

Look who Jesus condemns

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[0 : 00] So that's Matthew chapter 15 verses 1 to 20. Anyone tells his father or his mother, what you would have gained from me is given to God.

He need not honour his father. For the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well, did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, these people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. And he called the people to him and said to them, hear and understand, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person.

Then the disciples came and said to him, do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying? He answered, every plant that my heavenly father has not planted will be rooted up.

Let them alone. They are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit. But Peter said to him, explain the parable to us.

[1 : 39] And he said, are you still without understanding? Do you not see whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and that defiles a person.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. Well, for those who are visitors, my name is David.

I'm one of the pastors here and I'll be taking you through this passage, Matthew 15, 1 to 20. Last Sunday, we started to ease back into Matthew's account of the life and ministry of Jesus after a 10-month break.

I spoke last week about the importance of understanding both Matthew's big picture and also the details of the many incidents and personal encounters people had with Jesus.

[2 : 46] And I said that we needed to understand that the specific incidents stand alone. They're stories in their own right. But we should never take them alone.

Because together, they form what I'm calling this morning an identikit composite of Jesus, who he is and what he's come to do. If you're familiar with identikit, it's what the police use.

They'll put the eyebrows on and the mouth on and the nose on and eventually they'll get a very, very close resemblance to the person they're trying to describe. Well, that's what Matthew's doing here. Bit by bit, he's brush stroking in the picture of Jesus, who he is and what his mission is.

And he's writing particularly to a Jewish audience. And he's writing to convince the Jews that Jesus is the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah from the Old Testament.

The one who was called God's King and Savior. The one who would come and establish God's kingdom, God's eternal kingdom, a worldwide kingdom. That is, God's rule in the hearts and minds of people.

[4 : 00] Matthew wants the Jews particularly to understand that Jesus is this man, this Messiah. He's here. It's happening. And so therefore, the big picture of Matthew is that Matthew primarily wants us to see the Jesus that people met.

It's his picture that we want to see emerging from Matthew's account. The Jesus people met as they encountered him individually and in groups, in all sorts of different circumstances and incidents.

And it's then that the details of the people that Jesus met become really helpful because we then see people's individual and perhaps also group conclusions about this Jesus they've been encountering.

People form conclusions and respond personally to Jesus, either positively or negatively, but they do respond. So the details feed into the big picture.

And the big picture then, as I say, delivers perspective. So from the start of Jesus' ministry, the public ministry, Jesus declared himself to be Messiah, God's King and Savior.

[5 : 21] Now, we would expect, when that's declared by a Jew to the Jews, we would expect them to welcome Jesus and respond, fall in line and believe.

But in fact, as we trace through the life and times of Jesus, we find actually growing opposition. Many of the huge crowds who initially flocked to Jesus out of interest had now left the crowds and gone home in bitter disappointment.

Jesus just wasn't the sort of person they expected Messiah to be. And therefore, Jesus couldn't be Messiah that he claimed to be.

Perhaps some of them left because Jesus wasn't the sort of Messiah they wanted him to be. In response to his growing opposition, as I said last week, chapter 13, Matthew teaches a series of parables.

And in those parables, he says, my kingdom is like. And throughout that chapter, Jesus is really saying that in spite of opposition, his kingdom, that is his rule in the hearts and minds of people, was here.

[6 : 47] It was happening, already happening. And that in spite of appearing weak and pathetic and small in the face of opposition, it would flourish.

It would end as a massive, eternal, worldwide kingdom. It would sweep up all sorts of people who would see him as the treasure they'd look for, the most desirable thing they could imagine.

And they would reorientate their lives to align with the Lord Jesus Christ. And then after chapter 13, as I said again last week, Matthew illustrates this truth in a series of rejection incidents.

And we talked to those a little bit last week. And I just want to bring them all together to build this big picture. So Matthew introduces to rejection in Nazareth. Nazareth was, of course, Jesus' hometown.

It was his local community. Now, here's the thing. In a culture, in a society, where pedigree was everything, lineage and pedigree was everything.

[7 : 59] It was a major pillar of society. What did they conclude about Jesus and his hometown?

Nah, Jesus is way too ordinary. Way too ordinary. He doesn't have.

He's the son of Mary. Yeah, Mary, that Mary. Then there was rejection by the Jewish royal household.

Chapter 14. Herod Antipas, who's the son of, also called Herod the, I don't know, I'll get it. The son of Herod the Great. He had murdered John the Baptist.

