

- Just As He is Pure

1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 7:9-17

Sunday, November 5, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

I recently read an article about purity, and that the many ceremonial works in the Old Testament had powerful symbolic meaning. The author wrote this: "Israel had an elaborate purification and cleansing system in the Old Testament. Under the Mosaic Law the holiness of Israel was from the first recognized as moral separation from sin, but it was expressed outwardly by separation from objects designated unclean. Uncleaness contracted through contact with such objects required cleansing. Unclean utensils and clothing were washed in running water; but if a porous earthen vessel became unclean, it had to be destroyed. Metal was sometimes cleansed by passing it through the fire.

The participle translated "purified" is in the perfect tense, which means this is an ongoing process, which began when we believed and continues on throughout our lives. We have been purified from the penalty of sin, we are being purified, and will be once and for all purified from the power of sin. Jesus took away the penalty. We must deal with the power of sin."* Ceremonial purity was important because it symbolized and reinforced the value of moral purity, that God expected honesty and integrity in our relationships and that we avoid anything tempting or degrading. There is something to that in our Sacraments as well. Baptism is an appeal for a good conscience and Holy Communion requires self-examination before we partake. (1 Peter 3:21; 1 Corinthians 10:14-22)

- Set the Stage

Let's look at the passages for today. Our main verse, verse three, mentioned this hope that we have in Christ. I suspect that hope is a vision of the destiny of the people in Revelation 7. In that vision, the Apostle John sees people clothed in white with palm branches in their hands, representing every ethnic group. They remain in the presence of Christ at all times and are in a position of great honor. The angel guiding John tells him that these are people who have come out of the Great Tribulation and have washed their robes and made them clean in the blood of the Lamb, symbolic of forgiveness and a purity that comes from focus.

John, in his first epistle, may have something similar in mind when he wrote "now we are children of God; and 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. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. So with this vision in mind, how does a person purify himself?

- Main Point: Purity is a matter of focus and of singleness of heart and mind.

I think that purity is a matter of focus. James, the brother of Jesus, gave us a terrific insight when he wrote James 4:7-8 "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." A strong element of spiritual purity is a focus on Christ, and one of the great dangers to purity is to become so busy that we become distracted. A great exercise of spiritual purity is a periodic review of your life and commitments. Are you too busy to be a good disciple of Jesus?

- Application/Vision connection

I recently read the work of John Koessler, speaking of the great British preacher John Stott's views on purity. He wrote that "Stott points out that Jesus' words in this beatitude have often been understood in terms of 'inward purity.' He notes that the popular interpretation is to regard purity of heart as an inner cleansing from moral defilement, as opposed to merely ceremonial cleansing. But Stott proposes that the core idea expressed in this statement has to do with *singleness* of heart. What Jesus portrays here is the 'single self' as opposed to the divided self. It is the person who presents the true self to God and man.

If this is true, then the opposite of purity of heart is hypocrisy. John Stott describes the pure in heart this way, "Their very heart—including their thoughts and motives—is pure, unmixed with anything devious, ulterior, or base."* *

- Conclusion

One of the powerful characteristics of Jesus Christ is His purity, His separation from all influences that tempt and degrade a person. We are called to the same purity, having in our minds the vision of the epic destiny of the pure before Christ. Our pursuit of that must involve a careful consideration of our entertainment, our conversations and what influences us, but the concept also includes focus. We be pure requires a focus on Christ and on the Christian life as a priority above all other pursuits. The pure in Christ have a singleness of mind and of priority.

* <https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-outlines/18627/purifying-the-soul-7-of-20/>

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* * <https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2009/may/beatitudes6.html>

John Koessler