

## Life Group Notes - King of Hearts - Sun 31 May 15

Read Mark 7:1-23

Once again the Pharisees challenge Jesus on the subject of their oral law (the traditions handed down). Jesus was a “rabbi” with disciples just like them, yet he did not encourage his disciples to wash their hands (literally “baptise”) before eating. Jesus’s response is brutal and direct. He calls them hypocrites – a word stemming from mask-wearing actors in a Greek play. He references Isaiah 29:13, and accuses them of setting aside God’s command to observe human rules, giving a perfect example in the tradition of Corban. In a nutshell, the Pharisees struggled with a 1500 year old command (Exodus 20) so they came up with a work around. They introduced a new rule, a human rule, which could override what God had commanded.

We might be surprised at the way the Pharisees had found themselves so off track but it is easy for us to substitute God’s commands for modern day values such as humanitarianism which are good but not founded in Biblical principles. The idea that “You can do whatever you want as long as it is not hurting anybody or anything” is not a command from God. The Ten Commandments (including “honour your father and mother”), were as unpalatable when they were given (after 430 years immersion in an Egyptian culture) as at Jesus’s time (1500 years later) and as they are now (3500 years later) in today’s perceived ethical standards. Amongst the ten, commands like “do not murder” are listed next to directions to take a day off work once a week and not to covet your neighbour’s new double glazing or car. God’s commands are very different in essence from simple humanitarianism, there is something within them that goes deeper than outward actions.

Jesus lists things such as anger, lust, malice, folly and envy throughout his teaching – things that may never manifest. These things are problems of the heart. God is more interested in the condition of our hearts than our outward actions, we need to change before our actions can follow – otherwise we too could be hypocrites. The “Greatest Commandments” are revealed in Matthew 22:34-40. All the law and the prophets hang on/depend on these. Loving God with heart, mind, soul and strength underpins everything God asks of us. Therefore obeying God’s commands is more important than rationalising them. The Pharisees rationalised them – they explained it away, they worked out a way to take a command that was 1500 years old and find a way around it using of a new tradition of human rules.

God wants us to change our hearts, not the rules. Abstinence and separation were the tools of the Pharisees – transformation by the power of God is Christ’s. God can change you - this is the power of the gospel: forgiveness AND regeneration. He can address the heart of the problem, if you let him.

Questions

1. What do you think are the moral standards that people rely on in today’s culture in the UK?
2. Where and how do these moral standards start to fall short of what God requires of us?
3. Try to list “evils of the heart” that concern God in spite of never hurting anyone else.
4. Why does a heart problem need something more than a simple change of attitude?
5. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? (And what does it not mean?) Pray that God will ignite a passion and devotion for him that impacts your whole being.