

Hardness of Heart

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we come before you as people who, whether we know it or not, desperately need a touch from you. Lord, we know that from you, many were healed when you walked this earth.

Many were cleansed when you walked this earth. Many were relieved of oppression and possession when you walked this earth. Lord, we are people who have professed our faith in you, and yet we still live in a broken world.

We still have our flesh that fights against the Holy Spirit that resides in us. We still struggle. Lord, we need a touch from you this morning, this afternoon.

Lord, would you please speak to us by your word? Lord, minister to us by your spirit, and help us to love you and one another. We pray all these things in Christ's name.

Amen. Guys, I will nail that afternoon eventually. It is baked inside of my being to say this morning or good morning. Anyways, wouldn't that be wonderful if that was a big setup for, like, this opening intro to the sermon, but it's not.

[1 : 20] So, I was talking to Christine about this. I actually, I struggle sometimes with coming up with introductions. But, so this was like a, this was like at the 11th hour, but I married two couples in my life.

A huge honor. I mean, marrying and baptizing and some of those kind of big milestone moments are just wonderful. Yeah, it's just, it's such a blessing and honor.

One of the things I said in the sermon to one couple I married was that I went into marriage personally with expectations.

And the expectations that I went into marriage were, I mean, they were kind of, they were very naive. And I came to realize that the things that I thought were going to be hard in marriage were way harder than I thought they were going to be.

They were way, way more difficult. But on the flip side, the things that I was looking forward to in marriage absolutely exceeded my expectations.

[2 : 33] Like, it was unbelievable and it continues to be exceeding my expectations. But it got me thinking about expectations in general. We have expectations for things that we hope for, our desires, and oftentimes reality doesn't quite line up with our expectations, does it?

We think that if we are hoping for retirement to look a certain way, if we are hoping for our children to grow up and pursue a specific profession in a kind of way, if we have expectations, whether big or small, and it doesn't line up with reality, we are, we have a choice before us how we are going to essentially change, how we are going to manage our expectations.

We can, we have the choice to either be upset and bitter, if they don't line up the way we want, or we can adjust and ask the question, like, is this actually better than what I was expecting?

Or it's a bit of a mixed bag maybe, but you kind of roll with it. You see that life isn't always the way you envision it, but, you know, this is the way reality is.

I'm going to make the most of it. If you are joining us, or you've missed a week or two, we've been going through the first three chapters of Mark.

[4 : 07] And right off the bat, it flavors the rest of the gospel. Mark chapter 1, verses 14 and 15, Jesus says that he has come to proclaim the gospel.

The kingdom is at hand. At hand, he is proclaiming the gospel. Repent and believe in the good news. We found out that that good news isn't just a get-out-of-jail-free card, but the good news, the gospel of God, is Jesus himself.

His life, his death, his resurrection. Jesus has come, and he is the Messiah that has been proclaimed in the scriptures. And he has been messing with expectations.

The religious elite have this idea of who the Messiah is going to be, and Jesus is, it just does not compute with them.

We are coming up to the end of kind of like a mini-narrative, like a story within Mark. Chapter 2, verse 1 to chapter 3, verse 6, and we're going to wrap up chapter 3, verse 6 today.

[5 : 12] Today, there's like a bit of a mini-narrative, where Jesus, he is proclaiming the gospel. He is healing people. He is cleansing leprous folk. He is casting out demons.

He is also forgiving sin. He is also calling himself the bridegroom. He is doing things that are only reserved for God. And his authority and his ability continues to progressively grow.

And the religious elite, who know the Bible inside and out, know who the Messiah is supposed to be, as Jesus' ability and authority and revelation of who he truly is gets progressively revealed, their antagonism and anger and frustration progressively grows.

And it hits a fever pitch at the beginning of chapter 3. Take a look with me. Chapter 3, verses 1 to 3, it says this.

Again, Jesus entered the synagogue. By the way, just pause real quick. Chapter 2 ends with Jesus saying that he's Lord of the Sabbath. Very offensive. Very offensive.

[6 : 23] We took a look at that last week. For Jesus to say that he is the Lord of the Sabbath, he is already rattling chains. The Sabbath is, I mean, apart from the Day of Atonement, in the Jewish world, the Sabbath is the holiest day of the year.

