

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Mathew 5:8

This past week our family spent a few days away enjoying some time together in a cottage on the shores of the Sunshine Coast. We had a great time, and the place we rented provided for our needs, and the only thing we really needed to work around was the quality of the water in the house. And so, as we were buying a few gallons of spring water at the grocery store, I was reminded of how oftentimes we forget how truly blessed we are with the purity of the water that have in Port Alberni. It was also in that same grocery store where I was also reminded how we in North America are becoming increasingly concerned with purity of the food that we eat, as there are now often large sections in stores set aside for health food – specifically for food that is organic and/or gluten free. It seems like today, more than ever before, we want pure water to drink and pure food to eat. I was also reminded we want pure air to breathe, which came to mind as we were parked next to a fertilizer truck in the belly of the ferry.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mathew 5:8). In these words, we are reminded that as important as pure water and pure food and pure clean air are, Jesus spoke of a purity that we tend to ignore or overlook, and that purity is the purity of our hearts. This sort of purity, however, isn’t something we can drink, eat or breathe; but rather a purity of the attitudes, desires and motivations of our hearts. *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* Jesus spoke these words in the context of the five beatitudes before it. In being keenly aware of the depth of our sin, and truly grieving over our sin, causing us to sacrificially surrender and submit to God, we become hungry and thirsty for the righteousness of God, which causes us to be overwhelmed by God’s mercy – which should then cause us to passionately pursue the purity of our hearts before God. But the truth is, that whenever we try to do so, we will find ourselves in a spiritual battle that bars none, because our hearts here on earth will always be somewhat corrupt due to our inherent depravity. God knows this; in Jeremiah 17:9 He declares: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* If that is true, then *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* is more than we can ever accomplish.

Well, purity of heart is more than we can ever accomplish. That’s why Jesus declared, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* Jesus said this because he is concerned about our hearts. In these words he is declaring that it’s not enough to clean up our behaviors and how we act on the outside. The aim and purpose of Jesus’s life, death and resurrection was not to reform the manners of society but to change and transform the hearts of saved sinners like you and me. He knows and understands what is going on in our hearts more than we do. In 1 Samuel 16:7 God Himself said: *“For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”* God knows our hearts. He knows that our hearts reveal what we are, in the secrecy of our thoughts and feelings, where nobody knows but God. And in Matthew 15:18-19 Jesus tells us what we are in the deep, private recesses of our hearts: *“What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”* Jesus did not come into the world because we have bad habits that need to be broken. Jesus came to purify our hearts.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The English word “pure” is the Greek word “katharos” from which we get the English word *catharsis*, which means to “release, purge or cleanse.” The Greek word “katharos” translated as “pure” has two basic, distinct meanings. The first meaning is “to make pure by cleansing.” So in the context of our faith in Jesus Christ, the “pure in heart” are those who come to Jesus in recognition and confession of their sins, and who have then received forgiveness and have been cleansed of their sins. The pure in heart are those who have been cleansed by God and this purity cannot be attributed to any human effort, but rather through the experience of the new spiritual birth that occurs when one surrenders their heart and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The word “*pure*” means “to make pure by cleansing.” But it also means “unmixed or undiluted.” The Greek word “*katharos*” was also used to describe clear water or of metal with the impurities removed or of grain that has had the chaff removed or of feelings that were unmixed. So “*pure in heart*” in this sense means having a heart that is unmixed with devotion to anything or any person other than God. Purity of heart in this sense is singleness of heart, as opposed to a divided heart. The pure in heart are those whose single-minded goal is to please and glorify God. Yet double-mindedness has always been one of the great plagues of the church. The trouble with us is our divided heart. One part of us wants to love, know, worship and please God; but another part of us wants to love, know, worship and please ourselves. Paul expressed it well in Romans 7:15-24 where he spoke of this as a continuous war in our hearts in which while we want to do what is right, we have a lot of difficulty carrying that out. The word “*pure*” here means “to be purged and cleansed of sin and to be totally and completely devoted to God.”

