

Beatitudes: Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8

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TRANSCRIPT:

Matthew 5:1-12 reads, "And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'"

Let us pray. Father, we pray that You would break the bread of life to us. Pray that You would touch our eyes that we may see. Show us the truth revealed and concealed within Your word. That in Thy book revealed we may see the Lord. I pray, Lord God, that You would help us this day to understand and to recognize that we stand before the living God. We come before the living word. We pray that by Your Spirit, whoever lives to work amongst Your people and in the world, may operate change in our hearts this morning. May effect change in our lives this morning. That may raise our affections to love You more. To seek Your face. To be conformed more and more into the image of Your dear Son. Oh Lord, I pray have mercy on us, Your people, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The last time we were in the Beatitudes several weeks back, we looked at Matthew 5:7, saying "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." We considered how mercy really has a heart that pities. It's a heart that feels pity and doesn't just feel pity but that pity prompts that person to help and relieve the afflicted. But also that mercy is demonstrated in forgiveness and not to, I guess, revenge or to take opportunity against another. And so we see that mercy encompasses both forgiveness and it had that arm of

forgiveness and it also had that arm of help, if we could say, demonstrated in the Good Samaritan and also in the parable of the unforgiving servants.

This morning we come down to a consideration of Matthew 5:8 which, in my estimation, is one of the most sobering, most glorious, most high doctrines that is revealed, if not in the pages of scripture, at least in the Beatitudes themselves. Particularly the second part of verse number eight where it says "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." And any thoughts about the idea of seeing God should drive one to take off the shoes from off their feet and to recognize that we stand therefore on holy ground. What follows purity of heart in the text of scripture here is a high and holy doctrine. It is the most glorious of all the promises that follow each beatitude in this scripture here, this portion of scripture. In fact, it is the epitome of all the blessedness above all the other blessednesses that are referred to here and estimated here; this one stands head and shoulders above the rest. And let me explain to you why.

Every other beatitude and the promises that follow, if we could say, are indirect blessings of God. This one is uniquely peculiar in its own glory. Let me illustrate that like the sun. The sun has its own peculiar glory and the sun stands as its own peculiar glory when it is seen face to face. But even though the sun is hid behind the cloud, it still, if we could say, ministers to us, you know, life, warmth, and light so that we can go about our days and continue to live, whether it is cloudy or whether the sun is, we could say, out and shining. But there is a peculiar glory about seeing the sun face to face. Although the sun may be hid behind the clouds and we receive the benefits of it, there's something peculiarly glorious that happens when you wake up early in the morning and you see the sun come above the horizon or when it's a cold day and the clouds break away and the sun shines directly upon your countenance and upon your face. And in the very same way, or in a similar way at the very least, all the promises here come from God. He promises the kingdom of heaven. He promises comfort. He promises righteousness. He promises mercy. He promises sonship. But in this peculiar text of Scripture, standing far above the rest, He promises a vision of Himself. He promises, if we could say, the peculiar glory of being able to see God face to face. We see Him in comfort. We see Him in all these things, but here there is a peculiar glory and a vision of the Lord that Jesus brings to our attention. It stands as it were different from the rest. And this peculiar glory is experienced by those who are regarded in this text of Scripture as the pure in heart. "For blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

What does He mean here by pure in heart? Well, we must begin first with the heart. You see, the heart is the seat of man's personality. It is his entirety, including his mind, his will, his emotion. In fact, it could be likened

to Matthew 5:3 where it talks about "blessed are the poor in spirit." It is not poorness in the outward form that is being referred to there, but there is something going on in the inside, in the inner man. In the same way, the purity of heart that Jesus refers to here is something that is to be evident in the heart of man or residing in the inner recesses of man. The heart in Scripture is the place where evil dwells. If you remember, Jesus says regarding the Pharisees, as He is rebuking them and speaks to His disciples, He says from within, and then He says out of the heart. So the place called within is where the heart is, and He says out of the heart proceeds, and you can name all the sins there of the flesh that Jesus Christ unfolded. But at the same time, the same seat from which all evil proceeds is the same seat which God commands and demands the love of His people. The Bible teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart. And so here we could understand the heart as being that which is within us, and therefore it is distinct from externalism which merely tidies up the exterior but has no work towards the interior. What Jesus is talking about here is purity of the inward parts, purity of the heart, purity of spirit, not necessarily ceremonial and outward cleansing that gives the impression of purity where there is no purity within.

