

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Happy Are The Pure In Heart

by Dan Trygg

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew an upright spirit within me.”

Psalm 51:10

“Who shall ascend the hill of Yahweh? And who shall stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false/vain and does not swear deceitfully. ⁵ He will receive blessing from Yahweh and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.”

Psalms 24:3-6

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Matthew 5:8

The Hebrew idea of the human heart is a very important concept in the Bible. The Hebrew word for heart occurs almost 600 times in the OT, and the Greek word occurs an additional 160 times in the NT. **The Hebrew notion of what the heart signifies is *not* the same as our 21st century American concept.** To us, the heart is primarily the seat of our emotions. The biblical concept is much larger. **The heart signifies the inner person, primarily the mind, will, and understanding.** Only secondarily does it refer to the emotions. The Hebrews saw the gut, the intestines, the kidneys, the womb and belly, as the primary centers of emotion (somewhat akin to our usage of a “gut feeling”). The heart was more the center of one’s being. There, self-awareness, understanding reside, and choice originates. The heart was to *overrule* emotion or desire when it was in conflict with the values of the inner person. The heart was the place where one’s world view and values served to map out one’s life direction and behavior.

The heart was seen to be like a wellspring (Prov. 4:23). If the wellspring was good, then the outcome of one’s life would be good. If the wellspring was bitter or tainted, then the outworking of that in one’s day-to-day choices would unavoidable. All would be tainted with the bad flavor of the water which flows from the inner source. If the heart was unclean, then unclean thoughts and behavior would be the result in one’s life (Mk. 7:20-23). If the heart was deceived (Jer. 17:9), then misguided and foolish actions would follow. If the heart was darkened (Rom. 1:21), then one’s spiritual understanding was limited and blocked, and the person’s beliefs, attitudes and behaviors will reflect that inner blindness (cf. Rom. 1:22-32). An “uncircumcised” heart was a way of referring to a person whose life was *not* set apart for God (Jer. 9:25,26; Col. 2:13). The one whose heart was “circumcised” would have a desire for God, to love Him and obey Him (Dt. 30:6-10). **The condition of one’s heart is evident by the behavior of one’s life.** A heart that has been “hardened” refers to a person who has become dull, insensitive or unreceptive toward God (e.g., Ex. 8:15; Eph. 4:18; cf. Ezk. 11:19). Some go so far as to “make strong” their heart to rebel against what they know is God’s desire for them (e.g., Ex. 7:22). They strengthen their resolve to go on in their rebellious behavior, and often must go through much pain to come to the place of brokenness and receptiveness toward God. Since the heart was primarily the seat of the mind and will, not the emotions, **to speak of a “broken heart” meant that a resistant person was finally in a place of humility, teachableness, and submission,** not that they were sad (Psa. 51:17). The person with a broken heart no longer thought they knew all the answers. They were no longer stubborn or willful. Their inner strength of will was shattered, along with their pride, and they were willing to accept counsel and instruction.

Each of the beatitudes we have examined have been statements that not only are true in and of themselves, but were also references to OT prophetic themes that would have been familiar to these Galilean Jews. This passage is no different. **When Jesus’ listeners heard Him say, “Happy are the pure in heart”, they would have thought of Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a pure heart, O God.”** The OT scriptures had declared that we all start out in life with hearts that are inclined toward evil (Gen. 8:21). As a result of Adam’s sin, we have all become sinners by nature, as well as by choice (Rom. 5:12). ***Our hearts are corrupt and deceptive (Jer. 17:9). Left to ourselves, our sinful hearts would lead us to disaster.*** In this beloved Psalm, David holds out hope for another possibility, a heart made clean and pure by God. David had blown it, big time. He had committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal soldiers (II Sam 11). When he couldn’t cover up her pregnancy, he conspired to have her husband sent to the most dangerous part of the battlefield, so he would be killed. Then, after a respectable grieving period, he married Bathsheba, the wife of his former friend. *This was despicable to God.* In His word, adultery was worthy of death. What David had done, the adultery, the lies and cover-up, the abuse of His God-given authority, the murder of his loyal friend, were all diametrically opposed to everything he had claimed to be as a God-seeker. **He deserved to be rejected by God.** He *deserved* to end up on the trash heap of human disappointments. But God, being rich in mercy, confronted him through another friend. Psalm 51 was written by David when he was first confronted by his friend, Nathan the prophet. Read it, and you will see the example of someone who really faced up to his actions. During his cry for God to cleanse and restore him, David penned, “Create in me a clean (pure) heart, O God, and renew an upright

spirit within me.” **Even though this was a thousand years before Christ would come, David knew that God could change his heart.** When David fully grasped what he had done, his arrogant heart was broken (vs. 17). He repented, wept and asked for forgiveness, ...and God accepted him. **This corresponded to the “good news” message being preached by Jesus. It was possible to be made clean, renewed and to be given a fresh start through receiving God’s grace and determining to live for Him.** So, no matter where you and I may have been, or what we have done, ...no matter how messed up we have been, *God can clean us up and give us a heart for Him.* If we call out to Him, He will not reject us. God will always accept the broken-hearted, ...that is, those who are humble, teachable and willing to yield to Him. **If you feel that you need a clean, pure heart, you can call out to God, right now. If you are willing to yield to Him and His way, God will hear and work in your life to bring about the change you long for.**

