

July 31, 2005 The Pure in Heart and the Peacemakers Matthew 5:8-9
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As we have been making our way through the Beatitudes this month, I have said they clarify Jesus' message of the availability of the kingdom of heaven to anyone who will place their trust in Jesus, even those who seem beyond hope. Today we will be talking about the pure in heart and the peacemakers. We live in a time when purity of heart and peace making seem to be in even shorter supply than is usually the case for the human race. One of the more amazing cases I read about recently involved two teenage girls Taylor Ostergaard and Linsey Zellitti who wanted to bless their neighbors. One year ago today on July 31, 2004, the two teenage girls decided to bake cookies for their neighbors rather than attend a dance. After baking the cookies, the girls set out late that evening. They left the fresh-baked goods only at houses with the lights on. It was 10:30 p.m. when they knocked on the door of one home. The 49-year-old woman inside didn't answer the door, but she did experience an anxiety attack over the late-night visit. After a trip to the emergency room the next day, the woman decided to sue the girls. And she won.

The judge awarded the plaintiff \$900 to cover the emergency room visit. The woman said she wanted the girls to learn a lesson, because they should not have been out late at night running from door to door. "*Something bad could have happened to them,*" she said.

After the story was published in the *Denver Post*, hundreds of readers were **outraged that the girls were sued for dropping off a plate of cookies and a paper heart for their neighbors**. Thousands of dollars poured in to help the girls pay their fine. Their story was reported on national news programs, and the girls appeared on the Saturday edition of Good Morning America. As a result of the publicity, a fund has been set up for the girls' college expenses. Interested donors have the option to contribute to the "Never Forgotten" Scholarship Fund for Columbine High School students.¹

¹ Citation: Mike Lundberg, Montrose, Colorado; source: Electa Draper, *Denver Post* (2-4-05 and 2-6-05)

The girls were rewarded many times over for their act of kindness. The saying “*No good deed goes unpunished*” is not ultimately true. Even if our “pure in heart” attempts to bless others are rejected and unrewarded in this life, even if those who are not at peace with themselves or with others, seek to pull us down to their level of discontent and animosity, there is still hope for us in the kingdom of heaven because Jesus said,

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

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Matthew 5:8-9

I think the first reaction many of us have to the verse about the pure in heart is,

“I won’t plan on seeing God any time soon because my heart is far from pure.”

We tend to believe God is good to and blesses those who are pure while also believing we don’t fit into that category. We can relate to the feeling expressed in Psalm 73:1-3, *“Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are **pure in heart**. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.”*

The scriptures affirm that God is pure and desires for us to be as well.

Psalm 18:26 says, *“With the pure you show yourself pure.”*

And Psalm 24:3-4 asks and answers the question, *“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and **pure hearts**, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.”* I think Jesus had this psalm and a few others in mind when he spoke

this Beatitude because the psalm goes on to say, *“They will receive **blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation. Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.”*** The psalm says we seek the face of God by having clean hands and a pure heart.

Psalm 11:7 says, *“For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; **the upright shall behold his face**.”* Jesus says the pure in heart will see God.

All well and good, but if I don’t think I am pure in heart, where does that leave me?

I feel my own heart is far from pure, and purity of heart seems in some ways just impossible to achieve. The thing about an impure heart is, it can hide behind good behavior and proper external actions. Proverbs 16:2 states, *“All one’s ways may be pure in one’s own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.”* In other words, our actions may measure up in *our* eyes to *our* standards, but the Lord is interested in our inner motive, in the spirit that inspired our action or behavior. **Is it even possible to be pure in heart and action?**

Job affirmed his integrity and purity to his three friends, yet one of them (Eliphaz the Temanite) asks (Job 4:17), *“Can mortals be righteous before God? Can human beings be pure before their Maker?”*

The Biblical answer to that question is no and yes.

No in the sense that we are all sinners saved by grace and none of us has a completely pure heart or motives. It is possible that there is more ugliness on the inside of us than what we show on the outside.

The other way that purity is used in the scriptures is in a positive and invitational way, God calls us to purity and I don’t think God would invite and command us to do something that we could not do with God’s help.