And so He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart," and commentators have debated a little bit about this, about whether the pure in heart refers to moral purity or does it refer to sincerity, and is He simply saying "Blessed are those that are sincere," or is He saying "Blessed are those that are pure as in they are holy, morally clean"? What is He referring to? Well, I think D.A. Carson silences the debate by pointing out that this is a false dichotomy, and he says this: "The dichotomy between these two options is a false one. It is impossible to have one without the other. The one who is single-minded in commitment to the kingdom and its righteousness will also be inwardly pure. Inward sham, deceit, and moral filth cannot coexist with sincere devotion to Christ." And I think it's important that we realize this, that these two things hang together. You cannot say, "I am sincere in my devotion for Christ," and be morally impure because sincerity and devotion to Christ looks like purity of heart. And Jesus points this out in the lives of the Pharisees most peculiarly when He says in Matthew 23, when He denounces the scribes and the Pharisees, He says unto them, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence." So you see their sin, extortion and self-indulgence, and you see the outside of the cup clean, but Jesus is really saying that there's filth here. "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so, also outwardly you appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy

and lawlessness." And what the Bible teaches us here in this passage, that the Pharisees' devotion to Christ was an insincere one, or their devotion not to Christ, to God, was an insincere one. And what He is simply saying here is that insincerity is marked by a certain lawlessness and a certain extortion, and so therefore you cannot have one and the other. In fact, to be insincere in Scripture is moral uncleanness, if we could say, and impurity. And so when Jesus here refers to the pure in heart, we must consider that He's referring to both these things. That He is including a purity of devotion to Christ that manifests itself in a pursuit of holiness and righteousness in the life.

Paul charged Timothy to shut the mouths of the legalists in 1 Timothy 1:5, and he says this: "Now the purpose of the commandment," what was the commandment? He said that they may teach no other doctrine. He says that the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, from sincere faith. And what Paul understood is that if legalism had its way in the church at Ephesus, what would end up happening is that there would be people that do not have a sincere faith, there would be people that do not have a pure conscience and a pure heart, but rather their life of legalism will force them to a kind of facade, that there would be dead men's bones on the inside but a whitewashed sepulcher on the outside. And the Bible teaches us, therefore, that the pure in heart is one where there is an inside renewal and cleansing that manifests itself in the life and the actions and the thoughts and activities of the people of God. And Jesus says that this is what it means to be pure in heart, essentially. And this is not just something that happens once in your life; this is a pathway, as many of the Beatitudes as we've already looked at are. And the pathway that Jesus is laying out here is a pathway of true obedience, gospel obedience, that produces and evidences sincerity of heart and holiness of life, as if one lives their life as if it was open before the Lord, examined by God. And that means that's a life that is filled with confession, that is a life that is filled with repentance, that is a life that continually seeks cleansing. Because if anyone was to confess whether or not we have purity of heart, how pure is pure? And we will be in a big amount of trouble to try and measure that out. But as the Bible teaches us in 1 John 1:7, if we walk in the light, under God's sunshine, if we could say, under the light of His presence and of walking in His holiness and His righteousness, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we pursue a life of sincerity and holiness, of confession and of repentance, whereby we are coming for cleansing to the Lord, we can have the promise which follows here, that we shall see God.

Now, I believe Jesus is alluding to the Old Testament passage in Psalm

24. If you'd like to turn there, that was read to us earlier. I believe Jesus is alluding to this text of Scripture. And He says in verses 1 to 4, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." In verses 1 and 2, David here talks about the earth being the Lord's, that God owns the earth. Everything belongs to Him. All that is in it is His. He has founded it. He has established it. He has made it work and keeps it sustained. It is His world. We are His creatures. But look what he says in verse number 3 and verse number 4, "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place?" And immediately David says, yes, although the Lord, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of the earth belongs to the Lord, and every mountain and every valley and every hill and every beast of the earth belongs to God, David wants us to understand that there is a place called the hill of the Lord. There is a place which is more specifically known as His hill, as His holy place. And David wants the people of God to understand, and I guess wants us also to understand, that God has a hill and God has a holy place. And as we know, this was the place of the manifest presence of God in the temple upon the mount where God's presence resided, His hill, His holy place. The place, if we could say, set apart as a special presence of God that the people of God might come to and commune and know and fellowship with God in a unique way. And they would do that there at the temple. So that was God's holy mountain.

