

Matthew 5 v 8 A new inner motivation

Introduction

The new coach of the England's Women's cricket team was being interviewed on BBC Radio 5 Live on 11 February 2016 about his first impressions of the job since he took over his position. He described the players he inherited in the national squad as 'innocent' with reference to the way they played their cricket. It was intriguing what he actually meant by his choice of words. It was not exactly a criticism nor was it a commendation of them. I wished the interviewer had picked him up on his choice of words and asked for a fuller explanation of them. I suspect that what he was hinting at was that they were too nice towards their opponents; not aggressive enough in their playing style, if they wished to attain the level of success merited by their talents. It is, though, not just about how people play cricket that this kind of comment can be made. Christian rugby players like Euan Murray have been questioned by journalists whether a Christian can be as effective as someone without their particular convictions - given all the skulduggery that allegedly goes on inside the scrums! In Murray's case it was clearly a backhanded compliment because he is arguably Scotland's best tight-head prop in the professional era and was also picked as a British Lion some years ago as well. If that was not success in his chosen profession, then an explanation is called for! Although it is hard to put into words we all know what is being suggested here. The world in which we live is a murky place where a little bit of lying and cheating or low-level malpractice may at times be necessary to get on. From the footballer seeking to gain an Oscar for his diving skills or feigning serious injury, to the accountant assisting his client on the margins of tax avoidance law to the office junior asked to tell the business contact that 'the cheque is in the post'; in this kind of world a Christian with their high standards could be, some might argue, a bit of a liability or someone difficult to accommodate within the system! It certainly a memorable occasion that none would forget Va'aiga Tuigamala walked into the dressing room of Wigan Rugby League club in 1993. Tuigamala despite being born in Samoa, had been a successful member of the New Zealand All Blacks team, but crossed codes to join the predominant League side in Great Britain. It was a rough tough dressing room where God-talk had been noticeably absent. Winger Jason Robinson, later a convert to Christianity himself, noted the shock of the man with a stunning muscular physique who walked in to the dressing room on his first day with a kit bag in one hand and a big black leather Bible in the other. Noting the serious face of the big man not a word was said, but a powerful statement had been made that his Christianity had not been left outside the rugby arena. Yet there are times when as Christians that we struggle to know how we ought to think, act and speak in some difficult situations. Jesus said: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God* (Matthew 5:8) First of all:

1. What is meant by the reference to our *heart*?

This is not a scientific or biological use of the word with which we are so familiar. In the Bible human beings are understood as spiritual beings made in the image of God. They have a body and a soul; the latter is a collective term that covers everything else in terms of our personality, our rational faculties, emotions and decision-making capability. The apostle Paul in I Thessalonians 5:23 wrote: *May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May*

your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In many passages of the Bible instead of referring to the soul the word ‘heart’ is often substituted as an alternative to using the word ‘soul’. This kind of thinking and usage is found in our culture and language as well. The whole notion of Valentine’s Day, and the industry of cards and gifts associated with it, is based on the usage of the heart as a symbol of our love and affection for that special person or people in our lives whom we love, and for whom we might purchase a card or some other gift for that day! Of course there are some scientists who would reduce the whole notion of love to chemical stimuli, reactions and changes in our bodies, but the vast majority of us, including the majority of scientists know that such a reduction in the meaning of love and its impact on us to chemical formulae is far from adequate. So how does the Bible use the word *heart*?

(a) **The heart is understood as the place of our emotions** King David in Psalm 27:1-3 declared: *The Lord is my light and my salvation –whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? ²When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. ³Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.* In his case he had in mind his time on the run from King Saul before becoming king of Israel or the many military conflict situations he experienced over the years. He would not be overcome by fear in such a context. In words familiar to all of us from funeral services, we remember Jesus’ words to His disciples in the Upper Room prior to His crucifixion stating in John 14:1-3: ***Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. ²My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*** Why, because there is a natural fear and uncertainty in the face of death for many people. Jesus wants to give His followers a clear assurance that He has already taken care of our future beyond the grave. In Mark 12:30 Jesus said: *Love the Lord your God **with all your heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* There is a foundational emotional input to a relationship that we invest in – this includes not only with members of our family and friends, and the range of other people we associate with, but also in our relationship with God.

(b) **The heart is understood as the place of our understanding** In John 12:40 Jesus, in a quotation from Isaiah 6:10, spoke about the people who had consciously rejected His message in this manner: *they can neither see with their eyes, nor **understand with their hearts**...*; their worldview was such that they had factored out the possibility that Jesus was who He claimed to be; is that not a place some people are in today? Their secular or other religious views are incompatible with the direct claims of Jesus, so instead of questioning whether their current views need to be reconsidered they upfront rule out the truth claims of Jesus. This was certainly true of many Jewish people of Jesus’ day and in subsequent generations. Paul in II Corinthians 3:14-16 made this statement in reflection on his mission work in his own Jewish communities around the Roman world. *But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, **a veil covers their hearts.** ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.* Are our minds open to being shaped by the call and claims of Jesus?

