

Reading: Matthew 12:38-50

Theme: Being real with God.

Imagine you are out in the car and suddenly the engine fails, but thankfully you are able to freewheel into a garage forecourt and come to a stop by the air, water and vacuum cleaner section. You try turning the engine over, but you've no power, no lights at all. You have a cunning plan to resolve the situation. You check the tyre pressures! That doesn't work! So, you top up windscreen washer bottle... neither does that work. You then wash the windscreen. Still no joy! You decide the car needs to be cleaned on the outside and inside and that should fix it! Yet still nothing happens when you try to turn the engine over. Then a mechanic in the garage strolls up to you, lifts up the bonnet and sighs as only mechanics can! He says "*The main earth wire has decayed, so has the battery terminal and you need a new battery and cable.*" No matter what you tried, the engine would not turnover, for the car did not need cleaning up, but needed its power source sorted out.

Through the centuries the Jews had, in obedience to God's word, stopped committing outward adultery with false idols and gods. Yet instead of replacing false worship with true and right worship of the Lord, they tried to tidy up things on the outside. On the whole, there was no true or real godly power flowing in their lives, but had as their religion in the Lord's name, just a set of outward rules and rituals, which especially emphasised the negatives - not associating with sinners, not breaking an oath to the Lord, not picking grain on the sabbath, not healing on the Sabbath unless it would save a life, even not eating an egg laid on the sabbath unless the hen was going to be killed also! The Jews became bound by a list of dos and don'ts.

When John the Baptist came and preached the need to be converted, Jesus then came and reinforced this message and expanded it, the religious Jews were shaken, but many people were enthusiastic. Sadly, the Pharisees and scribes warned against such notions and gradually, as time went by, the picture was changing as people were not as enthusiastic about Jesus as they once were; the Pharisees even warned He was casting out demons by the prince of demons and really it was more straightforward to keep lists of do's and do not's - as you knew where you were and everything would appear ok.

Yes, people were affected by Jesus' teaching and ministry, but not in a true converting way, for there needed to be more than an outward change as we will see in the first of our 2 areas of consideration this morning:

1. Cleaning up Is Not Enough. (v43-45)

Jesus uses the illustration in v43-45 regarding this demon. It may very well be an insight into spiritual truths, or it may be a parable, an illustration based on those truths. It is not intended as a complete discourse on demonology, but illustrates *what His generation would be like* (v45). This means we are not to speculate on or explain the work and ways of demons as such, but see there is a danger to be avoided which these verses illustrate.

I feel the danger emphasised here is that of cleaning up the outside, looking so fine and nice and yet ending up far worse than we were originally. The situation Jesus speaks of here is that of a man who was possessed by a demon. Through some means the demon comes out of the man – we are not told how the demon was cast out, but the demon wanders about looking

for some other place to rest, a place to possess, but does not find such. In the meantime, that poor man, now free from demonic influence, sorted his life out, tidies up things in his life - there is a moral reformation and now he is respectable, nice and not afflicted as he was previously. Yet the demon returned to him because he is still free to be inhabited and 7 other demons move in with the original demon and the poor man is worse off than he ever was before.

Governments are concerned to improve the behaviour of so many areas of society and all would conform to standards - within families, industry and society. Sadly, some people think that Christianity is about being good and nice or that you have to be moral. Yet morality is not enough, being good and nice is not enough. Even if our nation was to become the most moral nation on earth it would not be enough! As we read the NT, we learn the Pharisees were the most moral, scrupulously moral people you could meet. They were careful about so many things and would even tithe (*give a10th*) of their herbs to God as gifts. If we had spoken to them, spent time in their presence, we would feel these were very moral, godly men and women. Yet Jesus says that the state of His generation would be as that poor demon possessed man - their final condition would be worse than their first.

Jesus' generation had Him among them casting out their old ways and ideas including the "demon" of morality, of good works and religiousness, yet they did not have the reality of the life of God in Jesus Christ come into their lives. They knew a form of religiousness, but they didn't have God's power or reality in their lives. As such they had nothing to keep out the return of their old ways and when those came back to them, they

would cling to them in a greater way. This was already happening in the reaction against Jesus - which was growing more and more and many would try to trick Him, imprison Him, seek His arrest and seek His death. They as a generation would cry out "*Crucify, crucify...*" They would get rid of the One who had confounded and challenged them, who had done miracles and taught them the things of God. They would even cry out "*Let His blood beyond us and our children*". Their later condition was worse than their first condition – open condemnation and rejection of Jesus. Eventually they and their children suffered destruction when Jerusalem was utterly destroyed in 70 A.D.

What does this mean for us here this morning? One danger is that we have to beware of merely becoming moral, or moral and merely religious. We have to realise that being scared of hell is not enough, even to the point of owning that we've done wrong. These things can leave us cleaned up outwardly, but empty on the inside. We can become nice but not new; harmless but not holy; change our lives but not know the new life from God; we can become hopeful but not heaven bound. Stopping doing or saying wrong things will not get any of us to heaven. We can do all these moral and right things and yet we can be in a self-deluded, contented situation and still be heading to hell.

We do not need empty morality, or be really nice, but we need to have the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour. We need to have our lives under new management and have the Son of God residing in and being in control of our life. With Him as our Lord, He will work to clean us up - from the inside out and our desires will change, so will our thoughts, language and behaviour. Yes, such things are evidences, pointers to the new life of Christ that

is in us. It is more than mere morality or religiousness, but these things are to develop and show more and more in our lives as they spring up from within us through our saving and living relationship with Jesus as our Saviour.

Do you have the Lord Jesus as your Saviour? Do not be content with a cleaning up of your life, your outside lives, but make sure you are under Jesus' new management, and have a new "boss", Lord in your life. If you do not, then your old master will come back and make you more and more his. He doesn't only trap, ensnare people by open and gross sin or wickedness, but more cunningly he does so by morality, niceness, good works, religion, self-satisfaction. Ask yourselves who is in control of your lives?

The Lord Jesus then carried on speaking to the crowd inside a house. As He does so there is an interruption to His message, as He is told of His mother and brothers standing outside. His reaction may seem puzzling to us, but we are to realise that:

2. Natural Relationships Are Not Enough. (v46-50)

Just as cleaning up our lives is not enough, so we are to realise that neither are our natural relationships enough to get us right with God, to get us into heaven. Jesus' mother and brothers came to Him and want to speak to Him. There's nothing wrong with that, for it is good for families to talk, for relations to want to speak and communicate with each other. Mark tells us in 3:20-21 that His family had heard all He was saying and doing, even the sayings of the Pharisees and they go to take charge of Him, possibly feeling He was out of His mind! His family were not there to listen, but to speak to Him, to stop Him doing His work and ministry, to sort Him out and to give Him chance to

calm down. Mary, His mother should really have known better - after all she knew of His origin and work; His brothers – He had real brothers and sisters fathered by Joseph and born of Mary - some teach that Mary remained a perpetual virgin, but this ruins their argument - His younger brothers were concerned for their older brother, even felt they should not have teased and pressurised Him as they had at other times (John 7:1ff). Jesus appears to question this in v48 and then He gives a high honour to those who are His disciples - those who did the will of His Father in heaven. He points to His disciples and says “*These are my mother and brothers...*” (v49-50).

Jesus does not dismiss His family ties, or any family ties. In other parts of the Gospels these are emphasised as right, proper, true - parents and family must be honoured and relationships maintained. What He is doing here is showing that natural relationships are not enough when it comes to spiritual and eternal realities. His family, not even Mary His mother, could presume on her physical relationship to Him. He had to question her in John 2:4 and ask her literally “*What about you and me?*” He was not her little boy, but was the Saviour, her Saviour too and she had no natural claim of relationship upon Him in that office. She was not going to be allowed to hinder His work.

Instead of hindering, she and His brothers should have been listening to Him and coming to trust Him as their own Saviour. Instead, they stood outside and wanted to “help” Him by preventing Him from getting on with His work. We have to realise that our nearest and dearest may try and hinder us in the things of God. We can hear God’s word; begin to understand it and may find that as we mention such things, or as friends and family find out that we go to church or read the Bible, then they

may warn us off Christian things, warn us not to become too serious, get too involved, be careful of the church, even accuse us of going off the deep end, of being religious nutters! Jesus probably had it done to Him and we can have the same done to us.

Jesus' mother and brothers assumed they would be welcomed because they were His mother and brothers, but they were not! We need to note this, especially the young people and children. You may have many blessings and privileges in your lives because your parents are Christians, whether they're involved actively or not in the life of the church. Please realise that you are not ok because of your relationship to them. Yes, as children of Christians, you have many honours and privileges, but it does not automatically make you a Christian. You personally have the need to trust and take the Lord Jesus your own Saviour. You may fail to realise, even ignore that fact, but your natural relationships are not enough to get you to heaven, are no guarantee Jesus will automatically welcome or make you His child and receive you to heaven.

You as a child, even of Christian parents, you have to trust the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour. Do you realise that? If you do, are you seeking to have Jesus as your Saviour? You may not feel bad enough, or you may want to live life a bit and try this that or the other. I want to warn you, not to presume on your parents' relationship with the Lord Jesus, for Jesus must be your Saviour too or else you are lost.

The moment anyone of us becomes a Christian, then we are related to Jesus and He owns us as His. Imagine how His disciples felt as they were owned as Jesus' family! That is the

honour given to all who trust Jesus as they Saviour - owned as Jesus' family and we are show such a true faith as we do God the Father's will - for it evidences that we are His children. What a great honour and privilege. Do we know such? Do we have this amazing relationship or are we content with a second-hand religion which trusts in our parents' beliefs, even feeling that everything is fine because of them? We need to realise that God has no grandchildren, only children!

The Lord Jesus would have us all - from the youngest to the oldest, trust Him as our Saviour. To do so makes Him our Lord and Master and we will have real life - not merely an outward conformity to externals, or a cleaning up of the outside. It will mean a true and personal relationship with the Lord Jesus will be in place and we have been received, accepted and owned as His child - His near relative and we will be forever loved and cared for. I don't want any of us to be trusting in formal religion or our natural relationships, but that we all come to have a living faith and relationship with the living Saviour. When we do, we will know His love, care and help in every situation and stage of life. Realise that then He will never leave or forsake us. Even when our lives come to an end one day, as we go into that dark valley of death, we will find that He is with us even there and He will comfort us as we go from temporal life into the fullness of joy of eternal life. This Jesus is the Saviour I want us all to know and love from this day onward.