Paul writing to instruct Timothy, his young colleague in ministry, tells him (1 Timothy 1:5-6) that the “aim” of Christian teaching is, ***“love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk.”*** He also tells him to (2 Timothy 2:22), *“pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”*

In referring to the pure in heart, Jesus may be talking about the people “for whom nothing is ever good enough, not even themselves. These are the perfectionists. They are a pain to everyone, themselves most of all. They will find errors in your doctrine, your practice, and probably your heart and your attitude. They may be even harder on themselves. They endlessly pick over their own motivations. They wanted Jesus to wash his hands even though they weren’t dirty and called him a glutton and drunkard. The pure in heart, perfectionist types can tell you what is wrong with everything and they are frequently miserable. Yet the

kingdom of heaven is open to them and in it they will find something that satisfies their pure heart, Jesus says they will see God and when they do they will have found someone who is truly good enough.²

How do we call on the Lord from a pure heart? How do we purify our hearts? It begins with prayer, and facing the truth about God and ourselves. Henri Nouwen writes in *The Way of the Heart* about purity of heart and the prayer of the heart in our relationship with God.

“The prayer of the heart is a prayer that does not allow us to limit our relationship with God to interesting words or pious emotions. By its very nature such prayer transforms our whole being into Christ precisely because **it opens the eyes of our soul** to the truth about ourselves as well as to the truth of God. **In our heart we come to see ourselves as sinners embraced by the mercy of God.** ...The prayer of the heart challenges us to hide absolutely nothing from God and to surrender ourselves unconditionally to his mercy. Thus the prayer of the heart is the prayer of truth.

It unmask the many illusions about ourselves and about God and leads us into the true relationship of the sinner to the merciful God. To the degree that this truth anchors itself in our heart, we will be less distracted by worldly thoughts and more single-mindedly directed toward the Lord of both our hearts and his universe.

Thus the words of Jesus *“Happy are the pure in heart, they shall see God”* will become more real in our prayer. **Temptations and struggles will remain to the end of our lives, but with a pure heart, we will be restful even in the midst of a restless existence.**

The prayer of the heart is indeed the way to **the purity of heart** that gives us **eyes to see** the reality of our existence. **This purity of heart allows us to see more clearly, not only our own needy, distorted, and anxious self but also the caring face of the compassionate God.** When that vision remains clear and sharp, it will be possible to move into the midst of a tumultuous world with a heart of rest. It is this restful heart that will attract those who are groping to find their way through life.”

² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 118.

With the help of God's Spirit working within us we strive for purity of heart. The Apostle Paul prayed (Philippians 1:9-10), "*This is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best **so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless.***"

When Jesus talks about the pure in heart, he is not referring to the organ that pumps our blood, but to the place within us that determines our conduct. This involves our thinking and what we focus our mind on. Purity of heart is related to the quality of what we think about. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8-9 to think about, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.**" If we think about whatever is false, dishonorable, unjust, impure, revolting, disgraceful, disgusting, and worthy of condemnation – we shouldn't be surprised if our hearts are not moving in the direction of purity or in the direction of God.

If we are pursuing impurity, God is not someone we wish to see. In the movie Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade, a brother of the cruciform sword who has spent his life protecting the Holy Grail says to Dr. Jones as they are about to be chopped into fish bait, "*My soul's prepared, how's yours?*" Indiana Jones isn't ready to see God yet and pulls them to safety.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*, "*We are afraid that Heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell **the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to.***"

Our prayer is that of Psalm 86:11, "*Give me an undivided heart to revere your name.*"

Peacemakers

Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" **If we are going to be peacemakers, we need to first come to peace with ourselves, in accepting who we are, and to be at peace with God.** Without being at peace with God and with ourselves, it is highly unlikely that we will be peaceful or peacemakers with others.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh in her wonderful book *Gift from the Sea*, expresses this desire well. **"I want first of all ... to be at peace with myself.** I want a singleness of eye, **a purity of intention**, a central core to my life that will enable me to carry out these obligations and activities as well as I can. I want, in fact--to borrow the language of the saints--to *live "in grace"* as much of the time as possible. I am not using this term in a strictly theological sense. By grace I mean an inner harmony, essentially spiritual, which can be translated into outward harmony. I am seeking perhaps what Socrates asked for in the prayer from the *Phaedrus*, when he said, *"May the outward and inward man be one."* I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and give as I was meant to in the eyes of God."