And it happens every week. Very, very, very, very holy. So for Jesus to claim authority over the Sabbath, he was putting himself in the very bootstraps, or the very boots of God, so to speak. So anyways, a bit of a background. Chapter 3, verse 1. Let's get into this really intense climax in this mini-story here. Again, Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.

And they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, hit pause for a quick moment.

Jesus is, in the last chapter, he is a blasphemer. He fraternizes with sinners. He's eating dinner with sinners.

[7 : 33] With another gospel account, talks about prostitutes, tax collectors as well. He's an apostate. He's a breaker of the Sabbath.

He's a troublemaker who leads crowds astray. This is from the perspective of the religious elite. They want him gone. And they're quarreling with him.

And here, it's very clear that they are looking for an opportunity to just get him. To level charges against him. To accuse him.

Trial. Conviction. Execution. Done. Out of the picture. And Jesus here has a chance to pull the plug on his ministry.

Or at least postpone this healing. The thing is, it's not as if the religious elite had some bone to pick with people getting well.

[8 : 31] It's just that the way the Sabbath began to be observed. And I mentioned this last week. That the command was in the Bible for certain bits about prohibition, about work.

But then the religious scholars, they would build rules around the rules. And calling those rules the rules. And so on and so forth. So there was this giant collection of rules.

Just for the Sabbath. And one of the rules for the Sabbath is, listen, if you get hurt on the Sabbath, if it's not life-threatening, it can wait. It can wait until the Sabbath is over.

So an example of this, if you break your leg or your finger, you stub your toe, and it is clearly broken. It's not going to kill you to wait. Set it on Sunday. Like, put a cast on it Sunday.

Wait. Why ruin the Sabbath for a broken toe? So another thing was, if a house collapsed, yeah, you want to check the rubble for survivors.

[9 : 34] But if you find some dead bodies, like you can't clear the dead bodies out. Wait for the Sabbath to be over. Then you can clear out the dead bodies and bury them. The Sabbath, you don't want to screw around on the Sabbath.

Don't want to mess things up on the Sabbath. This man's been living with a withered hand his whole life. Why couldn't it wait one more day? Why do you have to heal on the Sabbath? Why are you poisoning, continuing to poison all the synagogue goers?

You're working. What are you doing? They were taking issue at what was about to happen. So Jesus, he could have waited. You don't really, if you're a bit of a troublemaker, whether it's right or

not, you don't want to keep being a troublemaker if you can avoid it.

Why didn't you, like, Jesus could have waited. He could have waited a day. They wouldn't have got the dirt they wanted. He could have, he could have punked them, played their own game.

He could have been strategic. But Jesus does not do that. He sees pain, and he sees an injustice. Because, the Pharisees, and the scribes, and the religious elite, the irony here is that, they are trying to catch Jesus, for doing good on the Sabbath, all the while conspiring to kill him, and to do evil.

[10:59] And, right in the midst of this, forgotten in all this, is this man with a withered hand. And he's leveraged for the Pharisees. He is commodified, by the Pharisees.

By the Pharisees. His dignity, isn't that of somebody who's in need of help. He's a pawn, in their scheme, to get Jesus, absolutely crushed.

No love. Complete injustice. Jesus sees the pain, and he does not wait, till after the Sabbath. What is the Sabbath for?

It is, for rest, but it is also this proclamation, that God created all things, and he made it good. It proclaims, the very goodness of God. It takes disorder, and makes it into order.

And Jesus is not having it. This man has a withered hand, but maybe his spirit is withered. People with disabilities, are often ostracized. And maybe, they're not made fun of to their face, but they're gawked at.

[12:05] And they're whispered, whispered about behind their backs. And in an agricultural society, a man with a withered hand, was a man who couldn't work the fields. Sure, I'm speculating here.

It doesn't say anything about this guy's job, or what he can and cannot do. But if you think for a minute, there's more withered in this man, than just his hand, isn't there? And Jesus doesn't play the game.

He doesn't play the game. What does he do? He sees pain, and brokenness, and injustice, and he fixes it. Right there on the spot. Like I mentioned, complete irony here.

The Pharisees, who are trying to do good, and keep the law, are completely missing it. And not just missing it, by not doing it, but are doing evil.

Look with me in verse 4. And Jesus said to the religious elite, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm, to save life, or to kill?

