

“IF YOUR HEART KEEPS RIGHT”

Dr. John Allan Lavender
Mt. 5:8

I suppose all of us have had our secret dreams, our little castles in the air, our longings to see places we've never seen and go where we've never gone. I know I do.

Some day I hope I'll get to see the Taj Mahal in India. The great pyramids of Egypt. The mysterious beauty of the far east and the beguiling allure of the south sea islands. I'd like to visit Petra, the rose-red city of antiquity mentioned in the Bible, and, most especially, I'd love to climb the path our Savior trod up that holiest of all places, the hill of Calvary.

Yes, there are many things I'd like to see, but none of these begins to approach the longing in my heart this morning which is stirred afresh by the promise of our text, the hope that one day *I shall see God.*

I know no human has ever seen God, at least not with physical eyes. I know “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the mind of man” what the glories of almighty God must be like. I know the promise of our text seems utterly unattainable. But I also know my heart I know my longings. I know what is more important to me than anything else, and *that* is that I *shall* see God, and I shall know him even as I am known. That's your deepest desire too, isn't it?

A sight-seer once stopped beside the great artist Turner and watched him at his work. After a bit the man leaned over the artist's shoulder and said ,with a superficiality all too common with sight-seers, “Mr.Turner, I cannot see any such light and color in this scene as you are putting on your canvas.” To which Turner replied, “Oh, but don't you wish you could!”

And isn't that the way you feel about God? For while it seems sometimes as if there is a dark

blanket of mist between heaven and earth, as if God has covered his face with a cloud so you cannot “break through,” as Jeremiah put it. Even though it’s true that “no man has seen God and lived,” isn’t it also true that there is that persistent voice inside you which continues asks the haunting question, “Oh, but don’t you wish you could?”

And we must answer, yes! Yes, we wish we could see God! For the deepest, dearest, finest, sweetest longing of our soul is to share in the promise of our text. To enter into that blessed happiness which only lies within the polished radiance of his presence.

Why, then, don’t we see him? If this is so important to us, why does he seem to remain such a distant dream, such a far-flung ghostly thing out there somewhere beyond our reach? Why don’t we see him?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that we are looking for him in the wrong way and with the wrong eyes. As Ralph W. Sockman points out, “We have three organs of vision and our preoccupation with just one of them often leads to indifference to the other two.”

Physical Vision

There is first of all that which we call physical vision. Through our natural eyes we absorb the somber beauty of a Rembrandt masterpiece. Or the lingering radiance of an autumn sunset. Or the lacy greenness of an April morning.

But the indescribable majesty of Almighty God cannot be captured by the physical eye. There is something in his nature which a mere mortal cannot behold. About the best we can do is to capture a fleeting glimpse of his reflected glory in the beauties of the world about us. Beyond that, “No eye has seen.”

Mental Vision

Then there is that sight which we call mental vision. This we can best describe by calling to our

remembrance an experience all of us have shared when, after groping through the misty darkness of depressing doubt, we have flicked on the light of faith, and in that light have cried with great exhilaration, “I see it! I see it!”

Now we don’t mean that we “see it” through our physical eye. We “see” it with the eye of our mind. We understand it. We get the idea. The light dawns! The thing which has befogged us and bewildered us suddenly becomes clear. We see it, not with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the mind. Which is to say, we experience a breakthrough in the area of learning.

But again, Almighty God, cannot be seen by mere mental vision. The infinite is too vast to be apprehended by finite mind. Hugh Martin, the gifted English preacher, tells how after Pascal’s death a servant discovered, sewn into his coat, a scrap of parchment which apparently he had always carried with him. It was a record in broken words of an overwhelming, ecstatic experience of God’s presence.

Among its phrases is one which reads like a cry of excitement:

“Non des philosophes et des savants!”

“Not the God of philosophers and scholars.”

