

Blessed are the Pure in Heart
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
By Phil Brainerd
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Introduction

I ran into an interesting article recently in the magazine, “Psychology Today”. It was entitled, “How to Figure Out What You Want Out of Life”. It was written by Jennice Vilhauer, Ph.D. She is the director of the Emory University Adult Outpatient Psychology program. So, she’s very accomplished.

Here’s how Dr. Vilhauer starts: “A lot of people come to work with me because they feel stuck, and they want to change their life. But one of the first obstacles we run into is that when I ask them what they want their life to look like, they often don’t know.” Now, listen to this: She says, “Knowing what you want is the first and most important step in creating a better future. But how do you make this important decision?”

So, let’s start by asking a question: What do you want out of life?

We’re working our way through Matthew’s Gospel, and we’re currently in a section I’m calling “The Christian Manifesto”. Here’s what we’ve read so far. Jesus tells his disciples that there are people in the world who are “blessed”

- 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - 4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
 - 5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
 - 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
 - 7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
- (Matthew 5:3-7)

And our verse for today: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (v 8)”

We’re going to organize our session today on three questions:

- What does it mean to be “pure in heart”?
- Why do we want a pure heart?
- How do we get a pure heart?

I. What Does It Mean to be “Pure in Heart”

What does it mean to be pure in heart? We have two words here: Pure and Heart.

A. Pure

First, let’s look at the word “pure”. To understand, I’ll use an illustration.

Example: Pure Gasoline

Most of us drive cars that require gasoline to operate. Gasoline is one of those things that we take for granted. You pull up to the gas station and you get gas and you leave. But sometimes, gas station owners don’t maintain their pumps well. If a gas station doesn’t maintain their pumps correctly, other substances creep into the gas. **Impurities**. These impurities can include things like water and simple dirt. Apparently, this happens more than most of us know.



Back in 2017, NBC News released an article with the title, “Watered Down Gas Is Way More Common Than You May Think”. If you want to run a gas station, you have to allow inspectors to check out your operation every now and then. According to the article, an alarming number of gas stations don’t pass inspection. They’re allowing impurities to mix with gasoline.

When impurities get mixed in with gasoline, your car doesn’t run well. In worst cases, the engine can be damaged and will stop running. The more impurities, the more of a problem you have. For your car to run at its best, you need pure gasoline. A good chemist working for an oil company may come up with things that make your car run better, but anything else is definitely a bad thing.

Let’s see if we can arrive at a simple definition of “pure”. We’ll state it and compare it to the opposite. There’s something you want or need. Our example is gasoline. We need gasoline for our cars to run. So, we want pure gasoline - Something that is completely composed of what we want. When other things creep in, they make what we want less effective. Or, they even destroy what we want. Those other things are impurities. Gasoline with water or dirt mixed in is **impure**. Impure gasoline can inhibit our cars, or damage them so badly that they become useless.

So, here are our definitions:

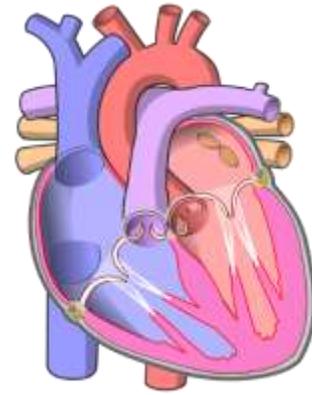
Pure: You have something that is completely composed of what you want.

Impure: Other things are present: Other things have crept in.

B. Heart

1. Physical heart

The next word is heart. We can think of hearts a few ways. We can think of the physical heart inside of our body. We can think of a dry cross-section, like something we'd see in a medical textbook. That's certainly important.



In the 1980s, someone invented a game called “Trivial Pursuit”. To play the game, you were asked all kinds of trivia questions. I was playing with some friends, and the question came up: “What is the cause of 99 percent of deaths?” Everyone started guessing. Is it cancer? Is it some kind of injury? **Here’s the answer: Lack of oxygen to the brain.**

The heart pumps blood, which sends oxygen all over our bodies. The brain especially needs this. If the heart fails in its job of getting oxygen to the brain, our brain stops functioning, and we die. All kinds of things can cause this, including disease and injury. But the diseases and injuries aren’t the actual cause of death. The cause of death is the failure of the heart to do its job. So, the heart as a physical mechanism is vital to life.

