

The Heavenly Citizens Charter 6

Blessed are the Pure in Heart for they will see God.

Psalm 51

Matthew 5:1-12

A strange ceremony takes place in many posh and well situated churches on almost every Saturday in the summer. Some Women who aren't virgins wear expensive white dresses to pretend that they are; and some couples make impossible promises, which they know they're unlikely to keep, before a God that they no longer believe in. It's called a traditional English wedding, but it's an occasion when the church seems to give its seal of approval to rank hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is a national disease. A Politician who posed as a family man is caught in bed with an actress. A Bishop who listened to the confession of others kept silent about his illegitimate son. A publisher who said that he was on the side of ordinary people stole millions of pounds from their pension fund. And in churches every Sunday some people who spoke the truth all week long stand up and sing lies; the words that they sing are truth but they don't really believe them or live them. Christian homes are largely indistinguishable from their secular neighbours in demonstrating the materialism, which grips western society. Christian Motorists break traffic regulations without turning a hair. Christian Ministers believe that their Church is better than the others nearby. Christians pass on gossip so that it can be 'mentioned in prayer'. Few Christian people think any differently to their secular colleagues, yet they follow the one who commended eight attitudes, which are directly opposed to the common sense of western society. Society commends the self-confident; Jesus congratulates the poor in Spirit. Society envies those who laugh; Jesus applauds those who mourn. Society urges people to stand up for themselves; Jesus asks them to be Meek. Society thirsts for happiness; Jesus hungers for righteousness. Society tells people to get their own back; Jesus instructs them to be

merciful. Society says 'how fortunate are those who are not caught out'; and Jesus replies with Mt5: 8.

At first sight this sixth attitude seems to be in the wrong place. Its such a magnificent promise that it looks as though it should be the first or the last in the list. But the attitudes are in a logical order: each one follows on from the one before, and each one is much harder than the one before.

Some of the people who are poor in spirit, who know they're nothing in comparison to God, go on to mourn for their failings. Some of those who mourn for the worst in themselves become meek before others and allow others to examine them too.

Some of the Meek are not content with their failings and go on to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Some of those who have experienced God's Grace - who've received His Kingdom, His comfort, His Earth and His filling - become merciful to others. And some of those who are full of His mercy go on to become pure in heart.

It is immediately obvious that the words 'in heart' indicate the kind of purity to which Jesus is alluding, as the words 'in spirit' indicated the kind of poverty He meant. The 'Poor in Spirit' are spiritually poor as distinct from those whose poverty is only material but from whom are the 'pure in heart' being distinguished?

The popular interpretation is to regard purity of heart as an expression of inward purity, those who have been cleansed from moral - as opposed to ceremonial - defilement. And there is good biblical precedent for this, especially in the psalms. It was recognised that no one could ascend the Hill of the Lord or stand in His Holy Place unless he had 'clean hands and a pure heart'. So David conscious that His Lord desired 'truth in the inward being' could pray. 'Teach me wisdom in my secret heart', and 'create in me a clean heart O God' (Ps 24:3/4, 51:6/10).

Jesus took up this theme in his controversy with the Pharisees and complained about their obsession with external, ceremonial purity: 'You Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and dish,

but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness'. They were 'like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness' (Luke 11:39 Mt 23: 25f).

Martin Luther gives this distinction between inward and outward purity a characteristically earthy turn. For he contrasted purity of heart not only with ceremonial defilement, but also with actual physical dirt. 'Christ...wants to have the heart pure, though outwardly the person may be a drudge in the kitchen, black, sooty and grimy, doing all sorts of dirty work'. Again 'though a common labourer, a shoemaker or a blacksmith may be dirty and sooty or may smell because he is covered with dirt and pitch, and though he stinks outwardly, inwardly he is pure incense before God' because he ponders the word of God in his heart and obeys it.

Like all the others, this attitude shows that Christianity is more concerned with internal than external matters. Jesus doesn't commend the pure in behaviour because he is more concerned with character than conduct, with what a person is rather than what they do, with attitudes rather than actions.

