

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

Matthew 5:8

We will study today the sixth Beatitude of our Lord Jesus. This is what we read in Matthew 5:8.

Matthew 5:8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Life without God

Blessed are those who are pure in heart because they will be able to see God. Before we begin to look at the meaning of this Beatitude, just try to feel the excitement behind that promise. To be able to see God. What a prospect for the Christian! Who can give such a promise but God alone? There is something there that draws the attention of any reader of the Bible.

Most people, at some point in their life, have asked this question: What is the goal of human life? If you take the time to meditate on this question, you will have to face other related questions. Where does this life lead us to? Where does the road of life end? We all know the answer. Whether we accept it or not is a different matter. We have all observed in one way or another that the road of life leads nowhere but down to a hole, some several feet below the ground. That's a cold and blunt answer, but it is nevertheless a universal truth. That is the way of all living being. Whether we like to think it over or not does not change the fact that the way of all life ends in the ground.

We are confronted with this reality every time we attend a funeral. You are there, at the funeral service, with many solemn thoughts in your mind. What is life all about? What is the goal of human life? And you see this dead body. It seems so meaningless to listen to the list of accomplishments of the deceased. It is all finished. It is all gone. What's the point of reciting past honors? If that is the prospect of human life, then it is a gloomy prospect.

This life seems to lead nowhere but into the ground. It is literally a dead end. The end is death. We have to see it as a tragedy for those who do not know God. If you don't know God, where else will you go? In this life, everybody struggles hard for this goal and that goal. And in the end, no matter what we have achieved, everything seems to come to a dead end. It is not pleasant to think about it. What comfort is there to go traveling down this road of life only to realize that you have come to a dead end. The natural tendency is to evade the issue and try to think about something else. But inside of us, we feel a sense of frustration and we are puzzled by the meaning of all the toil of this world.

Seeing God in the future

The promise of this Beatitude is that the disciple of Christ shall see God. Now that changes the whole picture. Life does not end here on earth for we will see God. But what does that mean, that we will see God? Shall we see God with our physical eyes? Shall we see God in the same physical sense as Job when he said, *In my flesh I shall see God* (Job 19:26)? Or do we mean that we are going to see God in some spiritual sense?

This notion of seeing God has already been mentioned in the OT. In Exodus 33:18, Moses boldly asked God to see His glory. God told him that He could not grant him this privilege. He said, *You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live.* Moses was only allowed to see God's back. *But my face shall not be seen* (Exodus 33:23). In the NT, we are told that nobody has ever been able to see God except for Jesus. Twice in the gospel of John we read that *no one has seen God at any time* (John 1:18; 6:46). The apostle Paul also speaks of an *invisible* God (1Timothy 1:17) and of a God *whom no man has seen or can see* (1Timothy 6:16).

When the Lord Jesus says that the pure in heart shall see God, He is making what we call an eschatological statement. He is not talking about the present situation but about the age to come. They shall see God at some point in the future. But in this present time, i.e., living as we are in this present state of sin that we are in, no man can see God and live. In this mortal flesh, with all its sin, I cannot see God and live. That is why even Moses, being a sinner like all of us, could not see God face to face and live.

The Lord Jesus is not talking about a vision of God that we might have in our present situation. He is talking about a vision of God that will happen on that day when our body will be transformed into the likeness of the glorious body of Christ as Paul says in Philippians. The day will come when the Lord Jesus will *transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself* (Philippians 3:21). On that day, the corruption will put on incorruption. The mortal will put on immortality. The sinful body will no longer exist. We will have a new body, a fully glorified body. Then we shall see God face to face. The apostle John repeats this idea of seeing God perfectly in our final state in 1John 3:2. *...It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* When Christ comes back, we will become like Him. And we will be able see Him exactly as He is, with all His glory.

