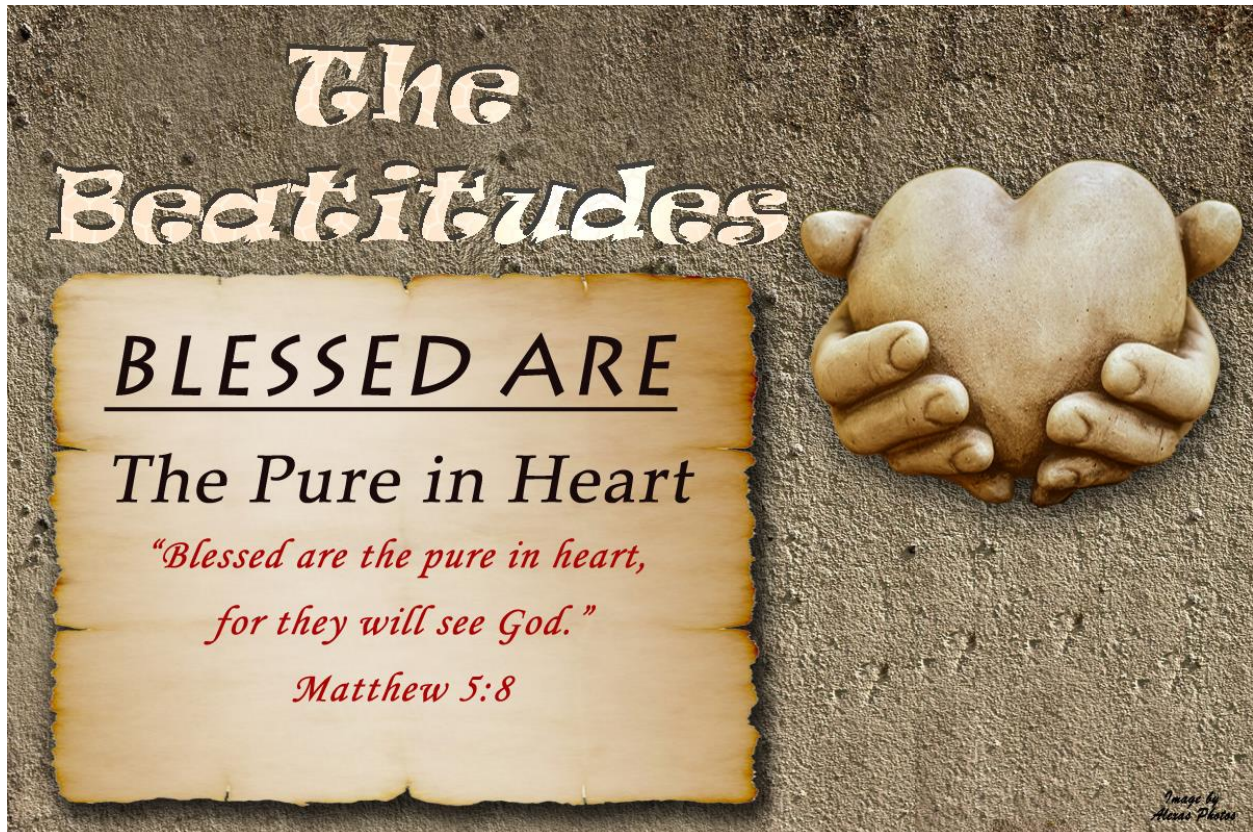


August 7

“Blessed are the Pure in Heart”

Matthew 5:8

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



Special Music: “Create In Me”

The Acappella Company

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noUeQQ64Q1I>

HEART OF STONE

**I am bone
With a heart of stone
Born in sin
Corrupt within
Sprit of a child
Though fully grown**

**My nature is
A hardened heart
No grace to give
No chance to live.
I feel my soul
May come apart**

**But God can take
My heart of stone
And make it fresh
With holy flesh
Recreated from
The Cornerstone**

**But first I must
Present my trust
Place in his hands
All my plans**

**My hopes and dreams
And sinful rust**

**And let him melt
The sin away
Human dross
And acrid moss
Scoured from
My heart of clay**

**And there remains
My heart of flesh
Like a chime
Beating time
As creation
With my soul doth mesh**

**Create in me
A clean heart, my God
Break the bone
And crush the stone,
Free complete
The flesh beneath
And remake my soul
From the mud and sod
To make me useful
To my God.**

When I lived in South Dakota as a child, my cub scout pack would sometimes take hiking trips into the Black Hills. The Black Hills were once the source of a great number of gold mines. Though most of the mining operations had ceased by the time my friends and I went exploring, we often came upon the skeletal remains of mines and mining equipment. On one such trip we found a mine with a turn of the century rock crusher. We all went scrambling on the crushing floor, which was still cover with rocks from whenever the owners walked away from the mine. Low and behold, I found a fist sized black rock with veins of gold running through it. I kept that rock for years, but I have no idea where it is today. Still, just having the rock lit the imagination of a young boy as he imagined a time when the mine was in full operation.

