

Jesus the heart surgeon discussion guide

based on **Mark 7.1-23** (Linked to sermon of 25/2/24)
which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/talks

Intro: How are you getting on with Challenge Mark?

Read Mark 7.1-8

The Pharisees and teachers of the law built extra layers of protection around God's law, to prevent themselves accidentally breaking it.

What are some of the ways in which we might create 'extra rules' which go beyond God's written law?

Are the Pharisees to be commended for being so concerned with keeping God's law? Why / why not?

What would be the warning signs that we're honouring God with our lips, but that our hearts are far from God?

Read Mark 7.14-19

Jesus teaches the crowd and then the disciples about how we become unclean / defiled / sinful. It's easy for us to miss how radical these verses were at the time! Elsewhere Jesus said that he didn't come to abolish the law but fulfil it (Mt 5.17). So he wasn't just erasing OT food laws, he was fulfilling them.

In what ways might Jesus have been fulfilling the law?

Read Mark 7.20-23

Give some examples of where you have seen these sins cause damage to people.

Dan said that the biblical view of sin is not about rule-breaking, but about:

- Sin spoils (relationships and the environment)
- Sin spreads (one sin tends to lead to another sin)
- Sin separates (us from God)
- Sin is self-destructive (ultimately it damages us as well as those around us)

How might that view of sin be able to help us explain the gospel to unbelievers?

How do you feel about Jesus saying that our problem goes to our heart – with the implication being that we're unable to cure ourselves of sin?

Why might this bleak diagnosis be good news?

Dan's follow-up video (<https://youtu.be/oCP1gGmSnA4>) talked about the risks of thinking of ourselves merely as 'sinners saved by grace' and the importance of seeing ourselves instead as God sees us (saints who sometimes sin). Do you agree / disagree? Why?

He said that churches talk about sin and repentance less than they used to. In what ways do you think that is true? Is that a good or bad shift?

Dan also warned about a teaching (which is becoming increasingly popular) that says that repentance is optional – that God loves and accepts everyone as they are with abundant grace. What's appealing about this view? In what ways is this teaching imbalanced? Why is this teaching dangerous?

Spend time praying, asking God to change our hearts, not just to put sticking plasters over our sins. Pray that we'd be a community marked by a desire to grow in holiness. Pray that we'd know how to communicate Jesus' teaching on sin to our culture, without turning him into a killjoy – and to present it as good news, not bad news!