

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

**Beatitudes 6: LENS CRAFTING:** *Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*

SCRIPTURE READING – **Matthew 5:3-12**

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is  
the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all  
kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for  
your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the  
prophets who were before you.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This is part 6 of our series focusing on the Beatitudes. These are eight short sayings that Jesus preached in his very first sermon as recorded in chapter 5 of Matthew’s Gospel. Each one of these blessings brilliantly distils down the sum total of all the teachings that Jesus will be expanding on throughout his entire ministry. The Beatitudes are like the preface to a book or the thesis statement of an essay. Each of these teachings reveals God’s point of view on humanity and also teach us what characteristics the beloved of God possess.

Jesus said, **“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.”**

Religion, in general, seems to spend a lot of time and effort on rules and standards for holiness. Cleansing rituals, purity codes and recipes for repentance are designed and codified by religious institutions to insure our acceptability before God. It's easy to get the message that holiness is reserved only for self-disciplined, uber-religious, and the rest of us...well; we just do the best we can or give up on the idea of religious purity all together. Somehow, the pure in heart are able to maintain a certain innocence that is free of all corruption and completely unstained by sin or guilt or wrongdoing. If this is what it takes to see God, I guess that ship has long since sailed for me. Is God asking the impossible of us, or is there another way of understanding?

Please pray with me...

*Holy God of all blessing, thank you for sending Jesus and preserving these sacred teachings for us to absorb. Open our hearts to understand. Help us to grasp the full meaning and may we have the courage to truly follow in the Way of Jesus. AMEN.*

What comes to mind for you when you think of the word "pure"?

Literally and figuratively, "pure" is anything unblemished or untainted, like pure maple syrup or pure gold. When I think of what is pure I immediately think of White's Brook up in the mountains of Western Maine. When I was a kid, I loved swimming in that clear, cool, ever flowing water. I remember standing under the waterfall and diving deep into the crystal pool below. When I came out I somehow felt transformed and especially clean and pure.

Also, every time I see a newborn baby, "pure" is what I think of and marvel at the blank canvas of that life. Yet at the same time I know that life is anything but pure. Innocence is as ephemeral as spring blossoms and before long we all know that the flower will fade and fall. For many, the loss of innocence is when we look for a way to regain or reframe our sense of goodness and purity. Unfortunately our first instinct is often to construct an outward mask. We want to appear pure on the outside but our inner self still feels guilt-ridden, culpable and anything but pure or blessed. This duality can breed a miserable conflict. Tension and confusion take root and our vision becomes blurred. The way we view people, places and things is altered by our experience. We see the world through biased eyes. Over time, we begin to lose sight of God. Our lived experience doesn't match up with who we want to be or who we think GOD wants us to be. I think this inner conflict is what the Apostle Paul alluded to when he wrote about the "thorn" in his flesh. (2 Cor 12:7) On the outside he

was succeeding wildly in preaching the Gospel, starting new churches and instructing thousands in the Way of Christ, but inwardly he may have felt hypocritical and unworthy. He prayed for relief from the agony festering in his soul. It was eating him up. Paul writes that God replied to his prayer.

*“My grace is sufficient for you, and my power is made complete in your weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9)*

The problem is that we're not very good at admitting weakness. We're not very good at receiving grace. We feel we have to earn God's approval. To be pure in heart, we think, is our responsibility and we have long since proven we are unworthy. We don't trust in God's forgiveness because we can't forgive ourselves. Over time, our eyes look away from God. Instead of receiving grace we can only see a God of judgment and condemnation. On our own, resentments are fed by the disappointments, losses and faded dreams. For many, the hard knocks of life create contempt for God and often times, those around us. Relationships deteriorate and we grow more and more isolated and bitter.

There is a great novel and subsequent movie called, *The Shack*. If you haven't seen it, I think you should watch it tonight or pick up the book after church. The main character Mack has lived a hard life filled with the worst kind of innocent suffering and guilt you can imagine. Eventually he spends a weekend with God in a remote shack deep in the woods. God, by the way, is portrayed in the movie by the exceptional African American actress, Octavia Spencer. Brilliant casting! He asks her the question we all ask. Where was God during the horrors that he and countless others have faced. Where is God in suffering? God looks at him and with tears welling up in her eyes she says, “I was always there beside you, but when all you focus on is your own pain, you lose sight of me.”

Naturally, our experiences affect how we perceive things. Some advance in a career, while others get fired, Marriages are celebrated and too many are mourned, maybe we become a parent or sometimes lose a child. We read daily about excessive poverty and the brutal injustice all around us. Everyone sometimes fails and most of us have had to confront the realization that we were to blame. If I am honest, I see that I am NOT the hero in my life story. All of these things shape the way we understand God. They become the lens in which we view God.

In the beginning, we were all born pure in heart, perfectly animated by the Spirit of God. As we grow, life gets messy and distorts our lens and when all we can see is our own pain, we lose sight of a God who can only love us. Yet, this is the good news of the Gospel! This original blessing of purity in heart, that clean, unblemished, innocent core deep inside you can never go away. As the dust and dirt of life blurs our vision, we need a lens crafter that will correct our vision and restore our original blessing. Receiving grace is the cleansing cloth that transforms our perception and restores our true self.

Howard Thurman wrote, "There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls." And, "Sometimes in the stillness of the quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper in the heart giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair."

This is God's sufficient grace, knocking on the door of our heart, willing...no yearning to restore everyone with a clean pure heart. Like jumping in the pure spring fed water of White's Brook, grace will not change our experience, but we will see the world differently through the purity of that lens, and we will see God in absolutely everything.

Jesus said, **"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."**

Amen