Heart Check

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[0:00] So we don't have a lot of time, so I just want to dive right into the passage and tease out some implications for us, all right? So, we're in the Gospel of Matthew right now, and tonight we come to a controversy that Jesus had with the religious leaders of his day over the clean laws and ritual purity.

Here's what happened. The scribes and the Pharisees, they travel all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to pick a bone with Jesus. They're upset because Jesus' disciples are breaking the tradition of the elders.
They don't wash their hands before they eat. Now, to us, this doesn't seem like a big deal. I often forget to wash my hands before I eat. My wife gets on me for it.
It's kind of disgusting, I know. But I forget to wash my hands before I eat, and it doesn't seem like a big deal. But to them, it was a very big deal. According to the Pharisees, if you touched anything unclean, if you touched something like a dead body, or an infectious skin disease, or a bodily discharge like pus, or blood, or diarrhea, or any of the foods that were considered unclean...
Yeah, it's disgusting. I had to say all of them. You would be considered unclean.
[1:24] Your hands would be unclean. And then whatever you ate would be considered unclean. And if you ate it, it would make your whole person unclean. And that would make you unfit for the presence of God.

It would make you unfit for worship in the temple. So what they did was develop this whole elaborate ritual of hand washing to remove defilement so they could worship in the temple.
You see, here's what happened. Water was poured on the hands up into the wrists, and defilement could only be removed by running water. It was this huge, elaborate system.
So, but here's the point. The Pharisees come to Jesus, and they said this. The things that make us impure and unclean are the things that are outside of us.
And in order to be clean before God, it is up to us to make ourselves clean. It is up to us to purify ourselves. It's up to us to wash ourselves.
[2:29] But Jesus comes along, and he says this. He says, listen, you've missed the point. You're holding so tightly to these rules and these regulations that you're missing that it's about a heart relationship with the living God.

He says, yes, we are all impure and unclean before God. But he says it's not because of anything outside of us. It's because of something inside of us.
It's much deeper than that. It's because of the sinfulness of the human heart. And then Jesus does something even more radical. He takes us even deeper.
He says there are three ways in which the human heart defile us before God. Three ways that it can make us unfit for the presence of God.
Three things that flow out of our heart and break fellowship between us and God. And those three things are our thoughts, our words, and our actions.
[3:35] And they all, in verse 20, Jesus says, defile us. Now, friends, this is serious. And if you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, it is good from time to time to do a kind of spiritual check-in, spiritual check-up on these three areas of your life, on these three areas of your heart.

So what I want to do in the remainder of this sermon is I want to look at these three areas together. Your thoughts, your words, and your actions.
And then just close with what Jesus has to say on the topic. So let's look at them together. First, we need to check our thoughts that flow out of our hearts.
We need to check our thoughts that flow out of our hearts. Jesus says in verse 18 and 19, he says this, But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.

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Then in 19, he says this, For out of the heart comes evil thoughts. Jesus says that the first place, if we're going to do a heart check-up, the first place that we need to start is our thought life.
[4:52] Why? Because our thoughts reveal what is truly in our heart. Because the things that we dwell on reveal what we truly desire.

Now, there are two kind of thoughts that can really damage our relationship with God. One, it's really obvious. They're bad thoughts. They're evil thoughts, as Jesus says.
And then there are less obvious ones. They're good thoughts that become bad thoughts. Because they become ultimate thoughts in our life, and they replace God.
Now, here's what I want to do. I want to just look at the bad thoughts and the good thoughts. And I just want to break them down a little bit. First, the bad thoughts and how they expose the inner dynamics of our hearts.
These are pretty obvious. Let me give you an example, a pretty humorous example from my own life. We live very close to a McDonald's, okay? Now, I know I'm not supposed to say I eat McDonald's, but we occasionally eat McDonald's.
[5:55] And on very special occasions, I like to treat Nicole to very special dinner. So I venture over to McDonald's, and I place the order, and I get the bag.

And then what happens when I'm walking on my way back to bring Nicole her dinner? Do you know what happens? A bad thought pops into my mind. I think I walked a full ten steps to McDonald's. Nicole isn't around. Do you know what? I deserve some of her fries. I deserve a bite of her McFlurry. And I take them. Do you see what's happening? I know.
I know. It's bad. It's evil. But here's what's happening. Those thoughts are revealing the inner dynamics of my heart, that I'm gluttonous, that I'm greedy.
But more seriously, let's take another example of how our thoughts reveal the inner dynamics of our hearts, the sinfulness of our hearts. Imagine that someone has wronged you in some way.
[6:55] A co-worker, a colleague, a friend. They've betrayed you, or offended you, or backstabbed you. And imagine that you get so offended that all you do is think about how you can pay that person back.

How you can make them pay. The things that you think about, like maybe at a staff meeting or something, you say something that would embarrass them and humiliate them. Or you would plant seeds to friends to tarnish their name.
You think about that. You see, your thoughts are revealing that you're an unforgiving and bitter person. Or think about someone who is outperforming you at work or school, and their performance is really making you feel inferior.
And then out of pride and insecurity, you think about all the ways you hope that this person will mess up and fail and wreck their life.
Think about that. Your thoughts reveal that you're a prideful person, that you're a vindictive person.
Now, these bad thoughts, they're pretty obvious.
[8:01] And we all might be guilty of them from time to time. But there are less obvious thoughts that are just as serious. And these are the good thoughts that become bad thoughts because they become ultimate thoughts.

Let me give you an example of how this works out. I am in ministry, okay? And every minister dreams about or thinks about having an impact for the kingdom of God.
We all want to do that. That's a good thought. That's not an evil thought. But the problem is that can become an ultimate thought in my life, an ultimate vision for my life.
I can look to that thought to have a big impact for the kingdom of God to bring me joy, satisfaction, meaning, purpose. And I say, if I only had that thing, then I would be truly happy.
If I only had that thing, oh man, then I will have made it. Do you see? I'm looking to that thought to be my savior, to save me out of feeling inadequate and inferior.
[9:04] I'm looking for that thought to give me only what God can give me. Now maybe ministry isn't your jam.

Maybe it's not your thing. But there's other things in your life. Maybe it's your career. Maybe you're thinking, if I just got that promotion, if I just got that job, if I just got that salary, oh, then I would be truly happy.
Or maybe it's your family. Your family life. You have a vision of your family life. Maybe if I had this kind of relationship with my kids, or we went on this many vacations, oh, then I would make it.

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Or maybe it's school for you. You want to get into that program, or get into these marks, and you say, once I get that, then, then I'll be happy.
See, friends, whether it's these good thoughts that turn ultimate, or these bad thoughts, they reveal the inner dynamics of our sinful hearts.
[10:13] And they cloud our vision of who God is, and what he wants to do in our life. We can't see him clearly. We can't hear him clearly. And this is why it is so important, friends, if you're a follower of Jesus, to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.

This is what 2 Corinthians 10 tells us to do. And then you replace it by dwelling on the beauty of Christ and the glory of his kingdom.
This is what Colossians 3 tells us to do. We need to check our thought life. So second, what else do we need to check? We need to check the words that flow out of our hearts.
The words that flow out of our hearts. In verses 10 to 11, and then in 18, here's what Jesus says. And he called the people to him, and he said to them, Hear and understand.
It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth. This defiles a person. But what comes out of the mouth, verse 18, but what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.
[11:31] Have you ever been walking, okay, and you stubbed your toe, okay? And you stubbed your toe, and you felt the pain begin to creep up, and it started simmering. And then it eventually boils over out of the mouth, and curse words start to come out of your mouth.