And as the book of Hebrews tells us, every temple that was established on earth was patterned after the true temple which is in heaven, where the full manifestation and the presence and the glory of God resides in all majesty. And so what the psalmist wants us to realize is that the hill of the Lord is not restricted to locality alone, but ultimately the types and shadows where God manifests His presence here in the world, in time and in space, has ultimately a view towards the high hill of God and His holy presence in heaven where He resides. And he says here that this is the hill of the Lord, this is the holy place, although the earth belongs to Him. And what the psalmist is saying that we need to understand is that the temple, or the holy place, or the special presence of God, was to the people of God, if I could say, the closest thing to heaven on earth. The presence of God displayed in the tabernacle of God was the closest thing to heaven on earth that God's people could experience. It was called the hill of the Lord and His holy place. And the Bible teaches us here in verse number three, "Who may ascend to it, and who may stand in it?" "Who may ascend to it" is who might go up unto it. It's a hill; it's a place of ascension; it's a place in which we must approach a high hill where God's holy name and where God's holy presence is. And not only to ascend up into the hill, but he says, "Who may ascend up into that hill and who may stand and remain in that hill?" Who may not only just go up there for a glimpse but go up there and remain and commune and fellowship and, as it were, see this God face to face on

the mount? Who may do it? And he gives us the answer in verse number four, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord."

You see, the blessedness, the blessing of the Lord, to be in the presence of God, to reside in His presence. Who may ascend there? Who may be able to see Him? He that has what? Clean hands and a pure heart. And those two things teach us of moral purity and also of sincerity because he goes on to describe it, "who has not lifted up his soul to an idol." Okay, there we have moral cleansing. "He is not worshiping idols, nor swears deceitfully." There we have sincerity. He doesn't make covenants and promises to God that he does not keep, nor to man that he does not keep. He is one whose heart is pure, both morally and a heart that is singly focused on God. And that person ascends the hill, and that person may stand in the hill of God, and that person may, as the Beatitudes calls it, see God, see God. Who are these ones? Verse six explains it, "This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face." And ultimately, he says, these are the people that are God-seekers. They are the sons of Jacob. They are the children of God, the people of the covenant, that seek the face of the living God, not just in name, not just in word because they profess Him, but they are seekers of God. They know the Lord, and they pursue the Lord, and they live a heart of, have a life of purity and holiness and sincerity, and they ascend the hill and they stand before the presence of the most high God.

This is what Jesus, I believe, draws upon in a few words in the Beatitudes, what David expands on in four verses in Psalm 24. These are the people to whom the promise is made. If you want to turn back to Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." And I believe what Jesus is referring to here is both to a near and far fulfillment, or to a now and not yet fulfillment of this very promise. "They shall see God" in this life, not a vision of God with the eyes, for no man has seen God at any time, and anyone who sees the Lord must die. However, there is a vision of God to be had in this life. It's a communication of God to man's soul. Seeing with the eyes is one of the great sensories of the body, one of the great experiences of people. The fact that we can see is one of the great senses that God has given to people. And when Jesus uses the word to see God, He's talking about this idea of sensing and experiencing. Sight is part of our experience. And in one sense, what He's saying here, there is a way in which we may see God in this life, and with our eyes, if I could say, the eyes of faith, or with the eyes of our soul, there may be a genuine, real, and immediate communication with God Himself for the pure in heart. This is a privilege of the pure, a privilege of those that have been forgiven, that live sincerely in repentance and confession. And you say, do we see this

anywhere in the Scripture? Yes, we do.

It's amazing how the book of Hebrews speaks of Moses as one who endured the wrath of the king. He endured the trials and tribulations that came in his life. And he says that he endured as one who saw Him who was invisible. There's the idea right there. How can you see one who is invisible? Well, the sight for which that is being referred to is saying that he saw God with the eyes of faith. The soul of his heart was communicated with God in a unique way. We see this also even more deeply when Moses asked the Lord, "Show me Your glory." And the Lord spoke to Moses, the Bible says, face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. You might say, well, what do you mean by face to face there? But when we see what actually happens, and Moses is hitting the cleft of the rock, He goes, "I can't show you My face, Moses, or you'll die. You have to see My back." But what does He mean by face to face? He means mouth to mouth, almost as in an intimate way, as if it was face to face, a communication of God to man. And Moses, in that revelation in the cloud and all these things, there was mediated to him a vision of the most high God. And he knew the Lord, and he endured as seeing Him who was invisible. And Jacob, the same thing. He wrestles with the angel of the Lord and he says, "I'm going to call this place Peniel because I have seen God face to face." And all these things that we see in the Old Testament, and many examples that we could give, mediated visions that God, in mercy, communicated to people on earth. It was the angel of the Lord, or it was the cloud, or it was the back parts. But as God said to Moses, "My face shall not be seen." But in the fullness of time, when the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem us from the curse of the law. And in Him was mediated to mankind the greatest, most glorious expression of God Himself. That when Thomas, when the disciples—it was Philip—said, "Show us the Father, and it will suffice us, satisfy us," He goes, "Have I not been with you? If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." How much more of the mediated glory of the Father do you need to see as it is revealed in Me? "You see, you're looking at My face, My disciples, and as you look at My face, do not you see, is not communicated to your soul, the very glory and the majesty of the most high God?"

