

## **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God (Matthew 5:8)**

While the mediaeval poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, seems to have known about it

- It was only in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England that Valentine's Day was celebrated in the modern way
- With flowers, confectionery, and greetings cards, predominantly red in colour and covered in hearts
- Consequently from just after Christmas until mid-February, card shops are full of hearts
- And messages of love – all in red, presumably because it is the colour of blood
- Being in love is reckoned to do something to your heart
- And putting your heart into something or being whole-hearted is also used to express commitment

On 3 December 1967, South African surgeon, Dr Christiaan Barnard, performed the first heart-transplant

- The recipient was a 53 year old man, the donor a 25 year old woman
- But no one expected that the man would love different people after receiving the new heart
- Because we know that we use the heart figuratively to mean the centre of our personalities and emotions
- This is not surprising for when we are excited, angry or frightened our heart rate changes
- In the Bible there are some references to the heart as a literal organ (1 Sa. 25:37; 2 Sa. 18:14; Ki. 9:24)
- But for the most part the heart is used to mean the centre of things, our inner being
- The heart is the whole person, the heart governs all our actions; character, personality, will and mind
- There is no suggestion in the Bible that the brain is the centre of consciousness, thought or will
- in the *New Bible Dictionary*, B. O. Banwell comments that the modern world has adjusted the levels
- the modern world uses 'mind' for consciousness, thought and will and 'heart' for emotions
- but the Bible pushes everything one level lower using the 'heart' for consciousness, thought and will
- and the 'bowels' for emotions – I am not for one minute suggesting either different pictures or colours
- for the popular Valentine cards – but I hope the distasteful picture has the desired impact

It might be helpful to note that in the Bible ‘mind’ often means human capacity for contemplation, judgment

- that is why we need to read a good Bible translation (NIV being a strong contender
- but ESV, NKJV and RV also being strong contenders) and be prepared to use an analytical concordance
- if we are preparing any kind of Bible study or sermon, no matter who the listeners might be
- here, although the word is ‘heart’ – blessed are the pure in ‘heart’, it translates the Greek *kardia*
- and should be understood as the centre of all physical and spiritual life and not just
- our passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes and endeavours though it certainly includes these
- the meaning is the middle, central or inmost part of anything

The word translated ‘pure’ (Gk. *katharos*) has the sense of being clean or purified by fire, or pruned to grow

- it is free from corrupt desire, from sin and from guilt – it is blameless and innocent
- ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God’ is the sixth of the Beatitudes
- a name that comes from the Latin *beatus* (blessed, still being the best translation)
- ‘happy’ has been devalued and cheapened in modern usage and, in any event, the focus tends to be inside
- Whereas the focus of the Beatitudes is how we stand before God whose blessing rests on unlikely people
- So much so that the usual order of things is turned upside down, or more accurately, the right way up
- To have a pure and undivided heart seems a laudable aim, but is it achievable?
- What if there is a logical progression in the Beatitudes, that we may become pure in heart
- Because we realise and are discontented that we are poor in spirit, we mourn over our sins
- We are meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful as those who receive mercy
- So, in fact, the heart is pure because it has been or is being cleansed
- If we follow this progression through the Beatitudes we realise that we start out with

## I A CORRUPT HEART

The heart is rightly identified as the very centre of consciousness, thought and will

- While emotions and feelings need not be ruled out, when we speak of the heart we must not limit it
- And though no end of people will tell us we are basically good at heart, this is not the Bible's message
- Rather, as Jeremiah puts it, 'the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure' (Jer. 17:9)

When I lived in London I used to enjoy the occasional visit to the shops in Oxford Street and Regent Street

- Outside the underground station at Oxford Circus, there was often a man carrying a placard
- The slogan on his placard read, 'less lust from less protein' (less steak, fewer eggs, less fish)
- According to him, all you needed to do was cut out high protein foods to deal with human sin
- We rightly regard such ideas as off-beat but the question remains, where does human sin come from?
- The Pharisees at the time of Jesus were very fastidious about clean and unclean things
- they had clean and unclean food, ceremonial washings and complained the disciples did not follow these
- Jesus replied quoting Isaiah: "These people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.
- They worship me with their lips but their hearts are far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach then out of the body?  
But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony and slander" (Matthew 15: 17-19).