“*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*” The English word translated “*heart*” is from the Greek word “*kardia*” - the word we get the English word “*cardiac*” and other similar medical terms. It is not surprising then that when we speak of the heart we usually think of the physical organ that pumps blood through our body. There is a spiritual reflection here in that since heart disease continues to be the single leading cause of death in North America today, we should naturally be concerned about taking care of our hearts. And so just as a diseased physical heart can kill your body, a diseased spiritual heart can constantly kill your soul forever. But in a biblical context, the word “*heart*” has a much broader perspective. The Bible speaks of the heart in three different connotations; the *human emotions* (John 14:1; Nehemiah 2:2), the *human intellect* (Mark 2:8; Hebrews 4:12), and the *human will* (Daniel 1:8). But all of these connotations together view the heart as being the seat of our character or the core center of our inner being, which responsively would be the seat of our affections – both good and evil. Thus the words of Proverb 4:23: “*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*”

Our fallen human hearts are, and always have been, the source of all our trouble. In truth, the fallen human heart has not changed for the better since sin’s entrance in the Garden of Eden. By the time of Noah, things had degraded to such a point that the “*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*” (Genesis 6:5). A quick glance of the cultural landscape of our society and world today reveals that the flood God sent into the world did not drown out the great wickedness of fallen humanity. Because we are creatures who chose sin as our first choice in the Garden, the attitudes and motivations of our hearts will always be polluted or twisted or warped or tainted to some degree, always battling against the image of God we were created for. Friends, none of us is free from this. Even right now, as I am in the process of preaching and you are in the process of listening (or not listening) to this sermon, God is in the process of judging our thoughts and our attitudes and the motivations of our hearts. Hebrews 4:12 tell us that that, “*the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes... OF THE HEART.*”

God’s Word and our human experience tells us the truth that becoming a Christian does not free us from sinning; Paul clearly states that in Romans 7 and 8. While *positionally* our souls are sanctified in Christ in glory before God, we are still here on earth - and we all still have within our hearts a nature that is not completely clean from sin or any kind of double-minded desires. The truth is our hearts are continually being polluted with self-centeredness, self-importance and self-desire, which is self-deceiving, self-defiling and self-destructive. And so it would seem that when Jesus said: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” he was asking from us that which is impossible for us to do, because there is no human thought, word or deed that is ever completely devoid or free of sin. Yet the Word of God hammers home the truth that the heart is the center of our being, and that while the heart is battleground where by which sin and evil continues to pollute us and divide us, we are still to pursue purity of heart, if we are to ever see God. The question that demands our attention is: Can we ever have a purity of heart here on earth to the point that will allow us to see God. The answer is - *yes!*

There are two, and only two, kinds of religious faith in the world. One is the religious faith of *human achievement*, which is the belief that we can work out or earn our way to be acceptable to God. The other kind of religious faith is the religious faith of *divine accomplishment* that says, "We can't do it. God did it for us in Christ." Every religious faith in the world fits into one of those two categories: either the religious faith of *human achievement* (which is the deceptive lie of Satan) or the religious faith of *divine accomplishment*, (which is the glorious truth of God's grace). When we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior - we then given the glorious grace of faith in the divine accomplishment of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ – purging and cleansing us of sin and empowering us to be totally and completely devoted to God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We see how this works in a Psalm of King David, who was a “*man after God's own heart*” (1 Sam. 13:14).

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

*He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.*

*He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*

Psalm 24:3-5

In this Psalm David asks the question: “How can one be worthy enough - pure enough - to stand in God's presence and see God?” David knows that it needs to be someone with “*clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.*” In the context of the psalm someone who had “*clean hands*” was someone who acted innocently toward others; and someone with a “*pure heart*” was someone who has been cleansed of all unworthy motives toward other people; and someone “*who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully*” was someone who has such a hunger for God and devotion to God that they didn't worship or swear by any idols. Therefore, true piety is shown both in devotion to God, and in fair and generous dealings with others.

