

4) THE PURE IN HEART

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

What does it mean to be pure in heart? What does it mean to see God?

Isaiah 6: 1-8

In the ancient Jewish Temple, the most sacred space in what's called the 'Holy of Holies'. It is surrounded by curtains, and only the High Priest is allowed to enter there once a year. In that space is housed the 'Ark of the Covenant' which contains the 10 commandments, and the Ark is covered by a gold framed lid with carved angelic winged creatures called seraphs. Part of the ritual the high priest conducts includes the burning of incense and lots of smoke fills the space. There is an altar, fired up by hot coals and sacrifices are offered on behalf of the people.

The prophet Isaiah has a vision in which God is seated on a throne with these seraphs flying around calling to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' Was Isaiah having a dream-like vision while in the temple during this kind of worship? Something like this, perhaps. But the vision is given us early in this book of prophecy to explain Isaiah's call to be a prophet.

- He 'sees' God, and he is left feeling very inadequate, unworthy and unclean. Feeling unclean is related to feeling moral guilt, unworthiness and sinfulness.
- The live coals placed on his lips are a kind of cleansing of his sin and empowerment in his worth.
- Receiving a call and responding in the affirmative is his response to the cleansing. He has to feel worthy to say yes and follow through.

What does this mean for us?

- 1) Perhaps, seeing God and feeling our inadequacy, unworthiness, guilt or sin is part of the same experience. God is pure love, pure goodness, pure righteousness, and proximity to God exposes are lack of purity in love, goodness and righteousness.
- 2) Experiencing cleansing, forgiveness and embraced in our infinite worth is also part of the experience.
- 3) Responding in a constructive, proactive, empowered way is also part of the experience. Isaiah experiences a vocational call that is also about his call to be and to become as a human being. What about you?

We can all feel inadequate, unworthy and insufficient. We are also all guilty of sin (failure to love) in some way, yes, all of us are. But what do we do about it? Do we stay stuck in it, do we downplay or deny it, or do we confront it and move through it cleansed, renewed and empowered?

Purity of heart is not necessarily about being totally free from sin and inadequacy. But 'seeing God' is about experiencing an inner cleansing, renewal, and empowerment to be a child of God in spirit and in passionate sincerity. Seeing God is also about being more sensitive to God's presence all around us and in our lives. What do you think?

Matthew 17: 1-8

Jesus is 'transfigured.' His appearance is changed. His clothes become dazzling white and he is shining. Bright white is the colour of purity. Moses and Elijah represent the Word of God as the law (10 commandments) and prophets. The voice of God is also heard. All three phenomena establish Jesus' authority to speak and act for God.

Why do the disciples fall down in fear? Is it, like Isaiah, this feeling of sinful inadequacy, or moral unworthiness? Perhaps it is. Were they dreaming this? Perhaps, although they all seemed to have the same dream at once.

For those who seem to be oblivious to their guilt or inadequacy, or those who are arrogant, holier-than-thou or self-righteous, experiencing the humbling of God's purifying presence is spiritually transformative. But for those who already feel highly unworthy, inadequate and guilt-ridden, perhaps the embrace of forgiving, empowering love is more important still. We need to be challenged to take responsibility for our humanity and live up to our call to love, to be and to do, as much as we need to be challenged to take responsibility for our sin, face it and recognize the grace and mercy of God that gives us our worth. We also need to take responsibility to forgive as God forgives.

What do you think?

FOR NEXT WEEK: Matthew 5: 9 – Blessed are the peacemakers. Also read the story of Esther (there's a short biblical book with that name. Look it up); and Matthew 21: 1-11 – the story of Palm Sunday.