Neither does Jesus commend purity of intellect. Unlike society, He doesn't say, "How fortunate are the highly intelligent." And unlike some churches, He doesn't say, "How fortunate are the pure in doctrine." The first five attitudes might have led us to expect that He'd congratulate the pure in mind, but Jesus doesn't do this either, instead he says: Mt5: 8. Today we know that the heart is the vital organ which pumps blood around our bodies. But throughout history it's been a picture of the seat of human personality, the centre of a human being. When Jesus speaks about the pure in heart He doesn't mean people with a healthy organ whose arteries haven't been clogged by too much fatty food. He means people who are pure in their thinking, and in their emotions, and in their wills - the people who are pure at the centre of every

part of their being, at the source of their attitudes and actions.

To be pure in heart means two different things. Firstly it means a heart, which has been washed down, scrubbed clean, hovered up, disinfected, fumigated, ventilated, shampooed, deodorised, and made utterly immaculate. It means that a man or woman is spotless at the centre of their being. Secondly it means a heart without anything hidden, a life without any secrets, a person who has been so straightened out that they haven't any folds or creases, a man or woman who is always honest and straightforward and never devious or manipulative. It's to be single-minded and without any hint of hypocrisy.

To be pure in heart is to be like Jesus. And according to Him, unless we are pure in heart we won't see God; unless we're immaculately clean, utterly straightforward and completely like Jesus in every respect we'll never see God. The whole object of Christianity is to help us to see God, and it must be obvious by now that we can't do it on our own.

Every promise that Jesus makes in the attitudes is a gift freely given - the Kingdom, the comfort, the earth, the filling, mercy and now a vision of God. As with the other promises it's rather ambiguous. Jesus doesn't make it clear whether it's a brief glimpse or a permanent gaze, whether it's a rear view or a face-to-face meeting. But the thrust of the promise is clear. One way or another the pure in heart will see God.

And like all the other attitudes the promise is partly fulfilled now and partly in the future. In one sense Christians already see God in a way that nobody else does. When 2 people see a glorious sunset, one sees the scientific consequence of the sun's rays hitting dust at a particular angle, and the other sees the master artist entertaining His children with His brush and canvas. When two people consider the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, one credits economic forces and the pressure of nationalism and the other the ruler of the universe for intervening at last. When two people read about Jackie

Pullinger or Mother Theresa, one notes their devotion to the poor and despised and the other recognises that they're following the example of the foot-washing God.

Christians see God in the Bible: where others see irrelevant words or Shakespearean prose, they see a description of God, which gives them new life. They see God in art, in music, in painting, in sculpture and in dance: where others see human skill and achievement they see the creator's inheritance. And most important of all - Christians see God in their everyday experience: where others see chance and coincidence they see divine footprints and fingerprints. All this is part of seeing God, but its nothing compared to the way that the pure will see Him in the future.

My dream as a child was to meet Bobby Moore, MLK, John Edrich and the Beatles. Sadly I never did! The person I'd most like to meet now is Nelson Mandela but I doubt I ever will.

However I did once meet a famous person - Cliff Richard! I was extremely nervous; I agonised over what I would ask or say; I choose my clothes with extreme care; and I made sure that I had washed thoroughly, and I sucked a mint slowly.

HOWEVER! When we grasp that we've been invited to see God everything else will fade into insignificance. When we realise that we've been offered a chance of seeing the Creator of the Universe, we'll do our utmost to grasp it. Think what people do to be first into the Harrods Sale or at the front of the queue for the final Saturday at Wimbledon - and then think what we would do to ensure we meet God.

Only the pure in heart will see God, and no one can make their heart pure. Only God can make hearts pure - spotlessly clean and without any hypocrisy - and He has promised to do it.

The Poor in Spirit who progress through the attitudes find, to their surprise, that they're becoming pure in heart, Those who go on to mourn and be meek, to hunger and be merciful, are those who place themselves in God's hands, who depend on His help and His cleansing. They know that He is dealing with them

and that one-day they'll be spotless. They will be pure in heart and how fortunate they are, for they - and only they - will see God.

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