2. Symbolic Heart



Then, there’s the heart as a symbol. We see this symbol every Valentine’s day. The heart can certainly be thought of as a symbol of love. In the Bible though, the symbolism is wider. The heart is the symbol of our inner being. It includes things like our will, and our desires.

Desires: Those are the things we want. Maybe it’s the things we long for. Those desires, those longings come from our hearts.

That’s why we started today by asking the question, “What do you want?” **What you want comes from your heart.**

Jesus is telling us that there’s something very important about having pure hearts. In the same way that a car needs pure gasoline, we need pure hearts. If a car gets bad gasoline; gasoline with impurities, its performance is hindered. Maybe the car dies when it has bad gasoline.

So let’s focus on this point: What do you want? In a little bit, we’ll talk about some of things that people want. But before we do that, let’s ask another question.

II. Why do we want a pure heart?

Here's the question: Why should we want a pure heart? Let's be reminded:

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Do you know why you should want a pure heart? Because our Lord Jesus tells us that if you have a pure heart you will see God. This is not *you might see God*. If you have a pure heart *you will see God*.

Let me ask a hard question: How does that sound right now? How valuable is it for you to see God? What would it mean to you if you could see God? Think about that.

While you're thinking, let's look at our next point.

III. How do we get a pure heart?

How do we get a pure heart? This is an important question. It's important because people have pondered the question for a long time. In our series, we've mentioned that many disciples have a wilderness experience. They get away for a time. Some people though, have believed that "a time" goes on indefinitely. People who believe this move up to a mountain and live in a cave as a hermit. They avoid people for years.

It's interesting that Jesus had a wilderness experience that lasted for 40 days. However, after 40 days, he came back and spent the rest of his life with people. Before that experience, he spent his whole life living with other people. So, we need something else if we want a pure heart. What is it?

Let me suggest some steps.

A. Realize how valuable it is to see God.

Many years ago, the great King David looked up to the heavens and believed that he saw God expressed there. Here's what he wrote:

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
(Psalm 19:1-2)

When he believed he was seeing God in creation, David then felt inspired to write about the laws of God.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
8 The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
9 The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
Psalm 19:7-9

Now, look at verse 10:

10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

To David, seeing God was more precious than gold.

Later, another psalm writer said this:

Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (Psalm 73:25)

Once again, we see that word: Desire. So again, we ask, "What do you want?" What does your heart tell you? **A pure heart says, "I want God".**

The first step to get there is to realize how valuable it is to see God. Once you realize how valuable it is, there's a second step.

B. Find out what makes a heart impure.

The second step is to find out what makes a heart impure. Let's read more from the Psalms. This is another Psalm written by David.

- 3 Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?
- 4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god. (Psalm 24:3-4)

So, we have a picture of what we're trying to understand, a pure heart, as opposed to its opposite, an impure heart. The pure heart wants God, the one true God. The impure heart wants idols, false gods.

What are idols? What are false gods? Well, we discussed this extensively on different occasions since I've been associated with the church. For now, let's just summarize.

The nature of sin.

Way back in the Garden of Eden, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve by telling them that if they would disobey God, they could be like him. In other words, they could have all the power and resources of God *without* him. That's really the heart of sin. People want the things of God without God.

At some point, we find that rejecting God results in us living in a lonely and dangerous world. So, we look for help. But, not from God. So, the heart of sin is: People want the things of God without God. The heart of idolatry is: We go elsewhere for help.

In olden days people would make up gods, and then make images of those gods. People would bow down and worship the images, imagining that the images would give them things. You're looking at an image of the Philistine god Dagon. The Philistines thought that worshipping this god would give them a good harvest, among other things.



