The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION SEVEN — Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Part One: The Blessings of the Kingdom · Texts: Matthew 5:8; Psalm 24:3–4

The Texts

> **Matthew 5:8** *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
>
> **Psalm 24:3–4** *Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?… Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false.*

An Impossible Promise for an Impossible People?

On its face, this is the most disqualifying blessing in the whole list. "Blessed are the pure in heart." Well — that settles it, most of us think. Not me. Because we hear "pure" and we picture the spotless, the sinless, the morally immaculate, the ones who never think a dark thought or make a wrong move. And every honest person knows they are not that. So we quietly excuse ourselves from this beatitude and wait for the next one.

And then there is the promise, which only deepens the trouble: "for they will see God." In Israel's imagination that was nearly unthinkable — "no one shall see me and live," God had said to Moses. The most impossible sight in the universe, promised to the most impossible people. Unless — and this is where we are going — unless "pure" does not mean what we have been taught it means. It does not. And once we recover the word, this becomes one of the most freeing blessings Jesus ever spoke.

Let's search the Scriptures together.

A Word from the Mountain Only

One note before we begin. As with the meek, the plain is quiet here: this blessing appears only in Matthew — Luke does not record it. But Matthew is quoting the songbook of Israel, reaching back to Psalm 24. So we will read the mountain and the psalm together, and let the old song teach us the word.[1]

What "Pure" Does Not Mean

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Like "the meek," this blessing appears only in Matthew; Luke records no parallel. Matthew echoes Psalm 24:3–4.

Clear the rubble first, because the church has done real damage with this word. "Pure in heart" does not mean sinless. It does not mean morally spotless, flawless, above reproach — if it did, the blessing would be empty, because that person does not exist. Nor does it mean what we have too often shrunk "purity" down to: a narrow, anxious rule-keeping, a scrubbing of the surface, a word wielded to shame people over their bodies and their failures. Jesus will later have hard words for exactly that — for people who polish the outside of the cup while the inside is full of greed. Purity, for Jesus, was never about the surface. It was always about the center.

The Undivided Heart

So what does he mean? Start with the word. The Greek is *katharos*. Yes, it means clean — but its deeper sense is unmixed, unalloyed, unadulterated. It is the word for pure gold with nothing cheap blended in, pure water with nothing muddying it. One thing. Not a blend. And then — crucially — "in heart." In the Bible the heart is not the seat of feelings; it is the center of the whole self, the core from which everything else flows. "Guard your heart," says Proverbs, "for from it flow the springs of life." So put *katharos* and heart together, and you get something with almost nothing to do with being sinless and everything to do with being whole. The pure in heart are the undivided — the single-minded, the integrated, the ones whose inside and outside match. Not the people with no sin, but the people with no duplicity. No double life. No mask over the mask. No serving of two masters at once.[2]

The great Danish thinker Kierkegaard wrote a whole book on this beatitude and gave it a title that says it all: "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing." That is it exactly. The opposite of pure, here, is not "dirty." The opposite of pure is double — the divided, the one who is warm in the light and cold in the dark, generous in public and grasping in private, one person on Sunday and another on Monday. Our word for that is hypocrite, which in Greek simply meant an actor, the one who performs behind a mask. The pure in heart have taken the mask off.

Psalm 24 and the Clean Hands

Listen to the psalm Jesus is quoting, and watch how it defines the pure. "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false." There it is — who do not lift up their souls to what is false. That is the definition. Purity of heart is the refusal of falseness — the refusal to worship two things at

[2]The Greek katharos ("pure") means clean, but its deeper sense is unmixed, unalloyed—pure gold, pure water: one thing, not a blend. Paired with "heart" (Hebrew lev), the center of the whole self from which life flows (Proverbs 4:23), it names not sinlessness but singleness—the undivided, un-duplicitous self. Søren Kierkegaard titled his discourse on this beatitude "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing." See W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, and Jonathan Pennington, on Matthew 5:8.

once, to live one life on the surface and another underneath. And notice it takes both: clean hands and a pure heart. Right action and a right core. The outside and the inside, matching at last. That is integrity, and integrity is what the Bible means by pure.[3]

