

## **The Pure in Heart Shall See God**

A Sermon by Rev. Steven P. Gunther

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Bryn Athyn Cathedral

**Lessons: Matthew 5:1-12; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; *Secrets of Heaven* 3863.9; *Doctrine of Faith* 13**

As Jesus stood before the multitudes to deliver the most famous body of teaching of His earthly life—the Sermon on the Mount—He chose to begin by calling out groups of people and offering them blessings, which are commonly known as “The Beatitudes.” Many of these blessings identify a group in need or in an unfortunate state and then offer assurance that the Lord will provide what they need—Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled, and so on. One group in this list that may stand out to us, though, is the pure in heart. Jesus says “Blessed are the pure in heart, *for they shall see God.*” This may seem strange when we think about it, because what does the quality of our heart have to do with our ability to see? We don’t normally identify our heart with our vision, and yet within this simple blessing there lies a key to truly understanding the way that our loves and motivations affect our ability to see and know who the Lord really is so that we can build a healthy relationship with Him.

To look at this connection between the purity of our heart and our ability to see God, this morning we heard a story that comes in the first book of Samuel, chapter 16. At the time of this story Saul was king of Israel, but he had disobeyed God and so God declared that He would lose his crown and his sons would never be kings. And so, Samuel was tasked with going and finding

the next king of Israel who would take over after Saul. To do this, the Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem to find the next king among the sons of a man named Jesse.

When he got Bethlehem, he invited Jesse and his sons to come sacrifice with him. So, they came and Samuel took one look at Jesse's oldest son and thought "This must be the next king" because he was tall and strong. But the Lord warned him not to look at his physical appearance or his stature. Then the Lord tells Samuel something very powerful; He tells him that the Lord does not see as a person sees, because people look to the outward appearance, but the Lord looks to the heart.

After this, Samuel looks to each of the rest of Jesse's sons, but the Lord had not chosen any of them to be the next king. So, Samuel says "Are these all of your sons?" and Jesse replies "Well, there's the youngest, but he's out taking care of the sheep." So Samuel tells him to send for his youngest son. When he arrives, he is small and ruddy, but the Lord says that he is the one chosen to be the next king of Israel, and of course this is King David.

This story is a perfect example of the importance of being pure in heart. As humans we often see only the outward appearance of things, and yet it's what lies within that really matters. We can see someone's actions, but we can't see their motivations or loves behind those actions. We can see things from our own perspective, but we may not see all of the different angles from which others can see the same thing. This tendency to only see the outward appearance can lead us to gain ideas of how things work that aren't always totally accurate. Just as the Lord had to remind Samuel not to look to the outward appearance when looking for the next king of Israel, we should try to remember to look to the "heart" whenever possible.

And so we know that the Lord looks to our hearts. When He sees us, He doesn't just see the outward appearance—He sees our loves and motivations. He sees who we truly are on the inside. And so we know that it's incredibly important that we strive to be “pure in heart,” because it's according to our will and our motivations that we are actually judged by God. But, even still, what does the purity of our heart have to do with our ability to *see* God? In our reading from the *Secrets of Heaven*, we were told that “seeing God” means having faith. And this makes sense, because when we say that we “see” someone, or we tell someone “I see you,” really what we are saying is “I know you, I understand you, and I am acknowledging your presence.” Our faith in the Lord really is the same thing: it's how we know and understand him, as well as our acknowledgment that He is with us always.

So the question then becomes, how exactly does the purity of our heart help us grow and develop our faith in the Lord? Remember that as humans, we have this tendency to see the outward appearance and miss what's happening on the inside. So, for many of us, we probably think of faith as something purely intellectual. In the world around us faith often refers to theological ideas that we subscribe to, or as our willingness to hold onto certain ideas no matter how much those ideas are refuted or challenged by others. And so, “having faith” is often boiled down to something that exists in our head rather than our heart. And there's an element of this that's true! In the New Church we are told that faith is an acknowledgment that something is so because it's true (*Faith 2*). This sounds an awful lot like something that happens in our heads doesn't it?

