

## Matthew 15:10-20 (Jesus re-interprets law) (17 August 2014)

Quick poll – food test: who likes:

- Marmite (love or hate – come to have a wider meaning)
- Pork scratchings (all pork products: LIST)
- Mussels (picture – white wine and cream)
- Milk

What do they all have in common?

If Jew, all restricted: pork and shellfish completely banned; Marmite has yeast which can't eat in Passover week; milk can drink but only if not from unclean animal, had any contact with animal products and prepared under supervision of a rabbi

Clean vs unclean foods: why these things?

- Don't know – bad foods to eat in desert – but too 'easy'
- Key point: what declared was an issue of obedience – so was washing hands, wearing certain types of clothing etc

Lots of rules and regs – but prob for Jewish people is that these external things came to signify a pure life. How can we love holy lives to please God? 'Obey these rules.'

Important, but only a part of it – what really matters? (ASK) How you behaved towards each other, how you loved them, your concern for justice and provision for vulnerable – in other words, **what was in your heart**.

V. important not to misunderstand – Jesus not trashing the law – but he did challenge the Pharisees that they had missed the point: READ v8-9. (p982)

Why I'm a Christian: could talk about God opening my eyes to message (specific day July 25<sup>th</sup> 1982)

OR things God has spoken to me OR great things he has done

OR evidence of resurrection.... but not today, today it's another reason

**Bible talks sense – most realistic, insightful, rounded view of human nature**

Key question in human history: why is there evil in the world?

1. People born good but corrupted e.g. by religious ideology – partially true: we are made in God's image, and no doubting that pride that sometimes comes with religion has led to many bad things BUT most brutal regimes of 20<sup>th</sup> century all non-religious. Violence a human problem not a rel one

2. Good but just chaos – 'fate', or spiritual powers. Again, partly true – there are evil forces in world – BUT same issue as (1) – problem is all 'out there', not really with us. Genesis 3: what happens when humans eat apple? What's first sin? And second? And third? (Adam blamed.... Eve blamed...) We like to point finger away from ourselves – clearest indicator of sin. (My experience at work.)

Can see in Pharisees too – in denial about state of their hearts. (Return)

3. We do wrong stuff, but can't help it, it's evolution – 'selfish gene', programmed to be selfish (talked about before). Again, partly true, BUT again, takes away our responsibility. Back to Romans 6-7 – just there in us, when our babies become toddlers and start to exert their will, how many of us think: 'never mind, that's just their natural evolutionary behaviour? It'll be good for the gene pool in the long run.'

4. Recognise that we do bad stuff, but we can change. Key idea in most religions – obey these rules, exercise some self-discipline and you'll be OK. Fundamental problem with that, which goes to heart of what Jesus is saying here: you can do all that, he says, be very religious, obey all the rules about washing hands and eating foods, and your heart can still be corrupt.

Who knows what this is? (PICTURE of Taj Mahal) – and what was it built for? It's a tomb – beautiful on outside but stench of death inside.

How Jesus describes Pharisees in another passage: READ 23:27

Pointing out same issue: obeying all rules, so look good on outside. But hearts not right – clean on outside but not on inside.

Heart is what matters to God – e.g. choosing David 1,000 yrs before – QUOTE. So not a new idea, Jesus is just taking an OT principle – but he goes on to make a revolutionary application: READ v16-19.

It's what's inside that matters: get the heart right, and actions will follow.

Sounds like sense now, but revolutionary at time, and hard to accept. Even disciples didn't get it till well after Jesus' death: Acts 9 Peter finally has a dream and an experience which convinced him that all food laws were no longer needed.

Don't be too hard on disciples: think of Bletchley Park and keeping secrets. (EXPAND)

Don't be too hard on Pharisees either – they were still much holier than most of rest of society. And Jesus is not getting us off hook. It would be tempting to say: don't need all these religious rules anymore, it's so much easier. But Jesus is raising bar isn't he? Easy to follow a rule. But to change my heart?

Like Jesus says earlier in Matthew: not enough to not kill – root issue is anger. Most of us would say it's easy to not kill – but not to bear anger against someone?

(Or church – easy to say 'don't need to go to church' – but if start with heart: key requirement is to love brother and sister, how can do that without seeing them regularly? If start with heart, it's a whole new ball game.)

**Final question:** if issue is heart, and even best sets of rules can't make us right with God (even if we could follow them, which we probably can't) – how do we live right way?

Back to Romans: **(1) recognise what we're like.** Most of us live in self-denial – but bible talks sense.

**2. Come to Jesus** – Romans 8 – takes punishment and sets us free. He has obeyed law fully in our place. Not bound to it anymore.

3. OTHER READING: Galatians 5 – did you notice similar list of bad attitudes and behaviours in v19-20?

Key point: **need transforming Spirit.** We need help! We need God's Spirit. It's God's power that slowly transforms our hearts. READ Gal 5:22-23. Our focus is not on what we do but on who we are, on virtues, the 'fruit of Spirit'. If we could do it, we're back to the pride of the Pharisee.

It's God's Spirit that helps us transform slander into kindness, rage into gentleness, immorality and debauchery into self-control. It is, after all, the Spirit of Jesus, who had all these qualities in abundance: so of course it's what his Spirit cultivates in us.

GOOD NEWS: you're free to eat what you like. Have as much Marmite and pork scratchings as you want!

BUT Jesus asks us a harder question. He's not interested in your religion. What he wants is your heart. What's your heart like? When did you last think a hateful thought about someone? Or imagine what you would do to them if only you had the chance? How often do we wear masks, looking all nice on the outside but being like the Taj Mahal, hiding the bad stuff inside?

In 1967 Dr Barnard performed the world's first heart transplant – until then, not thought possible. But more good news. Heart surgery has been going on a lot longer than that. Jesus has been performing heart surgery for nearly 2,000 years: by his Spirit, cleaning us up. He wants our hearts to change, but he also gives us the power to do it. 'The fruit of the Spirit....' Amen.