

DEEP AND WIDE

Pure

Matthew 5:1-8

Jeff Marian

“Grandma, why are you driving down the middle of the road?”

That’s the question that finally convinced Mary to see the eye doctor. In that moment she realized that she couldn’t see the lines in the road, and that put her and her granddaughter at risk.

When Mary got to the eye doctor he told Mary that she had cataracts, a clouding of the lenses in her eyes. The doctor assured Mary that surgery would restore her sight. The surgery would remove the old, clouded lenses in her eyes and replace them with clear, clean lenses. And sure enough, just a few months later, Mary was able to see clearly with 20/20 vision.

Looking back Mary said, “The change in my vision had happened so slowly that I barely noticed it, but now that I can see clearly I realize how bad it had gotten. Everything looked as if I was seeing things underwater. Everything was fuzzy, distorted and lacked color. What a gift it is now to see clearly!

What sometimes happens to our eyes can also happen to our heart. I’m not talking about a build up of cholesterol. I’m not even talking about our physical heart. I’m talking about the very center of our being. That’s what Jesus is talking about in today’s beatitude as we continue our worship series entitled “Deep and Wide.” So, open your Bible to Matthew 5, and let’s read verses 1-8 [NRSV].

If you’ve been following along in this worship series, you’ve probably noticed that each Beatitude is like a precious gem. The more you examine it, the more depth you perceive, and the more you turn it over in your mind, the more facets you discover. And that is certainly true of today’s Beatitude: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

Let’s start by understanding two key words. First, what does this verse mean by “heart”? Again, let’s be clear that Jesus isn’t talking about the blood-pumping organ in our chests. When the Bible talks about our heart, it’s referring to the core of our being, our essence. It’s where emotion and desire begin. It’s where the motivation for our actions comes from. That’s what Jesus means when he talks about our heart.

The Bible has lots of things to say about our heart, but two

of them rise to the top. First, God is intensely interested in our heart. God desires that our hearts belong to God. That is to say, God wants to be at the very center of our being, the object of our worship and affection and the motivation for our every thought and action. Proverbs 3:5 urges us, *“Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and don’t depend upon your own understanding. In all of your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your path straight.”* That’s God’s desire – that we would love and trust God with our whole heart.

But here’s the second thing that the Bible says about our hearts: we were born with a serious heart condition. It’s called sin, and it causes us to turn in on ourselves and turn away from God. Jeremiah 17:9 says it bluntly, “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” It’s the reality of our heart condition that caused St. Paul to cry out in frustration, *“I don’t understand why I act the way I do. I don’t do what I know is right...I know that my selfish desires won’t let me do anything that is good. Even when I want to do right, I cannot.”* (Romans 7:15, 18) Ever felt that way? That’s the result of the heart disease called sin.

And that leads us to the second word we need to explore – the word “pure.” Jesus said, *“Blessed are the pure in heart.”* What does the word “pure” mean? It means “clean” as in free from impurities. When applied to the heart it means having a singleness of heart toward God. A pure heart has no hypocrisy, no guile, no hidden motives. A pure heart is marked by transparency and an uncompromising desire to focus on God, to please God in all things. It is more than just doing the right thing; it’s doing the right thing for the right reason.

It’s the difference between praying so people will think you’re super spiritual, and praying because you long to connect with God.

It’s the difference between complimenting someone to get something in return, and complimenting someone simply to build them up.

Jesus once condemned the religious leaders of the day for having impure hearts:

You Pharisees and teachers are show-offs, and you’re in for trouble! You wash the outside of your cups and dishes, while inside there is nothing but greed and selfishness. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of a cup, and then the outside will also be clean.

You Pharisees and teachers are in for trouble! You’re nothing but show-offs. You’re like tombs that have been whitewashed. On the outside they are beautiful, but inside they are full of bones and filth. That’s what you are like. Outside you look good, but inside you are evil and only pretend to be good. (Matthew 23:25-28 CEV)

"Blessed are the pure in heart," Jesus said. Problem is, none of us are pure in heart. We all struggle with sin. We all wrestle with mixed motives. Five years ago, I was recovering from surgery in which I donated a kidney on behalf of one of our members. A noble deed, don't you think? Did I do it because I love God and love my neighbor? Yes, I did. And did I hope that people would hear what I did and think well of me, think I'm better than average? Yes, I did. I'm not only short a kidney; I'm short a pure heart. And so are you. We all fail to have singleness of heart toward God. We're utterly hopeless. Which is why we need Jesus.

Remember Mary, the grandmother with cataracts? She couldn't save her own sight. She needed someone else to save her. She needed a skilled surgeon to remove the clouded lenses from her eyes and replace them with clean, clear lenses. In the same way, we can't save ourselves. We can't make our hearts pure. We need Jesus to create in us a new, clean heart. That's why King David, a man with an impure heart, cried out in Psalm 51, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."* David couldn't do it himself.

The pathway to a pure heart isn't trying harder. It's trusting more. The pathway to a pure heart is a journey of getting honest with God and with ourselves about ourselves, and asking for forgiveness. It's about confessing our mixed motives, our hypocrisy, our consumeristic faith, our half-hearted worship, and our self-focused agendas. It's about asking God to replace our sin-sick heart with a new, clean heart. And this is something we need to do daily. Not every now and again. Daily. Remember how Mary said that the change in her vision happened so slowly that she hardly noticed? Sin is like that. It clouds our vision slowly so that over time we no longer see God, our neighbor or ourselves clearly.

The Kingdom of God calls us into a deeper relationship with God, a relationship of honesty, transparency and humility. But the Kingdom of God is so wide with God's grace that even impure hearts like yours and mine are welcomed, embraced and transformed.

On the back of your bulletin this week you'll find a series of questions to guide you in some self-examination. Spend some time taking a long, hard look at yourself. You may not like what you see. Welcome to the human race. But you can trust God for a new, clean heart. Like cataract surgery, it'll help you see more clearly. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*