

BUILDING CHARACTER: On Being Pure in Heart  
A Study of Matthew 5:8

Characteristic of Completeness: Goodness/Integrity

Big Idea: Pure hearts will see God.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 24:3-4; 51:10; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:1-20; 23:25-28;  
John 13:10-11; 14:21; Acts 15:8-9; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Titus 3:5-7;  
Hebrews 4:12; 12:14; James 4:8; 1 John 1:9; 3:2-3; Revelation 22:3-4

Introduction

1. Do you ever wonder why God does not make Himself more obvious? Do you ever wish that God would be a little more direct? Do you ever find it hard to keep serving a God you cannot see?
2. What if I told you that there is a way to see God? What if I told you that there is something you can do to bring God into focus, to experience Him more, to have greater fellowship with Him? Would you be interested?
3. The biblical text we're studying this morning tells us how we can see God. It says it quite plainly. Our text is ► Matthew 5:8. If you have your Bible, I invite you to turn there. It's Matthew 5:8. It ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

From this text, I glean the following ► big idea: Pure hearts will see God. Being pure in heart is a prerequisite for seeing God. If you want to see God, you're going to have to be pure in heart.

It sounds so simple. And impossible. Because my heart does not seem very pure. To be honest, there are some really bad neighborhoods in my heart—places where my thoughts and intentions are not pure, where my motives are mixed. And I'm very suspicious of anyone who says his or her heart is completely pure, because ► Jeremiah 17:9 speaks the truth when it says:

<sup>NAU</sup> Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

So, we need to get some things cleared up regarding this big idea that pure hearts will see God. Two ► questions in particular serve as the basic outline of my sermon. First, ► what does it mean to be pure in heart? How are hearts purified? What does purity of heart look like? And ► second, how will the pure in heart see God? In what way will God come into focus? How will we perceive Him?

- I. As to the ► first question, I want to show you that our hearts are purified in two ways. There are two means by which our hearts become pure.
- A. First, our hearts are purified when we believe in Jesus for eternal life. The moment we trust in Christ for our eternal salvation, our hearts are made pure in the sense that we are forgiven, we are declared righteous, we are no longer subject to condemnation for our sin. The big theological word for it is justification.
1. Ironically, the first Christians were Jews, and some of the early Jewish converts had a hard time with the idea that Gentiles could become Christians by faith alone in Christ alone. But the apostle Peter, himself a Jew, defends this idea to his fellow Jewish believers, saying that the hearts of Jews and Gentiles alike are cleansed by faith. In ► Acts 15:9, Peter says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> Acts 15:9 “. . . He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.”
  2. The Apostle Paul corroborates Peter, saying our hearts are washed by faith in Christ. In ► Titus 3:5, Paul says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration . . .
  3. And Jesus Himself settles the issue. He was with His twelve disciples, giving them a lesson in serving one another by washing their feet—something only the lowliest of servants would do in that day. Jesus used the washing of feet as an object lesson, teaching them that, though He washed their feet, their hearts were already clean by virtue of their faith in Him. All of them were clean, but one. Judas Iscariot was not clean because he had not believed. In ► John 13:10-11, Jesus says,
 

<sup>NAU</sup> John 13:10 . . . “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*.” 11 For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, “Not all of you are clean.”

So, one way that are hearts are cleaned or purified is by faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. If we want to see God, we’re going to have to believe in Jesus for eternal life.

It’s ► a curious thing, though. I’ve been a believer in Jesus for over thirty years. I feel clean in the sense that I’m forgiven, I’m saved, I’m accepted by God in Christ. But I still have heart problems. I’ve still got those bad neighborhoods.

B. That brings us to a second way our hearts are purified. Our hearts are purified not only by justification, but also by sanctification. That is, our hearts are purified as we obediently follow Christ. The first kind of purification, known as justification, happens once for all, at a moment in time, when we believe. This second kind of purification, known as sanctification, happens gradually over time as we cultivate personal holiness, putting off sin and putting on a single-minded devotion to Christ.

1. James ► 4:8 sheds light on the whole idea. It says,

<sup>NAU</sup> James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James is calling on a certain group of people to ► “purify” their hearts. He’s calling on the ► “double-minded.” This gives us a helpful ► contrast. It tells us that the opposite of being pure in heart is to be double-minded. To be double-minded is to have divided loyalties and divided goals. To be double-minded is to have one eye on God and the other on selfish goals. To be double-minded is to be spiritually adulterous. It’s two-timing God.

For example, if on the outside, it looks like I’m working unselfishly to serve others, but on the inside, I’m selfishly trying to win the admiration and approval of people, that’s double-minded.