None of us can seriously doubt that description, even in the perfect environment we have the capacity to sin

- And the root of it all is a corrupt heart, not to do with what we eat but our very inner nature

## II A CONTRITE HEART

‘Contrite’ is hardly an everyday word but it is a biblical word meaning ‘humble and repentant before God’

- Israel’s one great king, David, was possibly at the height of his power, but when his army went to war
- The man, who had been a great leader in battle, stayed at home – and in the wrong place at the wrong time
- In the evening light, he spied his neighbour’s wife, Bathsheba, bathing on the rooftop
- Filled with lust, he sent for her, committed adultery with her and arranged the death of her husband
- By commanding that he be put on a vulnerable part of the front line in battle – but reality dawned
- Pouring out his heart he wrote, ‘Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love (mercy)
- Continuing ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart’ (Psalm 51:7)

To have a broken and contrite heart is very much against the thinking of the current age

- Instead it is fashionable to project our problems on others – ‘if my environment had been different’
- It is some fixed disposition with which I was born, I cannot be held responsible and am not accountable
- But this is not the teaching of the Bible, which tells us that the outward manifestation of sin in all its forms
- Has roots: these are at the very centre of our being, we were born with a bias to unbelief and disobedience
- I do not believe for one moment such ‘original sin’ can be washed away by baptismal water at any age
- Any more than I believe that the heart can be made impure or even pure by what we eat
- But I do believe that we are responsible and accountable to God
- Unlike David we may not arrange someone else’s death – but we can easily gossip about others
- Unlike David we may not commit adultery – but we can do it by proxy, through TV, internet, printed page
- In the presence of a holy and righteous God, how do we feel – we are poor in spirit, we mourn
- We are meek, we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we are merciful – we want to be pure in heart

### III A CLEAN HEART

‘Theology’ does not have a good feel in today’s church – people often think it means dull theory

- Of course, it can be dull theory but theology really is right belief about God and that is what we need
- Where we so often go wrong in church is that we do not believe the right things about God
- God who is holy and pure – we may have the notion that if we were able to see God
- We would realise how impoverished and impure we are – but what if it really works the other way?
- In other words, what if we are unable to see God until our hearts are pure

Most days I wear two rings. The first I bought in 1978 with £15 that my grandmother left me in her will

- The second is a wedding ring - I have the receipt somewhere but I can’t remember where
- Neither of them is pure gold – one is nine carat gold and the other 18 carat, 24 carat being pure gold
- When we say that something is pure we mean that it is uncorrupted by anything else
- In many religions, purity is simply ceremonial but in the NT it is both moral and spiritual
- And means a state of heart where there is complete devotion to God

We know that the natural condition of our hearts is one of corruption – anything but pure

- Before a holy and righteous God our hearts should properly be contrite – humble and repentant
- The Apostle John reminds us, ‘God is light and in him is no darkness at all’ (1 John 1:5)
- But continues, ‘the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7), ‘if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9).
- The teaching of Jesus about what goes into the body (through eating) cannot make you unclean
- Must certainly mean that what goes into the body (through eating) cannot make you clean
- So that the inner washing of the heart, by the blood of Christ, can only be by faith

It is by faith in the saving and cleansing power of the blood of Christ that the believer's heart is cleansed

- Even if we accept our hearts are corrupt, we cannot wash our hearts, with water (baptismal or otherwise)
- Through coming before God with humble and repentant hearts, we show ourselves to be contrite
- And ready for God to work in our lives: by faith we may know the inward cleansing of the blood of Christ
- And in that moment, 'the hour I first believed' as John Newton would have put it (cf. *Amazing Grace*)
- The righteousness and purity of Christ is imputed to us – that is counted as ours
- As Paul reminds us, 'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness' (Romans 4:3)

But we cannot leave it there – for we are looking also for the righteousness of Christ to be imparted

- That is not simply counted as ours but ours in our living and day-to-day experience
- Christ's righteousness declared not only to be my righteousness in heaven, but transforming life on earth
- It is both the metaphor of the courtroom and the garden
- The ground of our righteousness in Christ is that his righteousness, his purity, is counted as ours
- The fruit of our righteousness in Christ is that his righteousness, his purity, is becoming ours (Oden)
- It is transformative righteousness, effectively changing those who have been declared righteous by God
- By the inner work of the Holy Spirit the purity of Christ may be ours, received in humility and faith
- And in this way alone the believer may see God – because the believer is pure in heart

The reward of the undivided heart is the vision of God, no vision of God can come to a heart that is corrupt

- because it is out of harmony with the nature and character of God
- we need a broken and contrite heart and faith in the cleansing blood of Christ
- God told Moses that no human could look on the face of God and live (Exodus 33:20)
- And yet, in glory, the redeemed will see the face not of the incarnate Christ (in humility)
- But of the exalted Christ, his name will be on their foreheads (Rev. 22:4) and they will be truly blessed