

# Trinity 7 - Beatitudes 7

## 15/07/18 09:30 St Peter

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

So we come to our seventh week of our sermon series on the Beatitudes. In previous weeks, we have covered a lot of ground. We have thought together how these sayings of Jesus tell us of those already being blessed (filled with joy) by God. They are often people who would not expect it, or are on the fringes of society. We have thought about the meek, the merciful, the mourning, the poor in spirit.

Now our attention turns to the pure in heart. Firstly, we might ask who are they?

Lookup 'pure' on the internet, and you get some interesting answers. There is a gym on Caversham Road (just over the bridge), called 'PureGym'. Perhaps some of you belong to it? There is a health food called 'Pure'. Look on the personal hygiene shelves in the supermarket, and you will find a shampoo called EverPure. Finally, it seems, here is a beatitude people want: purity is very much in vogue!

The dictionary defines pure as: "not mixed or adulterated with any other substance or material". The Greek word St Matthew uses in this saying of Jesus is Katharos, which indicates being clean or free from stains or shame, free from adulteration; it denotes a physical, religious, and moral cleanliness. So once again, as we have seen with all of the Beatitudes, the meaning goes so much deeper than a simple reading of it.

Behind this saying of Jesus lies Psalm 24, which we heard as our first reading today. The psalmist writes: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in God's holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts..." (Ps. 24:3-4). The Bible spends a good deal of time on being pure and clean. The Jewish religion had made a fine art of defining what was pure and clean - most of their rules were focused on action (things to do or to avoid doing). The Mishnah, the writings of the Rabbis, contains a nearly 200 pages of teaching on what it is to be pure and clean.

Jesus, however, is not focussing on physical action or behaviour, but on the heart. 'Blessed are the pure in heart', he says. The New Testament develops Jewish purity laws, to focus on what is in our hearts. Jesus reminds his disciples later in Matthew's gospel that it is not what goes into a body that makes it impure, but what comes out of the human heart. In this beatitude saying, he is trying to teach his disciples that purity of heart - focusing on the state of our hearts - is essential for being in right relationship with God.

The Danish 19th century theologian, Soren Kierkegaard wrote a book entitled "purity of heart is to will one thing". And that one thing he went on to explain was to focus on all things on God.

We all know about the many distractions of life. Things that take up our time, our focus, our energy. Some are welcome, others are not. I wonder what yours are?

For the follower of Jesus Christ, Kierkegaard still seems relevant today. Our focus must be for our hearts to be oriented God-wards. So our hearts must not become mixed up by things that are not godly. And that is the tough bit - because that seems almost impossible in our complex, multi-layered world. And, how do we know what is godly anyway? Psalm 24 once again: those "who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully". Staying true to what God places in our hearts - not pledging allegiance (swear) to anything counter to the Spirit of God at work in us.

And the promise to the pure in heart is to see God. Now the Bible is clear that no-one can look upon God face to face. So what might Jesus mean? Perhaps he is suggesting that when we follow our hearts, as God creates them - to be pure and focused on him, then we will be able to see God in the world. We have learnt through PMC that noticing God is something that has to be worked at. It seems ridiculous to say that, as a church, we have perhaps stopped seeing God. But ask yourself, in all honesty, when did you last see God at work in the world. We have learnt from PMC that it is when we return our focus back to God, through scripture, that we begin to be able to see God at work in the world again. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. God fills with joy all those who are true to themselves as God call them. Might we as churches learn to look out for those people, speak of what we see of God at work in them, and encourage one another to be pure in heart.