



Foundations: The Sixth Blessing

Matthew 5:8 (AFBC 10/14/18)

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

This is beatitude number six. It begs the question, “Do we really want to see God?” And, no—in case you remember that old joke—we’re not getting up a load to go see Him right now! But whatever our definition of “seeing God” is, do we want to?

Some people claim they see God in the beauty of nature. While our three children were still at home, we took a few BIG family trips. There were some things we wanted our children to see and experience.

The first trip was to Washington, DC. If financially able, I think every American should have this on their “to do” list. We started in Arlington National Cemetery and talked about the sacrifices that so many have made for us. We went to the various memorials located on the Mall, and talked about other kinds of sacrifices and responsibilities we have in this great nation.

Next, we took the kids with us on a mission trip to Guatemala. I had been there before, but I wanted our children to see how some people exist in this world with so very little. I also wanted them to understand the difference between gratitude and greed.

On a third trip, we drove our old Ford minivan to the northeast, making stops in New York City, Boston, and up the coast of New England as far as Kennebunkport, Maine, before turning back toward home by way of Amish country and Gettysburg.

But when the Baptists held their annual meeting in Salt Lake City, we took the whole family and tacked on a week and a half of vacation time to see as many of our majestic national parks as possible.

We traveled through Utah and into Colorado, touched on New Mexico, and then went all the way up to Wyoming, across to Idaho, and back down to Utah. It was amazing.

There’s not so much land to live on out there, especially in Utah--everything’s a mountain, canyon, or desert. Around each turn is something new to behold. And if you’re seeing it all with the eyes

of faith, you're simply amazed at the beauty and majesty of God's creation. Yes, you really do feel as if you're seeing something of God Himself as you behold those incredible vistas!

Some of them take your breath away. They leave you awestruck, momentarily speechless, and filled with wonder!

And that's just from seeing CREATION. Can you imagine what it's like to actually see the CREATOR?!? Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." They will SEE GOD.

That's not something to be taken lightly—seeing God. In the Old Testament, we find men of stature like Moses and Elijah hiding their faces in the presence of God--afraid to look at Him—fearful of actually SEEING God.

You remember old persecuted Job. After losing almost everything precious in his life, Job expresses a desire to see God. Listen to what he says, "If only I knew where to find Him; if only I could go to His dwelling." (Job 23:3)

What do we say, church? Do we have this desire to see God? Is this something we really want?

People go to church saying they want to encounter God; they want to see God in worship. If they don't, they want somebody to fix it. Make it more spectacular, maybe more entertaining—perhaps strobe lights with do it! You think?!?

I don't know. Is it really somebody else's responsibility to make sure that I see God? Or that you see God?

Jesus is explaining here in the sixth beatitude that it's "the pure in heart" who will "see God;" so maybe the problem is not somewhere OUT THERE. Maybe it's inside HERE—in our hearts.

Could it be that when our hearts are pure, we can do something as simple as opening and reading the Bible and be "wowed" by the presence of God? Without a pure heart, though, we find those very same words boring, and we can't see God in them.

Let's take this further. When we get to digging around in Scripture and find places where people actually DO see God, we may decide that we had just as soon NOT see Him.

I mentioned earlier about Job looking for God. Listen to what he says when he finds Him: "My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6) Is this what we want?

One of the most powerful God-sightings I know about is Isaiah's vision in the temple: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple." (Isaiah 6:1)

But what is the result of seeing God? Isaiah cries out, "Woe to me...I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." (Isaiah 6:5)

Peter says something similar after that great catch of fish. As he begins to realize who Jesus is, he falls to his knees and says, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8)

In time, though, Jesus gets hold of that crusty old fisherman. He remakes his life into a fit vessel to serve Him and to serve His church. God does the same thing with Isaiah, touching his mouth with a live coal taken from the altar, and saying to him, "...your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (Is.6:7)

Next thing Isaiah knew, he was begging for God to use him: "Here I am. Send me!" (Is.6:8) Sure, we want to see God—we all do--as long as it doesn't affect us much—as in convicting us and changing us and sending us out to do God's work.

Maybe we only THINK we want to see God. In theory, we want to see Him. But if our reality was anything like Isaiah's, maybe we would have second thoughts about it. Jesus often had to confront divided loyalties in people's lives—like on this occasion:

"As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

Many were ready to receive what Jesus offered, but they weren't willing to give what Jesus required. They didn't really want to SEE GOD. Their hearts and loyalties were too divided for that. Jesus knew this; so at the very outset of His ministry, He taught, **"Blessed are the PURE in heart, for THEY will see God."**

Let's talk about hearts. "The heart" is so important in the Bible. This verse from Proverbs demonstrates the significance of the heart: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (Proverbs 4:23) Paul Baloche was right on target when he wrote, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, I want to see you..."

What is the connection between our eyes and our hearts? I think it's this. The condition of our hearts affects everything we see—what we are able to see, even what we want to see. In the Bible, the heart is the control center for all of life. It's that place inside each one of us that we converse with on a regular basis.

The heart is where we weigh our options and make our decisions. It's also where God connects with us, and hopefully where we connect with God. At least for now, if we SEE GOD, it has to be with the eyes of our heart.

Think of the heart in this way. Most of us have driven through Spaghetti Junction in Atlanta. Soon, we'll have our own version a bit closer to home—in Greenville—IF it ever gets finished!