Paul writes in Romans 12:18, *"So far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all."* When we are not at peace with ourselves and with God, we are more likely to fuss, feud, find fault, and fight with others. Once that sort of behavior begins, it can be difficult to stop. Just two years ago, after 125 years, the infamous feud between the Hatfields and McCoys is finally history. Sixty descendants of the original clans gathered on Saturday, June 14, 2003, in Pikefield, Kentucky, to sign a document declaring an official end to more than a century of hatred and bloodshed. Most think the feuding between the McCoys of Kentucky and Hatfields of West Virginia began in 1878 when Randolph McCoy accused one of the Hatfields of stealing a hog. The Hatfields won the "hog war" when a McCoy cousin sided with the opposing clan. Feelings festered and other incidents occurred that finally resulted in the shooting death of Ellison Hatfield in 1882. Retaliation begat retaliation until the feud claimed 11 more family members over the next ten years. Subsequent conflicts between the two clans have involved court battles over timber rights and cemetery plots. The treaty calling for peace reads: *"We do hereby and formally declare an official end to all hostilities, implied, inferred, and real, between the families, now and forevermore. We ask by God's grace and love that we be forever remembered as those that bound together the hearts of two families to form a family of freedom in America."* Although the treaty was largely symbolic, both the governor of Kentucky

and the governor of West Virginia were present for the nationally televised ceremony.³

Some people seem to bring feuds, strife, anger, and contention wherever they are, we feel uneasy or uncomfortable just being around them and we can't wait to get away. Other people simply by their presence bring peace and calmness to a situation, we feel better just being around them. Thomas a Kempis wrote in *The Imitation of Christ*,

"First put yourself at peace, and then you may the better make others be at peace. A peaceful and patient man is of more profit to himself and to others, too, than a learned man who has no peace."

This week we witnessed history when the Irish Republican Army "formally ordered an end to the armed campaign" and instructed members to "dump arms" and adhere to "exclusively peaceful means" to try and achieve their political goals. For decades the violence of professed Catholics and Protestants has taken innocent lives in the Northern Ireland. In spite of their violence, peacemakers persisted. In his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, Philip Yancey relates this story about a peaceful and a patient man. In 1987 an IRA bomb went off in a town west of Belfast. Eleven died; 63 were wounded. Gordon Wilson, a cloth merchant and devout Methodist, was buried with his 20-year-old daughter under five feet of concrete and brick.

"Daddy, I love you very much," were Marie's last words, grasping her father's hand.

From his hospital bed, Wilson said, *"I've lost my daughter, but I bear no grudge. Bitter talk is not going to bring Marie back. I shall pray every night that God will forgive them."* Once recovered, Wilson crusaded for reconciliation. Protestant extremists who had planned to avenge the bombing decided, because of the publicity surrounding Wilson, that such behavior would be politically foolish. Wilson wrote a book about his daughter and spoke out against violence, constantly repeating, *"Love is the bottom line."*

He met with the IRA, personally forgave them, and asked them to lay down their arms. *"You've lost loved ones, just like me,"* he told them. *"Surely, enough blood has*

³ Stephen Leon Allgood, "American Profile," CBS News.com (6-14-03).

been spilled.” When he died in 1995, all Ireland and Britain honored this ordinary citizen for his uncommon peacemaking efforts and his forgiveness.⁴

Martin Luther King said: *“True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force, tension or war, it is the presence of some positive force, justice, good will, brotherhood.”* It is not easy being a peacemaker, it is often dangerous and difficult. Peacemakers are often stuck in the middle, just ask a police officer who is called to a home on a domestic dispute call. Neither side trusts you because they know if you are looking at both sides you can’t possibly be on their side so they get angry at you for not resolving the situation, meaning for not taking their side. Peacemakers sometimes end up hurt or even killed trying to break up a fight, well known peacemakers like Jesus, often end up killed. Peacemakers are often looked down upon as weird, strange, abnormal, unrealistic or unpatriotic. Yet being a peacemaker is not something for the weak, it takes great strength.