Words that you cannot utter in church. Has that ever happened to anyone, or has that just happened to me? That's never happened to me, I swear. Okay, but let, or maybe you're driving in traffic, and someone cuts you off, and you slew, and you throw out a whole bunch of profanity at them.
What Jesus is telling us is that the words we speak, they reveal what is going on underneath. As Jesus talks about elsewhere in Matthew 12, he says, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.
Jesus is telling us we need to check our words in order to get a gauge on our hearts. You may be thinking this. You may be sitting there, and you're thinking, I'm not a bitter and unforgiving person. I'm a loving person. I'm a generous person. I'm a caring person. But look at your words. When given the opportunity, you talk about how unjust things are in your life.
[12:51] You talk about how much this person has offended you. You can't let it go. You just talk about it all the time. Or you may be thinking, I'm not a consumeristic, greedy person.

I'm generous. But given the opportunity, look at your words. All you do is talk about stuff. You talk about this restaurant you can go to.
You talk about buying this piece of furniture for your house. You talk about buying this article of clothing. That's all you talk about. Or maybe you're thinking, I'm not a prideful person.
I'm humble. But look at your words. When given the opportunity, all you do is talk about yourself. You talk about your achievements, your accolades, your accomplishments, and you don't listen to anybody.
Your words you speak reveal what's going on underneath. But not only do words expose your heart, they also have the potential to wreak havoc on relationships.
[13:59] With both your relationship with God and your relationship with other people. Just think of what gossip does in a workplace. Think of how it destroys a workplace.

Think of what hurling insults does to a spouse. Think of what betraying trust does in a friendship. Or think of what complaining and criticism does to a church community.
I have seen how complaining and criticism behind someone's back can devastate church community. See, God wants us to be encouraging with our words.
He wants us to build each other up and He wants us to praise Him with our tongues. We need to check our thought life. We need to check our words. And thirdly, we need to check the actions that flow out of our heart.
That's the third point. In verse 19 and 20, Jesus says this, For out of the heart comes evil thoughts. And then He lists a whole bunch of actions.
[15:06] Here we go. He says, Murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

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But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a person. Jesus tells us, friends, that the things that we do, they demonstrate who we truly are.
And He gives us a list. And I want to read this list again because it's not comprehensive, but it's powerful and it's convicting if you actually meditate on them.
He says, For out of the heart come murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander. These are what defile a person.
How many of us, friends, have murdered someone in our hearts? How many of us, Jesus talks about elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew that we want to look at someone in anger.
[16:12] This is serious. How many of us have looked at someone in anger and hatred and just wished that they would disappear from our lives? How many of us have committed adultery with our eyes?

Our sexual immorality? I'm not just talking about pornography. I'm talking about that glance at a man or a woman and you want them. It's serious.
How many of us have stolen something? We've stolen a co-worker's ideas. We've stolen someone else's thoughts.
Or we've stolen our boss's time, our money. Or how many of us have slandered someone? We've talked trash behind someone's back and we've tried to tarnish their names.
You see, when we do a heart check in these three areas, this is what I want to close with. When we do a heart check in these three areas, our thoughts, our words, and our actions, we quickly see that we are guilty of doing all of them.
[17:25] We realize that we are unclean and stained before a holy and righteous God. We realize that we are unfit for His presence.

We realize that our hearts are so corrupt, they're so vile, they're so nasty, they're so dirty, that no amount of washing on our part will ever get them clean enough to stand in God's presence.
What we need is an entirely new heart. We need an entirely new set of thoughts and motives. We need to be cleaned and cleansed from the inside out.
And friends, this is precisely what Jesus Christ offers us. When we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, He cleanses us from the inside out.
He forgives us of all of our sins, every evil thought that we have ever had, every terrible word that we have ever spoken, every bad deed that we have ever done, He forgives us completely, washes them away by His blood.
[18:38] And then He gives us a new heart, an entirely new set of motives, a new way of life, and gives us His Holy Spirit to help us think, speak, and act more and more like Himself each and every day.

So friends, I want to encourage you. This is a heavy message. But I want to encourage you to check your heart this evening.
I've had to do it as I prepared this sermon. And it's not always a pretty thing, but check your heart. Check the areas of your thoughts, your words, and your actions and see where you're standing before God.
And then come to Jesus Christ and say, Christ, take this heart of mine, make it new, cleanse it, forgive me of my sins. I want to stand again in fellowship with you and praise Him for it.
Amen.

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