

Heart-sick

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] You may find it helpful to open the Bible to the passage Heather read to us, Mark chapter 2 on page 837.

While you're turning to that, I thought I'd tell you that when we were in our old church, St. John's, in the late 90s, at the time when cell phone jammers were just becoming available on the market, you know, they work by jamming different cell phone frequencies, I asked someone on staff, who shall remain anonymous for the purpose of this story, to find out both the legality and the cost so that we might install one in the church, purely because I was worried about the embarrassment that people had when their phones went off.

Well, we found a website that offered all sorts of things. It offered various illegal weapons, spyware, and, yeah, sure enough, cell phone jammers.

The men who staffed the site were all, they all looked very Eastern European, and they wore battle camouflage, and their English, it was translated into English, I believe, because none of the sentences had verbs in them.

So you'll be pleased to know we decided against having cell phone jammers, and at this point in the last sermon, someone's cell phone went off. And I've often thought about it.

[1 : 4 0] It's the exact opposite of what we ought to be doing at church. The problem, you see, is not cell phones. The problem is that we have an inbuilt spiritual jammer.

And whenever we hear God speak, whenever we open the Bible, it's possible that instead of receiving and rejoicing in what God says to us, we block out so much of what he reveals.

And I think life in Vancouver drives us in this direction. It drives us to having a very narrow spiritual bandwidth.

It's not uniquely Canadian. This is true in Australia as well. We live horizontally. We care so desperately about what other people think of us. We have been trained not to step out of that broad middle bandwidth.

Our conversations, our thinking, the habits of our hearts and mind make it safe to operate in that big middle bandwidth, that dull, grey ground that we're all so comfortable on.

[2 : 4 9] And anything in conversation that goes outside that zone suddenly gets red lights on it and we jam it out. First we say, well, I'm uncomfortable with that.

Then we say we're offended and then we hit the jam button. But the trouble is that almost all the important things in life are outside that middle bandwidth.

All the things we long for, all the things we need. I mean, any parent who's experiencing the deep ache for a child, that deeply negative experience, does so because of their love for the child.

Without the love, there would be no ache. And when we come to God's word, almost all of it is outside that middle zone. Because what the Bible says to us is that things are far worse than you believe and things are far better than you could possibly imagine at the same time.

And if we get one without the other, we just quickly slide back into the middle zone. For example, take the promise that God made hundreds of years before Jesus came.

[3 : 57] In the Old Testament, he said this, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

You see, things are far worse than we believe. In God's mind, we have hearts of stone, hearts that are cold. They're cold to the warmth of God and his love.

Hearts that are hard, impenetrable to the blessings of God. Stone, cold, dead. We don't have spiritual feelings outside of Christ. Nothing really gets inside.

This is the state of our hearts in God's eyes. And I'm very aware as I'm saying it, that it's way outside our comfort zone. Things are worse than we believe. And things are better than we could possibly imagine at the same time.

Because God promises to give us a new heart. It's impossible for us to do. He promises to remove the stony heart and to give us a heart of flesh, a living heart which pumps and breathes and grows and feels the warmth of God's love that is soft and tender toward God and toward each other and in suffering.

[5 : 09] A living heart that humbles itself and is melted before the word of God and draws us to God. And how does God do that impossible miracle? Well, that brings us to Mark.

Just about everything in Mark that Jesus does and Jesus says is way outside the comfort zone. Remember last week, if you were here with us, a paralyzed man is placed in front of Jesus and Jesus says to him, my son, your sins are forgiven.

Now he knows how offensive that is. But he goes further. He drives it deeper. He says, so that you may know the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He tells the man to rise and he does.

Jesus goes way off our usual radar. He says to this man, there's something deeper going on here. There's a core issue and it is your heart.

It is a sinful heart and that must be dealt with. And as we came to the end of last week's passage, Jesus is feasting with Levi, tax collectors and sinners and you see the last verse, 2.17 of last week's reading.

[6 : 22] Jesus says, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I came to call, I came not to call the righteous but sinners.

And you can feel the rising opposition in the three little stories we're going to look at today, the next three paragraphs. And they come to a stunning conclusion at the end of the third story in chapter 3 verse 6 where the Pharisees, the religious leaders, go out, immediately cork us with the Herodians, the political party, two groups that hated each other's guts against Jesus, how to destroy him.

