

The Blessed: The Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8

Readings: Matthew 5:8, Matthew 19:16-22

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Beatitudes Series #6

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Dear fellow followers of Jesus,

Have you seen God? What is that like? What would it be like?

Maybe you can think of Isaiah's vision of God in Isaiah 6 (which I read earlier). He saw the Lord high and lifted up, a picture of awe and glory. A sight that evoked humility and confession.

Ezekiel had a similar vision of God that led to his call into the role of prophet, much like Isaiah. In chapter 1, Ezekiel sees various creatures that ultimately point him to God. At v.26 he writes,

Ezek 1:26 Above the expanse over their heads (the heads of some majestic living creatures) was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. ²⁷ I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

That had to have been frightening and awesome, wonderful and scary at the same time. And Ezekiel is only seeing something that he describes as *the likeness* of the glory of the Lord in a figure like that of a man.

Some people had encounters with God. We read several times that the Lord appears to Abraham. Abraham is met by three strangers by the trees of Mamre in Genesis 18. He offers them hospitality and, over the course of the visit, it becomes clear that these visitors are angels and one of them might even be God in the form of a man. He speaks to Abraham and tells him that Sarah will have a son and that he's also going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Then in the book of Exodus, God appears to Moses in the burning bush and later we read several times that the glory of the Lord appears to Israel in the wilderness. The Lord also appears to Solomon in a dream, says 1 Kings 3:5. In that encounter, Solomon asks for wisdom. Then the Lord appears again after the temple is built and reminds Solomon of the need for his people to humble themselves and pray and seek God's face. (2 Chron. 7:12-14)

In addition, angels, who are God's messengers, appear to people. An angel comes to Hagar, Abraham's mistress, after she is forced away from Abraham's home because of Sarah's jealousy. Angels visit Lot and drag him and his wife and family out of Sodom as the fire and brimstone begin to rain down. Then, of course, in the New Testament several people, including Mary and Joseph, hear from the angel of the Lord.

The Passive Seeing

What strikes me, first of all, about seeing God is the active and passive ways this happens. I think all of the examples I found and gave thus far are passive encounters with God or his messengers. These people were not “seeking and finding”, if you will. They are not asking God to appear to them. They don’t appear to be going out looking for him.

They are, instead, people whom God chooses to reveal himself for specific reasons. He comes primarily to call them to his service or to remind them of his call on their lives. As such, you could say that these passive encounters with God are acts of grace. These are times when God decides that these individuals need to see him in some supernatural way in order to receive an important message. God is active in these encounters but the people are passive.

The Active Seeing

There are however active ways in which we can see God. These are ways in which *we* seek *him*. But to understand this better, we should consider what the Bible means by “seeing God.” Generally speaking, seeing God with our physical eyes is something that is forbidden. Think of how Isaiah considered himself ruined or doomed for having seen God’s radiance.

Instead, look at Psalm 24 where it’s pretty clear Jesus’ beatitude has its roots. Boys and girls, listen again, please:

Ps 24:3 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?

Who may stand in his holy place?

*4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to an idol
or swear by what is false.*

*5 He will receive blessing from the LORD
and vindication from God his Savior.*

*6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, O God of Jacob.*

In this psalm, those who seek the face of God are those who “see him.” This is also Jesus’ message to his disciples listening to his Sermon on the Mount. It’s his message to all of us who are followers of Jesus. It’s a message for everyone who knows Jesus as our Saviour and longs to live life his way.

Friends, Jesus helps us see that the pure in heart are simply people who are devoted to the Lord. In contrast to what first century Jews saw all around them, Jesus is saying that devotion needs to start in the heart. It’s not good enough. No, it’s not *sincere* if it’s just about outward appearances. Jesus fights to free people from a religion that teaches people to keep rules in order to prove your purity, ensure your righteousness or even earn your salvation. Our obedience can’t save us because no matter how well we keep the rules, God sees our heart. God know that our outward actions don’t always match up with what’s in our hearts. Just as Jesus says a little later in the Sermon on the Mount,

Mt 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Similarly, when talking about how we handle money, Jesus says,

Mt 5:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And that's basically the message he gives to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 as well.

God is not after our outward signs of faith, first of all. He's concerned about our heart. Sooner or later, your actions will show what's really in your heart. That's what happened to the rich man. He said he had done all the right outward things. He looked like someone who could be a follower of Jesus. From outward appearances, you and I might say, "This man is a Christian." But when Jesus presses him about his money, the man's heart is exposed. His greatest love comes to light. It is not the law he professes to keep perfectly and the God who gave it. His greatest love is his money. He loves it more than God.

The point of actively seeking God, then, is more like knowing, believing and sensing than laying our physical eyes on him. Seeing God flows from believing him to be our greatest need. A pure heart is one that has God on the throne. A pure-hearted person wants their life to express love for God. One who wants to follow Jesus above all else.

Country music singer Kacey Musgraves sings a song entitled *Follow Your Arrow*. Now that would be a great title for a Christian song as well if the arrow is Jesus. But for Musgraves, the arrow is your own desires. For the rich man in Jesus' day, money would have been his arrow. For Musgraves, it's our personal desires that are the arrow. Her lyrics point out a few examples of how people—like Christians perhaps—have certain standards of purity but we don't keep our own standards when it comes to how we look down on people. She sings:

If you save yourself for marriage
You're a bore
You don't save yourself for marriage
You're a horrible person
If you won't have a drink
Then you're a prude
But they'll call you a drunk
As soon as you down the first one

You're damned if you do
And you're damned if you don't
So you might as well just do
Whatever you want

So, make lots of noise
Kiss lots of boys
Or kiss lots of girls
If that's something you're into
When the straight and narrow

Gets a little too straight
Roll up a joint, or don't

Just follow your arrow
Wherever it points....

Source: [Musixmatch](#)

Music video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQ8xqyoZXCc>

Indeed, that's the message we hear all over our culture. Mind your own business. You do you and I'll do me. You follow your arrow and I'll follow mine.

And, indeed, we must respect the beliefs and choices of people who differ from us. Everyone is free to choose what to believe and how to live. However, as Christians, we choose to follow Jesus. That's our single-minded, single-hearted desire and it drives how we live. Those who have that desire are the pure in heart and will see God.

Active Ways of Seeing

So how is it, then, that we see God?

First of all, we recognize that our purity in the eyes of God is only made possible through Jesus. He alone is holy, pure and righteous in himself; he's fully God and fully sinless man. We are not sinless. We will never be sinless in this world. Our purity is gifted to us through Jesus' work of purifying us from sins. He took our sin upon himself and conquered it through his death and resurrection! He's our pure and holy Saviour who saves us by his grace and mercy. Recognizing this, believing it, opens our eyes to see God. So the best thing we can do to see God is to meditate on Jesus. Think on what he's done for you. Pray to know him and his glorious grace more fully.

Secondly, practice the faith. Once your heart knows the gift of salvation through Jesus, once you know that he is the one who makes you pure in God's eyes, then build that faith up and you're spiritual eyesight will improve with it.

Psalm 24 hints at what we can do. These faith building practices that help us see God revolve around worship. Psalm 24 is about who can worship the Lord... who may stand in his holy place. The generation of those who seek God's face or want to see him has clean hands and a pure heart that longs to worship the Lord alone.

The desire to see God is fed through our worship of him, rather than by lifting up our hearts to an idol, as Psalm 24 says. Self-desire is an idol, just like money can be. However, Jesus' disciples are focused on loving and serving the Lord. That's where our heart is at. That's our desire. And we know that Jesus' purifying work alone cleanse us from our sin and transforms even our desires. Yes, we know that even our pure desires don't always come out properly. Everything is still tainted by sin. The point, though, is that the overall direction of our heart is set on doing what Jesus desires. Those who are pure in heart don't take delight in that which dishonours the Lord. They worship the Lord. He's the arrow they follow. So, make and keep worship as a big priority.

Now, of course, worship doesn't save us. Going to church doesn't save us. We can all agree on that. But worship feeds our hearts. It helps us better see God. Yet statistics say that many Christians now think they are doing well if they come to public worship twice a month; previous generations thought it quite normal to go twice every Sunday. The important thing is that we make use of the means of grace—ways in which God feeds our hearts and souls. Two of the primary means we confess are the preaching of God's word and the participation in sacraments. These things—believe it or not—do enhance our vision of God. They draw us near to him. And he, in turn, promises to draw near to us. He promises that if we seek him, we will find him. When our heart gets more and more in tune with the heart of God, we begin to see him better.

