

The Integrity Problem (Evening Service)

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everybody. I hope you're all doing well. It's really nice to see you all. My name is Aaron Roberts, and I'm the minister for this service here. If you're new, I'd love to meet you. Come and say hi afterwards.

Well, we have a doozy. I don't even know if that's a word over here, doozy. We have a doozy of a passage tonight. So we're doing this series about... It's an apologetic series.

So we're looking at how do we defend the Christian faith against accusations. And this week we're looking at what we call the integrity problem. So we've looked at the suffering problem and the wrath problem and the exclusivity problem.

And tonight we're looking at the integrity problem. And the problem is this. So people might say things like this. The church? The church. You guys have a very messy history of injustice.

And injustice. Why would I want to join your club? Why would I want to be connected to you guys? Or somebody might say, my neighbour is supposed to be a Christian, but they're always yelling at my kids.

[1 : 0 7] I thought you guys were supposed to be nice and good. Well, this one. Christian missionaries destroy indigenous cultures. That's a good one. What about this one?

Why is it that the non-Christians I know are much nicer than the Christians I know? So very reasonable questions, actually. And unsettling questions, I think.

So here's what we're going to do. We're going to preach the passage. We're just going to preach the passage. And then we're going to come back to these questions at the end. So let's look at the passage first.

But the passage is going to be helpful. Because it answers the question. Okay, so we need a little bit of context for the second half of Mark 7 here. So what was going on was this.

So you have these religious leaders back in the day. And they are always looking to undermine Jesus, to attack Jesus. And so what they do is they attack the disciples. Because they notice that the disciples aren't doing the proper ceremonial washing of their hands before they eat.

[2 : 0 6] And they think, great. We'll get Jesus with this one. And the washing of your hands thing before you eat wasn't like a hygiene thing.

It was a purifying ritual. And the disciples didn't do it. So they questioned Jesus about it. And Jesus' response to them is very scandalous.

It was scandalous to the original hearers. And I think it's scandalous to our ears. And their response is sort of summarized in verse 15. Jesus says this to them. He goes, Nothing outside of you going into you can defile you.

It's what's in you already that's the problem. That's the basic summary. Nothing outside of you coming into you is going to defile you. It's what's in you already that's the problem. And the disciples don't understand this. The disciples aside, and he explains it a bit more.

Sort of getting to verse 18 and following here. And he kind of broadens discussions from just ceremonial washing to kind of a lot of the kosher kind of rules. And he starts talking about food, etc.

[3 : 10] And he says, Look, you guys are just very concerned about eating non-kosher food. But that's just not going to damage you spiritually. That's not your big problem.

Because food, as the passage says, It just goes in and then it's down the toilet. And you guys keeping all of these ceremonial rules, you think it's going to make sense.

It's not. It's not helping you. And the reason it's not helping you is because your hearts are rotten. That's what he says to them.

So scandalous to the Pharisees. Because these guys, for them, it undermined their whole system of salvation. This was their whole gig. It was the observance of traditions and being ritualistically pure and doing these right things, rights and rules.

And they'll make you right before God. And Jesus says, No, eating this food and not that food, it won't actually affect your stance with God. And if you get stuck on the food thing, if you get stuck on the ceremony thing, you'll never move past it to the real issue.

[4 : 24] And the real issue is this. Your heart is poisoned. It's broken. It's bung. So these are the words that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees.

And they're scandalous. Scandalous. They undermine all that they are doing. That's why the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus. It was ruining their whole thing.

And it's scandalous in our cultural context to say that, isn't it? I mean, half of you here probably, you know, thinking this is ludicrous what I'm saying.

Jesus is saying all the evil in the world is because the human heart is sinful. That's your problem. And this is very important because it's so in opposition to sort of the secular mindset today, which is this, that we are basically good, that we are fundamentally good, actually.

And the problem is out there somewhere. It's religion or it's systemic evil or it's a lack of education. That's the problem.

[5 : 36] We're actually good and innocent. It's that stuff, you know. You sort of see this in the comments from parents when their kids do awful things.

You know, even now and then you read in the newspaper about a teenager does some horrendous, horrible thing. And they interview the parents and the parents say something like, Oh, look, they're just, they're really, she's a good girl.

She's a really good girl. She just hung out with the wrong people and made a bad decision. You know. The problem is out here. It's something other than us.

Adam ate the fruit and God said, what are you doing? What are you doing? And Adam said, the woman gave it to me. Actually, the woman you gave it.