Jesus’ teaching would also have pulled up Psalm 24:3,4 in their memories, “Who may ascend into the hill of Yahweh? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a *pure heart*...”. **The Greek word translated “pure” is *katharos*, from which we derive the term “cathartic”, as well as the name, “Katharine”. The word simply means “clean” or “pure”. While it may seem that these two meanings are basically the same, there is a significant difference. To the Jew, someone who was “clean” meant that he was not defiled with the dirt or pollution of sin.** When a person sinned, he or she became defiled, polluted and unacceptable to the Holy God. This pollution would need to be covered by a sacrifice of atonement, ...a sin offering, a life given in exchange for the life of the sinner. There was no other way to cover or remove the defilement of sin. Of course, at the time, there was no sacrifice available which could fully *remove* the pollution of sin. Animal sacrifices would never be adequate to remove the guilt of human sin. They were only sufficient to temporarily *cover* the pollution and guilt before God. (Only Jesus Himself would later be able to fully remove every vestige of the filth of sin from our hearts and lives, by means of His blood shed for us. This was not a known possibility at the time of Jesus’ words in this context.) **On the other hand, “purity” refers to something of one substance, ...something without mixture. Thus, the “pure in heart” would refer to those whose heart is single, focused clearly and resolutely on God, with no mixture of other motives.**

As you might expect, *both* aspects of “purity” are at work in this passage. **The person who could come to “the hill of the Lord”** (then, a reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, ...now, a reference to heaven), and would be able to “stand in His holy place” **would have to be a person who was both undefiled and a person whose heart was single, ...set upon knowing God above all else.** Note that in the Psalm, this person had “clean hands”, meaning that *there was no unaddressed guilt on his hands.* He or she kept a clean conscience. He also does not “lift up his soul to what is vain, empty, or meaningless”, meaning that *this person does not waste his time and energy on things that are simply wasteful distractions, or on things that are deceptive and unprofitable.* This include both profitless entertainments, as well as keeping company with people who have no interest in the things of God. This person knows what is important, and gives him/herself to that. Finally, David writes, “he has not sworn deceitfully”. The LXX version adds, “to his neighbor/near one”. What does this mean? *He or she is a person of integrity, one who does not promise things that he or she does not follow through on.* This person keeps his word. He is dependable.

Notice what David says that God will do for such a person. First, God will give this person an affirmation of “Well done!” The word for “blessing” here is different than in Matthew 5. This word in Psa. 24 is a “well done” word of approval (cf. Matt. 25:21,23,34-40). **Would you like the God of the universe to give you a “Well done!”?** That is the highest recognition and affirmation possible! (Of course, that implies that there *is* something He wanted you to do, and you *did* it.) **Secondly, God will give this person His righteousness, justice, or vindication.** The Hebrew word covers all three of these possibilities. **God will certainly set things right for this person, ...and when God is wanting to do right by you, things will turn out way beyond what you could imagine!** God is truly “the God of his salvation!” **Finally, David says, in effect, “this is what happens to those who truly seek the face of God.”**

When Jesus uttered the words, “Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”, His listeners would have thought of the imagery of Psalm 24. They would have heard the message that **deciding to follow Jesus and to pursue the Kingdom of heaven would mean a radical change in life, agreeing to a very high standard of personal devotion and set-apart-ness for God.** The performance does not have to be perfect. There is grace to cover our present shortcomings, but **those who are single in heart will show their devotion by the focus of their lives.** They would be concerned with keeping clean before God, because they want to be pleasing in His sight. They would be concerned about what their hands do and what their lips say, wanting *all* their life be honoring to God. They would see the call to personal integrity, becoming men and women of honesty and trustworthiness, not of phoniness or duplicity. **As God-seekers, they would put aside those things that detract from their heart’s goal of intimacy with Him. They would tailor their lives to draw near to God and be available to serve Him.** This a new direction for them, the start of a new journey. It was something that seemed beyond their reach, but Jesus is assuring them that they can, indeed, know God. **Those who seek God with a single heart can be confident that they will see His face.**