

21/10/2007

Rev Robert Denham

Are people important to God? How important are people to God? Do people matter more than birds to God? Do you think that God would mind if some people just disappeared? Would he miss them, and look for them?

Is He like a shepherd caring for His sheep? Does He leave the 99 to search for the 1 missing? Did He come to earth to seek and save the lost? Does He love us with an undying love? Does He love those who reject Him? Does He want all to be saved, and desires that people repent rather than die and go to hell?

What sort of love does God have for people?

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The answer for God was plain, wasn't it? But what about the answer for people? Doesn't it depend on the person? But even with the most caring person, do they love in the same way God does, or is their a quantum leap between the two?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had raised the issue of Law, for many people thought that they'd be right with God by obeying the Law.

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law boasted about their ability in keeping it. But Jesus said:

*Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, you won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*

He then went on to give 6 examples of how the Pharisees had truncated the Law, chopped it short, and really didn't understand the full extent of what God was demanding.

Take the 6th Commandment: *Do not murder.*

The Pharisees understood it exactly as most of us would. For our law also has a similar law. Of course there are the exceptions, which are detailed both in the Old Testament Law, and in modern Case law, where under certain circumstances, murder is possible, but it's more like "self-defence".

So when they heard *Do not murder*, they thought it meant do not kill someone in cold blood. And that is what they taught. Jesus repeated their teaching as he said:-

*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'* It is clear that this means the physical act of cold-blooded murder is not on. But Jesus gave a different condition for his followers: *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.*

God cares so much about people, and how we relate to each other, that not only is killing each other against his desires, but even feeling angry about them is ruled out.

He desires that we be in perfect unity and harmony with each other, without any anger, or else we break that command. But he doesn't rest just with that statement, he added to it:- *Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca", is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Raca was not a complementary term, sort of like "Blockhead", 'empty head' and 'idiot'. The law covered for that name calling. It wasn't a death penalty, but you had to give reasons why you should not be punished. But if you call anyone 'fool', you're in danger of the fires of hell.

God certainly has a much more strict code of behaviour than what we are used to. Our law says do not murder, but it does not punish anger which has not bubbled over into actions. Our law punishes slander and libel, but the penalty is not as great as that for murder. Yet in God's eyes, murder, anger and harsh words all have a similar punishment.

Can you see how important loving your neighbour as yourself is to God? He takes that command very seriously, yet we often try to weasel our way around our attitudes to others. We ignore and avoid people we cannot stand. We often think nasty thoughts, and some even dream of possible ways of fixing them. and at the same time, we go on with our outward shows of Christianity.

We come to church and say we are sorry for not loving people as we should, and ask for forgiveness, yet inside we may be as dead as the Pharisees, those whitewashed tombs.

God knows whether we really want to relate well, or if we are angry with someone. He knows. And not only does he know, but He says it affects our

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relationship with Him so much, that we must quickly fix up the situation. *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you won't get out until you have paid the last cent.*

Is your love of your neighbour just a lip service? Or is it real? Do you murder, whether physically, verbally or in thought?

If so, you deserve hell, just as I do.

Jesus lived the perfect life, relating well to God and to people. Those who objected against him were swept along by their angry desires and had him killed. They side stepped the law by claiming the Romans executed him, but their intent, their thoughts, words and actions proved them sinners.

Only in Jesus have we hope of forgiveness. Only in Jesus can we be given the strength to live in love. and only in Jesus do we have the assured promise of heaven where perfect love will be experienced forever, because he paid the last cent for us. Only as we trust in Jesus do we have heaven instead of hell.

Thank you Jesus.