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Sermon Notes

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The Great Physician Diagnoses the Human Heart

Mark 7:14-23

Today's passage may be one of the most significant teaching sections in the entire Bible... certainly in the whole Gospel of Mark.

In this entire passage, Mark 7:1-23, we have the Savior of the world shining the light on the human heart as the core issue...

Last week, the issue of true worship – of a people that honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from God

Today, the issue of human defilement – of the source of all human evil being the wickedness of the human heart.

When we come to this passage, we are staring into the very heart of darkness... for our world is defiled by the river of evil that flows from the corrupted hearts of the almost eight billion people that populate this amazing planet.

When most people are asked, "Are you basically a good person?" they will inevitably answer, "Yes, I am! I do consider myself basically a good person." Even when individuals are arraigned for crimes in a court of law, often an effort is made to excuse the accused by citing circumstances that forged him or her from childhood... they grew up in an abusive home, they were not shown much love, they grew up in poverty, they were bullied in school

Very frequently when asked "What is the source of all the evil in the world?" most often answers are given external to the people...

environmental pressures are cited, externals, leading to these criminal acts.

After World War II ended and Allied authorities sought to bring Nazi officials to justice at the Nuremberg Trials, the most common defense was “I was just following orders.” When seeing the photos of some of the most heinous of the Nazi war criminals, like Adolph Eichmann or Heinrich Himmler, writer and philosopher, Hannah Arendt, commented on “the banality of evil” ... meaning, these deeply wicked men looked so ordinary, so routine, so boring... like accountants or bank clerks or research librarians... not like hideous monsters from the netherworld. These men had made cold-hearted systematic murder as commonplace as a train official stamping a pass.

But the Bible is not surprised by this at all. Indeed, this passage in Mark 7, in harmony with the teachings of all of scripture, makes it plain that true evil flows from within... from the heart... not from externals. We are not pure beings who somehow need to walk through a defiling world without getting our pure white garments stained by the muck from our environment. We are deeply stained within... evil bubbles up from the polluted well of our hearts, defiling everything from the inside out.

Now, lest we think this is the final word on the human heart, we need to understand God’s original creation, and his ultimate purpose for his people. God’s original creation of the human race was of our first parents, Adam and Eve, created in the image of God in perfect purity. At the core of their being was their heart – their inner nature. This included their ability to think, to reason, to evaluate, to love, to be delighted, to choose, to plan, to accomplish great works. All of this was in the original human heart – the crowning achievement of Almighty God, the pinnacle of his creation. Two pure hearts – Adam’s heart and Eve’s heart – perfect in every respect... able to know God, to love him, and to serve him.

But sin entered into the hearts of our first parents from outside them... and by their disobedience, they were defiled and corrupted deeply. And in the wisdom of God, the entire human race fell into sin in Adam. Another of the great mysteries of theology is the doctrine of original sin, but we receive not merely a corrupted standing as sinners in Adam, but a corrupted nature as well. At the core of that corrupted nature is the evil human heart that Jesus exposes in today's passage. And that corrupt human heart is universal... every human being alive today has the same deep defilement, as we shall see.

But thanks be to God, he has not left us without remedy! The good news of the gospel is of a comprehensive salvation from sin in all respects... God has the power to transform our evil hearts and make them pure and perfect in conformity to Christ. Through faith in Christ, our sick hearts will be HEALED... completely and totally conformed to Christ. We will spend eternity loving what Christ loves, hating what Christ hates, thinking what Christ thinks, feeling what Christ feels, choosing what Christ chooses, rejecting what Christ rejects.

Through simple faith in Christ, that is where we are heading. But before we get there, we need to hear the devastating truth about our hearts. We need to understand that the evil we do is not an accident, or some minor flaw, or some aberration, or some insignificant trifle in our basically good nature. No... the evil we do truly flows from our hearts.