A Heart We Cannot Scrub Ourselves

And before this becomes one more impossible weight on your shoulders — hear the grace in it. You do not manufacture a single heart by gritting your teeth and trying harder to be undivided. That road leads only to a more anxious, more polished division. The wholeness is a gift. When David's own heart lay shattered and exposed, he did not vow to clean it up; he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" — create, out of nothing, the way God made the world. The undivided heart is something we ask for and grow into by grace, not a self-improvement project we complete.[4]

"They Will See God"

Now the promise, and it is breathtaking. "They will see God." The very thing Israel believed was impossible — no one sees God and lives — and the very thing the faithful longed for above all else: "when shall I come and behold the face of God?" Jesus promises that impossible sight to the single-hearted. Why them? Because a divided heart cannot see clearly. When our loyalties are split, when we are always managing the mask, the vision fogs — we look at God and neighbor through the smudged glass of our own agendas. But the whole heart, the undivided gaze, sees. Jesus says it again a chapter later: if your eye is single, your whole body is full of light.[5]

And here is the now and the not-yet of it. One day, face to face: "we shall see him as he is." But already, now, the pure in heart begin to see God where the rest of us miss him — in the poor, in the stranger, in the ordinary face across the table, in the Kingdom quietly breaking in. The single-hearted have the eyes for it.

Freedom for Others

[3]Psalm 24:3–4: those who "have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false." Purity of heart is the refusal of falseness and the double self—integrity, inside and outside matching. The opposite of "pure" here is not "dirty" but "double" (cf. hypokritēs, "actor," one who wears a mask).

[4]A clean heart is God's creation, not our self-improvement: "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10). The single heart is a gift asked for and grown into by grace, not scrubbed up by effort.

[5]In Israel's imagination no one could see God and live (Exodus 33:20), yet the faithful longed to "behold the face of God" (Psalm 27:4; 42:2). Jesus promises this sight to the single-hearted—both the final face-to-face (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4) and, already, the clearer sight of God here, since a divided heart clouds the vision (cf. Matthew 6:22, the "single" eye). On this inaugurated "already/not-yet," see N.T. Wright and George Eldon Ladd.

Put it to our thread. At first the undivided heart sounds like an inward, private thing — but it turns out to be one of the great gifts we give one another. The divided heart uses people; duplicity almost always serves itself. But the whole heart, aimed honestly at God and neighbor, is finally free to love without an angle — to be the same person to everyone, trustworthy in the dark as in the light. And the pure in heart see God in others — in the very ones the world overlooks — which is the ground beneath all justice: you cannot trample the face of God once you have learned to see it. So ask with me: where is my heart divided — where do I wear a mask, serve two masters, say one thing and live another? What duplicity might I lay down, so my love for others could be honest and free? *Freedom for others may cost us our masks — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- What did you hear in the word "pure" before today? Where has that word been used to shame rather than to free?
- Kierkegaard said purity of heart is to will one thing. Where is your heart divided — pulled between two masters, two loyalties, two selves?
- Psalm 24 says the pure "do not lift up their souls to what is false." Where are you tempted toward the mask — one person in public, another in private?
- The promise is "they will see God." Where have you glimpsed God lately — and where might a divided heart be fogging your sight?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. What mask might you set down this week so your love could be honest?

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, name one division. Find the one place your heart is split — a mask you wear, a hidden thing, a loyalty that competes with God — and take one honest step to bring it into the light. Don't scrub; pray Psalm 51 and ask God to create the clean heart you cannot manufacture. Second, practice seeing. Go looking for the face of God this week in one overlooked person — and when you find it, let it change how you treat them. Then bring back what you saw. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, the last of the primary blessings, and one the world urgently needs: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." We'll ask what it means to make peace — not to keep the quiet, not to avoid the conflict, but to do the hard, costly work of

setting things right between people — and why that work, of all things, earns the name "child of God."

Benediction

So go this week and let God make you whole — one thing, not a blend; the same person in the light and in the dark. Take off the mask you are tired of wearing. Ask for the clean heart you cannot scrub yourself. And keep your eyes open, because the single-hearted see what the rest of us miss — the face of God, in the poor, in the neighbor, in the Kingdom breaking in all around you. Blessed are the pure in heart — not the flawless, but the whole — for they will see God.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

SESSION SEVEN

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. Today we come to what might be the most disqualifying blessing in the whole list — at least, that's how it sounds at first. "Blessed are the pure in heart." And most of us hear that and think: well, that's not me.