The purification process for gold is arduous. Rocks containing gold are crushed, washed, bathed with various chemicals, and then heated in a crucible until the gold melts and separates from the rock. In order to melt, the gold must reach a temperature of 1,948 degrees Fahrenheit. This will produce gold that is 99.5% pure. But the next process where the gold is bathed in chloride removes additional impurities to bring that percentage of purity to 99.9%. Which is fascinating information if you happen to own a gold mine and are trying to purify gold.

But how do you do that with a heart? In many ways, it is a much more difficult process. You see, gold doesn't care if it is refined or not. It is our human nature that wants it so pure. And the process doesn't really take much effort on our part other than following the process.

But the human heart is altogether different.

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Sometimes we don't objectively realize that the final goal in both the Old and New Testaments are the same. In both Testaments, God is doing everything possible to bring us back into His presence, purifying us to make us acceptable vessels to serve His people. That purifying process to wash us clean is different between the Testaments, but the results were the same. We can even see some of the symbolism in both as we reference these verses in Ezekiel. "I will sprinkle water on you, and you will be clean." We see ritual cleansing in the Old Testament to show a humble and contrite heart before God. We see baptism in the New Testament as a symbol of cleansing the sin from our lives resulting in a changed heart.

It is in the Old Testament that we find the roots for the baptism we embrace as Christians. Baptism was not something created by John the Baptist, but instead came from traditional cleansing ceremonies found in the roots of Judaism. Ritual handwashing was performed in different ways depending on the

purpose. Tvilah (Full-body immersion) was also performed depending on the circumstances. But the focus of both the hand washing rituals and full-body immersion was purification and sanctification, an attempt to provide an earthly image of a spiritual reflection.

We ask ourselves why this is necessary. After all, isn't this all just religious mumbo-jumbo that really doesn't do anything. Does salvation really require such a formal, deliberative act like baptism? That question has been debated since the time of the earliest Christians. Why did Jesus need to be baptized even though he was sinless? Why did Ananias baptize Paul, a man who he knew had killed and imprisoned many Christians? Why did Philip baptize the Ethiopian prince in the river? Why did Peter baptize Cornelius? What purpose did it actually serve? Why didn't the thief on the cross need to be baptized to be saved? Is there any real reason to hang onto such an outdated ritual?

When Ezekiel says,

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.”

is he implying that there is something magical in the process that turns a heart of stone into flesh?

There isn't any magic here. No hocus pocus. And no, the water isn't special, nor does it contain mystical properties.

When we take a look at our lives and all of our blessings, we can see how God has wound His way through every moment and lifted us. When we see His

daily provision and stand in awe of His grace and mercy, we are offered the opportunity to share those experiences everyone. We are granted the privilege to share our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, His son. Why are we so hesitant to declare that relationship with the world publicly?

Here is a quick story to help explain something so very important to this discussion. James was a man who was given an impossible project to complete. He had neither the skills nor the tools to accomplish the task. The project was underfunded, and James was not allowed to ask for additional resources or help. But his boss, Phil, informed him that his job was on the line. If he wanted to keep his job with the company, he would need to complete the project before the deadline and under budget. Times were hard and James had a wife and three children at home and knew that he could not afford to fail and possibly lose his job.

So, James leaned into the assignment and determined how best to accomplish it. First, he studied to gain the knowledge that he needed to understand the constraints of the project and then he studied even more to master the tools he would need to bring the project to fruition. He was focused. He was driven. He worked long hours and often neglected his family. He did what was necessary in order to keep his job and continue to support his family. He never asked for help, and he never asked for more resources, but people would often find him at his desk in the morning having worked throughout the night.

As the deadline approached, James engaged with the details of the project and proceeded to implement each segment of the project. A week before the project was due, James announced to Phil that the project was complete, which made Phil very happy. Phil called a meeting of the top executives to announce the completion of the project. James was not invited to the meeting, but it was televised throughout the company on the internal network. Everyone was so excited. The completion of the project was very well received.

In the meeting, Phil explained how difficult the project had been and how it had been completed only with the greatest of diligence and dedication on his part. He informed the board that the project came in under budget and was completed well before the deadline. He went on to relate the long hours it had taken him to make the project happen and the toll it had taken on him and his family. Never once did he mention James and his contribution.

Later, when the Phil met with James to recap the project, he thanked James for his contribution, his long hours, his team player attitude, and his dedication to the company. He also let James know that thanks to James' hard work, Phil had received a promotion. He went on to tell James how he had needed the promotion because he really had his heart set on a new boat. Although the platitudes were nice, what James was most grateful for was that he was able to keep his job go home and spend time with his family again.