And now he's on the trail of Jesus, thinking that Jesus is a reincarnation of John the Baptist. Now, remember, this is the second major pillar of Jewish society.

This is the king. The king who is supposed to rule God's people with God's righteousness. And here he is lining himself up for a second murder.

[8 : 59] Why? Because he didn't want to be called out for his sinful behavior. And then as we move into chapter 15, we find the third pillar of Jewish society, the Jewish religious leaders, the Sanhedrin.

They also are ganging up against Jesus. But we'll get to that in a minute. But in the meantime, in the midst of all that opposition, and Jesus teaches and shows some miracles, he's providing ample evidence.

He's calm. He gets on with the business of what he's here for, of healing people. That is, demonstrating that he's here to undo the effects of sin and renew people. To bring them into the kingdom.

That is, to bring them under his rule in renewed form as they were created to be. He's getting on with the business of doing that, calmly, and providing at the same time ample evidence that he is who he says he is.

Only God could do the things that Jesus is doing. And in the doing of those things, he shows himself to be Lord of the universe, able to suspend the laws of nature at will.

[10 : 13] He shows himself to be a compassionate saviour who comes to his people in the midst of their brokenness and sin and lostness and restores them.

And he shows himself to be the one worthy of worship. We saw all that last week. Now, we bring all that with us into chapter 15. That's big picture stuff. Rejection is real.

But Jesus calmly gets on with the job of building the kingdom. So let's walk through the incident in chapter 15 then.

So, the Jewish religious leaders throughout his public ministry have constantly challenged Jesus about what they believed was careless disregard of various aspects of God's law.

And so, you can see what they were pushing for. They believed that Messiah would never act like that. So, since Jesus was acting like that, conclusion, well, Jesus had to be a fraud.

[11 : 23] That Jesus was misleading God's people. Verse 1. It all comes to head when a high-level delegation of Pharisees and scribes, that's the Jewish religious leaders, arrive from Jerusalem.

And essentially, they ambush Jesus as he's getting about his business. And what is happening here is that these scribes and Pharisees essentially put Jesus on public trial.

And they do so by launching a formal, serious charge against him. And the charge is that he's got no regard for the very important practice of ritual cleansing as defined by the tradition of the scribes and the Pharisees.

Now, in the judiciary of the time, when you were charged like that, you had to respond. You had to defend yourself. For Jesus not to defend himself, for Jesus to be found guilty at this point, left himself open to a punishment of death.

So, this is a major ambush by a high-level delegation. Let me tell you how it all works, if I can, very briefly. So, the Pharisees and scribes were very, very, very religious people.

[12 : 48] And they wanted people to know that they were very, very, very religious people. And essentially, they were. They were good people. They spent their lives trying to do good, trying to do right, trying to honour God's law.

And they thought they were pretty good at it, to be honest. Now, they had, the scribes and the Pharisees, we might consider them to be sort of high-level academics and professors at our sort of theological colleges or something like that.

That's the sort of people we're dealing with here. But they also had legal responsibility to ensure that God's written law to Moses was kept on every detail.

And also, to ensure that Jewish culture, defined by the ceremonial law given to Moses, was preserved from generation to generation.

So, the way they did that was they took each written law from the Pentateuch. And alongside that, they spelled out in detail how that should be applied in any situation, especially new situations that weren't around at the time of the giving of the law.

[14 : 04] And so, what happens over a period of years is that you have these laws, and then around about them are things that the Pharisees and scribes wrote in as essential to keeping these laws.

And these things became known as the tradition of the elders. And they were legally binding and came to have equal authority with Scripture.

Now, a little bit more specific. They charged Jesus with being careless in regard to the laws of ritual cleansing. Well, there's some logic to what they've done here.

They read in the Pentateuch that God is a clean God and will not have any fellowship or relationship with unclean or dirty people.

The Pharisees believed that you could become unclean even just by touching someone or something. So, to ensure that God's people didn't inadvertently become unclean, they formulated these ritual hand-washing traditions.

[15 : 26] So, before any eating, you had to wash your hands in a particular way for a particular length of time. Now, you can see the logic. They were trying to protect God's word, trying to protect God's people.

And the traditions grew up around that. So, they insisted that every person had to ritually cleanse their hands. Not to do so was to risk treating God with contempt.

And if that was proven, then the sentence was death. Now, this is what they charged Jesus with.

