

The Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the Pure in Heart.

The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”. (Matthew 5 v 8)

In Old Testament times Jewish pilgrims would once a year make the long, dangerous journey to Jerusalem to worship God. They took the time, crossed the thirsty desert, risked violent attack in order to see – a curtain!

They were not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies where the presence of God was thought to dwell. They knew their sin shut them out of God’s presence. No one could look on God in His holiness and purity and survive. In Exodus 33 not even Moses was permitted to look on God’s face. The prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19 encountered God on Mount Horeb but even he shielded his eyes and just heard a voice. Isaiah had a vision of the Lord in His glory in Isaiah 6 and it was almost the end of him! “Woe to me!” he cried. He was painfully aware of his sin and uncleanness, and that of his people, as he glimpsed something of the glory of God.

No images or statues of ‘the Lord’ were ever allowed for how could any sin-flawed human, however creative, adequately represent the perfection of God’s being? Read the first chapter of Ezekiel. This prophet also was granted a vision of what he calls ‘the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord’. His legs gave way and he fell to the ground and it’s clear from his words in this chapter he is struggling to describe the overwhelming, absolute splendour of God’s presence.

And the Lord Jesus in the New Testament declares to His disciples: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”.

The New Testament book of Colossians describes Jesus Himself as “the image of the invisible God”. On the Mount of Transfiguration,

Peter, John and James glimpsed Him shining, revealed in heavenly glory, along with Moses and Elijah. John was granted a further vision of the risen Christ, ascended and reigning in all authority, recorded in chapter one of the book of Revelation.

But here's the thing. The most profound glory was witnessed when Jesus was lifted up on the cross to die for our sins. As Jesus breathed His last, that heavy curtain in the temple was supernaturally torn from top to bottom. The symbolism was clear. God is still holy and utterly opposed to sin but Christ His perfect Son has become our Substitute and made full atonement for all our sins, offering His perfect life as a sacrifice on our behalf. In so doing Jesus has ushered in a new era where penitent sinners like us can be assured of forgiveness and welcomed into the presence of the Almighty for His perfect redeeming love has driven out the need for fear. We approach the throne of God with reverence and gratitude but with confidence and joy knowing there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ, walking after Him in the holiness and power of the Holy Spirit.

And He, the Lord Jesus, assures us that those with a pure heart will be granted to see God. We remember the story how when Samuel came to Jesse's house to anoint a new king he was told to pass by the first sons even though they looked promising. "Man looks on the outward appearance", says God, "but God looks on the heart". The Lord is looking not just at our outward show of respectability. The Pharisees were brilliant at that. But the Lord is looking at our inward motives.

A pure heart is a 'single' heart – it is all one thing, undivided. The person with a pure heart is the same on the inside as on the outside. The things he or she does spring from and match the thoughts and attitudes that fill their hearts. It is the opposite of hypocrisy – it is complete sincerity in our dealings with God and with one another.

Let us gather our thoughts on this under three headings:

1. A pure heart wants to see God. Pop group U2 once had a song in which they sang, "I can't live with or without you", and it's a bit like

that. A bit of us is still naturally a little afraid to draw too near to God and yet we cannot turn away. We are dissatisfied with lesser things. Our hearts hunger and thirst for our ‘true love’. This is why we were created – to know and love God. The Old Testament pilgrim would sing Psalm 42 on the way to Jerusalem –

“As the deer pants for water
So my soul (longs) for You O Lord
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God
When can I go and meet with God?”

Other things decrease in significance as this one desire becomes the dominant theme of our lives – to meet daily with God in worship and prayer, to experience His presence and serve in His joy.

2. A pure heart feels its unworthiness and prays to be even more pure.

David was the one described as the ‘man after God’s own heart’. He was the one anointed because God saw David had a pure heart. For most of his life David’s single greatest motivation was to know and serve the Lord His Shepherd. Yet even David could fall into sin and had to pray in Psalm 51:

“Create in me a pure heart O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me”.

Because his heart was already set on the Lord he wanted to be even more pleasing to God and grieved over his sin that had not only dreadfully abused his fellow men and women but temporarily distanced him from God. “Restore unto me the joy of salvation”, He pleaded.

In Colossians 3 the Apostle Paul urges Christians to set our eyes spiritually on Christ in Heaven and our destiny there and live our lives here in the light of that. As those being renewed to live in heavenly

harmony and Christlikeness we are to ditch old things like malice and practice love in all our relationships.

3. Noticing finally that a pure heart is rewarded by God. We are blessed. We see the Lord now by faith, at worship and in the outworking of circumstances in our lives. We discern His 'hand' of mercy and provision. And we are promised that these are just precious foretastes of what will be soon – the honour of worshipping before Him in Heaven face to face, redeemed, finally and completely purified and secure in Christ.

As children of heaven let us seek to live with single hearted devotion to our Lord and blameless motive toward one another until we are received into that glory by His grace.

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

Amen