

Sermon Title: "The Pure in Heart"

Prelude

UMH #361 "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me"

Congregational Reading: UMH #755 Psalm 24:1-6

Apostle's Creed UMH #881

Scripture

Matthew 5:1-8

Luke 11:37-46

James 1:27

Sermon: "The Pure in Heart"

Lord's Prayer

UMH #397 "I Need Thee Every Hour"

Closing Prayer and Benediction: Number 6:24-26

Postlude

Memory Verse: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Monthly Challenge: [This month your challenge is to memorize the Beatitudes. More importantly, beyond just memorizing them you are also challenged to memorize what the individual Beatitudes actually mean.](#)

“The Pure in Heart”
Pastor Jacob Hanson
03/10/2021

Opening Prayer

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Purity, Beloved, like the rest of the attributes mentioned in the Beatitudes, is a defining characteristic of the Lord and His people. Purity, as we understand it, can relate to a few different things. We think about something pure as being refined, filtered, and untainted. Pure water and pure gold as examples, are all more valuable than if they are mixed with something else. Water that is not pure has the potential to carry disease, gold that is not purified is not worth as much because the other materials do not add to its value. That understanding about purity bleeds over into the second definition, which is to be clean (pure) in heart.

To be pure in heart is perhaps a bit difficult to describe, but easy to identify. The old adage “You know it when you see it” certainly applies here. It doesn’t take just a long time to figure out who is pure, sincere, honest, and clean at heart versus someone who is not. Most of us can tell after meeting with someone else for a while, whether or not they care about us. Most of us can tell when somebody’s motives are honest and when they are not, when someone seeks our good or when they do not, and we tend to naturally gravitate towards those who care versus those who do not. This matter of being pure at heart is a defining trait of the Christian man or woman, and the world can see that rather easily. The saying “People don’t care about what you know until they know you care” rings true, and it is directly relatable to being pure at heart. The pure at heart, those who seek after the Lord honestly, who love others honestly, who seek to do His will sincerely, will see the Lord. It is a sign of the redeemed. On the opposite side, the other things that we often do in this life to seem holy and good and nice do not make us pure at heart and do not define us as clean depending on our motives. Jesus uses the Pharisees as the prime example of what an impure heart looks like versus a pure one.

In Luke 11:37-38 we read “Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal.” That may seem innocuous to you, but we have to remember this was a different time and place from today. Folks knew of course that the cleaner you were, the less likely you were to get sick. That on handwashing was obvious, but this isn’t the concern the Pharisee had with regards to Jesus. He was concerned about the ceremonial washing of hands. To get why this is a big deal, you have to understand that in the Old Testament law there were many prescriptions for ritual purity. In order to give a sacrifice to God, or in order to enter His temple, etc. you would first perform a purifying ritual act. This wasn’t about sin, but rather about putting yourself in the right place for the occasion. It is like if I was going to meet the president tomorrow, or if I was going to have a school board meeting, or if I was going to meet someone at the hospital, I am not going to show up in my workout clothes smelling of sweat.

It isn't that it would necessarily be a sin to do so, but out of respect I (and probably you) would dress a little nicer. It is the same reason why many of you wear suits or nice clothes to church. It isn't that you have to dress like that to worship the Lord, but it is for you a sign of respect to Him to put on your Sunday best. Well for the Pharisees, they had looked at the ritual purity laws that were in the Old Testament, and they had added to them. They had added so much in fact, that they had gone from valuing what scripture says to instead valuing these traditions more so. There are quotes from Rabbis of that time that survive where they state they would rather die of thirst than miss washing their hands ceremoniously. This, to the Lord, is patently foolish. Jesus as we see is not concerned about the purity in outward appearance, but much more desires purity of the heart... which the religious teachers of the day (and perhaps many of our day) severely lacked.