Let me add that our ability to see God increases in many other ways that revolve around hearing and learning the Word of God. Bible study, Small Groups, private, couple and family devotions. Good books help. Also, there are lots of online ways to absorb more of the word today—podcast, videos, worship music. So many ways to feed our souls. Aside from Sunday worship, we have access to heart-strengthen, soul-feeding resources online. We ought to use these means to help us better see God. Our love for Jesus only grows stronger as we feed our heart this spiritual food. In these ways, we stop depending on self (which is idolatry) and we better see the Lord in all his goodness and grace, so that we can better rest in him.

Third, it's also worth noting that we catch glimpses of God when we look for him in creation. Psalm 19 reminds that the heavens declare the glory of God. And isn't it true that when we know God as the creator, all the beauty and majesty of our world reminds us of him? But it's especially through faith in Jesus that creation helps us see who God really is. So going for a walk in nature helps us see God, especially when we look at all the beauty through the eyes of faith in Jesus.

Fourthly, with that in mind, remember that living your whole life for the glory of God gives us better spiritual eyesight too. Serving in the church, serving at the Mosaic Centre to help the poor, doing these sorts of things might be the first thing we think of when mentioning kingdom activities. Someone mentioned a while back how serving as an elder or deacon really helps them to feel God's presence. To see him in that sense. Similarly, we can remember in Matthew 25 how Jesus says that when we do something for the least of these, we do it for him. Serving others helps us see God.

But, dear friends, look for God in your daily activities. As you go to work each day, pray that the Lord gives you eyes to see your work as he sees it. To see opportunities to serve others as Jesus served you. And not just by doing something nice for your clients, customers, patients or family and friends. More than that, see your work itself as an offering to God. Romans 12 reminds us to offer our whole life as an act of worship—through which our vision of God increases.

In this harvest season, think of the farmer who plants and now harvests his crop. All the time, he is conscious of the fact that he is a steward of the land. He plants, tends and harvests the crop with care, recognizing it is ultimately the Lord's land. He looks to the Lord for rain and sunshine and then brings in the harvest. He

obviously has concern about profits but his heart is on seeing that his family, friends as well as neighbours nearby and around the world can eat quality food. This is the heart of God. He farms with an eye toward God because his heart is set on honouring the Lord in his work.

On this Labour Day weekend, likewise, nurses and other first responders offering their lives to God will care less about their paycheck than about caring for people with love and professionalism and providing the best possible care, serving people in Jesus' name. You see the effects of sin in ways most of us don't. You see accident victims, people with cancer and other diseases. And when you serve them with Christ-like compassion and all the skills you bring to your work, you are serving them as if they are Jesus. And you get a glimpse of God.

Similarly, teachers and others in education want students to understand the world God has given us, to learn each subject with an eye to how it all fits into the world and how we can live for the Lord in each area of life. God is at the center of history, philosophy, math, science and every other subject, not just theology. Helping others see the hand of the Maker and Sustainer of the world in all of the spheres of our world gives us a glimpse of God.

In all areas of life we can look to God and do our work to honour him. The carpenter builds homes as unto the Lord, not cutting corners or being satisfied with shoddy work. In all we do, dear friends, doing it as unto the Lord opens our eyes to God.

This is the upside-down message of the kingdom of God in our world. It's the God-side up message we need to trust and believe as we live out faith in this world. In being disciples of Jesus, we are called to follow him who is the perfect model of obedience to God and his word and therefore our perfect Saviour.

In fact, Jesus said, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. He is the reason we can truly see God. He makes us pure in heart and he connects us to God. He changes our heart and changes the focus of our life from self to serving the Lord in all we do. Indeed, blessed are pure in heart for they will see God.

Amen.

Today's text is the sixth beatitude of Jesus which he gave in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:8

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

Let me read another passage from Matthew that refers to the importance of where the heart is at.

Matthew 19:16-22

¹⁶ ...a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

¹⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

¹⁸ "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁰ "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

This is the Word of the Lord.