But verse 3, Jesus immediately launches a more serious counter-charge saying that they gave their own laws, that is their traditions, greater authority than the word of God.

And he cites a very, very damning piece of evidence in verses 4, 5, and 6. So, here's how this works. God's law was clear that children ought to honor their parents by supplying their needs as

they were able.

[16:48] But one of the interpretive rules of the scribes and Pharisees gave people a way out of that. That is, if they said to their parents, look, mom and dad, the money and energy and time I would ordinarily have been putting into you, I'm actually dedicating that to the Lord's cause, then they could ignore God's written word.

And so, what they had done was they'd used a man-made tradition as the basis of excusing people from obeying God's written law.

And that's what Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of as a counter-charge. But not only does he accuse them of that, he really goes to town on them. They tried to king-hit him.

He's effectively king-hit them. And he continues then to publicly condemn these prominent religious men. Men who appear to be concerned for God's honor, but he condemns them as the worst sort of religious frauds.

They came to him thinking he was a religious fraud and misleading God's people. The tables are turned and now he's accusing them of being religious frauds and misleading God's people.

[18:16] Verse 7-9, look at the harsh words that he uses. He calls them hypocrites. Apparently, they're concerned for God's honor, but even more concerned to see their own traditions upheld.

And they're prepared to distort God's law about the basis of acceptance and relationship with him.

And Jesus is really saying, that renders all your so-called worship useless.

Verses 12 and 13. Effectively, he calls them noxious weeds. Completely out of place in God's kingdom.

They might claim the authority of God, they might look and sound like wheat, like God's holy people, but Jesus is really saying, no, I didn't plant them.

They're a totally different species and they do not belong among my people. Those are strong words. In verse 14, he calls them blind guides.

[19:38] He's speaking of them now with contempt. Because not only have they been misled themselves, but they lead God's people to destruction, not life.

And the irony is just palpable. The very reason for forming all these traditions, they said, was to lead God's people to life. To make sure they didn't break God's law.

To make sure that in the keeping of God's law, they would be acceptable to God. And Jesus says, blind guides, you're leading God's people to death down this pathway.

So the question then is, is Jesus over the top in his condemnation of these eminent, religious, good people?

Surely, you could say, they had good concerns. Surely, you could say, they wanted people to come to God carefully and properly. Surely, they were right to point out that God expected his people to keep the ceremonial law.

[20:52] That was the whole purpose in giving it in the first place. Surely, their desire to protect traditional values and practices was commendable.

Surely, these guys deserve some credit. And yet, there's just complete condemnation. So the question the rest of my time this morning is, why?

Why does Jesus condemn them so completely? I think the answer is really, really simple and I'll dig into it. I think he condemns them ultimately because he hates religion.

Jesus hates religion and religious people. That might sound a bit weird for somebody in a church to say that Jesus hates religion. The religious understanding and thinking was so fundamentally wrong that affected everything else and undid everything else about these people.

It's a little bit like a house can look absolutely magnificent when it's just been built. But if it's discovered that the foundations are totally dodgy, then there's only one way ahead and that is you demolish the whole thing.

[22:13] So, let's dig into that a little bit about why Jesus condemns them.

The first point I want to highlight here is that they refused to know themselves properly. They refused to know themselves properly. What they had done was convince themselves that externals or appearance was what mattered in terms of being acceptable to God.

Do this. Keep this law. Not only will you look good to those around you but you'll be acceptable to God. And the doing of religious things was what they emphasized as pleasing to God but were completely oblivious of heart attitudes.

Now, I remind you again that these guys were the gatekeepers of God's word. But they were willfully ignorant of it.

Verse 11, Jesus tells them sin or uncleanness comes from the inside out not the outside in. Jesus said it's what a person is in their heart in their nature born state which makes a person unacceptable to God and unworthy of relationship with him.

[23 : 54] Now, here's the rub for these Pharisees and the scribes. This was not new teaching. This is what Moses had taught. This is what Joshua taught. This is what King David had taught.

This is what the prophets one after the other over a hundred of years had all testified to. they had condemned any thought of self-righteousness.

They kept on saying to God's people, your heart is far from God. You're doing all the right external things but your heart is far from God and God is not pleased with you. And the prophets condemned any notion of self-righteousness, self-salvation and they pushed God's people to look for God's grace.

self-righteousness. So these guys willfully refused to know themselves properly but even worse they failed to know God properly and were actually I think in practice determined to shape God to their own thinking.