But what actually leads us to acknowledge that something is true? And what exactly does it mean to “acknowledge” something like that? Well, in our reading this morning from the

*Doctrine of Faith* n. 13 we we're given another element that is key to having faith. We were told that the only people who genuinely have faith are those who at the same time possess charity. It then describes what charity is, and I'd like to share a portion of that passage again with you. As I read, I invite you all to notice how the word "affection" is being used throughout it:

*Charity in its first origin is the **affection of good**; and as good loves truth, **the affection of good produces the affection of truth**, and by the affection of truth, the acknowledgment of truth, which is faith. By these in their series, the affection of truth manifests itself, and becomes charity. This is the progression of charity from its origin, which is the affection of good, through faith which is the acknowledgment of truth, to its end in view, which is charity: its end is action. (Faith 13)*

There's a lot packed into this passage, and when we just hear it it might come across as kind of clunky and hard to follow, but this passage gives us a really powerful explanation of how exactly our faith grows and develops.

Now, I had asked us all to focus on the word "affection" in that passage, and it shows up in a few different ways. The passage says a lot about the "affection of good" and the "affection of truth." What exactly is it talking about here? When we hear that word "affection" in conversation we might often think of it as a smaller degree of love: "I have an affection for watching the sunset" or "I have such an affection for flowers in the springtime." But here the word is actually a little more mechanical. In this context "affection" is really referring to the process of being affected by something. And so when it says "the affection of good" it's really talking about us being affected or *moved* by what is good. To have the "affection of good" is to be moved, inspired, and motivated by goodness. We could think of this as being "pure in heart!" When we

are pure in heart, we have this “affection of good” which means that we find ourselves genuinely wanting to reach out, love, and care for our neighbors.

The passage goes on to say that because good loves truth, this “affection of good” *produces* the “affection of truth.” And now that we know what “affection” really means, we know that it’s saying that this “affection of good” leads us to, in turn, be affected by what is true. And so, in it’s simplest sense this passage is saying that when we are moved by what is good and we are genuinely motivated by a desire to love our neighbors, then when we come across true ideas that support that goal, they will *resonate* with us. We will see those ideas or those teachings and say “I can see how that will help me and others in my life.” And so it is having our motivations and loves in the right place that allows us to see and recognize truths when we come across them.

And this recognition of truths that we are talking about here—that is what faith is: an internal acknowledgment that a thing is so because it is true. When our heart is pure and we are moved by a desire to love our neighbors to the best of our ability, then we will come across those true ideas and they will resonate with us, which in turn leads us to accept those ideas and say “I believe these things.” But the most powerful part comes when all of this comes together. Our motivations are good, so we acknowledge truths, which finally in turn leads us to simply living according to those truths. We finally reach the point where our love for others is able to fully manifest itself in our lives. And this is what the passage tells us it means to be in charity—knowing what is true and actually living it in our daily lives.

But just like Samuel looking at Jesse’s older sons, we often see the appearance, which can skew our idea of how all of this works. We may not often think about faith as being

something that starts in the heart. When we want to grow in our faith, we probably often think that we need to go searching for true ideas to help us, because on the surface, it may look like faith is developed by being taught true ideas that we then accept intellectually because they make sense, which in turn leads us to try to apply those truths to our lives. And there are times where we *do* go through processes like this, because by our own human nature we are born with hearts that inherently want to focus on ourselves and our wants and needs, and so we all must go through a lifelong process of working to allow the Lord to change our hearts so that instead we can focus on loving *others*. And yet, even though our hearts naturally incline to look toward ourselves, from the time we are born the Lord is hard at work filling us with His love and inspiring us with His goodness so that we receive from Him an innate desire to grow, to learn, and to become better.

And so as Jesus stood before the multitude ready to deliver His Sermon on the Mount, He chose to begin with this series of blessings, including the promise that the pure in heart shall see God. We can now see that wrapped up in that simple statement is the powerful message that if we are genuinely moved by what is good, then true ideas will resonate with us and with our experience, leading us to acknowledge and accept those truths as our guiding light, which in turn will lead us to actually go out and live a heavenly life from the teachings that the Lord has given us.

And so as we go through this next week, I invite us all to take time to pray to the Lord and ask Him to continue changing and purifying our hearts. Let us ask ourselves what kind of person we genuinely want to be. Where are we putting our own wants and needs above the Lord's call to love and serve our neighbors, and how can we work this week to let those things

go so that the Lord can fill our hearts with His love, because we know that if we allow the Lord to change us from the inside out, we will become the pure in heart, and we shall see God.

*Amen.*