Now that is kind of a heavy story, but not all that unusual. This kind of thing happens more than we would like to admit. I know that you are probably thinking that James should have just quit over what happened. But remember, James did get what he needed out of his hard work. He managed to keep his job and return to spend time with his family. Yes, it wasn't fair. As a matter of fact, it's horrible. Our hearts go out to people like James who are put in impossible situations and expected to thrive to the benefit of someone else.

I hear you thinking out there. It's an interesting story, pastor, but what in the world does it have to do with our scripture? What does it have to do with a pure heart and seeing God?

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

The story isn't about a clean heart. The story is about acknowledgement. What drives us to want a clean heart? What pushes us to cry out to God in the words of David, **“Create in me a clean heart oh God, and renew a right spirit within me?”** Psalm 51:10 What caused Paul to tell Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:15 **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”**

In our story, James did not get the recognition that he deserved. But James did not do the project for the recognition. He did the project to keep his job and take care of his family. Jesus did not die on the cross for the recognition. He died on the cross so that we might have the opportunity to have a right relationship with our Creator. He

suffered the cruelties of the cross so that our sin-stained, ugly, disfigured, calloused, stony hearts could be cleansed and made flesh. And, while we recognize and are grateful for His sacrifice, He didn't die for that recognition and that adoration. He died to remove the sin and wickedness from our hearts. And all He really asks of us is for us to admit that we have hearts of stone, born of sin, and that He delivered us from that situation by giving us hearts of flesh and forgiving us our sin. Baptism is an acknowledgement of that fact. Baptism is a declaration before all humankind that we understand what Christ did for us. But He would have died for us whether we chose to be baptized or not. Our thankful recognition of what Christ has done for us is an important step in developing and growing our relationship with God

I could have told you that everyone in the company knew that James had done all the work on his project and that ultimately, Phil lost his reputation and his position in the company. But that isn't always the case. Sometimes, the things that we do, whether coerced or out of kindness, go completely unnoticed or unappreciated. And that makes us angry or depressed. This happens because we often lose our sense of purpose. Our purpose as Christians is to strive for a clean heart, a heart of flesh. Our attitude of servanthood should be modeled after Jesus who never sought recognition for what He did for others. It is Christ's love for God's children that motivated Him to consistently be a servant to those around Him.

When we break today's verse down,

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

we can start with a question, "How can we see God?" And the answer is right there in the verse, "By having a pure heart?" When God cleanses our hearts, our view of the world changes. When we have pure hearts, we can begin to see the world the way Jesus sees it. When our hearts are pure, we can fully see God at work in our lives and the lives of the people around us.

But how do we do that? Here are a few questions that we can ask ourselves to see if we are on the right path:

1. Do we truly want a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone? If we do, then we need to understand that having that heart of flesh leaves us vulnerable to the world. But by placing our hearts in God's hands to have Him change us, we are placing our souls into his trusting arms knowing that he will give us hearts of grace rather than prejudice, selfishness, and condemnation.
2. Are we humble before God? Obviously, we all want to answer yes, but are we brave enough to truly look for that humility in our souls. Are we willing to forego recognition in order to stand with Christ rather than seek the accolades of the people around us?
3. Are we willing to stand in adoration and praise of God and Christ even when we are ridiculed and persecuted? It's not easy and it could mean loss of earthly possessions and dignity. It could magnify the intolerance of others when we are in their presence. It could cost us our jobs, our families, and even possibly our lives.

4. Are we willing to accept the process? The process is difficult. Just like the refining of gold. God has to bring us to the point of understand who He is so that He can cleanse our hearts. He has to show us how filthy we are in order to understand how the cleansing process has changed us.
5. And lastly, are we willing to accept what it means to see God? Moses couldn't bring himself to look at God. Neither could Elijah. It was just too much for them and their faith was so very strong. Do we realize that to look upon the pure nature of God is to realize how imperfect we are? And yet, by doing so, we learn how to embrace and express the values of Christ. Everything becomes so much clearer for us. Christ's sacrifice to cleanse our hearts allows us to be welcomed into the presence of God.

There are so many wonders that take on whole new meanings for us when we allow God to purify our hearts. We have a greater appreciation for sunrises and sunsets. We can almost sense a supernatural love when we look into the eyes of babies. We find joy in serving the people around us. We become grateful for each and every opportunity for service that comes our way. And we find that we really don't need the accolades of people to know that we are fulfilling the purpose that God has for us.

This week, I want us all to read these questions to ourselves in the morning, pray about them, and see what God has to tell us about them. I want us to know if we are looking to see God. God has us in His crucible, constantly remolding us to fit His needs. Are we meeting the needs of His people as He intends for us to do? Are we

embracing the flesh of our new hearts, or are we slowly letting our hearts turn back to stone?

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

God bless you all!

AMEN

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