But many of us have traveled I-85 South and beheld that tall, intimidating maze of bridges and highways weaving in and out, around and through each other. It's mind-boggling, and even feels a little scary as we approach it.

Which is better—taking the road that goes to the top of that mess with the possibility of falling off; or, taking the route on the bottom with concerns about what may drop out of the sky from above? I have mixed feelings about having spaghetti junctions in both directions now! Too much pasta, I guess.

Anyway, try this. Think of your heart as a “spaghetti junction.” All your thoughts and emotions, your will and your wisdom, your prejudices and insecurities, your faith and your doubts—all these and more converge in that convoluted place deep inside of you that the Bible calls... “the heart.”

Having a “pure heart” would be something like going through spaghetti junction with every car and truck on all those various levels doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing. They would all be traveling at precisely the speed limit—which is okay because weather conditions are perfect.

There’s a proper distance between each vehicle. Everyone has two hands on the wheel; no one’s texting or talking on a cell phone, adjusting the radio, doing their make-up, or eating lunch.

They’re all licensed drivers with perfect driving records, neither too young nor too old, and everyone’s insurance is paid in full! Each car has recently been serviced, and...need I go on??? How likely is that to actually happen—for every car and driver going through spaghetti junction along with you at any moment in time?

It’s about as likely as it is for my heart or yours to be PURE! That is, if you think of “pure” as meaning “perfect,” then I believe we would have to conclude there’s no chance of it happening!

So, there goes our shot at seeing God, right? Unless, of course, we don’t make it through spaghetti junction!

Even then, though, if we have to be pure in heart to see God—and we’re not--what do we get to see? It may not be good!

But there is hope for us. Take a look with me, please, at what it means to be “pure in heart.”

“Pure,” as Jesus uses the word here, does not mean “absolutely perfect.” Purity was an important concept in the Old Testament, and Jesus was steeped in the Scriptures. He understood them. He fulfilled them. He quoted them often.

So we need to understand this. In the language of the Old Testament, wine or milk that had not been watered down was called “pure.” An army that had no defectors, a person who was

free of debt, or a sacrificial animal that had no obvious blemishes—these were also called “pure.”

Something could be made pure by cleaning it or, in the case of metal, refining it. It could be kept pure by allowing no foreign substances to be added to it. Dirty clothes, once they were washed, and grain that had had all the chaff removed from it, were said to be “pure.”

Now, none of these things is perfect according to our understanding of the word. But each of these things is headed in the right direction—as good as could be expected given the circumstances—and this is what qualifies it as being “pure.”

When Bible scholars explain what Jesus meant by “pure,” they use words like integrity, single-mindedness, genuineness and sincerity. Soren Kierkegaard said, “Purity of heart is to will one thing.” (Ogilvie, p. 92) You hear the clear sense of priority and focus in that statement—“to will one thing.”

William Barclay translated the sixth beatitude like this: “Blessed is the man whose motives are entirely unmixed, for that man shall see God.” (Ogilvie, p. 93)

Purity of heart, then, is all about our focus, our priorities, our motivations. It’s about giving God first place in our lives and trying to see all of life through God’s eyes.

There was a book published a few years ago called The Year of Living Biblically: One Man’s Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible (Simon and Schuster, 2007). It received a lot of attention because the author, A. J. Jacobs, was an agnostic who claimed he wanted to see what he had been missing when it comes to religion.

Let’s go ahead and acknowledge that Mr. Jacob’s motives were not pure. He did this to write a book that he thought would sell a lot of copies, thus making him a lot of money; and evidently, he was successful.

Still, I think we can learn something from his observations. I want to share a few of his insights with you. He was asked what the biggest challenge was in trying to live strictly according to the Bible. Here’s what he said:

“That would be no coveting, no lying, no gossiping. They’re little sins, but they’re killers. My year made me realize just how many of these sins I committed every day. And refraining from them for a year was really hard, but completely transforming.”

He was also asked about the biggest lesson he’d learned. He responded—and get this: “Your behavior shapes your beliefs. If you act like a good person, you eventually become a better person. I wasn’t allowed to gossip, so eventually I started to have fewer petty thoughts to gossip about. I had to help the less fortunate, so I started to become less self-absorbed.”

Now, without getting into the theology or lack thereof that we find in his response, let’s just consider what he did. For one year, this non-believer focused on what he found in the Bible concerning how God wants us to live our lives. And he says he became a better person because of it.

This got me to thinking. What if those of us who know Christ as Savior and Lord, who’ve asked for and received forgiveness, who now have the gift of His Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us, who are surrounded by Christian brothers and sisters to encourage us and hold us accountable...

...what if, even for just one year, we all shared such a clear focus on doing what God wants us to do and becoming what God wants us to be—if we were truly that “pure in heart,” what would we, and our church, and our community look like by the end of that year? Imagine that, friends!

Do you think we would see more of God? And do you think the unbelievers we rub shoulders with would also be able to see more of God... in us? Could THIS be the blessing Jesus has in mind?

When we confess our sin and ask the Lord to get our hearts right, so that we can live as He wants us to live—when we really make this our focus--God may start showing up all over the place.

This is foundational, friends—one of the most basic lessons for living a Christian life. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God!”

“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord; open the eyes of my heart.
I WANT TO SEE YOU.”