Because we hear "pure" and we picture the spotless, the sinless, the morally immaculate — the person who never thinks a dark thought. And every honest person knows they're not that. So we quietly excuse ourselves from this one and wait for the next.

And then there's the promise, which only makes it harder: "for they will see God." In Israel's imagination that was almost unthinkable — God told Moses, "no one shall see me and live." So here's the most impossible sight in the universe, promised to the most impossible people. Unless — and this is where we're going — unless "pure" doesn't mean what we've been taught. It doesn't. And once we get the word back, this becomes one of the most freeing things Jesus ever said.

[Quick note.]

Quick note: like "the meek," this blessing shows up only in Matthew — Luke doesn't have it. But Matthew's quoting Israel's songbook, Psalm 24. So we'll let the psalm teach us the word.

[Clear the rubble.]

First, what "pure" does not mean — and the church has done real damage here. It doesn't mean sinless. It doesn't mean morally spotless — if it did, the blessing would be empty, because that person doesn't exist. And it doesn't mean what we've too often shrunk "purity" down to — a narrow rule-keeping, a word used to shame people about their bodies and their failures. Jesus actually blasted that — the folks polishing the outside of the cup while the inside's full of greed. For Jesus, purity was never about the surface. It was always about the center.

[The core — lean in.]

So here's what he means. The Greek word is katharos. It means clean — but its deeper sense is unmixed, unalloyed. It's the word for pure gold, with nothing cheap blended in. Pure water, with nothing muddying it. One thing — not a blend. And then, "in heart" — and in the Bible the heart isn't your feelings, it's the center of the whole self, the core everything flows from. Put those together and "pure in heart" has almost nothing to do with being sinless and everything to do with being whole. The pure in heart are the undivided — the single-minded, the ones

whose inside and outside match. Not people with no sin. People with no duplicity. No double life. No mask over the mask.

Kierkegaard wrote a whole book on this beatitude and titled it "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing." That's it. The opposite of pure isn't dirty. The opposite of pure is double — the divided heart, warm in the light and cold in the dark, generous in public and grasping in private, one person Sunday and another Monday. Our word for that is hypocrite — which in Greek just meant an actor, someone performing behind a mask. The pure in heart have taken the mask off.

[The psalm, and grace.]

Listen to the psalm Jesus is quoting: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false." There's the definition — who don't lift up their souls to what is false. Purity is the refusal of falseness. Clean hands and a pure heart — right action and a right core — the outside and the inside finally matching. That's integrity. That's what the Bible means by pure.

And hear the grace, before this becomes one more weight: you don't manufacture a single heart by trying harder. That just gets you a more polished division. The wholeness is a gift. When David's heart lay shattered, he didn't vow to clean it up — he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Create. Out of nothing. You ask for this one. You grow into it by grace.

[The promise.]

And then the promise — "they will see God." The impossible sight, given to the single-hearted. Why them? Because a divided heart can't see clearly. When we're always managing the mask, the vision fogs — we look at God and neighbor through the smudged glass of our own agendas. But the whole heart sees. One day face to face — "we shall see him as he is." But already, now, the pure in heart start to see God where the rest of us miss him — in the poor, in the stranger, in the ordinary face across the table. The single-hearted have the eyes for it.

[The thread and practice.]

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: where is my heart divided? Where do I wear a mask, serve two masters, say one thing and live another? What duplicity could I lay down, so my love for others might be honest and free? Because the pure in heart see God in other people, even the overlooked ones — and you can't trample the face of God once you've learned to see it.

Two things to practice. First, name one division — one mask, one hidden thing, one competing loyalty — and take an honest step to bring it into the light. Don't scrub; pray Psalm 51 and ask God for the clean heart you can't make yourself. Second, go looking for the face of God this week in one overlooked person — and let it change how you treat them.

Next time — the last of the primary blessings: "Blessed are the peacemakers." We'll ask what it really means to make peace, and why it earns the name "child of God."

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and let God make you whole — one thing, not a blend; the same person in the light and in the dark. Take off the mask you're tired of wearing. Ask for the clean heart you can't scrub yourself. And keep your eyes open — because the single-hearted see what the rest of us miss: the face of God, in the poor, in the neighbor, in the Kingdom breaking in all around you.

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Blessings, Pastor Mick Finch.