But David knew that God knew the depravity of his own heart. David knew that God knew that David could not do any of those things for himself. But David also knew *what he needed to do* to receive the purity of heart of being cleansed from his sin and devoted to God and generous in dealing with others.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.*

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.*

Psalm 51:1-17

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

In the words of Psalm 51, written by a man after God's own heart, we see the pathway by which God purifies the hearts of those who come to him with broken and contrite hearts. The pathway to purity begins with confession of sin, continues with prayers for purity, ends with worship and devotion to God.

Confession of sin. David begins by acknowledging and confessing his sins to God. God will not purify us or forgive us or cleanse us or restore us or empower us if we refuse to recognize and admit the impurity of our hearts and our desperate need for God. But to admit and confess our desperate need for God to make our hearts pure is not to suggest that we become passive about the matter. Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote, "this does not mean that I should walk through the gutters of life waiting for God to cleanse me." While God is the only one who can purify, we still have a responsibility to pursue purity. The apostle Paul spoke of this in Philippians 2:12-13 when he told us, "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*" What this means is that once we come to faith in Jesus, we do receive a pure heart through surrendering our lives to Jesus. That purity of heart is a *positional purity* we have before God that is based on our relationship with Jesus. But that's not the end of our pursuit of purity, as we are then called to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, *because* it is God who is working in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. This is the *practical purity* that we are to be living out by the power of the Holy Spirit that based on the *positional purity* we have before God. Other words for this are *sanctification* and spiritual formation. Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 7:1: "*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*" God purifies our hearts but each one of us is responsible for maintaining the purity of our hearts.

Prayers for purity. David knew how impure his heart was when he thought back to his rebellion against God and the depravity of his sins. After confessing to God, he then prayed in Psalm 51:10, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*" Prayer is the means by which we can open the depraved brokenness of our hearts to receive the purity of the grace of God's heart. God will not *forgive us* if we refuse to recognize and admit the impurity of our hearts – *Blessed are the poor in Spirit!* God will not *cleanse us* until our hearts are broken and contrite (remorseful and repentant) – *Blessed are those who mourn!* God will not *restore* our hearts until we cast ourselves on the grace of God and beg him to do what we cannot do – *Blessed are the meek!* God will not *empower* our hearts until we totally and completely devote our hearts and our lives and our all to Him – *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!* God will not *purify* our hearts until live out our positional purity with practical purity through a sacrificial sympathy towards those in need – which reflects the mercy and forgiveness we have received through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – *Blessed are the merciful!*

Worship and Devotion to God. David began his walk down the pathway of purity by acknowledging and confessing his sins to God, after which he then prayed prayers for purity through forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, and empowerment – which caused him to worship God and proclaim his devotion to God: "*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*" Worship is the natural response of a pure heart that has been purged and cleansed of sin, and empowered the Spirit of God, to be totally and completely devoted to God, fulfilling the promise of "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*"

King David understood Jesus' words 700 years before Jesus was born. He was known as a "*man after God's own heart*" and the 51st Psalm is just one of many Psalms that David wrote that give us the eyes to see the heart of God. Many of King David's psalms reflect the reward of walking the path of purity, which is the glorious grace of faith at work in the divine accomplishment of the promise of God to send a Savior into the world to purge and cleanse us of our sin – and empowering us to be totally and completely devoted to God, giving us the eyes to see the heart of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.
 Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.
 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.
 One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.
 On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
 They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.
 They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
 The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
 The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.
 All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you!
 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power,
 to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds,
 and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
 The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.
 The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.
 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.
 You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.
 The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.
 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.
 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them.
 The LORD preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.
 My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.*

Psalm 145:1-21

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” How do the pure in heart see God? The pure in heart see God like King David saw God. The pure in heart see God in creation - Psalm 19:1: *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”* The pure in heart see God in their circumstances - Romans 8:28: *“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* The pure in heart see God in the Word of God - 1 Corinthians 2:13-14: *“We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”* The pure in heart see God in their pursuit of purity - 2 Corinthians 3:18: *“We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* The pure in heart will ultimately see God forever – in John 14:2-3 Jesus said, *“In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”* Two of the apostles also wrote of that day. In 1 Corinthians 13:12 the apostle Paul tells us: *“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.”* And the apostle John said: *“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”* (1 John 3:2). Jesus said: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

