



Matthew 5:8

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

Reflection

The bible is filled with picture language and some of its most powerful imagery is presented in terms of light and darkness, blindness and sight. These images provide a great lead-in to our passage today, so we'll begin by exploring them a little.

Sin has a way of blinding us. The more we sin, the more blind we become to reality, as we stumble around in the darkness of unbelief. But the bible tells us that God is calling us out of darkness and into his glorious light – only humankind loves the darkness. In Jesus, a great light has dawned (Matt 4:16), light has come into this world but humankind loves darkness more than light. Even those of us who respond to God's call and approach his glorious light find ourselves conflicted. We find ourselves moving forward, ever closer to the light, our sin being progressively exposed to us and dealt with. The closer we move towards the light, the holier we become, the Holy Spirit working in our hearts to enable us to be increasingly conscious of our sin, and to sin less, and thus become increasingly pure in our hearts. What happens

to us as we leave the darkness further and further behind and get closer and closer to the light, being purified as we go, is known as the process of sanctification. As you grow as a Christian, as you grow in your faith and in your relationship with Jesus, you're progressively sanctified, which means you progressively become more like Jesus as your heart is progressively made more pure by the work of the Holy Spirit.

And yet, because of the nature of this world, and the nature of what it is to be human, Christians still struggle with sin. We still feel the pull of the darkness around us even while most of our heart desperately wants to head towards the light. Today's passage speaks into this situation. Jesus knows that we're struggling, he knows how hard it is to resist the darkness, after all he lived in this world just as we do.

Jesus knows the pull of the darkness, the pull of the kingdom of this world, the pull of our culture. But he also knows that the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of this world don't combine well. They're like oil and water, like light and darkness, like blindness and sight – they just don't mix.

That's why the Sermon on the Mount is so countercultural. Jesus is reminding us that even though we live in this world, we're citizens of another country, a heavenly one. We're foreigners in a country that is not our own, we're here for a time, but we're just passing through, we belong to another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. He's reminding us of who we are and how different we are.

And so when Jesus speaks in today's verse about having a pure heart he's speaking about

having an undivided heart. One of the commentators I was reading spoke of it in terms of being single-minded, being free from the ‘tyranny of a divided self.’¹ That’s his way of saying how awful it is to have a foot in both camps, a foot in the kingdom of this world, and a foot in the kingdom of God, a foot in the church and a foot in our culture – ‘the tyranny of a divided self.’ Not a divided self, but a pure heart.

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What does a divided self look like? What does an impure heart in this sense look like? It is a person in conflict. A person at war within themselves at best; and a person who is completely hypocritical at worst. At best, having

¹ John R. W Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*. (Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 49.

a divided heart is being conscious of it, worshipping the things of this world before God and partly regretting it but also partly embracing it, living constantly at war with yourself and never truly being at ease except when you manage to block out entirely either one side or the other. At worst, having a divided self is putting on a mask for the occasion. It's hypocritically living one way with a group of people on Sundays and in certain friendship groups, and then living another way amongst other friends and in other contexts. It's living hypocritically, unreflectively, and not realising the inconsistency of your life or how foolish you would look if someone were to put it all together. And yet this is a line that all Christians walk to some degree – how often we pick up and put on and take off different masks in front of different people and in different situations in life!

And so when Jesus says, 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God' he's saying to be the same person in every situation and in every relationship. Be a person who loves the light, love's Jesus and lives wholeheartedly for him in every situation. That person will see God. They'll experience his presence in their life through the work of their constant companion and guide his Holy Spirit. They'll see him in the Scriptures, they'll encounter him in their prayers, and they'll see his sovereign hand in the unfolding of their lives. If you live wholeheartedly for Jesus you'll see him everywhere and experience intimately his presence in your life as you grow to know him increasingly deeply.

Think

Are you at war with yourself? Is your heart divided? Do you feel torn between the pull of our culture and your faith? Perhaps it's a relationship with someone who isn't a believer? Or the temptation of sexual sin that's causing this war within you. Or something else. It's time to live at peace. Whatever situation you find yourself in choose Jesus. And experience the joy and peace of intimacy with him, experience his blessing – because no matter how it might feel in the moment nothing will ever bring you more satisfaction than him.

Pray

If you're at war with yourself, and in the end we all are to some degree, then spend some time acknowledging it before God. Pray Psalm 51:10, with all your heart,

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

And pray that the Holy Spirit might help you resist the pull of our culture, to resist the pressure of your peers, and enable you to see God. And may that vision of God be so glorious that any temptations might just fade away, seen for what they are, just meaningless distractions that waste your time and waste your life, when compared to the infinite peace and joy and meaning found in worshipping and enjoying our God forever.

And tomorrow we move from purity to peace.
Until then.