
Blessed Are the Pure in Heart, For They Shall See God

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**A Sermon for Evensong
by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Epiphany 4A**

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."
Matthew 5:8

Most of us have heard each of these nine beatitudes of Jesus before. Blessed are these. Blessed are those, nine times. We know them as the opening verses of "The Sermon on the Mount." They have been holy words for us, comforting us when we have been poor in spirit, or in mourning, or trying to make peace.

And these words have caused us to notice saints around us. We have noticed that the merciful and the persecuted and the meek truly are blessed.

All these qualities are like musical notes in a chorale or symphony. Together, these qualities—mercy and purity of heart and peacemaking and poverty of spirit and many more—they all blend and harmonize to make a communion of saints, a church of blessed people, a grand chorale of exquisite beauty.

But today, I want to speak about a distinctive beatitude, one of the nine, but one which is distinctive. Today, I want to point out the only beatitude which uses an active verb.

Other beatitudes use the passive voice, or they describe a state of being. "They *will be* comforted, *will be* filled, *will receive*," These are all passive parts of speech. And "*Theirs is* the kingdom of heaven," is a state of being.

But only one beatitude uses a verb in the active voice. There is one state of blessedness that leads directly to an action, an active capability: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for *they shall see* God."

Other people who are blessed have things happen to them. But the blessing of the pure in heart results in their doing something. They see. In fact, they see God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

One of my heroes, the great Danish thinker, Soren Kierkegaard, said that "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing." Our Episcopal postcommunion prayer asks that we might serve God "with gladness and *singleness of heart*." (Book of Common Prayer, page 365). The Buddhists call it "mindfulness." Jesus said things like "the eye is the lamp of the body, , no one can serve two masters. , seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6).

I pale in comparison to those speakers. But in my own humble way, I say, "Pay attention to where you are paying attention." We will usually get to the place to which we are actually paying attention.

"Single-mindedness" may be one of the most difficult spiritual characteristics for us to muster in these frantic times. How can we be single-minded when so many images and ideas compete for our attention? It is rare to be able to walk, or to drive, down the street without seeing hundreds of billboard words and directions. Every television screen seems to have text scrolling below the image, or strange pop-ups appearing during silences in our shows. We even try to have conversations with our loved ones or friends, and neither of us can stay on subject! Pay attention to where you are paying attention.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "If your eye (your will, intention) is single-minded (not scattered, distracted) then your whole body will be full of light."

I am sure that choral singers hear "purity of heart" in still another way. If one can concentrate on that one tone, that pure tone—and then if everyone can sing their pure tone at once—then the grand chorale is blessed. And many have heard God, "seen God with their ears," when that purity of tone is achieved. Blessed are the pure in tone!

There are lots of ways to say it. But the gist is this: purity of heart is to be single-minded and sincere in intention. I believe this is what Jesus meant in the great beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart." He then added the only active verb among the blessed consequences. "They shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Maybe they will hear God, too.

If we seek spiritual health and light, we will see and hear—we will taste and feel—through purity of heart. If we seek God, we will experience God through purity of heart—engaging life un-distracted from our priorities and visions. Pay attention to where you are paying attention. Purity of heart is to will one thing; it is to see God.

AMEN.

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