

## AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART LUKE 11:37-54

Christianity is very simple: 'love God, love others!' That's it in a nutshell. There is no more to say than that. Yet, we make it complicated at times. We try to describe what it means to love God; we describe all kinds of ways in which we should love others and we create strategies for how to behave in all kinds of circumstances. I heard a story the other day about Brian Clough; he was one of the best and most successful football coaches in England in the 1970's and 80's, but was quite an outspoken and unpredictable character. I think he was coach of Nottingham Forest at the time, and the team had lost a few matches in a row and their confidence was really quite low. The players came to the next game and were a bit scared of what Clough's team talk might be like before the game because he was unpredictable; would he be angry? Would he shout at them? Would he give them all kinds of strategies for winning the game and then expect them to remember all these strategies so that if they lost again he would blame them? Instead Clough came into the dressing room before the match, carrying a football; he dropped the ball on the floor and said to his team "That's a football; go out and play with it!" Then he left. Christianity is simple: love God, love others.

We all have people that we love. We either have family of some kind, or friends, people that we love dearly. If I were to ask you to put into words what that love is like or what it means, you might struggle. Love can't be defined, or love can't be described, but we feel it; we know it's there; we know that some people are special to us and we feel love for them and try our best to show that love, but not always as much or as well as we should. Christianity is simple: love God, love others; it is an affair of heart. That sounds like a title for a Mills and Boon novel, a love story that sounds sappy and sentimental; it is not that either. "Affair of the heart" means simply that the heart of being a Christian is about loving God and loving other people and that can only come from within, from the heart; it can't be achieved by a whole pile of rules and regulations and we can't even tell someone else what that means, but we know it because we feel it. It is simple!

If there is a thread through Luke ch 11, this is it! Jesus is showing, first His disciples and then the Pharisees, what really matters, what should be their top priorities. We will do a quick overview of the first part of the chapter and later concentrate on the last part; as I've said before, you have the chance to discuss any bits that we skim over in more detail at next week's Discovery Group when we will look at all of chapter 11. The sermons on chapters 9 and 10 are on the website, or in print in the vestibule. Chapter 11 can be summed up as "An affair of the heart"; loving God, loving others; there are some very simple principles here in Jesus' words.

**1. Just ask** – this is all about prayer. We get all worked up about prayer, that we will say it all wrong or that we need to do it in the right way or at the right time and use the right words; so we turn prayer into a code and a formula. Jesus said: "Ask &..." (11:9f) My children don't need an appointment to speak to me; they just call me up, or text, or e-mail and tell me what's on their mind,

or ask me a question – ‘is Freud a philosopher?’ They don’t need to wait till the right time, or get the words right or even spell them correctly; they just call me up and talk to me. My dismay at times is that they don’t do it often enough! Only if I’m in the middle of something really important would I tell them to call back later. If I’m like that with my children, how much more is God ready and willing to say to us ‘just ask’; this is not about the right words, or the right time; just ask, from a heart that needs help, or is overjoyed, or is concerned for other people; the heart of prayer is here – just ask.

**2. Look and listen** – Some were suggesting that the only way Jesus could drive out demons was if He had the power of demons Himself. It was a crazy notion, because demons were all about destroying life and health. Jesus says “What do you see? You see people’s lives begin saved, changed, and healed!” That’s what He was doing and so He challenges people: “*He who...*” (11: 23) “*Blessed are...*” (11:28) “Are you with me or not? If you are with me, then listen to my word and do it!” This is all about allegiance, where does your heart lie? Some people thought Jesus was wonderful, others hated Him. That’s as true today as it was then. We have an allegiance to what? Some of us perhaps would describe an allegiance to the Church, or would talk about an allegiance to a particular minister, but our real Christian allegiance, deep down, has to be an allegiance to Jesus Christ, a love for Jesus, standing alongside Jesus, being ‘for Him’. That allegiance is based on seeing Jesus for who He is, the Saviour of the world who changes lives for the better; that allegiance is fed and nurtured by listening to the word of God and reading the Bible.

**3. Be the right kind of people** – in good old days before cameras went digital, and when your film was processed by the chemist or the photo shop, they came back a string of negatives. The pictures came from these negatives, but they were the wrong way round; what really was bright in the photo, was black in the negative; what was dark in the photo was bright in the negative; it showed everything backwards! Only when you saw the photo for real, could you see the beauty of the colours etc. What Jesus does in these words to the Pharisees at the end of chapter 11 is to give us a negative picture of the Christian; so to understand what He is teaching, what He wants to see in us & from us, we need to turn that picture around and find the glorious technicolour picture of the Christian who learns to love God and love others from the heart.