(c) **The heart is understood as the place of our thoughts and desires** Later in this same sermon, in Matthew 5:28, Jesus stated: *I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her **in his heart.*** The traditional Jewish view was that only the sinful act was wrong, but Jesus sought to challenge that view by declaring that our attitudes and

speech must also be controlled appropriately in line with God's standards. How is that possible? Through the Word of God; Hebrews 4:12 reminds us that : *the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* By reading and reflecting on what we read in the Bible it informs and influences our attitudes to do what is right.

(d) **The heart is associated with our conscience** On the day of Pentecost Peter preached a powerful sermon that the Holy Spirit used to convict many people of their sins and their need to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Acts 2:36-37 states: *'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.'* ³⁷ *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'* ³⁸ *Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.'* The heart represents the place of moral conviction and judgement where our convictions are formed in response to our recognition that things need to be changed in a particular way.

(e) **The heart is associated with our decision making** Daniel 1:8 *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine;* literally, as the NKJV states: *But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies...* Here a brave teenage boy in a foreign land makes choices that his parents would have been proud of, he thought through the options before him and stood up to be counted for his Jewish faith. In II Corinthians 9:6-8 Paul wrote on the subject of financial giving to the Lord's work: *Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* ⁷ ***Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*** ⁸ *And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

(f) **The heart is described as the place where faith choices are made** Romans 10:9-10 states: *If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* ¹⁰ ***For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.*** It is not merely ascent in our heads, but our whole being is involved in the commitment to follow Jesus. By contrast Hebrews 3:12 warns us with these words: *See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.* We must be wholehearted in our commitment to the Lord and in our service for Him. King David echoed these sentiments in Psalm 57:7: *My heart, O God, is steadfast, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music.*

2. **What is a 'pure' heart?**

(a) **The meaning of the word 'pure'** *Blessed are the pure in heart...* (Matthew 5:8) The Greek word *katharoi* Jesus used in this passage, historically in Classical Greek was a term used primarily of physical cleansing. Clothes that were dirty were washed clean instead of being soiled or stained by usage. It was also used in the sense of being 'unmixed' that is the substance was pure rather than a mixture or an alloy, for example some gold or silver that was being offered for sale by a trader. The purity of the gold or silver on offer rightly has a significant impact on the price of the product so a potential purchaser needs to know whether it is 'pure' gold or silver! It was used of pure water with no added substances; milk that was not watered down; also of grain that was winnowed to remove all the chaff; of animals that were free from

known blemishes; it was also used of a bloodline that was consistently a line of people of the same ethnic heritage with no interbreeding with people of another racial heritage. It was also used of an army that had been purged of ill-disciplined or inadequate soldiers who could not carry out the orders entrusted to them. It was used in a religious sense to speak of the person who had met the religious requirements of their faith and was free to participate in the worship services of their god. It was also used in obituaries to pay tribute to someone who was deemed to have lived an exemplary life and who had been a good example to the people around them (W. Barclay, *The Plain Man looks at the Beatitudes*, pp.72-73).

In the New Testament there are a number of examples of different uses of this term. In Matthew 27:59-60 the author writes: *Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a **clean** linen cloth,⁶⁰ and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock.* Matthew is describing what happened to the body of Jesus after his crucifixion. Another use of this word comes in the book of Revelation where John from the vision he received is attempting to describe the new Jerusalem and expressed it this way in Revelation 21:18: *The wall was made of jasper, and the city of **pure** gold, as **pure** as glass.* Paul uses this term in a semi-legal way in his sermon before the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:26-27: *²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am **innocent** of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.* He had shared God's word with them without qualification and imbalance and had sought to present it to the best of his ability in his public proclamations. It was used by Jesus with reference to the Jewish religious practices. He made it very clear that He was abolishing the ceremonial regulations then practiced in the Holy Land. *In saying this, Jesus declared all foods **clean*** (Mark 7:19). The best known usage of the New Testament, though is probably with reference to our cleansing from sin when we come to faith and as we seek fresh cleansing from our sin. In I John 1:7-9 it states: *But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, **purifies us** from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and **purify us from all unrighteousness.*** It was stated as a general principle of the work of the Spirit in believers at the Council of Jerusalem in AD48. In Acts 15:8-9 Peter explained that God worked in the lives of Gentiles who came to faith in exactly the same way as believers of a Jewish background. *God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for **He purified their hearts by faith.***

(b) **Purity of heart involves sincerity** One of the biggest complaints Jesus had about the Pharisees was hypocrisy. He denounced them sometimes in the very strongest terms, as can be seen in Matthew 23. For example, in Matthew 23:25-26 Jesus declared: *'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.* There was also a very familiar story He told, recorded in Luke 18:9-14 about the contrast between a Pharisee and a Tax Collector who went to pray in the Temple in Jerusalem. *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."¹³ 'But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."¹⁴ 'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those*

who humble themselves will be exalted.’ This was equally prized in the Old Testament also. In Jeremiah 32:39-40, the prophet declared how God would work to transform His people in exile. ***I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear Me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them.*** ⁴⁰ *I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from Me.* Do you and I have singleness of heart serving the Lord with sincerity?