So these three little stories, very big stories in a little format, they are about what's happening in our hearts and they are pictures of forgiveness of sins and most of what happens is outside our bandwidth.

So the first little paragraph I've called True Heart Renewal, verses 18 to 22. And we move from feasting to fasting.

And in verse 18, we meet two renewal movements within Israel, the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees. There is no command in the Old Testament to fast, but we know that the Pharisees fasted at least two times a week as a sort of a spiritual discipline of self-control by denying themselves certain things they felt more spiritually focused.

[7 : 58] And the idea built up that by doing these spiritual exercises that they would prepare themselves for the kingdom of God to come and that they would make God's kingdom come faster.

The irony is that they hope to bring God's Messiah through these great spiritual disciplines. And I want to know what on earth were John the Baptist's disciples doing not following Jesus at this point?

Strange, isn't it? So I think both John the Baptist's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees thought Jesus' disciples are letting the side down.

They look at Jesus' followers and they see way too much feasting. There's not enough fasting going on. It all looks too happy and superficial. You've got to be serious about the kingdom of God.

So you see the presenting issue is fasting but it's not the real issue. In the Old Testament fasting was a sign of mourning. When someone you love died you fasted.

[8 : 58] If you were grief stricken for sin and wrong that you had done you fasted over your sin. Now fasting has become much more popular in Christian circles in the last 20 years particularly following the publication of a book by Richard Foster called The Celebration of Discipline which has sold over a million copies.

I'm sure many of us have read it. Foster offers 10 spiritual disciplines meditation, solitude, simplicity, fasting to help deal with our superficiality and our consumerism amongst Christians and there's a great deal of truth in it and he's absolutely clear that the spiritual disciplines are not virtues in themselves and that there's a danger and he warns of the tendency to focus on the discipline and not on Christ himself.

Still he can't help promoting the spiritual disciplines as the way to renewal and so in his chapter on fasting chapter 4 he says I quote fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way.

Well what does Jesus say verse 19 Jesus said to them can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast in that day.

What's Jesus doing? I mean it looks very simple doesn't it? I think what Jesus is doing is he is breaking out of that safe bandwidth. He is not against fasting per se he is saying to these people they have completely missed the point.

[10 : 43] He is saying fasting during my earthly ministry is just inappropriate. He says the fact that I have come into this world means life ought to be more like a wedding than a funeral and to expect my disciples to fast is just out of the question.

It doesn't mean that Christians have to be happy, happy, happy but the joy of forgiveness of sins and the grace of God as we prayed and sang that last hymn changes the deep tenor of our lives.

Why? Why does he say that? Because Jesus the bridegroom is with them with them twice and any Jew in the first century knew that this is exactly how God described himself in the Old Testament.

Let me read you two verses from Isaiah. God says your maker is your husband the Lord of hosts is his name again for the Lord delights in you as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride so shall your God rejoice over you.

You understand? It's quite shocking what Jesus is doing. He's saying I am the bridegroom. All that God is I am.

[12 : 01] All the blessings that God brings are in my hands to give. The new heart the new spirit that God promised it only comes in your connection with me. That's why he speaks about the bridegroom being with his disciples because to be a disciple of Jesus means to follow him and as we begin to follow him we begin to enter into this feast as he gives us a new heart.

You see what he's saying? There's something way deeper than spiritual disciplines and he explains it in these two little parables in verse 21 to 22. They're all about newness.

You don't sew a new piece of cloth on old clothing it'll tear off. You don't put new wine into an old wineskin a little burst and the wine will go everywhere. Jesus hasn't come to patch up hearts.

You can't add Jesus to a heart of stone it'll be a disaster. See true newness newness of heart newness of spirit come from him.

They don't come from spiritual disciplines no matter how helpful they are. And this is true for you as individuals for me it's true for us as a church.

[13 : 20] You see Jesus delights to do for us what's impossible for us to do for ourselves. He delights to cleanse and to give us new hearts ongoingly to make us alive and to renew us constantly to fill our hearts with the wine of his presence if you will.

