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Be-attitudes: Pure in Heart

By Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr.
Burke County

The marketplaces or bazaars (called souq, in Arabic) are one of the most intriguing parts of any of the ancient towns and cities throughout the Middle East. There, you will find endless merchants selling their wares, usually in an open or semi-open market. The open marketplace is usually found in an expansive location, usually near the center of the town. You will find various varieties of food and wares, which are usually gathered or lumped together by similar types or kinds in small, individual shops. So, if you were to walk through the old Arab market inside the old city walls of Jerusalem (or any other souq in the Middle East), you will find stall after stall or shop after shop selling the very same thing. There will be a whole row of shops selling spices and nuts; a whole row selling fresh vegetables and/or fresh fruits. Turn the corner and you will find a whole row of shops selling olives and figs; a whole row selling houseware; a whole row selling cloth; sandals and shoes; bread and sweets; etc.

After a little while you will find a row of shops selling live chickens. Another row of vendors is selling meat. A side of beef or lamb is hanging outside on a hook. You ask the shop owner to cut you a kilo (or two) of meat. He cuts it off the side of beef, wraps it in a newspaper, and sends you on your way. Needless to say, shopping in the Middle East is not for the faint of heart!

A little further on are the gold and silver shops. Each shop owner displays their precious wares. Rows upon rows of solid gold bangles and bracelets are on display. Rings and earrings, necklaces, and tiaras arrayed in splendor. Only real, 18-carrot purified gold is acceptable. Dowries must be paid to secure a wife. And Gold is the only acceptable payment. That gold becomes her life insurance in case something happens to her husband. She doesn't store it in a bank vault. She wears it on her arms and around her neck for all to see how valuable she is to her husband. Gold is and has always been valuable. But not just any gold. The most valuable is that which has gone through a complete process of purification. In other words, the ore is mined and extracted from the core of the earth. It is then subjected to extreme heat time after time to extract from it any contaminates or foreign elements. The refiner won't stop until the gold has become pure. The process of purifying gold is a long a process with the purity of the metal increasing with each subsequent step. At the final stage, the gold which is retained is 99.95% pure. Not 100%. Surprising, right?

The point is that we, like gold, are a work in progress. And so, the more we know, understand, and love the God of the Bible, the more we come to realize that it's not perfection that God is after, only purity.

When Jesus stood on that little hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee and said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,"* He must have been thinking about that very thing. I believe that when Jesus mouthed those words, He called to mind the prayer of Psalm 51. And at that very same moment, Jesus thought about you and me! "*Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithfulness; According to the greatness of Your compassion, wipe out my wrongdoings. Wash me thoroughly from my guilt And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my wrongdoings, And my sin is constantly before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in guilt, And in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in secret You will make wisdom known to me. Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; Cleanse me, and I will be whiter than snow."* (Psalms 51:1-7)

To be pure is to be rid of all that separates us from the holiness of God. *"Who may ascend onto the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place?"* asked the Psalmist (Psalms 24:4). His answer came from the Lord God Almighty. "*One who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to deceit And has not sworn deceitfully. He will receive a blessing from the Lord And righteousness from the God of his salvation."* (24:5)

Clean hands and pure hearts signify those who have chosen integrity, singleness of devotion, undivided loyalty, and love of God above all else. Purity of heart arises, not from the perfection of our will, but out of our deep, earnest, and humble desire to receive God's grace, mercy, and love. Those who are pure in heart have passed through the fires of temptation. They have emerged as "broken in spirit" and "mournful" over their own sins. They spring up and present themselves as gentle, merciful children of God who continuously hunger and thirst after God's righteousness.

Those who are pure in heart are those who have yielded to the refining fire of the Holy Spirit. They have seen their need for the Lord and have willingly and eagerly invited Him to "*Search me, Oh God, and know my heart; Try me [Put me to the test] and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there is any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way."* (Psalms 139:23-24) It is only then will the Spirit of Almighty God be allowed to transform our lives. And it is only at that moment of faith and eternal commitment to Christ as our Lord and Savior can we—will we truly "see" God for who He is, for what He does, and for why He does it!

Dr. Jack R.Hodges, Jr. is the Senior Pastor at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Morganton, Burke County. He has served as a pastor, a biblical counselor and a International Mission Board missionary.

Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. Proverbs 23:22-25