[13:12] But they were silent, and he looked around them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, Stretch out your hand. Jesus, Jesus is angry.

And it's connected to the injustice that he sees, to this commodification of a human being made in God's image that he sees, and he is angry. And friends, it is okay to be angry at injustice.

It's okay to read the news, and see some kind of horror in the Middle East, or in Asia, or in parts of Latin America, or in our backyard, and to be angry about it.

And there's something wonderfully righteous about that. It is not something that you're indifferent to, that you're angry about. Ephesians chapter 4 says, In your anger, do not sin.

There's a way to be angry, and not sin. Even though oftentimes, anger and sin are so connected, Jesus here is completely sinless, but he is angry. And not just angry, but he is grieved in his spirit.

[14:29] This idea of being grieved in his spirit, it's the same grieving in his spirit that we'll see when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's not just that it bothers Jesus, but he hates it.

He hates what he sees. We can commodify people as well if we use people as a means to our ends.

If we see people as a stepping stone for promotion, or, you know, if I'm friends with that person, my reputation might get a bit better, or, you know, if I clown that person at a party, or at a dinner, people laugh at me, think I'm pretty funny.

Whenever we disregard the dignity, inherent God-given dignity, for people, we commodify them.

We use them for something they were never meant to be used for.

That's why sexual knowing with many partners is a form of commodifying people, treating people as a means for your own pleasure.

[15:43] It is not a self-giving act, it is a self-taking act. We read the Bible, and we see stuff like this, and friends, let's ask the Lord, Lord, am I like the Pharisees in this?

Am I commodifying people? Am I using people? In any way, small or big, am I not treating people as image bearers of the Most High? Because my guess is, as Jesus is the same yesterday, today,

and forever, his reaction to us using people might very well be similar to what we see here. Anger, and deeply grieved. But also, it is permission for us to be angry at the things that we see, the injustices that we witness.

This type of injustice is connected to, we'll see here, their hardness of heart. We see that in verse 5, and he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

And more than intellectual objections, or differing worldviews, or even different faiths, it is, it is a hard heart that is the true enemy of divine grace and, and, and true faith.

[17:09] A hard heart. And how do we get hard hearts? Well, the Pharisees and the, the scribes, they knew the scriptures inside and out. They sought to keep the commands of God.

The Apostle Paul talks of the Pharisees and the non-believing Jews as their zeal, they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. They genuinely want to follow God, but not, but based on their own interpretation, their own, not coming under the scriptures, right, but standing on top of them.

The hardness of heart comes when we fail to see the heart of scripture. And what is the heart of scripture? It's always that God wants to dwell amongst his people. The opening chapters of Genesis, it's this beautiful picture of God walking with Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day.

Adam and Eve are naked and unafraid and unashamed. They are completely vulnerable and yet cared for. The tabernacle when the Israelites are going through the desert after their, rescued from slavery is this picture of God dwelling amongst his people.

The temple when it's built by King Solomon, what does it represent? God dwelling amongst his people. And now, God himself is clothed in human form, in human flesh, fully God and fully man.

[18:36] And where does he dwell? He dwells among his people. It's the heart of the scriptures.

This is the overarching story of the scriptures. scriptures. But when the scriptures are looked at and seen as just a bunch of rules to be kept so that we may please God somehow at the end on the cosmic scale of good and bad, then we fail to see the heart of the scriptures.

And our heart becomes hard. Self-righteousness comes in. And all of a sudden we become stiff-necked. We see the Messiah in front of us.

What happens? We say he is a blasphemer. He is an apostate. He is a friend of degenerates. And now he is a Sabbath-breaker. God himself, the heart of scripture is unfolding in front of them.

God is dwelling amongst his people and they're blind to it. Hardness of heart. It's remarkable that the hardness of heart has set in in such a way.

And what is Jesus? He is angered but he's also grieved. God's word points to God's purposes and to God's heart. And God's God's creation is declared good by God but it is bent.

[19:57] But it's still God's creation. And when we treat God's creation humanity as the pinnacle of that made in his image it grieves his heart.

It angers him. Hardness of heart is faithlessness and it always leads to some sort of injustice. So Jesus is undeterred and unwavering.

The kingdom is at hand remember. He is constantly being the source of healing and cleansing and he says to this man put out your hand and it's healed completely.

Right then and there you'd think that the Pharisees and the scribes and the Herodians which I'll mention in a brief moment they would say well hold on a second isn't there something divine and wonderful and beautiful at play?

Again the hardness of heart that can come from self-righteousness is blinding. Look with me in verse 6. the Pharisees went out and immediately held council with the Herodians against him how to destroy him.

[21:09] The Pharisees were they were they were purists they did not like the fact that Rome was in their land. The Herodians were they were Hellenists which means that they were deeply influenced by Rome.

there was a little sprinkle of Israel a little sprinkle of Rome and they were conspires with the enemies. They were natural enemies the Pharisees and the Herodians and yet because of their hardness of heart what united them?

The destruction of Jesus. Verse 6 again how they held council with the Herodians how to destroy him and thus ends this kind of mini story but one thing we can take from this mini story is that that the Messiah has come and he is destroying expectations.

Destroying the expectations of the Pharisees the Herodians the Sadducees the scribes even the crowds and this will bring us to the next section here starting in verse 7 read with me Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea and a great crowd followed from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon when the great crowd heard all that he was doing they came to him and he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd lest they crush him and on one hand there is a desperation in this crowd to touch Jesus but a failure also to understand who he is and the crowd in Mark is never a positive thing the crowd is always getting in Jesus' way and causing him to change plans and causing danger to loom so the crowds are about to crush him why?

for he healed many so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him and whenever the unclean spirit saw him they fell down before him and cried out you are the son of God and he strictly ordered them not to make him known see it's interesting it's not the crowds that recognize who Jesus is it's not the religious establishment even not even his disciples the demons for some reason are the ones who declare who God really who Jesus really is we'll touch on that in future weeks but one of the things that I want to touch on in verses 7 to 12 this middle section of our reading is that one of the things that the Messiah was prophesied to do is to rescue Israel from her enemies and at this time the religious elite they thought the enemies are Rome the Messiah is going to come draw his sword and he is going to whoop behind he's going to destroy these Romans but again failing to see the heart of scripture the Messiah was always going to save Israel from her enemies but two things

[24 : 17] Israel would be reconstituted it wouldn't be ethnic Jews anymore there's hints of that throughout the Old Testament that it wouldn't just be the Jews it would be the Gentiles as well and also the enemy wouldn't just be the enemy in the here and the now but the eternal enemy sin and death so we see a bit of this just hints of it remember Mark here is leading us to the cross progressively revealing who Jesus is in verse 8 Mark is giving this kind of like list of people of where they come from he says Jerusalem the Galilee and Judea Jerusalem I do and from beyond the Jordan and from Tyre and Sidon I'll pause here Tyre and Sidon are not Jewish towns they are they're not they are they are not Jewish towns the people that are there do not worship the God of the Bible in Mark chapter 7 it's this picture of there's this sort of interaction with Jesus and the Syrophenician woman who is desperate desperate to have her child healed and where does she come from she comes from

Tyre and Sidon and Jesus says to her listen I've come for the children of Israel it is not appropriate for me to feed the bread to the dogs that is meant for the children very very very offensive thing to say to anybody but this woman she goes even the dogs get the crumbs under the master's table and Jesus heals a non-Jewish non-Israelite daughter and he marvels at her faith it's interesting we will partake in communion later on in the service and there's this prayer it's called the prayer of humble access you might recognize it we do not presume to come to this your table oh Lord trusting in our own righteousness and it goes on and that prayer is fashioned after Mark chapter 7 this picture it's a beautiful picture of Jesus this Jewish Messiah reaching out to the Gentiles salvation is not just for the Jews it's for the Gentiles it's not just to kick out the Romans it's to kick out death and we start to see bits and pieces of that all of a sudden the crowd is no longer fully Jewish is it? the next scene is the last scene and Jesus goes up the mountain we can read it in verse 13 and Jesus went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired and they came to him and he appointed twelve whom he also named apostles so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons and I'll hit a pause button there the wonderful thing about the Bible is it doesn't have a whole list of footnotes I mean Crossway here puts footnotes in it your Bible has footnotes in it but the Bible doesn't have a bunch of footnotes it doesn't say hey this is from Isaiah chapter 49 and then you can scroll back literally in a scroll and take a look at it but throughout Mark and the other gospel writers there's hints there's whispers allusions to the Old Testament and all of a sudden here we see we have another example and Jesus went up on the mountain the mountain whether it is from Elijah where he is battling the prophets of Baal but especially when Moses climbs up the mountain Mount Sinai to receive the law the mountain is always where God's power comes where his revelation comes and in this case the mountain it's alluding to Mount Sinai Moses goes up on the mountain and he witnesses God himself he comes down his countenance has changed he has encountered the living God and Jesus goes up the mountain and he calls whom he desires it's

interesting that Jesus is the one who takes the initiative the new Moses he is the new Moses he is he is the Moses that is better than Moses who goes up the mountain that is better than Sinai and he calls people whom he desires and what does he do he sends them out no no no he does but he doesn't send them out right away what does it say and he appointed twelve so that they might be with him and all of a sudden he draws disciples first and foremost to be in communion with him to know him and

Jesus here is drawing twelve disciples twelve tribes of Israel and we're starting to see these connections with the Old Testament where Jesus is reconstituting Israel no longer is Israel just Jewish people but it will be constituted with people of all ethnicities every tribe every tongue this picture of the Messiah is much bigger than what the Pharisees and the religious elite see the salvation reaches to the ends of the earth it's a beautiful picture of what does he do first he gathers his disciples and the apostles are very unique in what they do a very unique time in the history of the church but the call of discipleship is still the same God first calls us to himself he initiates that he calls us to himself and then what then he sends us out and he sends us out with the same authority that he has verse 15 so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons the very thing that

[30 : 15] Christ does himself and this is what it means to be a disciple first it's being and then being sent and it's on the initiative of Christ himself and he draws whom he desires if you are drawn to him it's because he desires you in the same way he desired to heal the man with the withered hand he desires to do good to not do evil to bless and not to curse to proclaim that this is the day of the Lord to do away with sin and death the eternal enemies forever not for a moment forever and what will he do he will be hung on a cross and we see little bits of it here right at the end of our section the 12 are named and then verse 19 it says and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him Jesus will be betrayed by one closest to him but just like every other time in history where evil tries to thwart the plans of

God God will use it and turn it on its head death tried to end Jesus and he defeats death by dying but does he stay dead he does not three days he rises again never to die again and that promise of new life is ours friends he is calling you to himself today he has reconstituted Israel so that all of us who are not Jewish people can call Abraham their father that can say that their history goes all the way back to Genesis 1 in a spiritual sense that God is doing a mighty mighty work in all nations to all people and we retire in Sidon and we think man that is not in the vicinity of Judea and Jerusalem and Galilee we are in

North America that wasn't discovered by Europe until 500 years ago we are the Tyre and Sidon times a hundred times a thousand we are the far off ones we are the ones that are like the end of the earth away from Jerusalem and Judea and the Galilee and God's grace extends to us and not because there's the internet or mail or whatever ships that sailed across the sea in the 1400s is because God's purposes can't be stopped they can't hell rages against God and what does he do he defeats it it's a wonderful thing it's a wonderful promise and it is ours today friends let us not have hard hearts let us not think with smugness that we are self righteous because of what we do or what we know we don't want the living

God to grieve because of our hard heartness even worse we don't want him to be we don't want to kindle his anger against us but friends we don't have to taste death do we because Christ tasted it for us so let us strive by God's strength to be God's people doing God's things and when we fail and fall we go back to Mark chapter 1 verses 14 and 15 we repent and believe in the gospel we keep repenting and we keep believing in the gospel we come to the table and it's like our marriage vow is reestablished it's like we are renewing our marriage vow with Christ at the table receiving him afresh saying I sin please forgive me I believe help my unbelief heavenly father we thank you so much for your goodness that your purposes are to bless that you did not wait till

Sunday or even Saturday evening to heal the withered hand you healed it on the spot you knew that it would get you in all sorts of trouble and hot water and you did it you had compassion on that man with the withered hand you knew the pain and the struggle that was going on in his withered life what did you do you restored and that's what you do today Lord help us to be people that believe in your restoration that you will heal and that you will restore and that you will mend and that all the bentness and brokenness will be made straight and restored Lord help us to believe we pray that comes out to■■■■■