I. Context: The Pharisees Charge Jesus with Uncleanness

A. Last week: The Pharisees and scribes attacked Jesus

1. Jesus and his disciples did not follow the ceremonial hand washings required by the traditions of the Jewish elders
2. This tradition did not come from scripture, so Jesus nailed them
3. As **traditionalists**, putting their traditions above the word of God: As **hypocrites**... espousing a religious standard they themselves could never live up to; as **legalists**, thinking they could be made

right with God by their religious actions... they had set up a pattern of so-called WORSHIP that was deeply offensive to God

B. Jesus Exposed Their Religion as Corrupt

Mark 7:6-7 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷ They worship me in vain

The issue of worship is the HEART... genuinely, loving God with all your heart and expressing that love in the holy ways prescribed by the Scriptures; **That is true worship**

But these men were hypocrites, whitewashed tombs who looked beautiful on the outside but on the inside full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.

That is the very issue we are going to address today... the heart as the source of all human uncleanness in the sight of God

II. Jesus Proclaims the Truth: All Defilement Comes from the Heart

Mark 7:14-15 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'"

A. The Crowd Summoned

1. The first half of this passage had all been focused on the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who had come down from Jerusalem (see verse 1)
2. But now, Jesus summoned the crowd to hear this vital proclamation
3. This is that mass of people who followed him everywhere for his healings
4. He wants them to understand a vital principle... without understanding this principle, we will never be saved
5. Remember the **spiritual healing** ministry Jesus came to do

Luke 5:31-32 "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

6. Everyone on earth needs to hear what Jesus stands to proclaim here
7. We need to know how SICK our true nature is, how EVIL our hearts are naturally apart from Christ's healing work
8. And Christ's healing work begins when sinners see their TRUE CONDITION and cry out for healing—they cry out to Jesus, "Lord, Son of David, SAVE ME!!"
9. If you think sin is something you occasionally do, you try to flick it from your life like lint from a sweater or scrape it off like gum from the sole of your shoe.
10. But if you realize it flows from within, from a desperately sick heart, you will cry to the Physician of the Soul, Jesus, who is the only one who can heal it

B. Jesus' Statement

Mark 7:15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'"

1. This would have been shocking to the Jewish nation
2. Their total perspective was the same as the Pharisees...unless I am a tax collector or a prostitute or a murderer... I am basically fine
3. So most normal people started pure and righteous and just needed to keep from being defiled
 - a. Remember the rich young ruler

Mark 10:19-20 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

- b. That was the norm

4. So... defilement was something from the OUTSIDE that HAPPENED to you
 - a. That was why the lepers had to walk around crying out "Unclean! Unclean!" and were ostracized and no one could ever touch them
 - b. That's why that woman with the bleeding problem had to stay away from all human society, because anyone who touched here would become unclean
5. Jesus is here asserting that nothing from the outside can make you unclean in God's sight... rather it is what comes from inside you that makes you unclean

C. Levitical Holiness Codes

1. Now the Old Testament actually did establish this concept of clean and unclean
2. It started with food itself... there were foods that were considered clean, and those that were declared unclean

This is such a huge issue, I want to address it fully next time, for later in this passage Jesus declared all foods clean:

Mark 7:19 (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

3. However, distinction between clean and unclean went far beyond food
 - a. People with skin diseases like leprosy were considered unclean
 - b. People who touched dead bodies of animals or people were unclean until evening
 - c. People who go into a house where a leper was were unclean until evening
 - d. People with a bodily discharge were unclean until the discharge stopped and anyone who touched them had to wash and were unclean till evening (Leviticus 15)

- e. If you were in a house when someone died, you had to wash your clothes and you were unclean until evening
 - f. Women who gave birth were unclean for one to two weeks
4. So, the idea of ceremonial cleanness or uncleanness was clearly established in the Laws of Moses
 5. It was to give a picture of the pervasiveness of sin's defilement, and the call of the Jewish nation to be holy as God is holy
 6. Why did God do this? It was a PICTURE BOOK of the future reality found in Christ... like a child's picture Bible

Hebrews 9:10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-- external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

Colossians 2:17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

D. BUT This Does Not Mean God Was Saying Sin is External!!

1. Though the Pharisees, and most Jews generally saw defilement as EXTERNAL, many Old Testament verses show God's intense desire for HEART righteousness

1 Samuel 16:7 Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart

Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart

Psalm 51:5-6 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God

Jeremiah 4:14 O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts?

