



Matthew 15:10–14

10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. 11 What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.” 12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?” 13 He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by

the roots. 14 Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Craig Tubman)

It was the Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard who once wrote, ‘Jesus didn’t want admirers, he wanted followers’. This is a great summary for what is happening in today’s passage in Matthew. We heard yesterday that the religious leaders had made an art form of appearing religious but in fact being far from God. Jesus’ main criticism of them is that they had taken their role as God’s guides selfishly and were elevating themselves through their

adherence to man-made rules. In doing so, they were leading people away from genuine faith and trust in God.

Moving straight on from this Jesus picks up on another aspect of Old Testament law and makes a bold statement to the crowd around him. He addresses the holiness laws of Leviticus which had stipulated some foods as clean and some foods as unclean. These laws were found in a set of laws that were designed to set the Israelites apart from other nations. Unlike ceremonial hand washing, these were laws from God, but Jesus saw himself as bringing the fulfilment of these laws. We will explore this fulfilment further in our next devotion but it is clear here that Jesus sees his role as bringing the fulfilment of God's kingdom in the hearts of people not just

in external practices.

What's interesting here is that Jesus' disciples pick up on the offensive nature of Jesus' teachings. They remark,

‘Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?’

The disciples seem torn, perhaps because they still have a view that Jesus must fit into the man-made religion of the day, but Jesus seems to have no intent on doing this.

Ultimately, Jesus offended the religious leaders because he was calling them out on their selfish practices and shining a light on their ignorance as to the nature of

God's kingdom. He was undermining their power by declaring that God is more interested in your heart than your adherence to rules. This is not to say that Jesus will not go on to call his followers to live out a new life of obedience to him and love for others, but the centre of gravity of this new life will revolve around a genuine love for God and others; not around a set of religious rules.

Jesus' advice to his disciples in regards to the religious leaders is damning. Basically he says, that God will bring judgement on them and it is time to walk away from their leadership – for those who are blind cannot lead.

Think & Pray

It's fair to say that as we live out our faith in Jesus we do so seeking to love others, building peace and reconciliation. That being said, there is a reminder here in this passage that the message of the kingdom of God can be offensive. It was offensive to the religious leaders of the day because it called them out on their own selfishness. It continues to be offensive today because to follow Jesus means we must acknowledge our sin before God, accept his offer of forgiveness and hand our lives over to him. This is confronting to the man or woman who still believes they have done nothing wrong before God and that God has no right to speak into and shape their lives.

In his discussion on sharing the good news of God's kingdom, the apostle Paul wrote

in 2 Corinthians 2:16 that,

‘To the one we are an aroma that brings death, to the other we are the aroma that brings life’

As we consider our own life and witness to Jesus we must know that the love and forgiveness that we have found in Christ can be an offensive message to those who do not want to let God be God. It happened back in Jesus’ day and it still happens today.

However our response to this is not to shut up shop and stay quiet but rather to lovingly and gently share our faith with others, knowing that for some it will be a message they don’t want to hear but for others it will be the greatest news they have ever

come across. How can we pick who will react which way? We can't. Rather as Peter wrote in his first letter we must always be ready to give the reason for the hope that we have in Christ (1 Pet 3:15).

Jesus didn't want admirers. He wasn't looking to join the religious club of the day. His mission was to usher in the kingdom of God and to lead people back into relationship with the God who had given them life. To share in this kingdom means getting on board and actively following. Allowing Jesus the place of both Lord and Saviour in your life. Our response is not mere admiration, it is worship.

Why not take some time today to consider how your life, your actions and particularly your words are promoting the kingdom

of God with those God has placed around you. If you've had a bad experience of sharing your faith in the past, perhaps it's time to actively witness again, knowing that the way people react to your gentle sharing of faith is not your responsibility, it's between them and God. Some will not be interested, and may even be hostile, but others will be truly blessed by your honesty and your willingness to share the good news of Jesus.

Pray for those you work with, your friends and your family who do not yet know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Ask God to soften their hearts to Jesus and that you and I would have the courage to take the opportunities that God provides us with to share our faith with them.