The great scientist and philosopher had discovered God reveals himself, not to the wise, but to babes. Not to the learned, but to the loving. Not to the proud, but to the pure in heart. This is precisely what Jesus has been saying in our text.

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

Heart Vision

Jesus has been talking about a third kind of vision. He has been telling us that the heart also has eyes. That through *them* we see God. Paul reminds us of this when, in his letter to the Ephesians he prays,

“May God grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation for the knowledge of himself, illuminating *the eyes of your heart.*”

If we’re going to see God, we will see him, not through the eyes of our mind, or of our body, but through the eyes of our heart. But, to do this, the lenses of those eyes must be free from the fogging, blurring, blinding limitations of sin. We must be pure in heart, for the promise is

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

Charles Allen reminds us of The Quest for the Holy Grail. It’s a story about the cup which was said to be used at the last supper. According to the legend, it was in the Holy Grail that Joseph of Arimathea caught the last drop of blood which fell from our Lord’s side as he died on the cross.

In the story Sir Galahad, along with other Knights of the Round Table set out in quest for the Holy Grail and they find it. But to each it is something different, because it is a mirror of each man’s soul.

To some of the knights it is swathed in misty clouds, for their hearts are fog-bound with selfishness.

To Sir Lancelot it is covered with holy wrath and fire, for his heart is exceedingly sinful.

To Sir Galahad it is a vision of polished radiance, for his heart is pure and his soul is clean.

This is a parable of how we see God. There are times when he is a cloudy mystery, for our hearts are full of selfishness. There are times when he seems like a fearful judge, for our hearts are full of sin. And, when we see *these* likenesses of him, they are a reflection of the condition of our soul. *But*, when our heart is right, we see God as a loving Father. An unfailing friend. The fulfillment of our deepest desire. For the pure in heart not only *see* God, they see *him as he is!*

What Does It Mean To Be Pure In Heart?

What did Jesus mean by “the pure in heart?” Was he speaking of sinless perfection? If so, none of us shall ever see God. We might as well give up the quest right now. It’s a lost cause. We shall never attain sinless perfection in this life.

Was Jesus calling us to a prim, proper, pious attitude toward life? Was he demanding that we enter into a kind of neuter morality akin to that of the angels, who do not know what it is to soil their hands or get their faces dirty, because they have never had the urge to sin, nor do they possess the will to act on that urge.

No! I don't think Christ meant *any* of these things when he called us to be pure in heart. He was speaking of a relationship with God which is primarily concerned, not with what we *do*, but with who we *are*: God's children, though it's painfully clear that, at times, we are disobedient children.

Again and again Jesus denounced the perfectionism of the Pharisees.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,” he cried. “You are like whitened sepulchers (beautiful, ornate, white-washed tombs) which appear beautiful on the outside, but are full of dead men's bones inside.” (Mt. 2:23-27).

He knew perfectionism could not meet their need. It's kindergarten stuff, having to do with punctilious adherence to an endless list of external things. Eating the right meat. Drinking the right drink. Keeping the right days. But the purity of which Jesus spoke goes much deeper. It goes beyond a mere surface washing of men's feet. It demands that their souls and their hearts be clean!

Christ has always been more concerned about our heart than about our hands. Jesus knows the heart is the place of our innermost thoughts and desires. It is the seat of our emotions. It is the center of our moral and spiritual life. What goes on within our heart will ultimately affect our entire behavior, for “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

Again and again Jesus made it clear that what defiles us is not what goes into us, but what comes out of us. We may guard our thoughts, censure our words, watch our acts, and yet, even while we're doing so, a thin stream of infection seeps out of our heart of hearts and pervades our entire being. And, until that disease is rooted out, until the malignancy of the soul is excised by the

Great Physician, we cannot be pure in heart.

That's why we must be born again. Our heart can, and has, alienated us from God. It can and has separated us from the Source of happiness and joy. That's why the Psalmist cried,

"Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Until our heart is right, we cannot be completely or supremely happy.

