

THE BEATITUDES: JESUS' CALL TO HAPPINESS

Matthew 4:17-5:12

“Blessed are the Pure in Heart...”

Matthew 5:8

In Psalm 24 we read a portion of a liturgy that was used when the Hebrew people would enter the sanctuary for worship. *“...who shall stand in this holy place? Those who have clean hands and a **pure heart**, those who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully, they will receive blessing from God...”*

When the prophet Samuel was commissioned by God to select a new king for Israel, he heard from God, *“...the Lord sees not as men and women see; for they look on the outward appearance but the lord looks upon the **heart**.”* And it was David, who is known as *“a man after God’s own **heart**”* that was selected to be king.

In the 139th Psalm we find King David’s prayer, *“Search me, O God, and **know my heart!** Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* David later says to his son Solomon, *“...know my God, and serve him with a **whole heart**...for **God searches all hearts**, and understands every plan and thought.”*

*“Blessed, happy, are the **pure in heart**, for they shall see God.”* Many see and hear this beatitude as a call to morality—living a moral life. I am not opposed to moral living but I do not at all believe that is the meaning of this text; especially, when David, with his questionable morals, is described as being *“a man after God’s own **heart**.”*

As we move into the New Testament, Matthew records Jesus as quoting the prophet Isaiah, *“The people honor God with their lips but their **heart** is far from God...”* According to Isaiah many people say the right religious things, they even do the right religious things; yet, the state of their hearts are not right. How many times have we heard accounts of people going to their physician for a routine physical, feeling fine, only to discover that a cancer grows within? Outwardly they look fine while inwardly they are sick.

Further into Matthew’s gospel he records Jesus saying to the religious leaders, *“Woe to you who cleanse the outside of the cup...but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence. First clean the inside of the cup so that the outside may also become clean.”* Jesus implies that a true outside cleansing is only possible when the inside has first been cleansed. Anyone who has ever faced an addiction knows

this is so. An addiction cannot be controlled over a long period of time unless there is a change, a cleansing, on the inside. Continuing this same thought of inside and outside cleansing Jesus says, *“Woe to those who are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead. So you also on the outside look good but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy...”*

In Hebrew and Christian scripture the heart is considered the center of personality. When biblical writers refer to the heart they are signifying who a person is at their core. Heart refers to one’s values—to how one really feels and believes.

The Greek word that we translate as pure in today’s beatitude is *katharos* from which we derive the word catharsis—a cleansing experience, an experience of purification. Today’s beatitude could then read, *“Blessed are those whose values are clean and pure.”* James, in his epistle, writes it this way, *“...purify your hearts you who are double-minded...”*

So what is the happiness that Jesus is calling us to in this beatitude? I believe Jesus is calling us to integrity—to be the same on the inside and on the outside, to not say one thing while doing another, to not be double-minded. Jesus is calling us to take seriously how we believe and feel—to cleanse our inner being, to not only look good on the outside but to be good on the inside, to be introspective. Jesus is calling us to be pure in our motives, to have no hidden agendas, to be sincere. Jesus was ever aware that one could appear outwardly pure while holding feelings of hatred, anger, vindictiveness and arrogance. Jesus is saying that happiness comes to the one who is as clean and good-looking on the inside as they are on the outside.

Consider Jesus’ example of the cup. Would you rather drink from a cup that is clean on the inside or on the outside? Do you want the contents of the cup to have a clean surface while you put your lips to the dirty outside, or do you want the contents to have a dirty environment while you place your lips on a clean surface? I know that people will respond differently to this choice; yet, my suspicion is we would all prefer a cup that is clean both on the inside and on the outside.

“Blessed, happy, at peace, are the pure in heart, those who have pure motives, who are sincere, who have integrity, who are the same in action and in belief. Blessed are those who are not double-minded.”

The *“pure in heart,”* according to Jesus, *“...shall see God.”* Have you ever considered how Jesus saw the world? While his disciples were awed with the temple, Jesus saw a poor widow contributing all that she had. When people were pressing in all around him Jesus saw the ones in need; Zaccheus in a tree, and the woman with a hemorrhage. Jesus saw the fishermen who needed purpose in their lives, and he called them to be his disciples. Jesus saw the woman at the well, an

outcast from the community, and offered her a new chance at life. Jesus saw his executioners and prayed, *“Father, forgive them for they do not know what it is they are doing.”* In the most ordinary people and places Jesus was able to see the splendor, the spark, of the divine. Jesus was able to see hope—to see the possibility of a cleansed heart which would lead to a healthy whole life, on the inside and on the outside, a life of integrity.

When Jesus says, *“Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* I believe he is indicating that those who are internally cleansed, who are single-minded, who have integrity, will be able to sense, to see, the presence of God everywhere; just as he did. For you see my friends when we are able to see the presence of God in another it is going to change how we relate to that person. And when we can see God in the most ordinary of life experiences it will change how we see the world—for the better!

There is the story of the father who brings his ill son to Jesus. The boy from all accounts has some type of seizure disorder. His seizures have almost cost him his life. The father has taken the boy to all of the known healers but to no avail. Jesus is this desperate father’s last hope. After some conversation with Jesus about the boy’s condition, Jesus says to the father, *“All things are possible to the one who believes.”* If you believe the healing can happen! The father’s response to Jesus is an indication to me that he is *“pure in heart.”* He says to Jesus, *“I do believe, but help my unbelief.”* He believes but there is some doubt. In this most crucial moment he tells the truth. He does not just say what he thinks Jesus wants to hear. He does not lie about his doubt—he is a person of integrity. His inside beliefs and feelings, and his outside words and actions remain consistent. *“I do believe, but help my unbelief.”* I believe that it is this father’s honesty, his integrity, his purity of spirit, which Jesus honors when he brings healing to the boy.

“Happy are those who are consistent inside and outside, those who have integrity, for they are able to sense everywhere the presence of God.”