

MATTHEW 5:8  
THE FIGHT TO BE PURE!

Did anyone set out this week with good intentions to do something? It might have been the intention to go somewhere, to visit, or on a trip, to meet somebody for coffee and a scone, to help someone, or to do good in the world. It might have been the intention to do something around the house, cleaning, or a task, or some DIY project that has been waiting to be done. Or it might have been in the garden, something to do before winter sets in. Or it might be a lifestyle issue: the diet to get started, going to the gym, some problem or issue to be resolved. Or at work, maybe there is a piece of work that needs finished, a deadline is coming up and you want to attack it well before that deadline! Or it might be all kinds of other things! We set out with good intentions. One of the songs of the month, which we heard so often in the car on holiday: Jamie Cullam, Gregory Porter *"I'm just a soul whose intentions are good"*. Some of these intentions you will have fulfilled: you set out with a plan and have done it, even if been waiting for weeks to do, and you have a deep sense of satisfaction to have achieved something in that kind of way, especially if you've been putting it off for months! But I can also guarantee that some of these intentions have not been kept: something has got in the way; you have procrastinated again, or something else has come along that is more important, so you quite rightly shelved the first plan; or you've simply not been strong-willed enough to do it! That has left you feeling frustrated, perhaps; you had intended, but you have not done it! You had good intentions, but...

*"Blessed are..." (Matthew 5:8)* This is all about motives and intentions. The Beatitudes is a set of eight sayings from Jesus; here are the qualities and values of the disciple. These are not eight groups of people, but eight qualities of the one group of people, the disciple. Here are values and qualities to aspire after. "Be like this" says Jesus. 'Poor in spirit' is a quality to aspire after; being meek, being hungry for righteousness, being merciful - all are qualities to aspire after; and are very different values from the world in which we live; this is Jesus' counter-culture. For every quality there is a blessing promised by Jesus to the disciple; the whole blessing of God is promised and poured out on the disciple as we seek to live by these values and put these qualities into action.

*"Blessed are..." (Matthew 5:8)* This is all about motives and intentions. In the Bible, the heart is the centre of our being; the heart is not just the piece of our body that keeps us alive, but is the seat of our emotions and motivations, our thoughts, the centre of our human spirit. When the Bible talks about 'the heart' it is talking about what makes us people, human beings, "the well-spring of life" physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Jesus presents us with the challenge – to be "pure in heart": in the kind of people we are, to be single-minded in our motivations, sincere and honest, with an undivided loyalty. That undivided loyalty is to God: our love for God is to be single-minded, sincere, undivided and pure! The promise that Jesus makes is that the person who is pure in heart will see God; there will come a time when all that hinders and blocks us will be swept away, the world will be made new, we shall be perfect people; we shall see Jesus and we shall be changed to be like Him. We will be pure, not only in heart, but in every way and we will enjoy the unfettered, unhindered presence of God.

24 carat gold – is that the nearest thing to purity? But it doesn't come that way! 24 carat gold comes out of the ground in a very different form, mixed with rock and all kinds of other metals and rubbish around. There is a process at work to refine the gold from that rough form till it gets to be 24 carat and pure. It involves heat and melting and other processes that I don't really understand. There is an illustration

here that we mustn't take too far, but there is something similar about us as human beings. Being pure in heart, with undivided loyalty to God, sincere and honest - we don't start that way; we start a bit rougher round the edges and we need to be refined and changed and improved and here is the life-long learning process for us. In a very real sense, we are a work in progress: we learn, God is at work in us.

There used to be a great debate amongst scholars about Romans 7: which Paul is Paul writing about? Is this Paul before he was Christian? Paul after he was Christian? Some contended that surely Paul after he was Christian wouldn't have these issues to wrestle with! The debate seems resolved now: most people agree that Paul is indeed writing about his life as a Christian; he has this constant struggle with his motives and intentions and how to do what he really wants to do, putting his good intentions into practice. Listen again to what he says about himself as a Christian: "*I have...*" (Romans 7:18b) His intention? To do what is good. That is what he wants to do; he starts off the week with intentions to do good, but something gets in the way; "be good", his friend tells him but there is some perverse part of Paul's spirit that says "you know what, no! I won't be good; I'll do something else entirely!" Paul confesses that his intentions are frustrated and the good he wants to do is the last thing he does and the very things he does not want to do, these are the things he keeps on doing. He is learning lessons; the refining process is making him a stronger Christian, a better person. This is how the pure heart is formed in us.

Paul vents his frustration: "*What a...*" (Romans 7:24f) He knows what he is not! He knows that he is a work in progress but the progress is awfully slow! But here's the thing: in this struggle with trying to get life right, what matters most is that his motives are right! God is pleased when Paul *wants* to be the right kind of person; Jesus blesses the person who has good intentions and right motives and undivided loyalty. He knows that we are a work in progress; He knows that we make mistakes, and get things wrong, and not always get things right and He forgives us; what counts is that the motives and intentions are good. You might find that mildly controversial; you want to think that being pure is more than just good intentions, and of course, it is great when we get things right and actually put these good intentions into practice, but we are a work in progress; we are people being changed little bit by little bit as the Spirit helps us to put these Bible words into practice.

Here is a genuine aspiration for us. Here is a quality to aspire to and live and work for. Human nature is strange with these kinds of aspirations: part of us knows that this is a good thing to aspire to and embraces that aspiration completely and we work for it and try hard to make it happen. But there's another part of us that says "this is way beyond me, way out of my league" and so we give up; we don't take it on because we know we'll never get there! Here's the best aspiration we can have: to love God with an undivided loyalty, totally sincere and honest, the centre of our being completely given to love God and to trust Him. Jesus says those who do this will one day see God. Take heart from that; aspire to be the best, knowing that we are work in progress; we get frustrated but are not giving up; we are working hard and God is at work in us, together.

Moses wasn't sure about lots of things; he wanted reassurance that God was really there and would go with him on the rest of his journey. God promised him. But that was not enough: "*Show me your glory.*" (Exodus 33:18) God agreed to show Moses something of His glory, but with restrictions: "*you cannot...*" (Exodus 33:20) So Moses was hidden in a hole in the rock and was given to see God's back as He passed by; Moses was covered as God passed by; God was too pure, too holy, too glorious! God has not changed since Moses' day: He is still the pure, holy and glorious God. In some ways, we have not changed either and are like Moses, sinful,

imperfect people and can't look on the face of God. We hide our faces from a great God, unworthy people if we're honest.

But, Jesus has changed everything: Jesus has made us blameless in God's eyes. By taking our sin on His own shoulders on the cross, we are forgiven, blameless people, holy people in God's eyes. God sees us as blameless and pure because of Jesus and our aspiration is to become blameless and pure in real life. The pure in heart will share Jesus' glory; we will see Him face to face; we will be changed to be like Him. We shake our heads and say "no" but Jesus opens His arms wide and says "yes!" Here is an aspiration that goes to the very heart of who we are and what we want to be, our motives, our intentions; here is an aspiration that goes way beyond anything we've ever known before; embrace it, work with it, let the Spirit help. "*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:8*)