Perhaps there is someone here this morning whose sin has separated him from God. Whose unclean heart has driven a wedge between him and his heavenly Father. If so, I am so happy to say, I have good news for you! Christ has come to break down the wall of partition that divides you from God. He has come to bridge the chasm that keeps you from God. And, he stands ready *right now* to bring love, and forgiveness, and cleansing through his blood.

Do you remember the story of Mary Magdalene? It isn't a pretty story, is it? According to tradition she was a women of the street. A pawn in the hands of lustful men and, in her loneliness, she was more sinned against than sinning. One day she came in contact with Christ. The purest of the pure. When he saw her he did not condemn her. He did not condone her behavior, but neither did he condemn her for it. He simply said, "Go, and sin no more."

She got up out of the dust of the road where she had lain, squared her shoulders, lifted her head, and for the first time in many years looked people in the eye without shame. She knew her sins were forgiven. Her heart was clean. She had seen God.

There were *other* people who saw Jesus that day, but they did not see him as God. They only looked at him through the eyes of their body or the eyes of their mind. They observed his actions and studied his teachings, and, while they were impressed by what they saw and heard, they did not see him as God.

Mary Magdalene did! She saw him through the eyes of her heart. From that moment on she was

never the same. And, if Jesus could do that for a tawdry woman of the street, there is hope for you, my friend, if you will look at him through the eyes of your heart.

Singleness of Purpose

You see, the purity at heart about which Jesus is speaking, has little to do with your behavior. It has everything to do with your attitude. To get at the root of our text, we must go back to a verse which precedes it, where Jesus describes what I have called the dynamics of a desperate desire.

“Happy are they who *hunger* and *thirst* after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

Jesus was depicting the *longing* -- the nagging, gnawing, piercing, thirst and hunger of a *longing* which will not be denied -- which must drive us, if we would see God. And then, having described the dynamics of a desperate desire, Jesus goes onto say it must be matched with a singleness of purpose, an undivided will, a sincerity of goal.

What he is describing is the direct antithesis of the double-minded, half-hearted, chameleon-like approach to life which is typical of so many people today. Jesus is calling us to a life that is free from duplicity, insincerity and instability. You see, fellow seeker, the pure in heart are those whose hunger and thirst after God is free from any weakening alloy. They are driven by a singleness of purpose.

They are not narrow-minded, or simple-minded, they are single-minded! They have experienced the redeeming power of the greatest of all affections. And, having glimpsed the vision of a life tinged with glory, they press on toward the prize of their high calling in Christ, until they see God!

Shall See God

Does that mean they have an hallucination? No. It simply means--

They see him in the world about him, when others don’t.

They see him in the movements in history when others are despairing.
They see him in world affairs, causing all things to work together for good, when others are disillusioned and discouraged.
They see him in the involvements of life, and therefore know that perfect peace which comes from being in the center of his will.
They see him in the *now*, though they see through a glass darkly, even as they shall see him more fully in eternity, face to face.

Does this sound like an opium-smoker’s pipe-dream? Well, it isn’t. And the way you can prove that, is to try it for yourself. One day a rather skeptical, speculative student stopped the great scientist and experimentalist, Sir Humphrey Davey. He wanted to talk about a new theory he was working on, and said, “I wonder if . . .” Before he could go on, Professor Davey said, “Stop speculating. Go try!”

That’s the answer! You will never prove Christ true while you linger around the periphery. You will never experience his redeeming love out there on the margins of faith. Try him! Test him! Submit him to the scrutiny of your own investigation within the laboratory of your immortal soul. As someone has said, “The best angle by which to measure anything is the t-r-y angle.”

“The world is weary of new tracks of thought

That lead to naught.

Sick of quack remedies prescribed in vain

For mortal pain.

But still above them all one figure stands

With outstretched hands,

One message sounds above the strife,

‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’”

Come! Taste! And see that the Lord is good!