Seeing God in the present

It is interesting to read in Hebrews that Moses was still able to see God to a certain extent. In Hebrews 11:27, the writer tells us that *By faith he (Moses) forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him (God) who is invisible.* Does that contradict Exodus 33 where God said to Moses that no man can see Him and live? There is no contradiction. We have to distinguish two kinds of seeing. Seeing God directly, face to face, is impossible right now. It is something that will happen only in the future. However, it is possible to see God right now, by faith. It is an indirect vision of God, but a vision of God nevertheless.

Hebrews 11 is a chapter about faith. And we are told that it is faith that allowed Moses to see God. He endured in faith and saw God. Faith gives spiritual perception and enables the believer to see what an unbeliever cannot see. What did Moses see? By faith, He saw that the riches of Egypt that he could have enjoyed are nothing compared to the spiritual reward that God can give him. Therefore he left Egypt and chose to suffer with the people of God.

Hebrews 11:25. Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The unbeliever can only see what is material. The person who has faith in God can see beyond this material world. He can see the spiritual world. He can see God. Seeing God can be equated with the consciousness of God's presence in one's life. It is about knowing God and fellowshipping with Him.

The eye of faith

We will never stress enough the importance of a living relationship with God here and now. If this living relationship is absent, then what you call faith is going to be founded more on fantasy than on reality. Saving faith implies that we have a personal and constant relationship with God. Without that relationship, we will never be able to say like Paul, *I know whom I have believed* (2Timothy 1:12).

Are you able to say that you know whom you have believed? Don't just say that you believe in whom you believe. You have to go beyond the believing of what you believe to a knowing of the One whom you believe in. And the way to know God is through this step of faith and commitment to Him. It is a faith that is founded upon a reality in which you are able to say with the apostle Paul, 'I know whom I have believed because I have experienced His power in my life. I have met with Him in this transforming relationship whereby He has made me to become a new creature in Christ.' That is the kind of faith that we find in the pure in heart.

By faith, Moses was able to see the unseen. He saw the reward. Can you see that the road of life does not have to end in a coffin? The Lord Jesus tells us in this Beatitude that for the pure in heart, there is an awful lot beyond that point. They shall see God. And we begin to experience it in this life. What a promise! With this kind of vision, human life has a meaning. It doesn't end in the ground. It is a life that is eternal. But we must understand that unless God becomes a reality to us in this life, we might only be talking about a rather mystical vision of God. We might be just trying to comfort ourselves and refuse again to believe that the end is dead. We try to invent some future for ourselves that we shall call the vision of God. This will not lead us too far either. We have to meet with God and realize who God is. Unless we meet with God in some way here and now, then this prospect of the vision of God will not become real to you.

A reflected vision of God

Moses endured in the faith as already 'seeing Him who is invisible.' This vision of God is an indirect one. He could not see God face to face but he could see, in a reflected way, the glory of God. This is also our situation. We do not yet see God in His glory and in His majesty. The apostle Paul says in 1Corinthians 13:12 that we see Him in a glass darkly. 'But then,' Paul says, 'we shall see Him face to face.'

1Corinthians 13:12. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Paul tells us that our knowledge of God in the here and now is not of the same kind than what is going to happen in the future. Right now, our vision of God is an indirect one. It is like looking into a mirror. Mirrors in those days were made of polished metal. Bronze was often used. But no matter how good is that mirror, looking into a mirror will always give us an indirect vision of God as opposed to seeing God directly, face to face. What we see now is a reflected glory of God and not God himself. It is like the difference between seeing the picture of a friend and seeing that friend in person. As good as the picture is, it is just not the real thing. Paul's emphasis is on the indirect nature of our seeing

rather than on the quality of what we are able to see. For now, we see God indirectly. But one day, we shall see Him directly, face to face.

Purifying the heart

How is it possible, for you and for me, to have a share in this glorious vision of God? How can this glorious vision be ours? This leads us to talk about the way by which we become pure in heart. If a person desires to see God, he has to be pure in heart.

