

## Blessed are the Pure in Heart

Philippians 4:4-9, Luke 10:38-42, Matthew 5:8

Have you ever paid attention to the wacky label contests. Each year various labels that are put on products that give instructions about their use. They are called wacky labels because you wouldn't believe what some manufacturers' put on their merchandise. Here are a few examples:

On a hair dryer: Do not use while sleeping. On a child's stroller: Remove child before folding. On a coffee pot: Do not hold over people, On a package with a fishing lure with a 3 pronged hook: Harmful if swallowed. On a carpenter's electric drill: Not for use as a dental drill. And one of my favorites: On a t-shirt: Do not iron while wearing.

Well, you would think these are unnecessary instructions and warnings but I guess in such a litigious society you can't say you haven't been forewarned.

We have been looking at the instructions and directions for living given in the Beatitudes by Jesus that I suppose by the world's standards and point of view may seem a little strange or crazy or maybe even wacky to some. Because who wants to be poor, or mourn, or be meek, or hunger for righteousness or be merciful. The kind of behavior that Jesus calls us to live by seems to run counter to our worldly logic and conditioning. The world tells me that in order to be blessed, such blessing is reserved for the rich, the happy, the powerful. And yet Jesus says those who find blessing live with a different mindset.

Today's beatitude gives witness to the same thing: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The concept of purity doesn't resonate with today's culture. As a matter of fact, it seems old-fashioned, out of date. But Jesus indicates that this is one of the secrets of blessing. Blessed are the pure in heart. Notice Jesus says "pure in heart". That this kind of behavior as we have seen with the other Beatitudes is not so much emphasizing our human achievement as much as it is the attitude and motivation of our heart. That we seek to put ourselves in a position and posture before God, where God can do a work in our hearts. I want to be able to allow God by his Spirit, to cleanse my heart, purify my heart and in effect be brought nearer to God...It is in the spirit of the prayer we

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sometimes sings as a prayer chorus: "Change my heart, O God. Make it ever true. Change my heart, O God. May I be like you." When we allow this to happen, maybe we can understand why Jesus says these are the ones who will see God. Because of the attentiveness of your soul, you can focus on who God really is.

I still remember that one scene from the movie, City Slickers. Mitch who is played by Billy Crystal is on one of these vacation cattle drives and he is having a heart to heart conversation with Curly, a tough, and intimidating cowboy about life. Here's the edited scene: (show Youtube clip) The secret of life - one thing.

James Howell, the author of the book we have studying, The Beatitudes for Today explains it like this: "Purity of heart is to will one thing...The pure in heart will the one thing that is genuinely and enduringly good. They want God and no substitute will do."

What a beautiful lesson is learned from the Gospel story read this morning about Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus. We discover from the Scriptures that Jesus had developed a close friendship with these three. And evidently Mary and Martha wanted to express their devotion to Jesus in different ways. Really it seems as though these two women had different approaches to life and yet they were equally valuable and important as children of God. But on this occasion, Martha is frantically trying to take care of all the necessary details of being a good host and you can sense her frustration when she complains to Jesus about her sister: "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?" Here is Mary, not helping around the house at all...why she is just listening to Jesus and being attentive to his words. And then Jesus gives this important reply: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her. You have to ask: Was Jesus condemning Martha? I don't think so. But I do think he was teaching the lesson of looking to what is most important. That one thing of taking care of the soul. That one thing of focusing on being near to God. It is not all about how many things I can do for God...it is having a heart that is seeking to be connected to God. That one thing can bring about purity of heart. We can do many things that may be good things, so busy with things pertaining to

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God, that we could still miss God. I want to be more attentive in my soul to what God is wanting to do in my heart and life. “Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.”

That doesn't mean that there aren't steps we can take to help our hearts be more in tune with God. To experience this purity of heart will require giving serious attention to the state of our souls. Because I can get so busy in life, so wrapped up in the everyday details of life, that I can neglect taking care of this one thing...the health of my soul. I think most of us have heard of the practice of detoxifying the body. You know, you eat certain foods, or drink certain healthy drinks and you seek to cleanse your physical body. The detox is carried out to cleanse the body of the toxins that have accumulated in our system. Recently Pastor HeyYoung shared a devotion at our staff meeting about detoxing our souls. She quoted one writer who said: “We are not a body with a soul, but rather a soul with a body.” Sounds a lot like C.S. Lewis who said: “You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body.” While the world rightly teaches us to detox our bodies, sometimes we need to detox our souls. You remember the question that Wesley incorporated into their weekly covenant groups. Each week as people gather to share about their spiritual journey the key question was this: “How is it with your soul?” Or what is the state of your soul? In the world we live in, we can't help but be exposed to a lot of deadly toxins to our spirit. Toxic words, toxic attitudes, and behaviors that deeply impact our souls. Craig Groeschel, pastor of Life Church, in his book, Soul Detox, offers some helpful thoughts on how we might detoxify our souls and purify our hearts: Let me share a few:

1. Realize that everything counts. All of life's influences, the everyday choices, the little things and the big things, anything that we allow to enter our minds, all have an impact on our spiritual life.
2. Identify the lies that have deceived you, and replace them with the truth. What are the things that we have allowed to creep into our lives that may be hindering our relationship with God? What behaviors do we continue to persist in that stifle the work of the Spirit?
3. Clean up your thoughts. Craig puts it like this: “Since spiritual battles are ultimately either won or lost in the mind, it's crucial to pay attention to

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what thoughts you focus on.” Here is where the apostle Paul’s words to the Philippians are so significant. That we could carry an attitude of prayer and rejoicing and then focus on those things which positively impact the mind. Philippians 4:8-9: “Finally, beloved. 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.” That if we keep doing these things we will experience the peace of God.

4. Craig goes on to mention a number of other things like uncovering hidden sins, digging up the bitter roots from your soul, getting rid of envy, letting go of your fears. All of these things to get rid of the toxic influences in our lives. What experiences and practices of my life are bringing me closer to God and what things are hindering my relationship with God? He concludes by saying: “Ask God..to help you focus not on the external behavior to try to earn God’s love, but on responding to the love that God has already given you by trusting Him in every part of your life.”

These things that can re-direct the focus of our hearts. These practices that seek to cleanse and detoxify, and purify our souls. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The very idea of seeing God in the Old Testament was to surely mean death. But in Jesus, people now could see God face to face. He showed the way to be able to get close to God. No longer would we need to try and hide like Adam and run away from God, but we can return to this God who loves us deeply and wants to be in communion and fellowship with us. Today I invite you to get closer, examine the state of your soul, look for those toxic influences and lay them before the cross. Allow the Lord to do a work in your heart, bring cleansing, forgiveness, and healing. To have a heart that is attentive like Mary, seeking to be near to Jesus and to hear his words. Focusing on that one thing that will deepen your walk with God. And asking him to purify your soul. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”