(c) **Purity of heart requires integrity** King David of Israel had many faults and weaknesses alongside his undoubted strengths. In Psalm 78:70-72 Asaph the Temple worship leader wrote: *He chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; ⁷¹from tending the sheep He brought him to be the shepherd of His people Jacob, of Israel His inheritance. ⁷²And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them.* People can be forgiven for genuine mistakes; for inadequacy of gifting that results in lesser accomplishments than they had aspired to. However, a person whose conduct is lacking in integrity and who is found out is in an extremely problematic position. In Jeremiah 17:9-10 there is a very frank assessment of the state of the human heart: ***The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ¹⁰ I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.***’ This matter was frequently raised in the Psalms. In Psalm 51:6 (NKJV) David admitted: *Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.* In verse 10 of the same Psalm David prayed: ***Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*** In Psalm 24:3-4A there is a general reminder to God’s people coming to worship the Lord: *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? ⁴The one who has clean hands and a pure heart...* In Psalm 73:1 Asaph declared: ***Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.*** Will you and I maintain our integrity of words and actions even if others around us adhere to lesser standards?

(d) **Purity of heart includes fervency** A person who is pure in heart doesn’t settle for just being as good as the next person. Their frequency of attendance at church; their level of commitment to Christian service and the attention to detail in rendering it or The level of their financial giving to His work is not determined by what other people do. This person is passionately committed to honouring the Lord in each area of their lives. The details of what that looks like may vary from Christian to Christian, in some respects, but it would be evident from the self-discipline and determination of that individual to please the Lord that their motivation and enthusiasm for bringing glory to the Lord Jesus was not in doubt. Hebrews 12:14 reminds us of this fact. ***Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*** Our focus on the basic Christian disciplines of time in prayer and in God’s word and joining together with fellow-Christians for worship, witness and service will bear fruit in time. Paul summarized it this way to Timothy, a young pastor who he had mentored in the faith. ***Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*** (II Timothy 2:22). Are you and I pursuing these things in our lives personally and collectively?

3. **How do we ‘see’ God?** ...*For they will see God.* (Matthew 5:8)

(a) **It is not with physical sight** This is not a physical rare sighting of Almighty God, like the bird watchers who descend on remote spots of the country when an unlikely bird visits this country! In John 1:18 we read: ***No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known.*** Paul, likewise in I

Timothy 6:16 stated concerning God the Father: ...*whom no-one has seen or can see....* Seeing God is sensing His presence with us in a variety of contexts. It may be when we pray or in worship services. Jeremiah 29:12-14a *Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.* ¹³ *You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.* ¹⁴ *I will be found by you,* declares the Lord. Why is it that unbelievers have no comprehension of the presence of God in the world let alone in their lives? Paul stated in II Corinthians 4:4: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* Philip, one of Jesus' disciples asked this question at the Last Supper: *Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'* ⁹ *Jesus answered: 'Don't you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?'* ¹⁰ *Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me?* (John 14:8-10) It is a spiritual awareness of His presence by a person sensitive to living a God-honouring life.

(b) **It produces an awareness of our shortcomings** In the book of Job the patriarch was complaining that he did not understand why God was at work in the world in the way He was. When he had an overwhelming experience of God it was a transformational one that brought about a humbling of himself and a turning to God in repentance and a deepened faith. Job 42:5-6 states: *My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You.* ⁶ *Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'* To sense something of the greatness and glory of God will inevitably result in a deepened awareness of our own hearts and place in the universe, a place that too many people today have forgotten in their arrogance and pride.

(c) **It produces an awareness of God's holiness and our call to mission** In Isaiah 6:1-8, the familiar passage describing the call of Isaiah the prophet to his life's work, there is a profound realisation of this revelation. *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple.* ² *Above Him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.* ³ *And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.'* ⁴ *At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke* ⁵ ***'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'*** ⁶ *Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.* ⁷ *With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'* ⁸ *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'* Our desire to see God glorified in the conversion of people yet to come to faith is intensified when we 'see Him'.

(d) **It will be a foretaste of our experience of heaven** There is so much about heaven we will not know until we get there, but seeing God through sensing His presence now is a little glimpse of what we will experience in its fullness then. In Revelation 22:4 John writes concerning believers in heaven that *they will see His face.* What a motivation we have for living a God-honouring life here on earth when this is the future planned for us. May we never forget Jesus' words here: *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God, Amen.*