The Philistine god Dagon

The ancient world was filled with such false gods. When the Hebrew people were getting ready to live in the promised land, Joshua said this:

- 14 "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.
- 15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:14-15)

Joshua, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, told the Hebrew people that they had to choose whom they would serve. Later Jesus expanded on the idea of false gods.

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

So, Jesus also talks about choosing whom you will serve. However, he goes past the images. He says we want things like money.

I call this “statues and stuff”. People would serve the statue, but they really wanted stuff. The Philistines worshipped Dagon, but they wanted a good harvest and all the things that came with it.

Jesus said that people want money and all the things that go with it. So, the kind of energy, mental and physical, that they put into getting money looks like serving a god. In fact, Jesus says that money becomes a god.

Money isn't the only thing that can become a god. In fact, we need to look deeper. What do most people long for? Some say love, some say power. I'm going to suggest that there are several things people want. They can be summarized in two words that both begin with the letter “P”. They are “Provision” and “Protection”.

Provision: You want something. You think you need it. You long for it. So, who will give it to you? That's provision.

Protection: Once you get something, it seems like there's always somebody or some thing that wants to take it away. Who will protect you and who will protect your stuff? That's protection.

Now, there are lots of things we might want that are legitimate. Here's the issue: All kinds of things can become gods. There are ways to find out if things have become gods.

Ask yourself these questions: What happens when you don't get what you want or what you believe you need? What happens when you have what you want, and there's a chance that you'll lose it?

What do you feel at those times?

- Fear?
- Worry?
- Anger?
- Other negative emotions?

What do you do when you feel these negative emotions? We know how God wants us to act. We know the choices that God wants us to make. Do we do what God wants, or something else?

This brings us to another hard question: How does your desire for things compare to your desire for God? The pure in heart want God. They want God more than anything else. The impure in heart want other things. They want those other things more than they want God. ***This is shown in our choices and actions.***

How do we get a pure heart? Recognize the things that make our hearts impure. These are the idols. That's why all along our way today I've been asking, "What do you want?" When I first asked that question, maybe you said something like:

- I want a better career.
- I want more money.
- I want people to appreciate me.
- If you're unmarried, maybe you want to find that special person.

By themselves, there's nothing wrong with these things. But, the person with a pure heart says, "More than anything else, I want God".

Let's look at another point.

C. Ask God for one.

How do we get a pure heart? We ask God for one. Let's hear more from David:

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
11 Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me. (Psalm 51:10-11)

We can not create a pure heart on our own. Not with any amount of human effort. Certainly not by hiding in a cave for our entire life. Only God can renew our heart. ***So, ask him.***

There is only one thing that a person with a pure heart fears: Losing God. The writer says, "Cast me not away from your presence". The person with a pure heart wants God. He doesn't worry about anything else. Anything else on this world can vanish. As long as a person with a pure heart has God, they're happy.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

In the "Christian Manifesto", we've learned important things about those who desire to become disciples of Jesus.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” People are blessed when they realize their spiritual poverty.
- They are rewarded by being becoming citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn” People are blessed when they realize they have sin in their lives, and it makes them mourn. They will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek”. Today we asked, “what happens when you don’t get what you want?”
-The prideful shake their fists. The meek doesn’t need to. They will be rewarded someday when the earth is renewed. They’ll have all they could ever want or need.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”. Once they have confessed their sins, a disciple isn’t content to merely stop sinning. They want the opposite of sin. They want to be righteous. And Jesus says, they will get what they hunger for.

“Blessed are the merciful.” When someone understands their own sin. When they understand the mercy of God and how it causes him to forgive. They extend mercy to others.

And today, “Blessed are the pure in heart”. A pure heart wants God. A pure heart wants God more than anything else. If a car doesn’t have pure gasoline, it won’t drive well. A disciple without a pure heart will have great difficulty.

Is your heart impure? Have idols entered your life? If you don’t think you have a pure heart, there’s only one way to get one. **Ask!** If what you want out of life is anything other than God, Jesus gives no guarantees that you’ll get it. If what you want is God, If you want that more than anything else, you’ll get God.

That’s a promise Jesus gives to his disciples:

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