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within charity, and then all things are clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it.’” There is a lot to unpack here about purity. The biggest problem, Jesus asserts, is that the Pharisees miss the point when they try to look pure of heart on the outside but lack internal purity. He compares them to washing a cup on the outside but not the inside where it counts. If we go to buy a car today, and the outside looks great but the inside is trashed, we won't buy the car right? What something looks like on the inside matters, it matters even more than the outside. Jesus explains exactly what this deceptive impurity looks like in a way we can compare to today. He calls these religious leaders out for paying their monetary tithes and yet not caring for the justice of the Lord. These leaders were self-righteous, they would call for things publicly that they would not do themselves privately, they were more interested in how much money was in the offering plate than they were about how people were being connected with the Lord, and they would check off their boxes to look holy without doing the actual important work of sanctifying their hearts.

To connect this to today, it is akin to us trying to check all the boxes in a good Christian life while not caring for what the important center is. What Jesus is talking about is exactly the same a people who get baptized as babies, get confirmed, occasionally give to the church, show up a few Sundays a year, maintain their membership with the church... all while not really having anything to do with the Lord. Beloved, it is much easier to just check off a few boxes than it is to actually do the Lord's will.

A healthy prayer life, sharing the Gospel with others, regularly studying the scriptures, engaging with others for their benefit, serving your neighbor, serving within your church, honoring the Lord in your speech all of the time, keeping yourself far from enticing sins, etc. is much harder than just writing out a check and sacrificing a few Sundays a year isn't it? What do you think is more important to our Creator? Is He more concerned with us making sure our kids are confirmed, or making sure that our kids know where our salvation comes from? The answer is obvious. It is important to note that these things, by the way, are not to be neglected either. Jesus says in verse 42 "But these things you should have done without neglecting the others." The Lord doesn't want your money, or your name on a membership roll, or for you to check a bunch of boxes. He wants your heart, and from that pure heart then all the other stuff comes.

Does this make sense Beloved? One who is walking with the Lord in their heart, who has a solid relationship with Him, is going to give generously and attend church and participate in the sacraments and the like; but the motivation to do so is going to be out of love rather than "because grandma expects it" or "this will make me look good with the in-laws." This is where the Pharisees had the whole matter completely backwards. They thought it was by looking righteous that then they would be righteous... but that is a selfish model, and it ultimately is dangerous too.

In verses 43-44 and 46 Jesus tells them "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it. Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers." There is danger in men like these that Jesus is referencing. These people love to look the part and to be respected. Everyone loves to be respected and to be called by a title, but when that is the goal, when the self-righteous attitude takes precedence, then it is dangerous. These Pharisees, in being compared to concealed tombs, have a great danger added in that not only are they actually not righteous, but they also defile others. The act of walking over a grave would make one ritually impure according to the Law. If the grave was concealed, if the tomb was unknown, then the defilement would also go unnoticed. These religious teachers not only were defiling themselves with their man-made laws, but they also were leading others into defilement. Shame on any leader who pushes one astray. Shame on any pastor or teacher or preacher who proclaims anything other than God's word and law, leading someone astray by putting burdens upon them that are much too difficult to carry, and shame on anyone who pretends to be pure in heart but inside is not. The truth, Beloved, is that even if no one else sees it, we know if we are walking with the Lord purely.

Our last verse that we read should give us pause as we leave here this evening, pondering if at the heart of our religion if we are actually serving the Lord well. James 1:27 reads “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” If you want to put it into modern vernacular, here you go: Serving the Lord well in His eyes means to look out for those in need and to attend wholeheartedly to God’s commands. If we do that, if we love the Lord our God with everything we have got and love our neighbors as ourselves, not neglecting His commandments but embracing them, not neglecting to tell the truth, not neglecting to lift up our brothers any chance we have, then we are walking pure in heart. As Jesus told us, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Check your own heart and motivations to see if you are pure at your core, and if you are not, then ask that the One who made you would cleanse you. Be made pure Beloved, and serve Him well knowing that one day His people will indeed see His face in eternity. Let’s Pray,

Closing Prayer