



THE HEART OF THE MATTER, PT1

Name this vital organ:

Right / left ventricles; superior / inferior vena cava; aorta; pulmonary veins; pulmonary artery; right / left atriums; mitral, aortic, pulmonary, and tricuspid valves ...

Yep, it's the heart. And if you're looking at it medically, that's what the heart is: a highly complex anatomical organ.

But the heart can be understood metaphorically, too: as the will, the 'desire engine' inside of all of us. Just as the heart pumps blood, so the will pumps *US*.

And in this part of His sermon, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter: the need for His disciples to have a different kind of engine.

In the places where we struggle, most.

Matthew 5:21-37

Jesus here quotes several commands from the *Torah*, the Law of Moses. And He heads up each with this statement: "You have heard it said ... but I say to you." In saying this, He's challenging, not the *Torah* itself, but the way it had been traditionally understood by Israel's religious leaders. And then He gives *His* take on them.

Today, we're going to look at the first 3 examples:

1) Keep your rage in check. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not murder’ (Exodus 20:13), and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother (‘without cause’ in some manuscripts), will be subject to judgment.”

Jesus takes the command ‘Do not murder’, and says, “This is about more than taking a person’s life. This is about the rage, the anger, the temper that leads to that” (because murder never just ‘happens’). And then He takes it further: He extends it to calling someone a *raca* (‘fool’ in Aramaic) or a *more* (‘fool’ in Greek) – because words can destroy people: their confidence, potential, sense of value, even their lives. Which is why He says, “If this is what you do to people, you’ll be answerable to the Sanhedrin (either the Jewish leadership of the day, or more probably God’s courtroom) and at risk of Hell itself.”

We’re not talking bants or righteous anger here, but allowing our rage to get the better of us. If you do, Jesus says, make amends – quick. Even before you talk to God – because how you treat others is as important to God as how you treat Him. And one day, we’ll have to answer for it.

Every. Single. Word. (Or text / tweet / email.)

2) Keep your lusts in check. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery’ (Exodus 20:14). But I tell you that anyone who even looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Again, Jesus is homing in on what’s going on inside of a person; in this case, how you look at a member of the opposite sex and how you think about them – the thing that leads to adultery in the first place. He doesn’t mean seeing someone and finding them attractive – that’s normal. He’s talking about fantasising about doing stuff which, if you were to *actually* do it, would be wrong. He’s talking about looking at another human being as if they are just there to satisfy *you*. He’s talking about objectifying the women – or the men – you see around you, as if they are nothing but a piece of meat. And if you’re married, betraying your spouse in the process.

But He also provides a solution: cut it out. By which He doesn’t mean literally plucking out your eyes or chopping your hands off, but removing what feeds it. That band; those books; that series; those friends; that device ...

Then He adds:

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce’ (Deuteronomy 24:1). But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for immorality, causes her to become an adulteress ...”

Now in 1st century Israel, only men had the right to divorce (ironically though, the first reference to divorce in the Bible, Exodus 21:10-11, involves a woman divorcing her husband. They seem to have forgotten that). According to the school of Hillel, a man was allowed to divorce his wife for any number of reasons – burning the dinner, losing her looks – which meant that a woman would have to marry someone else in order to survive. And be branded an adulteress in the process. Jesus basically nopes that situation and says, “The

only legit reason for divorce is *porneias* – immorality. Anything else, and her husband is the one guilty of adultery.”

Personally, I think ‘immorality’ here means any twisting of the marital relationship, by adultery, abandonment, or abuse. But whatever your view, Jesus’ point is this: don’t devalue marriage / sex. But just as importantly –

Don’t devalue the person you’re married to.

3) Keep your words in check. “Again, you have heard that it was said, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord’ (Numbers 30:2). But I tell you: do not swear at all ...”

There were 2 kinds of oath in the *Torah*: a promise made to God; and a promise made to others, using God’s name in order to prove your honesty (“As *Yahveh / Adonai* lives ...”). Jesus here has that second one in mind. Now by the time of Jesus people had started bending the rules: rather than swearing by God Himself, they would swear by heaven or by the land of Israel or by Jerusalem, as a way of getting one up on people – convincing them to trust them, then breaking that oath. Jesus here not only challenges that, He tells His followers, “Don’t swear by anything, at all. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Anything more than this, and you’re already in devil territory.”

The point here is that Jesus’ followers are to be marked out by their respect for God and His reputation, yes – but also by their honesty. So be careful how you use God’s name – and say what you mean / mean what you say.

Because it isn’t just the world that’s listening (or your kids). *God* is.

Value The Things That Matter Most

There are 613 commands in the *Torah*. Why does Jesus highlight these 3 things? Perhaps because they deal with sacred things, the things that God values most: human life / dignity; marital relationships / family; and His name / reputation.

But it’s also because most of us will have failed in at least one of these areas. Which means we all need forgiveness. And heart-surgery.

And with Jesus, we can receive *both*.

As one of Jesus’ listeners, John, would go on to write: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

What do we need Jesus to do in us. Today?