The Pharisees were a group of Jews who wanted to keep the law and keep it to the best of their ability. They thought that all of Israel’s past problems had been the fault of a people who had not kept the law well enough; they thought that if they kept law well, then God’s kingdom would come in Israel in a new way. They were blind to the possibility that God’s kingdom would come in another way, would come through Jesus; they were also blind to the effect of their teaching, that is would make life complicated for people, that religion had become a burden for people. They had forgotten the simple things of ‘love God, love others!’ The scribes and teachers of the law had added to that; they wanted to make it impossible for people to break law, even by accident, so

they made a hedge round the Bible that meant people could not break law by mistake; they knew what to do in every circumstance.

Most famous of all, was their attitude to the Sabbath; they knew that the Old Testament fourth command said *“Remember the...”* (Exodus 20:8) but they wanted people to know exactly what that meant. So they defined work in 39 different ways and if anything fell within these 39 definitions, it should not be done. But even more ridiculous, though they thought it clever, they said this: “on the Sabbath they taught, a man may not carry his burden in his right hand or his left hand or on his shoulder. But he may carry it on the back of his hand, or with his foot, or mouth, or elbow or in his ear or in the hem of his shirt or in his shoe or sandal.” (Morris) They had turned the Bible into a book of obscure riddles and they were “so taken up with their riddles that they missed the wonderful thing that God was saying there.” (Morris) Micah reminded them long before Jesus came – it was not religion that gave them a right relationship with God, but *“to act...”* (Micah 6:8)

Washing dishes? Do I need to spell out that picture? *“Now then...”* (11:39) The Pharisees were so preoccupied with outward show, acting a part, that they forgot to be the right kind of people. Life and religion for the Pharisees, was all about a great list of things to do or not to do; they were completely preoccupied with what they did. Jesus, on the other hand, was far more concerned with what a person is, with the kind of person that you are and that I am, from the inside out. For Jesus, the inside of the cup needed to be clean and when the inside of the cup is clean, then people will behave in the right kind of way. The inside of the cup is clean when we learn to love God and love others and turn away from a life that is self-centred and selfish; we are to be the right kind of people from the inside out. Jesus then gives 6 examples:

- *“You give...”* (11:42) Which is more important? Get your priorities right! The big questions of love for God, justice for the needy are far weightier issues, far more important; these should be the top priority.
- *“You love...”* (11:43) The Christian grace of humility is far more attractive in the way that we relate to other people. I know Christians who love to be given their ‘place’ and if they are not given their ‘place’ and made to feel superior, they will tell you! Learn the Christian grace of humility.
- *“You are...”* (11:44) to walk over graves made the Jews ceremonially unclean; Jesus says that contact with the Pharisees make people morally unclean; yeast goes all thru’ bread and their teaching is like yeast that inveigles its way through us to contaminate all of life if not resisted. Christians’ love for God should make us holy, good people, people who love good and right.
- *“you load...”* (11:46) What do we tell others that Christianity is about? ‘Do this, don’t do that!’ Is it about keeping rules? Or is it about good news of grace, of God who loves us and accepts us as we are? Any message that is full of rules is a burden; where there is no grace there is nothing to lighten the load! We have good news to lighten people’s load through life.
- *“you build...”* (11:47) The prophets were men who brought God’s word to the people. Wise men listened and heard, but many of prophets were killed for their message. Outwardly, the Pharisees honour the prophets by building fine tombs for them, but inwardly they completely reject their message; they

reject their message all over again when they reject Jesus because the prophets foretold Jesus' coming. Listen to the bible and take it to heart; accept its message even when it is hard, because the Bible is there to help us love God and love others.

- “*You have...*” (11:52) The Christian is not only to love God and love others, but is to point other people in the same direction. Jesus is the key to knowledge. We point people to Jesus, Saviour, Lord; we invite others to love God and love others and we know that Jesus is the key, that He guides, leads, helps us do these two things to the best of our ability.

A picture in negative, all these ‘woes’, but the reality is wonderful colour picture of life. This is the life that Jesus offers and commends – to love God and to love others and all from the heart. We can’t define love; we can’t command love; love comes from the heart. For Jesus, we are to be the right kind of people from the inside out, with hearts that love God and love others. That is what matters and it is really very simple. ‘Just ask’ that’s what prayer is about; look at Jesus and listen to Him; be the right kind of people – this affair of the heart is our relationship with God and with other people and that’s what really matters. Get that right and everything else fits into place; miss it out and nothing else can take its place, nothing else really matters. Be the right kind of people from the inside out, people who love God and love others! It is simple, really!