The woman you gave me. It was her fault. She told me to. And Eve says, no, it was totally the snake. It was a snake.

[6 : 38] It's another problem, right? Society says you're innocent. You're good. Evil is out there. And the Bible repudiates that. Jesus repudiates that. He says, your heart is a poisoned well.

And every, all these little kids up the front, every little baby born into the world has the capacity for, as the passage says, evil thoughts, immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

It's all in there. Now, don't get me wrong. It's not like we do terrible things all the time. We do great things. We do amazing things. Because we're image bearers.

We're made in the image of God. But there is corruption in our hearts. We're like a magnificent gold watch that can't keep time.

The Anglican Confession. The Anglican Confession is helpful here, I think. Beginning of the Confession, or in the middle of the Confession, that we say, there's this line, which I think is confusing sometimes for people.

[7 : 48] It says, there is no health in us. That's what we confess. There is no health in us. Sounds very sort of depressing, doesn't it? But it's basically saying this.

It's not saying we're as bad as we can be in every area of our life. But it's confessing that every area of our life is touched by sin.

There is no 100% clean part in us. Every area of our life is touched by sin, is corrupted in some way to various degrees.

Okay, how do I respond to this? How do I summarize this? You could say this. I'll say it twice because it's a bit confusing. We are not sinners because we sin.

We sin because we are sinners. We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

[8 : 46] At the beginning of the previous century, the Times newspaper wrote letters to all these. They were trying to do a story on the problems of the world. And they wrote letters to all these famous authors asking the question, what's wrong with the world today?

G.K. Chesterton is Christian, was Christian, and sort of humorous. He's great. So he wrote a response, very short response.

He said this. Dear sir, in response to the question, what is wrong with the world today? I am. Yours faithfully, G.K. Chesterton. That's the passage.

It's very simple. Jesus has one point to make, and I made it. So what do we make of that? How does that grab you? You feeling good?

Here's a better question. How is this helpful to us? Why is this helpful to know? Well, firstly, it's helpful to know because it's true. And we should be.

[9 : 53] Primarily. It's helpful to know because it's true. Chesterton again. He says that this is the only Christian doctrine that can be empirically provable. Can't prove the Trinity.

Can't prove the resurrection. We've got great evidence for it, but we can't actually prove it. He says, we can prove this one. And in his day, he would have said, read the newspaper. Today, I would say, just read the comment section, you know, of any internet post.

We're sinful. Our hearts are corrupt. You really only need the evidence of one, though, probably.

When, in a quiet moment. When you're honest with yourself. I'm glad you can't see my heart.

The thought of that terrifies me. You would never listen to me again. So it's helpful because it's just, it's true.

[10 : 58] Secondly, it's helpful because it points us to the solution. I really like politics. I particularly like American politics.

I find it very interesting. And for me, every day is Christmas at the moment. So, in American politics right now, the left, the left, just for you guys, the left blames the one percenters.

Right? That's the wealthy. They're the great problem in the world. The right blames the one percenters. And, of course, they're both correct, aren't they?

The problem is Mexican immigrants. It really is. Also Bernie Sanders. The problem is Donald Trump. The problem is the Democrats. The Republicans.

It's the rich. It's the poor. The problem is the middle class. Because it's a heart problem. Like, it's all our problem. We all have a problem.

[12 : 12] And the only solution to this problem is one that will actually go directly to the heart. Which is why it's so important that this truth of Christ is understood. Because if you diagnose the problem wrong, you're going to have the wrong solution.

For example, if you think the problems of the world are shallow problems, you will invest in shallow solutions. You'll think, well, it's just a lack of education.

Or we just need a change of policy. And when we can do those things, we should do those things. However, they are small solutions to a much larger problem.

Now, if you think that the big problem is the heart, then you won't be satisfied with anything, any problem that doesn't actually reach the heart.

And that's why we should look at these harsh words of Christ, these hard words of Christ, this hard truth of Christ, as quite hopeful words. Because the one who says to us, our hearts are poisoned wells, he tells us because he loves us.

[13 : 22] Christ does not want us to live under the delusion that our good works and religious practices will make us pure before God. And no amount of tradition or hard work on our part can do this.

This is not a problem that we can solve. The problem was solved, though, and it was solved at great cost on the cross. This was God's remedy.

Christ died, he rose, and he sent his spirit, the very life of God, to be in our heart. And that's the hope of the passage for us. You see, the gospel is complete nonsense.

If we don't believe that we have a heart problem that is unsolvable by us, we need forgiveness and we need a new heart. That's why this truth is so important.