The Bible says no man has seen God at any time, but it is Christ, the one who was in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known. He has declared Him. And the beautiful thing about this is that that vision mediated to man when Jesus Christ walked upon the earth has not come to an end because that same vision is mediated to us through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians chapter number four, verses three to six, it says, "If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine

on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus's sake." Now listen to these words, "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

What Paul is saying is when we come to you and we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are more than just imparting information to you. We are bringing you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the mediation of the gospel, through the revelation of Jesus Christ that is communicated to your soul by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are communicating to you the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And he talks about this in terms of experiential knowledge, not just a matter of facts that we have in our intellects, but he is talking about something that is experienced by those who have the veil taken off their face, where the god of this world, Satan, has blinded their eyes, and that is removed, and now they see something that they've never seen before. They see the face of Jesus Christ. They see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This teaches us something very important, that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not about introducing us to truth about God; it is about bringing us to Him. The gospel is not about merely filling up the storehouse of our minds with information about God, but the ultimate end of that information, the ultimate end of that truth that is preached, is that we may be brought to God, that we might be brought in an experience to know Him. As Paul says, "Oh, that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." He wanted to know Him. And when we finally, on that final day, we ascend the hill of the Lord, when we finally ascend and stand forever in His holy place, the veil of our eyes, the sin and the corruption and all the impurities that remain within our bodies and remaining sin, will be finally gone and eradicated, and our vision of God will be ever most glorious and can never be compared with that which we've experienced, even though it glorious here down below. And we shall see Him in a glory that we have never seen before.

Oh, we have tasted it as heaven on earth, but there we will be in heaven with Him forevermore, seeing that which we have not seen before. And we shall see God. And though now we see through a glass darkly, or dimly, then we shall see face to face. Then shall we know even as we are known. Then shall the knowledge of God be complete. Then shall our soul be entirely and fully unified with God in a way and experience that we have not felt before. This is the promise for the pure, for the people of God. The hymn writer says these words, "Only faintly now I see Him, with the darkened veil between, but that blessed day is coming when His glory shall be seen.

Face to face I shall behold Him, far beyond the starry sky. Face to face in all His glory, I shall see Him by and by." This is the hope and the promise to the pure. As John reminds the people, he says, "Beloved, now we are the 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 every one of you that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure." What a glorious thing. What a glorious promise.

But a question that we need to consider this morning is, have you seen the Lord? Have you seen the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ? You see, religions can tell you about God, but only the gospel can bring you to Him. Have you tasted of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Have you examined your profession, whether or not I have just calculated information which I did not know before? Or has this word of truth so revolutionized my inward parts and purified my soul that I have had a vision of God and I have been born again? Have you seen God? There's no point thinking that seeing God is simply knowing about God. It is much more than that. It's much richer than that. It's being brought to God. It's the establishment of a relationship with Him. We ought to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. We ought to prove our own selves, to consider ourselves in light of these truths. Because the Bible does not speak to us merely of information but of revelation. It speaks to us of a union, of a fellowship, of a communion that is to be had in the people of God. And no amount of information can help you endure unless you see Him who is invisible. No matter of information can help your soul stand on the great day of judgment unless you know that I've seen the Lord. No amount of good works, no amount of Bible memorization, can cause you to stand redeemed on the day of judgment. But only to say that I've seen the Lord. I know Him. He's communicated His life to me. I'm His child. I'm His son. I'm His daughter. He is my Father. It's more than just knowledge in an intellectual sense. It's the knowledge of Him, a deep, rich understanding of Him.