Possibly they weren't even conscious of doing that but because of the way they viewed their traditions I think they inevitably started to do that. These religious people and they were religious people they were good people they had enormous reputation across society.

[25 : 23] They believed sincerely they could create good relationship with God through their own actions and efforts. But as Jesus says in verse 9 quoting from the Old Testament the whole thing is worthless in vain do they worship me.

In other words good actions underpinned by a bad heart are useless. Their engagement with God was not because he was desirable and the ultimate treasure as Jesus had taught in the parables in Matthew 13 their ultimate reason for engaging with God was self-salvation.

Their life was spent trying to be holy trying to be good trying to look good because they believed this would secure and guarantee their place in heaven.

And so they brought that with them when they came to God. And as I was preparing this I was thinking about the other reference where the Pharisee and the tax collector and the Pharisee said in his opening of his prayer Lord thank you I'm not like these other people.

That was where they'd got to. And verse 12 even when Jesus made it clear to them that they were wrong these guys and remember again they're gatekeepers of God's word these guys chose to be offended rather than be corrected.

[27 : 16] they didn't like the idea of having to look at their heart attitudes.

They didn't like the idea of being guilty and rebellious on the inside in their hearts before the Lord because they had put all their efforts into what was on the outside.

And ultimately in being offended at Jesus rather than being open to correction and thinking my goodness me he's right we're the gatekeepers of God's word and somewhere along the line we've lost it.

Rather than taking that line they thought how dare Jesus say that to us. ultimately they rejected Jesus' word for their own views.

And ultimately as Jesus here says to them ultimately they were very keen on salvation and talking about salvation but it was salvation according to their standards.

[28 : 37] and they were showing themselves here prepared to manipulate God and even twist or bypass his standards for their standards.

And for those who claim to be gatekeepers of God's word you can sense now something of Jesus' ire at them. And the third thing is that they wouldn't accept their need for what Jesus was offering. Verse 19 Jesus gives a catalogue of the heart for out of the heart come evil thoughts murder adultery sexual immorality theft false witness slander these are what defile a person but to eat with unwashed hand that doesn't defile anybody.

Jesus gives a description of what's inside each one of us and that's not a comprehensive that's just an illustrator of the list. All of us in our nature born state have the same bad heart and are capable of the same terrible thoughts and attitudes and actions.

we can't explain it away. Our society wants to explain it away. Well it's only looked at because of unemployment or because our youngsters have bad role models or because there's so much

violence online and in gaming videos or because they get into bad company.

[30 : 21] we don't need circumstances to prompt us to these sorts of things. We don't need others to teach us these sorts of things.

Just hang around a two-year-old for half an hour. We don't need Satan to tempt us into these things. We can't blame it on him either. Not ultimately or not immediately.

sin naturally arises in our own hearts and overflows out of us. What a tragedy that these religious leaders for all their knowledge of God, for all their knowledge of the Old Testament, for all their years of study did not see what is on almost every page of the Old Testament.

that God measures the state of our hearts against his word. And that leaves us undone.

But the tragedy is even worse because these guys, because they were so committed to their actual thinking and so dull to what Jesus was saying to them, they couldn't even see that they were actually talking to the heart specialist.

[31 : 50] As people who had bad hearts desperately needing them renewed, they were actually talking to the heart specialist. the one who knows the nature and extent of sin in the heart.

The one who knows precisely how to treat it, how to undo its effects. The one who's shown himself in preceding incidents to be the one who comes with compassion to those who are lost and destroyed by sin with a willingness to heal and restore and renew.

the people at Gennesaret, they just came to Jesus and Jesus willingly, gladly dispensed grace and healing to them at the very moment of their most being aware of being caught up in the tragedy of sin.

And that's why the Jesus people met in this public confrontation hates religion and religious people. And as I've already said, this incident is in such sharp contrast with Jesus reaching out as the compassionate saviour to those who knew they were caught up in the power and the effects of sin and came to Jesus in their sinful, hopeless state for healing.

[33 : 18] As opposed to these guys who came to Jesus wanting to take him down because they didn't need healing. They were the ones who were telling Jesus what was right. The contrast couldn't be clear.

And next week when we jump into it, the next incident is the faith of a Canaanite woman. And I can't help but just dip into it for a minute. Here was this woman. She wasn't a Jew.