James is calling on the double-minded to purify their hearts, to pursue God only, to make the Lord their one overriding concern, to give Him their undivided devotion. As such, purity of heart is about integrity of heart. And so, our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is integrity.

The process of heart purification is linked to behavior. When James says, ► “cleanse your hands, you sinners,” it’s a call to change my behavior. To stop sinning. To clean up my act. Washing the hands is largely external; washing the heart is internal. James calls for both, as a matter of integrity. Washing my hands, but not my heart is double-minded; it lacks integrity.

James says it’s all a process of ► “drawing near to God.” And notice what happens when you draw near to God: ► “He will draw near to you.” That is to say, you will see Him. He will disclose Himself to you. Pure hearts will see God.

2. At this point, if you’re like me, the temptation is to try to draw near to God through self-righteousness. We talked about that a couple of weeks ago. I might say to myself, “I don’t really know how to purify my heart. Sounds touchy-feely, and I can’t conjure up feelings I don’t have anyway. But I think I know how to wash my hands. I can stop sinning. I can clean up my act.”

And I white-knuckle it, trying to do good in the flesh, according to my own goodness and self-righteousness, and I end up washing my hands, but not my heart. Jesus has some words for people like ► me:

<sup>NAU</sup> Matthew 23:25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. ► 26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. ► 27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. ► 28 So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

3. Whoops. ► When Jesus says, “Woe to you,” that can’t be good. So, I’m thinking: “Okay, I don’t want to be a Pharisee. How do I purify my heart? How do I wash my hands *and* my heart?”

Here’s how it works. The first thing I need is a bibliocardiogram. That’s right, a bibliocardiogram. A BKG. I made up the word, but it’s a timeless, biblical idea. It’s where I submit my heart for examination under the Word of God as applied by the Holy Spirit. It’s where I allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to me the condition of my heart using the Bible. Apart from the Word of God, I can be absolutely oblivious to my heart condition. I can be 95% blocked and 100% clueless. I need regular bibliocardiograms. The Bible, the Word of God is able to reveal with startling clarity the condition of my heart. It’s HD. Hebrews ► 4:12 tells us:

<sup>NAU</sup> Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And that’s exactly why, at times, I don’t really want to read and apply the Bible. It’s the same reason I don’t really want to go to the dentist or the doctor. I don’t really want to know how bad things are. I’m afraid to find out. I’d rather ignore what’s on the inside and outwardly act like everything’s fine. Even when I’ve got some symptoms, I still stubbornly say, “No, I’m fine.” I’m afflicted with the pathology of my greatest grandparents, Adam and Eve. Instead of being open and honest about the ugliness of my heart, I hide. Fig leaves come in all styles.

I know how silly it is for me to hide, but I still do it. It’s silly because the only way my heart is going to become pure is to identify and remove the impurities.

And the thing is, I can't identify and remove the impurities myself. Only the Great Physician can. And He uses the Word of God to do it as I surrender to His care.

Let ► me give you an example. Let's say I listened to last week's sermon based on Matthew 5:7: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy." Say I get all cranked up about the idea of putting some food items in two-gallon Ziploc® bags and giving them to the homeless. So I do. That's helpful.

But what about my heart? I don't want to wash my hands and not my heart. I don't want to skip the bibliocardiogram. So, I go back to the Scriptures, back to the Great Physician, and I prayerfully ask Him: "Lord, search my heart. What is true about the condition of heart when it comes to mercy? Am I merciful? Is there somebody in particular to whom you want me to show mercy and forgiveness?"

I wait on the Lord for the results of the bibliocardiogram. And the Lord shows me. I have not been merciful in this one relationship. Not in that other one either. And the truth is, I don't want to be merciful in those relationships. And I confess it to God. I'm just honest with Him: "Lord, I haven't been merciful, and what's more, I'm afraid I don't want to be. Lord forgive me. Help me; I'm stuck."

And that's where 1 John 1:9 comes in. If you've been around church for a while, you've probably heard it many times, but perhaps you haven't connected it with what we're discussing today. It ► says:

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The word ► "cleanse" is a verbal form of very same word translated "pure" in our text. When I open myself up to the truth about my heart, and I confess my sinfulness to the Lord, my heart undergoes purification. And notice who's doing the purifying. It's not me. It's God. *He* is faithful to cleanse. It's the Great Physician who cleans me up, but I still have to make the appointment.

