 22 promises that we will not only be with God in eternity, we will see His face.

For the time being we are still shut out of the Garden by sin, but the Garden will return, infinitely greater than Adam and Eve ever knew. We will see the face of the Lamb of God in His glory, and know the glory of God as much as any creature can. Sin will have been destroyed in the lake of fire, and so there will never again be even the temptation to sin, much less the the ability to sin.

What does all this mean for us today? It means that what we see in this world is not what eternity will look like. It means that the longing in our hearts to know God without reservation or fear will be answered. It means that His great purpose and intention all along has been to redeem a people from Adam's race with whom He can have intimate fellowship. It means that we will never again hide from Him in our nakedness.

We will have this because we have been made pure by the promise of the Father and the blood of the Son and the promise of the Spirit. We get discouraged because of our sin and weakness, but we need to hold on in faith because of His promise. It seems impossible to have the hope of purity, much less the hope of seeing God as He is, but remember: what God promises, He fulfills; and what God begins, He finishes. Cling to Him today. Trust in His purpose and plan and promise.