Now, let's get back to these original questions before we finish. So people say to you, the church, you people, you have a very messy history, don't you?

[14 : 31] Or my neighbor's supposed to be a Christian and he's a jerk. The Hindu guy on the other side, he's much nicer. He mows my lawns when I'm sick. Christian messengers destroy cultures.

Non-Christians are nicer than Christians. How do we respond to this? And maybe you have these, you know, as you think about it, this is a struggle for you as well. Why is this the case? Okay, Christians have a messy history of violence.

Your response? Yes. Yes, they do. And it should be addressed and it should be readdressed and it should be apologized for. But it is far too simplistic to say that religion necessarily leads to violence, which is kind of a maxim, like a mantra, like a, almost like a truism, right?

This is why I'm not interested in your church or your God or Jesus because, you know, religion causes violence. Well, yes. But the 20th century was a pretty bad one for the secular humanists, though, to be honest, wasn't it?

In terms of violence, in terms of corruption, I mean, people like to throw around the Spanish Inquisition. You know, the Spanish Inquisition lasted 350 years and probably less than 5,000 people were killed in it.

[15 : 53] And it's still really bad. But the secular humanist regimes, the Stalins and your Pol Pot, etc., they've got the blood of millions on their hands just over a couple of decades.

Now, I'm not sort of saying Christians did less violence. You know, you're probably not going to win that argument or it's not worth getting into. But I would say this. What it shows us is that there is a universality to violence.

You cannot pin it on religion. Because the problem is a heart problem. And we all have that problem. So Christians have done some really terrible things.

And so have non-Christians. And somebody says to you, yes, but what about missionaries destroying cultures? Does that happen? Probably, yeah. Like, I'm sure it's happened. Because Christians have corrupt hearts and do dumb things sometimes.

But then Christians tend to be on the forefront of protecting indigenous peoples as well. In New Zealand, anyway, the colonists, my ancestors, were coming in just stealing land from the Maori people.

[17:05] We were just killing them and stealing the land. It was the Anglicans that wrote to the Queen and said, this is terrible what's happening. This is awful what's happening. We need to make a treaty and put an end to this.

And so they did. The church has been terrible for the rights of women. Yeah, sometimes, yeah, that's happened, yeah. But you actually can't explain the current rights of women without talking about the teachings of Christ.

And the amazing things that the church did for women in the first few centuries. And even, like, it was the Anglican woman in New Zealand that actually, New Zealand was the first country in the world to give women a vote. It was the Anglican woman that did that, pushed that through.

Another question. My neighbor's a Christian and he's a total jerk, you know. The Hindu guy, he's way nicer. If we work with a presupposition that we're all made in the image of God but corrupted, this should not be a surprise to us.

Everyone has the capacity to do lovely things because it reflects their image-bearingness. Like, they reflect God's goodness. But we're all still sinful. So the answer is, yes, Christians can be jerks.

[18:15] And it shouldn't be a surprise because of what we believe about human nature and our hearts. Now, hopefully, we don't stay jerks because we get a new heart. And we want to be more like Christ. But we can be.

And it can be a slow process. I'm going to finish up here. Christ has one point. And what does he do that's so wonderful here? He diagnoses the problem.

It's not out there. There is bad stuff out there. But the big problem is here. And we make this out there stuff, right? The big problem is in here. He diagnoses the problem.

He diagnoses the world's problem. And it's a scandalous diagnosis. I don't know if you've seen this, but Chris Pratt, who's the actor, Jurassic Park, Guardians of the Galaxy, Parks and Rec, I think.

Yeah. So he got an MTV award recently. This was a couple of months ago. I don't know if anyone saw that. And he gave nine tips on life. He gave me nine tips on life.

[19:18] And five of them were just ludicrous, were ridiculous. But the ninth one, paraphrasing here, this is what he said. He said, everyone will tell you you're perfect. So he's speaking to young people, teenagers and millennials and millions of people.

And he goes, everyone will tell you you're perfect. You're not. It was great. He goes, you're not perfect. You're imperfect. But there is grace. And that grace was purchased by somebody else's blood.

Don't take it for granted. I was pretty surprised by this. And he's dead right. Humanity is a problem.

It's a heart problem. Unless you understand that, the gospel is nonsense to you. It's just self-help. You might as well join a tennis club, get some cardio in, you know, do something else.

Humanity is a heart problem. And the solution is forgiveness and grace and the life of God to change your heart. That's what Jesus is teaching us today.

[20 : 31] Amen.