You say, "Josh, I know that I've come to that place where I've seen the Lord. I know that. I know I know the Lord." But my vision of God is dim. It's not as it ought to be. There have been times and seasons in my life where the clarity of this vision of God's glory and His beauty and His majesty has shone so much brighter in my life than it has now. And I want to be made right. I want to get to that place where I can see Him. Our text here tells us that it's impurity of, impurity of insincerity and impurity of immorality that blinds and darkens the hearts of our understanding. And as we come to the Lord with our sin, we come to the Lord in repentance, and we come to the Lord with confession, He cleanses us and He renews our vision of Himself. You say, "My vision is dim." Well, it is dim, perhaps, because of impurity. It's dim because of sin. It's dim because of slothfulness. It's dim because we let the cares of this world choke out the life of God within us

by anxieties and fears. We let wrong attitudes infiltrate the recesses of our heart and cause us to look upon the things of others and not on the things of God. We get taken up in fear and worry and trouble, and no wonder our vision of God is dim. But if we walk in the light, if we confess our fears to Him, if we confess our anxieties to Him, if we confess our sin to Him, He will cleanse us and purify us and renew our vision of Himself. If our vision of God is dim, we will not be able to endure in times of affliction and in trial. It is impossible for the people of God to go on unless they see God. You see, the number one thing in trial and affliction is drawing near to God. From whence do we derive our comfort? From where do we derive our hope? From where do we derive a vision that ascends higher than the troubles of this life unless we see Him? What hope was there for Moses in the midst of Egypt, in the midst of corruption and vileness and fighting and rebellion? What hope was there for Moses if he did not see God? If he looked upon the people of God, he would not want to be leading them out of Egypt, or he would not want to be amongst those people. If he looked at the Egyptians, he would be like, "There is no hope for us." But you know what he did? "Stand still, and we'll see the salvation of the Lord." He looked to his God. He saw God who was invisible, and though he could not see Him with his naked eye, God's truth and His love and the revelation of Himself was mediated to him in such a way that he stood firm in the face of trial. And there's no hope for us otherwise. We can come up with strategies about how we're going to overcome temptation and how we're going to overcome this and overcome that. And these are all good and well to make plans and to think about ways. But, my friends, if in your equation you do not have the vision of God, not have a pursuit of the knowledge of God, all your attempts will be vain. "One glimpse of His dear face all sorrows will erase. So bravely run the race," as the hymn writer says, "until we see Christ." We must look upon Him. He's our hope.

Seek cleansing as we walk in the light. Be sensitive to sin in your life. You know, our vision of God is like a window, and God is on one side of the window, and we're on the other side of the window. And every time we sin against God, it's like we splash a cup of water on that, and a burst of wind blows on that. And you know what it does to your windscreen? Makes it dusty. And the vision is unclear. And then, instead of confessing our sin and going back to the Lord, we think, "Oh, there's no point to this. What's the point? You know, it's all done. I've stuffed up anyway." We continue to sin, and we go on sinning, and we go on not trusting, and we go on compiling troubles in our lives, not confessing. And you know what happens to that window? It just gets dirtier and dirtier and darker and darker. And the vision of God in our lives becomes dimmer and dimmer. And then, when troubles come our ways and trials come our ways, we can't see Him anymore. We say, "Where is the Lord? Where is the Lord?" He's there, behind the glass that we have allowed impurities in our life to smudge and

to distort and to pervert. But if we wash ourselves and make clean in the blood of Jesus Christ, we shall see again clearly.

We must pray for a clearer vision of God. Pray as Paul prayed for Ephesus. Pray for yourself. Pray for one another. That God may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of Him. And finally, what we need to do also is we need to make use of the means of grace that God has given us whereby we may see Him. There is no point going out and emptying your mind in contemplative mysticism to try and see God. God has given us His word. God has given us His Spirit. God has given us prayer. God has given us the table, the ordinances. God has given us the preaching of the word of God. God has given us the fellowship of His people. God has given us all these means of grace where we are to meet God in those places. These are places where we see God. These are places where God communicates His life to us. When you pick up your word and you read the word of God, "Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee, Lord." That should be the attitude of our hearts. Not, "Oh, I've just done my Bible reading today." No, "Beyond the sacred page, I seek You, Lord. God, I'm seeking You, and I want to find You in Your word. I'm seeking You, oh God, beyond the sacred page. And in Thy book revealed, I see Thee, Lord." Is that our attitude to the word of God? "Oh, it's just, we have to go another time. We just have to read our Bible. It's the same. I've read it before." No, no, no. It's here that we realize that these things are given for us, that we might come face to face with Him and renew our vision of Him.

This is what I want to encourage you with this morning.