Evelyn Underhill in her classic book, *The Spiritual Life*, captured the essence of our spiritual life in Christ when she wrote, **“All our action ... must be peaceful, gentle, and strong.** That suggests ... an immense depth, and an invulnerable steadiness which come from the fact that our small action is now part of the total action of God, whose Spirit, as another saint has said, *“Works always in tranquility.”* **Fuss and feverishness, anxiety, intensity, intolerance, instability, pessimism and wobble, and every kind of hurry and worry--these, even on the highest levels, are signs of the self-made and self-acting soul. The saints are never like that.** They share the quiet and noble qualities of the great family to which they belong: the family of the sons of God. **If we desire a simple test of the quality of our spiritual life, a consideration of the tranquility, gentleness, and strength with which we deal with the circumstances of our outward life will serve us better than anything that is based on the loftiness of our religious notions, or fervor of our religious feelings.”**

Charles Kuralt used to produce fascinating TV stories about his travels across America. In his 1985 book, *On the Road with Charles Kuralt*, he tells about a time he and his crew visited the chapel of Maria Angelorum in La Crosse, Wisconsin. There

⁴ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Zondervan, 1997).

the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration have been praying *without interruption* for a hundred years! Every hour of every day and night for a century, two sisters have been on their knees, side by side, always praying for the same things—for an end to sickness and hunger, for an end to social injustice, for wisdom in high places, for their city and their country, for their friends, for their enemies, for all people, including you and me—always ending, *“Bring peace to the world.”*

Sister Mileta first took her place in this chain of prayer in 1915. Kuralt asked her, *“So you're just going to go on praying for another hundred years?”* Sister Mileta answered, *“Hopefully, yes. Hopefully, we can go on for another hundred years, and perhaps another hundred years, till the end of time.”*⁵

Peace is one of God's greatest desires.

Isaiah proclaimed a son would be given whose name would be called the (Isaiah 9:6-7), “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. His authority shall grow continually and **there shall be endless peace.**”

Jesus came to earth so that all people might be at peace with God and the angels sang at his birth (Luke 2), “Glory to God in the highest, and **peace on earth.**”

Jesus “came and **proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near**; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). Having peace with God through Christ, we can be instruments of God's peace in the world.

James 3:17-18 says, *“The wisdom from above **is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.**”*

Romans 14:17, *“The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

James 3:17 tells us, *“The wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits.”*

⁵ Charles Kuralt, *On the Road with Charles Kuralt* (Fawcett Books, 1985)

Additional Scriptures you can read in their entirety on today's theme:

PURE

Psalm 19:9, "The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever"

Psalm 40:4-11, verse 8, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

Proverbs 22:11, "Those who love a pure heart and are gracious in speech will have the king as a friend."

Titus 1:15, "To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure."

1 Peter 2:2, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk,"

Hearts

Psalm 95:8-11 harden hearts, hearts going astray.

Psalm 86:8-13, esp. 11, "Give me an undivided heart to revere your name."

Purity

2 Cor. 6:6, "by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness,"

1 Timothy 4:12, "in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity,"

1 Peter 3:2, "when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."

Peace

MT 10:13, "If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy; let your peace return to you."

Psalm 122:6-8, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem,

Psalm 85:8-10, "for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful...righteousness and peace will kiss each other"

For Our World

We need to stop.
Just stop.
Stop for a moment
Before anybody
Says or does anything
That may hurt anyone else.
We need to be silent.
Just silent.
Silent for a moment
Before we forever lose

The blessing of songs
That grow in our hearts.
We need to notice.
Just notice.
Notice for a moment
Before the future slips away
Into ashes and dust of humility.
Stop, be silent, and notice
In so many ways, we are the same.
Our differences are unique treasures.
We have, we are, a mosaic of gifts
To nurture, to offer, to accept.
We need to be.
Just be.
Be for a moment
Kind and gentle, innocent and trusting,
Like children and lambs,
Never judging or vengeful
Like the judging and vengeful.
And now, let us pray,
Differently, yet together,
Before there is no earth, no life,
No chance for peace.

Mattie J.T. Stepanek

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