But we have to deal with him. It is possible to go through through all sorts of very good disciplines but not deal with Jesus. So do you know what it is to have a new heart?

Do you know what it is to draw newness of life from Jesus? Monday Tuesday Wednesday through the week. If you don't ask him because he delights to do it.

In fact in verse 20 his delight is going to take him all the way to the cross. In verse 20 he says the days are coming when the bridegroom is going to be taken away. It's a violent whoosh.

He's speaking about his death and as we read through Mark we will come to see that his death on the cross is the place where newness of life comes from. It cannot come from any other place.

[14 : 32] It cannot come from any other person. Newness of heart comes from Jesus. Second paragraph verses 23 to 28 I've called this true heart rest.

One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain the Pharisees said to him actually they were badgering him ongoingly look why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath.

It's lovely isn't it? In the New Testament whenever Jesus' disciples are criticised Jesus does not criticise them he takes it on board himself. It would have been very interesting for him very tempting for him to have said they don't know what they're doing.

and I've always wondered where the Pharisees were hiding like how did they know the disciples were taking heads of grain in the cornfield and you think about it just I'm sure that'll now the Pharisees believe they are on impeccable grounds here they thought they had the whole spiritual bandwidth covered because you can't get anything bigger than the Sabbath the Sabbath was God's idea it's built right into the fabric of creation it's the pinnacle and purpose of the creation you remember God made the world in six days and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he's done he blessed the seventh day he made it holy he rested on the seventh day God himself takes the Sabbath and all the goodness of God's blessing and holiness God is caught up in this idea of the Sabbath God himself takes the Sabbath and makes it a place of holiness for us and it's one of the ten commandments six days you shall work and do all that you have to do but in the seventh it's holy to the Lord your

God and especially the people who depend on you and work for you the Pharisees cherished the Lord was one of the key marks of identification of the people of God that made them different and they asked the right question they said if this is God's commandment what constitutes work clearly taking corn from a head of grain was work in fact they had developed a little ethical guidebook with 613 rules to follow and I make that point because Jesus disciples were not breaking God's law they were breaking the tradition of the Pharisees a venerable and widely agreed tradition you see there are two different ways of responding to law and the law of God one is to say I am not going to allow anyone to tell me what to do I need to be myself I'm not going to be constricted by what God says or what anyone else says like the self-style free man we read about in the papers this week who has seceded from Canada did you read about that he lives in

[17 : 39] Edmonton but has declared himself the king of a sovereign state and he doesn't recognize Canadian law and the reason it came up is because his wife is suing him for spousal support payments and he is escaping taxes and when the judge brought down the decision he called the man and I quote bluntly idiotic which I think is a little bit offensive isn't it but strong no it's not it's true that's one approach that's people do the same thing with God's law but the other approach begins in a very well meaning way because the law of God is so precious we need to build walls around it to protect it and to promote it and to explain what it means all sorts of rules so that we will never cross the line and we build it into a tradition and we find ourselves going further than God does don't get me wrong it is not possible to live in this world without doing this it's necessary that we do this but what happens over time is that we begin to focus on these additional rules these additional traditions and we begin to forget what God's purpose was in the first place and we get so busy doing that we miss God because you know our traditions are measurable and quantifiable and in the end you know you know you can say whether you've obeyed it or not you can do all the rules and still have a heart of stone and doing the rules will not give us true rest because you need to keep doing them

I imagine the Judaizers who went to Galatia after Paul went there in the first missionary journey and planted new churches thought they were being very helpful they go to the new churches and new Christians and they say it's wonderful to hear that you have become Christians gospel of forgiveness and justification by faith is a great start but now what how do you grow how do you get renewal how do you know you're pleasing God the way is the deeper discipline of the law it's the opposite of the Sabbath so what Jesus does here is very interesting he takes three steps he says three things each one is more challenging than the last and the first is in verses 25 and 26 he says to them have you never read what David did by the way it's a very cheeky way to speak to Pharisees have you read the Bible David your hero when he was in need and hungry he and those who were with him how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiath of the high priest and ate the bread of the presence which is not lawful for any but the priests eat and also gave it to those who were with him can I say what a relief it is that we have studied 1 and 2

Samuel I just wanted to say that we know what that's about question who was David he's the Messiah and Jesus point here is here is not oh we can go and do whatever we want Jesus point is the first Messiah sets a very good precedent for the real Messiah and for those who are with him and while their heads are spinning around that in verse 27 the second move Jesus says the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath now made is a creation word and Jesus steps across the line from humanity into the place of God and he explains the purpose God created the Sabbath for you you can feel how bold and audacious that is he's not just telling the religious leaders that they've missed the point of the Sabbath but he's saying I know what was in God's mind there I was there at creation again there's absolutely nothing wrong with God's law God's

God's law is holy and good and righteous and all of God's laws he gives for our sake I don't know if you have thought about that all the 10 commandments they're for our sake they're not for God's honoring your father and your mother that's for our sake I do not commit murder adultery don't steal that's not for God's sake it's for our good and for our blessing that's their purpose but none of God's laws and none of our additions to God's laws have the power to renew our hearts or to give us true rest they can't bring us the forgiveness of sins our problem is in here and I think this is such a great passage because it shows us the layers of subtlety and deviousness of our own hearts we turn God's wonderful laws into ways of managing God so we keep him at a distance and we sabotage the very purpose of the blessings in them and even worse he goes a third step verse 28 he says the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath now this is so far outside their bandwidth I don't know I don't know what their response would have been listen to this Jesus is not just saying he is Lord he's saying he's Lord even of the Sabbath that is his

Lordship is so supremely gloriously sovereign that he's Lord over all things and even of this thing the Sabbath the whole point of the Sabbath he is saying is me Jesus personally all the blessings of God are in him and our true heart rest does not come through doing it comes through our union with him quite astounding it's the second son of man saying the one we looked at last week the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins here he says the son of man is Lord of the Sabbath he's saying the same thing the forgiveness of sins and true rest come from Jesus the ability to put down the spinning plates and to give them to God to know that we're loved and accepted no matter what happens life with God it comes through Jesus Christ this is the purpose of the Sabbath standing there in front of the Pharisees this man says I am the Lord of the Sabbath I am the bridegroom of the Old Testament they're so addicted to their traditions they miss him completely please again don't misunderstand traditions good spiritual disciplines are good you can't embody the faith in this world without them but I do think this shows how devious our hearts can be with Jesus right there in front of them healing and forgiving answering their questions offering true rest it's possible for us to prefer the safety of our usual practices and the test is when you hear him challenge you we either hold tightly to the practices or we hold on to him we either hold on to him or to something else and if it's anything else we will miss him and our hearts grow cold because true heart rest comes from him and then thirdly and quickly the last paragraph I've called this heart sick and the first six verses of chapter 3 amazing contrast piercing contrast between the true purpose of the Sabbath this day that was made for humanity the Lord of the Sabbath what does he do he gives life and what the Pharisees do verse 6 they plan his death again he enters the synagogue and there's a man there with a withered hand and the idea of the withered hand is the death has begun to invade his body he's beyond medical help he can't earn a living but the Pharisees don't care about that he's just a bait in their trap for

[25 : 55] Jesus they have dehumanized this guy and they put him in the in the synagogue verse 2 and they watch Jesus to see whether he's going to heal him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him a legal word again must have been very tempting to Jesus to say to this guy come back tomorrow come back tomorrow and I'll heal you and they won't hate me he won't do that very interesting isn't it Jesus pushes forward he floods the moment with truth through his question in verse 4 he says to them is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or do harm to save life or to kill and there is a very guilty silence he Jesus is pushing on the Pharisees and on us I think a very stark choice to either trust him or to kill him now that's outside the bandwidth isn't it and here is the Lord of the Sabbath showing how far they've moved from God's purpose they want to see if he's going to give life on the Sabbath so that they can plot and take his life on the same Sabbath Jesus says this is why I've come I'm doing good and I'm saving lives and a great picture of Jesus in his ministry bringing true renewal and true rest and life to our hearts and then in verse 5 amazingly we are taken inside the mind of Jesus he looks around at them with anger grieved at their hardness of heart and he says to the man stretch out your hand now is this your Jesus does your Jesus combine the anger and the wrath of God with the compassion compassion and tenderness and grief of God and the love of God he's angry with their dehumanizing sin he's grieved with their hardness of heart this word hardness is a great word it's a gradual build up of minerals doesn't happen suddenly it's it happens over time in our hearts it's the steady growth of unbelief and insensitivity to the things of God and a thickening on our hearts calluses and I never tire of saying this but every time we hear the word of God our hearts are either growing softer towards God or harder towards him and I have to warn you like these Pharisees there can come a time when there's no remedy for your hardness of heart and look what Jesus does he says stretch your hand out and the hand that was dead is stretched out a miracle a creation miracle what was dead is now alive Jesus has done good and he saved a life on the Sabbath and so they go out and they take counsel how to kill him it's a very searching passage and as we finish I want to say Jesus is at the center of every word of the passage and they missed him the bridegroom the Lord of the Sabbath the Son of Man the life giver healing answering their questions forgiving and they harden their hearts against him and it is possible to be part of a church and to go to a church for a very long time and to miss Jesus just as they did it is possible to become very practiced at hardening your heart toward him when you hear what Jesus says and you see what he does does it stir your heart to love him to follow him to seek him to get closer to him or does it just leave you cold is it a bit dull for you when Jesus explains who he is

and the joy that he brings us the bridegroom the joy that he gives us through his death is your heart just overflowing toward him and I don't mean emotionally I mean in terms of your affection the way your heart leans or does it just quickly go back to the broad middle band this is not about information it's the way our hearts lean you know do we go to him for renewal for rest and for life or somewhere else because this is the key to life in this world this afternoon and tomorrow and the rest of the week it's key to life in the life in the world to come it's the key to living this life under the shadow of death and moving through death and here is God's promise he says I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh I want to urge us all to continue to do what may be uncomfortable to us and that is to deal with Jesus to turn to him and ask him for his forgiveness ask him for his presence look to him as the bridegroom as the lord of the sabbath do you need renewal do we need renewal go to him do we need rest do we need life go to him that's what we should do and we're going to begin doing that as we bow our heads and kneel and pray almighty God father of our lord Jesus Christ we understand ugliness when we read about the Pharisees and when we look into the spiritual mirror of your word we know how unbeautiful we are we're kind of stupid we crave beauty and we dispose of the ugly and sometimes we forget that you sent your most beloved treasure to live amongst us and to die for us father when we think of your love and what that love for us cost you we have only one thing one solution and that's to fall on our knees in grateful adoration please accept our adoration for who you are and our gratitude for the extravagance of your love lord in your mercy hear our prayer father this morning we intercede for loved ones and organizations and organizations around the world for the Asian and multicultural missions in Canada and Anglican 1000 for our dear partners in Christ in the diocese of the Upper Shire of Malawi for the churches of new life in Sturgeon Falls

Ontario and New Song Church in Port Perry in the same province and for the dearly loved ones amongst us who need your blessing be especially close as they struggle with illnesses of various descriptions or grief or loss or even fights against the devil and we pray especially for Derek Rowena Chris Marguerite Glenn Doug Beatrice Nora Carly Betty Sally Manuel Michael and Rhoda Be with them we pray and Lord in your mercy Father we know what love is or at least we think we do we know what falling in love looks like we talk about it and sing about it we think about our loved ones constantly we put their pictures up on Facebook but today we've seen a bridegroom that we don't discuss as freely except maybe on Sundays and maybe just for five minutes after the sermon and so this morning

Father we pray for ourselves help us to love our Lord Jesus better to talk to him more frequently and to love him as intensely as we do those whose pictures we plaster on our Facebook pages help us to know with every Skerryville being that Jesus is the path on which our feet tread the latch on the door of our lips the light that shines through our eyes the music in our ears help us to know that Jesus is the marrow of our understanding the strength of our will the sweetness of our memories and the one that we walk with at dusk hand in hand into the horizon of the setting sun bright bridegroom may we grow in our love for you and never forget what you've done for us

Lord in your mercy father keep us from fluttering about religion guard us from the trap of religiousosity help us always to see you and not rules and regulations may we who have been saved by your grace into faith live by that faith feel the joy of that faith and do the work of that faith and in Christ's name we pray this morning Lord in your mercy hear our prayer