Now, we see from the Scriptures that by nature, man's heart is very far from being pure. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that *The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked*. The Lord Jesus is even more explicit. This is what He says in Mark 7:21-23.

*Mark 7:21. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,
22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.
23 All these evil things come from within and defile a man.*

If that is the condition of my heart, how will I ever be able to see God? Well, left to myself, I will never be able to see God. God has to do something to my heart. What He is going to do is to perform a spiritual heart transplant on me. He is going to remove my old heart and put a new one into me. In the OT, God says, *Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh* (Ezekiel 11:19).

In the NT, the picture is about a cleansing of the heart and we find three things related to this process. Firstly, we read that the blood of Christ can cleanse our heart. It is Jesus who makes us clean and so gives us a new heart. John says, *If we walk in the light ... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin* (1John 1:7). Secondly, the Lord Jesus tells us that the Word of God cleanses our heart. *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you* (John 15:3). And thirdly, we are told that our heart is cleansed by means of faith. In Acts 15:8-9, we read, *So God, who knows the heart ... made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith*. Faith is that by which God cleanses our hearts.

So the Scripture uses different pictures to say the same thing. Whether it is about cleaning a heart that is dirty or changing the heart which has become hardened, the message is the same. The heart of man has to go through a process of spiritual transformation.

The human heart

What then is the heart? What is being changed? What is being cleansed? In the Bible, the concept of the heart refers to the center of our inner life, which includes our mind, our will and our emotions. Paul speaks of the inner man with all his feelings, his decisions, his capacity to think. In Ephesians 3:16-17, he puts the inner man in parallel with the heart. This is what he says.

Ephesians 3:16. That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the **inner man**,
17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...

In this passage, whether Paul talks about the inner man or about the heart, they both refer to the same thing. The heart is simply the innermost self, the man as you really are. It is not just what appears to be on the outside. It is first and foremost what you really are on the inside. When God deals with man, He is concerned to deal with our real self. He wants to deal with our hearts. When Jesus comes into our lives, He cleanses this inner man with His blood.

Keeping our heart pure

Now we know what is the heart. We know how the heart becomes pure. But what does purity of heart mean? The notion of purity here is connected with the dirt of sin. A pure heart is a heart that is not defiled by sin. This moral purity of the inner life is often expressed in the Psalms. Take for example Psalm 24:3-4.

*Psalm 24:3. Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place?
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.*

In the Bible, the purity of heart is defined in the way you behave, in the way you conduct yourself. It will be manifested in the cleanliness of your hands, i.e., you do not use your hands to commit sinful things. It will be expressed in the truthfulness of your speech. What you say is true and nothing but the truth. It will be seen in the singleness of your devotion to God. You do not commit sins by worshipping idols. We can see that the notion of a pure heart emphasizes the inward and moral part of one's life.

We also find that the Bible speaks about the cleanliness of heart to mean obedience to God. Being pure in heart means that you love God with a perfect heart. So we have this expression 'perfect heart', which is used many times in the Scriptures. In 2Chronicles 15:17, it is said that *the heart of Asa was perfect all his days*. In other translations, we read that his heart was 'blameless' or 'true', or 'loyal'. He had a pure heart, a heart that was totally committed to God. Pure means 'perfect'. There is no blemish. It is perfectly clean. Only a heart that is pure, perfect, wholly committed and obedient to God, shall see God.

If you are pure in heart, you shall see God. We need to realize that this glorious expectation has immediate practical implications. It should encourage us to live godly lives. If we truly believe that we will see God in all His glory and purity, we will make sure that we do our part, while we are on this earth, in purifying ourselves with the power that God provides. That's what John says in his first letter. After revealing that one day, we will be like God and see Him exactly as He is, he says, *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure* (1John 3:3). The prospect of seeing God face to face should stir us to live pure and holy lives. We must make every effort to be pure even as Christ is pure.