So, it is clear that God searches hearts and minds, and God demands a pure heart if we are to be in his presence.

BUT that is the very thing we do not have!!

2. The fundamental problem of the human heart was established plainly in this famous passage:

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

So Jesus is not teaching some unheard of doctrine here... God has always searched the heart and mind of man

But the Lord made plain in Jeremiah 17 what he found... the heart of man is DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS, meaning it is deeply corrupt, a lying heart... deceptive, not loving the truth

And he says it is BEYOND CURE... meaning DESPERATELY SICK...we can't fix the problem ourselves

Keep in mind that Jesus is the physician of the soul... "It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Repentance starts with agreeing that this is the true state of our hearts

And Jeremiah 17:9 says we do not understand the heart... we don't understand why we do what we do

Sin is essentially IRRATIONAL, crazy, with no explanation

- E. Jesus' teaching must have fallen like a BOMBSHELL on these people... Jesus was saying their righteousness was a SHAM; all the handwashing in the world could never transform such a wicked heart

III. Jesus Explains the Truth: A River of Evils Flows from the Heart

Mark 7:17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.

- A. The Disciples Are Deeply Troubled

1. First, they didn't really understand the full ramifications of this teaching
2. They considered it a parable... a rough play on words
3. In Matthew's Gospel, they are also concerned about the Pharisees and scribes who were DEEPLY offended at this teaching
4. Jesus told them not to be concerned about them

Matthew 15:13-14 He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

- a. In other words, in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, they are weeds... sons of the devil... whom God will uproot someday
- b. Secondly, they are blind guides who are leading their disciples into a pit... the eternal pit of hell

B. The Disciples Ask for an Explanation

Matthew 15:15 Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

1. This was the usual pattern... the disciples get the inside explanation
2. But unusually, Jesus rebuked them

Mark 7:18 "Are you so dull?" he asked.

- a. Dull means "without understanding"... when they should have understood
- b. Sometimes sin clouds our minds, makes us slow to understand
- c. Jesus thought it best to rebuke them being so slow to "get it"
- d. Thanks be to God, when we get to heaven, we will "get it"... whatever God teaches us, our hearts will no longer be slow to comprehend truth

C. Jesus' Explanation of Food

Mark 7:18-19 "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body."

1. In other words, food is just food
2. The physical process of digestion leads to excretion, and the stuff that leaves the body is just physical waste
3. That physical stuff cannot make us spiritually unclean because it does not touch our HEART
4. And the HEART is the issue spiritually
5. So, no food can ever make you spiritually unclean; food is just food

D. Jesus Declares All Foods Clean

Mark 7:19 (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

1. This is the end of the Old Covenant's ceremonial laws... all of them will be fulfilled and then rendered obsolete
2. More on this next time!

E. The True Lesson: Wickedness Comes from the Heart

Mark 7:20-23 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

1. This is the source of all the trouble on planet earth
2. Every sin begins in the heart... the water that flows from the wellspring of our hearts is all polluted

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

- a. But the well has been polluted... it is defiled already, and Jeremiah 17 says it is beyond cure; nothing of ourselves can cleanse this inner fountain

- b. Jesus is alluding to the filth that comes out when we eat; the true filth of the human being is not physical but spiritual... it is the river of sins that flows from our corrupt and rebellious hearts

3. It starts with EVIL THOUGHTS

- a. The Greek term *dialogismos*... a person's inner reasoning, perception, thinking process
 - b. Jesus calls these EVIL... deeply dark; man's inner musings, ponderings, plans, assessments, fantasies, purposes, intentions, schemes, devices... all the tangle of his thoughts is polluted by evil
 - c. The heart loves wicked things and causes the body to act accordingly
 - d. It's not some accident; it is the wicked nature of our true selves
 - e. Out of that corrupt thinking flow twelve specific corruptions listed by Jesus... Six evil actions, and six evil attitudes
 - f. All of these defile us, making us unclean spiritually in the sight of a Holy God
 - g. The twelve listed here is not a comprehensive list, but representative of tragically an even broader list of evil
4. Six evil actions... all PLURAL! Like these happen again and again, a continual harvest of evil

- a. **Fornications:** from the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get pornography; general term for all sexual sin; it is the King of all corruptions; a staggering percentage of all internet queries are sexual in nature... all sexual sin flows from inside; this of course includes fornication in the standard sense of sex between unmarried persons... it is amazing how bad the statistics are in the evangelical church on this sin—as if our young people didn't even know this was considered perversion by God
- b. **Thefts:** acts of stealing someone else's property
- c. **Murders:** the wicked acts of taking human life

d. **Adulteries**: sex between people who are married but not to each other, violating the marriage covenant

e. **Deeds of coveting**: desires and behaviors coming from greed

NOTE: these four would have all been clear to the disciples as violations of the Ten Commandments

f. **Malice** (Wickedness): a general term for all manner of evil actions; anything that would violate God's character and will

5. Six evil attitudes that underlie these evil deeds... the first six were plural, these are all singular

a. **Deceit**: craftiness, lying, misrepresentation, treachery

b. **Lewdness**: the lust coming from having a dirty mind

c. **Envy**: the greed that underlies the materialistic life, the endless drive for money; also attitudes of jealousy and coveting toward other people's success

d. **Slander**: a destructive attitude of hatred toward another person that flows out into words

e. **Pride**: the root of much of the evil in the human race; feelings of superiority, arrogance, dominance, pushing yourself forward, feeling yourself better than others

f. **Foolishness**: again a catch-all term for all manner of wicked attitudes that violate the pure standard of God

Jesus' final statement:

Mark 7:23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean

IV. The Only Solution: Heart Transformation by Christ

A. This is a Devastating List

1. None of us can look at that list and not see ourselves exposed

2. All genuine Christians have known this about ourselves; it is why we came to Christ to begin with

3. But maybe some of you have never fled to Christ for salvation!

B. Flee to the Great Physician

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

We cannot change our hearts... left to ourselves, this problem is
BEYOND CURE

But thanks be to God, there is one who can heal us

Luke 5:31-32 "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

1. Repentance begins with us acknowledging the true nature of our hearts
2. Crying out against this wickedness, seeking the cure Christ alone can give

C. The Promise of the New Covenant

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

The Lord has the power to transform our hearts... making us new from within

He also has the power to cleanse our souls... not the handwashing ritual of the Pharisees, but this deep cleansing by the Spirit

Titus 3:5-6 God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior

That is the cleansing we need from the defilement our evil hearts have caused!

D. The Ongoing Problem of the Heart

1. God in his wisdom chose to save us in stages
2. So, our heart is now a divided heart

Romans 7:14-15 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Romans 7:19-21 what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

Culminates in Paul's cry to the Lord:

Romans 7:24-25 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin

3. God commands us to wage war with our inner corruptions by the Spirit

Romans 8:13-14 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

4. ALL OF THESE SINS ARE STILL DEADLY THREATS TO US... we will never be free of their danger till the day we die!

E. The Future of the Heart

1. An eternity of heart worship and heart service in the New Heaven and New Earth
2. Our hearts will be perfectly conformed to Christ, perfectly PURE

3. THINK OF THIS... Jesus Christ is the only pure and holy man, perfectly free from every single one of these corruptions!
4. When he is done saving us and we are glorified in heaven, we also will be free of every one of these evils forever!
5. Our hearts will be as pure as light; our worship will be genuine; our works will be perfect

FOREVER!!!

Final image: The Apostle John had an image of the resurrected and glorified Christ:

Revelation 1:14-16 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

His reaction:

Revelation 1:17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

And Jesus' tender assurance:

Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid.