

Mark 6:53-7:30 (PM)

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[0 : 00] Today's passage is a very exposing and revealing passage. Jesus is confronted by the religious authorities of his day, and yet Jesus turns the tables on them and does a little bit of heart surgery.

And then somebody that would have been considered to those religious authorities as the lowest of the low in that society, a weak, a woman, a Gentile, somebody whose daughter had an unclean spirit, which was not good news for the reputation of your whole family, comes to him completely bereft of anything to offer.

And Jesus feeds the deep hungers of her heart. So as we come to this passage, I want us to sense that Jesus both wants to do the service of exposing our hearts, but he also wants us to know that for those whose hearts are exposed and know that they are totally unworthy to be in his presence, they discover a lavish abundance of goodness and graciousness that Jesus has for them.

I think this passage is about telling us what Paul said in Romans chapter 6, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. In Mark chapter 7, Jesus addresses two things.

The habits of the human heart, that's verses 1 through 23, they're exposed. And then the hunger of the human heart, that's verses 24 through 30, it is fed in the deepest possible way.

[1 : 28] Three times in our passage, it's the matters of the heart that Jesus continually draws our attention to. Verse 6, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, hypocrites, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

Verse 18 and 19, Do you see that whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile, since it enters not into their heart, but their stomach?

And then verse 21, From within, out of the heart, come evil thoughts, and so on and so forth. So Jesus is constantly putting before us the issue, the matters of the heart.

And the heart in the Bible, it's important to remember, is not just the place of feeling, or emotion, or gut instinct. The heart is the place of trust, and intent, and decision.

Think of Proverbs chapter 3, Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

[2 : 28] I think a helpful way to think of it is, to think of the heart as like the aviation control tower at YVR. Or to think of the heart as the operating system of your computer, or your iPad, or your iPhone.

It is that which orients, and directs, and animates all your thinking, willing, and doing, your thoughts, your words, and deeds. And how they are oriented, and directed, and animated, is based on what or in whom you trust.

What or in whom you trust. So to speak of the matter of the heart, is to speak of the depths of what it means to be human. And Jesus addresses the core of our humanity through our habits, and our hunger.

So habits, Jesus confronts and exposes the habits of the human heart. The Pharisees and the scribes, they come to him with this issue of impurity, and they ask this question in verse 5.

The Pharisees and the scribes say, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands? On Tuesday night, my kids were asking me, Daddy, what did you do at work today?

[3 : 38] And I said, oh, I spent a little bit of time preparing a passage, looking at studying a passage to talk to people on Sunday about it. And they're like, well, what happened in the passage? And I said, well, some people come to Jesus and are pretty upset because they forgot to wash their hands before dinner.

And my daughter looks at me and goes, What's the big deal? And I think that's a fair question. What is the big deal? It's important to remember that the Jews had this palpable sense of the holiness of God.

Think about being a part of a spiritual lineage where for 400 years your people were in slavery in Egypt. And then one day, Yahweh appears in a burning bush and says, I am who I am.

I am the God of your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I am going to deliver you from this slavery. And God delivers them. He takes them through the Red Sea, and then he brings them into the wilderness, a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day.

People would have a palpable sense of the holiness of their God, the might and the power of their God, that their whole existence as a people was because he had delivered them.

[4 : 53] He had set them free, and he wanted to come and make them new. And so there was this tagline throughout the Old Testament. God would say, I, the Lord, am holy.

Therefore, be holy as I am holy. There is no other God that does these sorts of things. And there is no other people who have been delivered from a God like this before.

So this people ought to reflect the distinctiveness and the magnitude and the majesty of their God. And that's why in the Old Testament, when you get all these laws, it was taken with such seriousness.

Because they were not just laws. They were meant to work your way and earn your salvation with God. They were laws that were meant to express to God your gratitude for his deliverance of you and his entering into a covenant relationship with you.

And there were laws that were supposed to show to the world your distinctiveness, your way of life as a redeemed and holy people of God, who were sent to be the light to the nations of the goodness and the graciousness of Yahweh.

[5 : 54] And so when we come to this text about the Pharisees, it is easy for us to distance ourselves from them and to throw mud at them from afar, thinking what they were doing was so obviously wrong.

But what happened is over the course of hundreds of years, as these Pharisees were trying to keep to the law that God had given them, they added to it.

And this addition wasn't a malicious intent at the beginning. This addition was them trying to figure out how do we apply and live out God's word to us in all the different seasons and circumstances of our life.

And what does that concretely look like? But as they do that, they develop all these different laws about what you wear, about how you eat, about when you sleep, about the ways you work that aren't actually in God's word themselves.

And they came to believe that in keeping these things, they themselves would hold to the distinctiveness of the holiness of their God and their own identity.

[7 : 03] But Jesus has a different diagnosis of what they're actually doing. He says in verse 6, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. So there's a dynamic in which the traditions they have developed to keep the word of God have actually distanced their hearts from the word of God themselves.

This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In the late 2000s, laundry detergent companies were trying to get people to buy their products.

So they had all these different ways of trying to make whites whiter and brights brighter. And they tried to sell people on their products by saying, look, we use this special protein and it makes your whites better.

We use color enhancing things and it makes your brights brighter, and on so on and so forth. But one thing they never asked customers is why they wanted their clothes to be clean in the first place. And so all these companies were just fighting with each other for a share of the market. No one company was getting an edge over the other. And it wasn't until a number of years later that the secret was actually discovered as to why people bought a particular detergent.

[8 : 15] A company hired a group of sociologists to look into it. And the sociologists discovered that when people took their laundry out of the dryer, the first thing they did is not hold it up to the lights and see how white the white was and how bright the colors were.

The first thing they did was hold it up to their nose and smell it. Did it smell clean? And so the first companies to get a competitive edge in the market were those that put scents in their detergents,

not more bleach.

It was the feeling of clean that was more important to people than being clean. It was the feeling of clean that was more important to people than being clean.

And I want to submit to you that that is a fundamental habit of the human heart. We could parse it out all over the place. We could parse it out on social media and all the ways in which you have to say the right things and you have to do the right things.

And if somebody else doesn't do it and you're friends with them, you de-friend them. We could think about it in the ways that we will easily give to charities that serve the homeless.

[9 : 27] But if we're walking on the side of the road, we will easily cross the road in order to avoid the person. And we'll see you next time. And we'll see you next time. The giving can often be a way of making us feel clean.

And maybe we aren't. And Jesus says, I think, that there are two ways in which this fundamental habit of the human heart manifests itself practically. There's a way in which it tends to affect religious leaders and those who have power and authority for shepherding God's people.

And then there's a way in which the disciples of Jesus tend to experience this. For the religious leaders, they have the tendency of elevating and enforcing human traditions above the word of God.

Above the word of God. And we see that in verses 6 through 13. Have any of you seen the movie, The Fiddler on the Roof? Or seen the musical, The Fiddler on the Roof?

Yes. It's great. Somebody gave me a vinyl record of Fiddler on the Roof yesterday, and I was thrilled. It was magnificent. And it reminded me of this particular song about tradition in there.

[10 : 37] This particular song about tradition. The line goes, Traditions, traditions. Without traditions, our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on a roof trying to play a song without falling off.

And what is it that helps us keep our balance in life? And he says, I have one word for you. It's tradition. And then as he's giving a woman milk, he says, We have traditions for everything.

How to eat, how to sleep, how to work, what to wear. And he said, Now where did these traditions come from? He said, I don't know. It's tradition. He said, But one thing I do know is our traditions teach us who we are and how to please God.

Our traditions teach us who we are and how to please God. And I think that's important to understand for the Pharisees. Following the traditions of the elders were about knowing who they are and how they believed they were to please God.

But Jesus says, and notice the words that he uses that are of increasing intensity. He says that they have traded their traditions for the word of God themselves.

[11 : 46] And thus they have abused their authority as leaders. Look in verse 8. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the traditions of men.

Verse 9. You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your traditions. And then verse 13. Thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.

Notice the increasing order of intensity that Jesus describes. It is leave, reject, make void. And I think what Jesus is highlighting is a slippery slope for those that hold religious authority.

Displacing the word of God by the traditions of humans does not happen all at once. It happens slowly. It begins with not listening to the word of God, just leaving it behind.

And then it evolves into rejecting its authority. And then it evolves into canceling it altogether from our lives.

[12 : 50] And over the course of time, we become convinced that our human wisdom makes more sense. It feels more appealing. And it seems more admirable than the wisdom of God's word.

And so I think what Jesus is highlighting here is something that those of us that are leaders in the church have to pay attention to. What is it that we are feeding those in our congregation? And I think those who are being led, are being shepherded in the church, we have to pay attention to this. What is it that our leaders are feeding us? Am I following and being fed by the traditions of humans or am I being given the pure word of God? And a good way to often discern that is take the leader out of the question that is shepherding you.

If you take the leader out of the question that is shepherding you, are you still left with a solid foundation in the scriptures? Or does everything erode away because it was actually built on the traditions of man?

So that's one way in which this feeling clean more than being clean can manifest itself in traditions. Another way comes in verses 14 through 23. And this is a tendency, I find it interesting that Jesus doesn't talk about this.

[14:08] He calls people to himself and talks about this, but then it's not until he goes into a house in private with his disciples that he really unveils the layers here. I think there's something intentional about that.

He wants his disciples to get this, but I wonder if he's also saying this might be something that my disciples struggle with in the days to come. They in particular need to pay attention to this. And it is this temptation, this habit of the human heart to pinpoint the source of impurity or think the source of what's wrong with the world outside of ourselves having to do with someone or something else rather than the inside.

Pinpointing what's wrong with the world outside of ourselves rather than inside. Verse 18, Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile them since it enters not their heart but their stomach and is expelled?