But remember I said I don't want to be merciful in those two relationships. I don't think I have it in me. So where is my hope of becoming more merciful? The answer comes in ► 1 John 3:3, where we are told:

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

My hope for eternal salvation *and* my hope for personal holiness is to be fixed squarely on Christ. I must be honestly and desperately dependent on His power in me, not on my own goodness, not on my own self-righteousness. *Then* my heart is purified, as Christ is pure. *Then* I experience the power of His resurrection. *Then* I can obey and become more merciful in Christ. Apart from Christ, I can do nothing about my heart.

- II. But how will that help me see the Lord? That brings us to ► the second question: How will the pure in heart see God? In what way will God come into focus? How will we perceive Him?

I want to show you that the pure will see God in two ways tied to the two ways in which hearts are purified: justification and sanctification.

- A. First, those justified will see God in heaven in the future. Those who have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life will see the Lord when He returns. Various ► Scriptures assure us that when the Lord returns, we will see Him . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12 . . . face to face . . . then I will know fully . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 John 3:2 . . . we will see Him just as He is.

<sup>NAU</sup> Revelation 22:3 . . . His bond-servants will serve Him; 4 they will see His face . . .

- B. But that's not all. Not only will we see God in the future, but ► those being sanctified will see God at work in their lives now. We will experience Him in this life. We will relate to Him more fully today. It's an issue of fellowship.

1. In the Old Testament, in the aftermath of David's sins of adultery and murder, in contrition, he offers his heart for examination by the Great Physician Psalm 51. In ► Verse 6, David says to God,

<sup>NAU</sup> Psalm 51:6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being . . .

Bibliocardiograms tell us the truth. And the results are not always pretty. In fact, they can be ugly and deeply painful. But here's the thing: *If we do not see how bad our hearts are, we cannot see how good God's grace is.* When we open our hearts to the bibliocardiogram, when we invite God to search and reveal the bad neighborhoods, only then can we see the grace of God at work to clean them up. We see God. His cleansing grace washes over us. Pure, honest hearts will see God at work. In ► Verse 10, David cries out

<sup>NAU</sup> Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God . . .

Notice He doesn't say, "O God, I'll be good from now on. You'll see. You'll see." No. He says, "I need to see You, O God. I need to see You create in me a clean heart."

2. And God's work on the inside moves outward in obedience. And when we obey—guess what?—we see more of God. Obedience brings still greater visibility. Jesus says when we surrender ourselves to the bibliocardiogram, when we see what God is showing us, and when we join Him in obedience, He will make Himself more visible to us. That's what He says in ► John 14:21:

<sup>NAU</sup> John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

See that little word, ► "disclose"? It's what the Lord does when we obey. He discloses Himself. The original Greek word translated "disclose" literally means to make visible.<sup>1</sup> Pure hearts will see God.

That doesn't mean He's going show up like a floating hologram in your bedroom tonight. At least, that's not the way I see Him. He shows up in ordinary circumstances to those who have eyes to see—eyes clarified by a heart being purified.

God showed up last night in this room. I saw Him. We talked. Or I should say He spoke; I just listened. Last night, as part of our Sharing Tree program, many underprivileged families showed up to receive the Christmas gifts you purchased for them. I saw God in you, welcoming guests, giving gifts, playing music, providing refreshments, making friends, praying for some who cannot find work. As a church family, I believe we were being obedient to God's call in His Word to be merciful. I take no credit for it; others did the work.

Most of our guests were Latino families, and I've mentioned before that I sense that God is stirring us to reach out to the Latino community in some greater way. And so, we've been praying for His direction because we don't really know what we're doing.

But I feel as though God disclosed Himself through several people. One was a young Latina mother who did not speak English. She was with her husband and two small children, six and three. As I chatted with the family, communicating awkwardly at times because my Spanish needs a lot of work, the woman asked me what kind of church this is and when we have services. I explained as best I could, and then I asked her if she goes to church. She

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<sup>1</sup> W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "ἐμφανίζω," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

explained that she used to go to a certain kind of church, but she never hears the Word of God there. And she asked: Do you teach the Word of God in Spanish? I said we hope to some day, but we don't yet.

And then I spoke with Latino man who asked essentially the same question: Do you have services in Spanish?

And then I spoke with another young woman. She is bilingual, but her husband speaks Spanish only. She said, "It is so difficult to find a church that teaches sound doctrine in Spanish. The ones we've tried are either wildly unbiblical or extremely legalistic. Do you have services in Spanish?" I asked what her name was. She said, "Anjelica." It means "angelic."

I felt like God's angels were there, giving directions. I don't have it all figured out yet, but I see it. I see Him.

My point is not to unveil some new ministry, but to simply say God discloses Himself, He makes Himself visible when we just try to honestly, openly follow Him. Pure hearts will see God.