The pathway to purity that leads to the blessing of seeing God begins with confession of sin, continues with prayers for purity, and ends with worship and devotion to God. This is the glorious grace of faith at work in the divine accomplishment of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ – purging and cleansing us of sin and empowering us to be totally and completely devoted to God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Brothers and sisters, this is the pursuit of purity that we are called to as followers of Jesus Christ. This is what our Lord was telling us in Luke 9:23 *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* In his book “Shaped by the Word” Dr. M. Robert Mulholland writes:

“Spiritual formation is a lifelong process of growth into the image of Christ. This gradual aspect of spiritual formation moves against the grain for instant gratification culture . . . but spiritual formation is the primal reality of human existence. Every event in life is an experience of spiritual formation. Every action taken, every response made, every dynamic of relationship, every thought held, every emotion allowed: These are the minuscule areas arenas where, bit by bit, infinitesimal piece by infinitesimal piece, we are shaped into some kind of being. We are being shaped either toward the wholeness of the image of Christ or toward a horribly destructive caricature of that image. . . . Human life is, by its very nature, spiritual formation. The question is not whether to undertake spiritual formation. The question is what kind of spiritual formation are we already engaged in? Are we being increasingly conformed to the brokenness and integration of the world, or are we being increasingly conformed to wholeness and integration of the image of Christ? . . .

Genuine spiritual formation, being conformed, is the great reversal of the negative spiritual formation of our culture. It reverses our role from being the subject who controls the objects of the world, to being the object of the loving purposes of God who seeks to control us for our perfect wholeness. Genuine spiritual formation reverses our role as the controllers (who act to bring about the desired results of our lives) to beings who allow the Spirit of God to act in our lives to bring about God's purposes. . . . Genuine spiritual formation reverses our habitual expectations for gratification to posture of patient, open ended yieldedness. Genuine spiritual formation brings about a fundamental shift from being our own production to being God's creation.

The goal of being conformed, the goal of the work that God seeks to accomplish in our lives, is that we find our cleansing, healing, restoration, renewal, and transformation and increasingly likeness of our being and doing to that of Christ being and doing. . . . This kind of spiritual formation takes place at the points of our unlikeness to the image of Christ. It is that precisely those points in our lives where we are not in conformity with the image of Christ that God encounters us. At those points God confronts us in our brokenness, challenges us to respond to God's offer of forgiveness and healing, calls us to consecration of ourselves to God, and when we respond, God graciously works to conform us to the image of Christ at that point in our being.

Spiritual formation is inseparable from her relationships with others. . . this reality provides us with a powerful but uncomfortable means of evaluating our spiritual growth. . . . If our spiritual journey is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ, then the journey should bring us to greater and greater Christ likeness our life with others. . . . Scripture is not only a place where we find ourselves encountered by God, but a place where God probes the nature of our relationships with one another.”

Jesus did not come into the world because we have some bad habits that need to be broken. Jesus came to purify our hearts and we are called to pursue that purity of heart. We “*work out our salvation with fear trembling*” because we all have divided loyalties in our hearts. It’s only when we are fully devoted to God that we begin to see things more clearly. When we get our hearts fixed on God’s heart it will resolve everything that causes stress in our lives. Stress comes when we have to make decisions among many conflicting interests. But when we fix our heart on Jesus most of our decisions will automatically be made. Paul Thigpen writes: “Unfortunately sin has blinded us, leaving our spiritual eyes swollen shut. Unable to see God, we grope in the darkness, searching desperately for someone or something to make us happy...our heart is splintered and scattered. We run to and fro, gathering first this trinket, then that one, dropping both for the next shiny one we spy...the result is a civil war of the soul. All the while our Father stands close by, waiting for us to turn around and run into His arms...if our vision of God is to grow wider, clearer, and brighter, our will must be united in a single focus on Him and an overriding desire to know and love Him.” In Psalm 73:25-26 the psalmist cries out to God: “*Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*” May the same be true for us. Amen? Amen!