She wasn't even a Jew. So she didn't have any lineage, any pedigree. She was a woman in those days, a Canaanite woman. She had no power influence. She had no access to the Jewish temple. all she had was her words to plead with Jesus to heal her daughter.

And the contrast, he condemns these religious leaders, these guys who know their Bible back to front, and he commands this woman.

[34 : 20] contrast is just phenomenal. Big picture, contrast is phenomenal. So friends, let me just wind up here now.

Please don't settle for religious appearance without gospel reality. It's so easy to do.

So easy to do. Jesus' gospel message, the very reason Jesus came into the world, is to tell people that he is the complete provision for our most desperate need.

He is the only provision for our most desperate need. Jesus' mission is about telling us that he's come to people who have bad hearts, and he's come to his people with bad hearts as the one who's able to renew bad hearts.

He comes to those who have a bad track record with God because of sin and disobedience, and he comes as the one who will wipe that bad track record. he wiped the bad track.

[35 : 47] When he died, for his people, he wiped the bad record of unacceptable thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and he gave us a good record instead, putting us back into good relationship with God, but not done there.

He gave us new hearts, changed us from the inside out, changing us from the inside out, so we have new thoughts, new desires, new attitudes, which prompt us to new obedience to love God. So, friends, believers or Christians are chug and cheese with religious people. Now, we've got to nuance that a little bit.

At first glance, it might not look that much different. It's hard to see sometimes the difference between a religious person and a true believer, because they do the same sorts of things.

The critical thing here is they do the same sort of things, but for vastly different reasons and motivation, from a vastly different perspective. religious people go to church, they give their money,

they read their Bible, they try to be good, in an attempt to make themselves acceptable to God, to save themselves.

[37 : 13] Believers do the same thing, believers do the same things, by and large, but it's because they've already been saved by grace, and they want to respond to that in an overflow of love and thankfulness and obedience.

Because Jesus has done for them what they could never do for themselves, and that is deal with their sin and truly make them acceptable to God. So a believer's orientation and motivation to do what is pleasing to the Lord is heart-driven, inside-out overflow of joy, overflow of delight, an overflow of love in response to God's grace and mercy.

So I just want to wrap up by pointing two different directions. So if you're a religious person here this morning, that is if you haven't actually encountered Jesus, if you haven't realized that you cannot do it on your own strength, you cannot earn God's favor, then I point you to verse 10 and verse 16 where Jesus says, you need to pay attention, you need to understand, because your bad heart will actually make you dull to the basic truths about yourself and God.

God's favor of God. You need to ask for understanding these key areas. Ask for Jesus to show you how your best efforts will never be good enough because you cannot meet God's standard of perfection in your own strength.

And that will point you to the Lord Jesus Christ. And as you're doing that, remember this, that these guys here came with impeccable credentials.

[39 : 19] They had massively good reputations. They were just good people. And Jesus condemns them. Yet in previous incidents, he opens his arms warmly to anybody who comes to him with an awareness of sin.

Just saying, Jesus, I need your help. I need you to fix me on the inside. I need you to renew me. And if you've already been changed by Jesus and now trust him alone to make you secure and keep you secure, then my friend, I don't need to tell you, you know just how much grace you've received in your life.

And you know that grace every day in face of your disobedience. grace. And you know that grace. So then surely we'll want to guard our thoughts, guard our hearts so that they continue to overflow with thankfulness and joy because the Lord is our treasure.

Pray with me. Lord, everything in our society and indeed in so many churches around Australia would say that religion is good.

And yet your word, Lord, shows it's condemned. I pray, Lord, that there might not be anybody here this morning who perseveres in a religious way of thinking.

[41 : 00] Lord, help us to measure ourselves against your standard of perfection and from there, Lord, see that we're done for because we cannot consistently do or say the things that would be acceptable to you.

Lord, help us to come to Jesus for that first encounter and have the freedom of knowing that he will do for us that which we could never do even though we spend a lifetime of effort trying to.

That is he will make us acceptable to Jesus by dealing with our sins. Make us acceptable to God by dealing with our sins. And Lord, help us to just throw ourselves on Jesus knowing that he will never reject or condemn those who come to him with a full awareness of sin and a full desire for his renewal.

But Lord, help us also remember that he will condemn those who dare to come to him on a religious basis, pleading their own merits as a reason for acceptance and passage into heaven.

Help us to understand these profound things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 36] Amen.