Verse 20, What comes out of a person is what defiles. And so Jesus is revealing that there's a desperate, deep, inner impurity and orientation towards evil that is in the heart of the human person.

[15:30] And then he goes on in verses 21 to 23 to parse this out in two ways. The first six words, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, those are in the plural and they describe evil actions.

And then the next six words, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness, those are in the singular and they describe evil attitudes. And so Jesus is picking up on this Old Testament tradition that sin has to do not only with our actions, things we actually do, but they have to do with our attitudes, the orientation of our hearts towards God and other people.

And he's saying both are fundamentally wrong. And both are the source of impurity and pollution and what's going wrong in the world. It's that the human heart is desperately sick.

Jeremiah 17, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind.

So there is this habit, I think, that Jesus is pinpointing for us, where we misdiagnose what is wrong with the world or the source of what is wrong with the world.

[16:54] We can easily diagnose it as economic issues. We can easily diagnose it as social issues. We can easily diagnose it as ethnic issues and all these things would be true, but Jesus is saying at the heart of all of them is a heart issue.

But there's a larger question that Jesus is also addressing here in Mark chapter 7 because he's saying the habits of the heart are undergirded by a more fundamental hunger of the heart.

And we see this in verses 24 to 30. The Syrophenician woman is hungry for bread and she's willing to take whatever Jesus can offer her.

And this is an interesting fact because if you actually widen out the lens from the story that we have and you look at Mark chapter 6, 7, and 8 you discover that the theme of bread and feasting is all throughout these passages.

I just discovered this this week in speaking with David Short, our head pastor. You look at the feeding of the 5,000, it's bread, they ate and were satisfied. You look at the Syrophenician woman saying I'll take even the crumbs from the children's bread.

[18:01] You look at the feeding of the 4,000, they were ate and they were satisfied with bread. Jesus warns in chapter 8 of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod and then the disciples forget bread on a boat ride with Jesus and Jesus says have you guys not understood yet about the bread?

The significance of bread. And so verses chapter 6 through 8 is all about bread and it's bread in extravagance. It's a picture of the abundance of the grace of Jesus Christ.

Grace that fills and that nourishes and that satisfies and that sustains and that there's so much that people can eat their fill and be satisfied to the max and there are still baskets full for every single person.

So what is it about impurity and bread? I think the bread surrounding this section of impurity is Mark's way of saying where sin abounds grace abounds all the more.

And in particular with this Syrophenician woman I think he's telling us that we long for an abundance of grace for which we are not worthy but which Jesus wonderfully and plentifully provides.

[19 : 15] And I think this is important for us in understanding what transformation and true faith looks like in the Christian life. Transformation and true faith in the Christian life isn't about constantly trying to change all of our habits all of our sinful habits.

Yes we need to repent and believe but if our focus is merely on changing all of our sinful habits we'll just end up in despair and depression over our lack of ability to do so.

I think one of the things that we're being told here is that the way in which we experience transformation in the habits of the heart is by experiencing deep satisfaction in the hunger of the heart by feasting on the grace of Christ himself.

In Genesis chapter 3 sin was not just disobeying the word of God and distrusting God's goodness it was hungering for something other than God as if it could satisfy us like God can.

And here we see that this woman she hungers for whatever she can get from the table of the Lord. She's the only person in the gospel other than Jesus and scripture to call Jesus Lord.

[20 : 30] And she believes that if he really is Lord even crumbs from his table are more than abundant to deal with the unworthiness and the impurity and the disorientation of her heart before the Lord.

And notice here how she asks this not only for herself but for her daughter. I think this is a lovely moment in the gospels. We see it a few times. How often in the gospels faith has to do not only with entrusting oneself to the Lord but also with entrusting the life of someone else to the Lord.

whether it be a son or a daughter or a servant or an employee or a mother or a friend. And so you can think of all the people in your life the relationships that you feel burdens for and you can sense here the grace of Jesus is not only for you but it is all for your loved ones and those that you care for as well.

I think it's no mistake and we'll end here that in the communion service which we are not doing tonight there's no communion service tonight but when you guys do communion in a couple weeks I think it's lovely how the communion service rehearses how the gospel addresses these two fundamental realities of what it means to be human our habits and our hunger.

We have to acknowledge our habits through a prayer of confession. I've sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. There is no health in me. And then we have to acknowledge that even though we are unworthy to come to the table we come to the same Lord whose character is always to have mercy.

[22 : 16] It's the prayer of humble access. And we kneel to pray that prayer. And that prayer is based directly on the faith of this Syrophenician woman in Mark chapter 7 that we pray every time we come to the Lord's table because she acknowledges her unworthiness but even more than that she understands that where sin abounds grace abounds all the more.

So my brothers and sisters whatever it is that you are struggling with at this moment when you read that list sexual immorality theft murder adultery coveting wickedness deceit sensuality envy slander pride foolishness Jesus does not expose these things for you to carry them on your own.

He exposes them so that then you may receive the abundance of his grace for you in those things. My brothers and sisters I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen.