

# Are Your Hearts Hardened?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let me pray as we prepare to open God's word and as I prepare to preach from God's word to you.

Our Father, oh, I need wisdom. Your Spirit, he is full of wisdom. He is the one who inspired these authors of Scripture.

He is the one who gave them this perfect wisdom without fail, without error. But I know that I am not perfect without fail, without error, and I know that each one of us who sits here does not listen perfectly without failure, without error.

And so we need your help. And I know this is all about what we're talking about, having eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand. Lord, we come in with hearts that are hardened.

Soften our hearts. Give us these things. Prepare us to receive your word. Lord, hold me back from saying anything that is false or that is unhelpful.

[ 1 : 13 ] Lord God, may you do wonders today. Do wonderful things in our hearts. Help us to come away from here with a clearer picture, not only of ourselves, but of you, of your son, Jesus Christ.

Let us come away with a clearer picture of these things. And so come away sobered, but come away prepared, fully prepared to receive the real encouragement that you have to offer of all of who Jesus Christ is, all of who he is for us.

Help us to see these things. Amen. Well, as we begin, let's start off. We're going to jump right into scriptures, and this is going to be a fun one because we're going to start off with one of the odd moments in the life of Jesus.

And if you are familiar with the gospels, sometimes you get overly familiar. You don't realize how many odd moments there are in the life of Jesus. But the more you dig into them, the odder they seem.

This one is really strange. Now, if you read through the gospels, and you read all these accounts of Jesus healing people, driving out demons, doing all sorts of miraculous things, and it goes very differently from what we read in Mark 8, verses 22 through 26.

[ 2 : 39 ] And so in Mark 8, verses 22 through 26, things take a little bit of a different turn. And so I'll read it, and then we're going to have a little bit of an interactive session here where you guys are going to tell me what you think is strange.

And there's a lot of different strange things happening here. But this will be on page 844 if you're using one of the Bibles we hand out. And Mark 8, verses 22 through 26.

Let me read this. And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him, that's Jesus, they brought to Jesus, a blind man and begged him to touch him.

And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, do you see anything?

And he looked up and said, I see men, but they look like trees walking. Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again.

- [ 3 : 46 ] And he opened his eyes. His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home saying, do not even enter the village.
- Okay. What stands out to you as a strange thing that happened there? All right, let's hear it. Yeah.
- Yeah. Yeah, Jesus, every other healing you ever read about Jesus, if you go through all the Gospels, when Jesus heals someone, they're healed.
- They're 100%. Not this time. Not this time. Yeah. You know, you notice that? People ask, they bring to him a blind man, beg him, you know, Jesus, touch, you know, they have this expectation, you know, touch him and he'll be healed.
- And instead, Jesus takes him by the hand, leads him out of the village. That's a little odd. What else? Then told him, don't go back into the village.
- [ 4 : 52 ] Okay. What else? Spitting. Oh, that's great. In a pandemic world, spitting in someone's eyes is, oh, that feels, oh, man.
- You know, that's very uncomfortable. Anything else? Yeah.
- Yeah, so he doesn't see people clearly. And I'll add to that. Isn't it interesting? Verse 23 ends with Jesus. He lays his hands on, spits in his eyes, lays his hands on him.
- And asks him, do you see anything? Now, you go through all the rest of the accounts of Jesus healing. You don't really see Jesus asking for feedback.
- Right? Hey, did it work? Do you see anything? This is the only place. So, man, you know, there's, there's just a lot of stuff.
- [ 6 : 03 ] And so that tells you something. Mark included this story precisely because it's so strange. And precisely to make a point. And I'll admit, okay, so there's one aspect of this.
- I don't know about the spitting. Okay. So, you know, you can come up with your own answer. Maybe it's because they told the Jesus, they want him to touch him. And Jesus is like, I'm going to do my own thing. And he's, you know, I don't know if that's, that might be it, right?
- He's not interested in following a formula, but it's very interesting that first of all, Jesus is very cautious about this healing being done in the village, about being done in public.
- Jesus is very cautious about the word getting out about this. And if you read through the gospel of Mark, you'll find that that is not the only time Jesus is very cautious about people hearing and seeing who he is.
- Jesus definitely does not seem to trust that his countrymen will respond well to this news. He doesn't trust that his countrymen will respond well to this news.
- [ 7 : 03 ] So let's keep that in mind. We'll come back to that in a moment. But there's another odd thing. And that is brought up by several of our observations that this healing happens in two stages. Jesus heals the man once.
- And the man goes, he doesn't go from blind to having 20-20 vision. He goes from blind to having blurry vision. So let's have a show of hands. How many of you, and some of you, you know, you're not going to be able to deny this, but how many of you wear glasses or contacts?
- All right. Wow. Okay. That's like probably 60% of us, including some people who are stealthily wearing contacts among us this morning. I remember the first time that I realized that my vision was not quite 20-20.
- And my vision is just good enough that I can legally drive without glasses. So if you see me driving without glasses, don't call the RCMP on me. But I went up until my mid-20s thinking that my vision was 20-20.

It was just fine. And then one afternoon, I was at a restaurant with friends, and we were sitting outdoors a beautiful sunny day, out on the patio overlooking the lawn outside the restaurant.

[ 8 : 18 ] And one of my friends had a new pair of glasses. And since I didn't wear glasses, I, you know, because nothing was wrong with my vision, of course, I just, he had put his glass down on the table, and I put them on just for fun, just to see what it would look like.

And when I put his glasses on, I just had this moment of surprise that all of a sudden, and I've remarked this out loud to everyone else sitting at the table, wow, you can see all the individual blades of grass all the way across the lawn.

And all of my friends replied, yeah, that's normal. You know, that's, you don't usually see that. And that was the moment that I knew my eyesight was not as good as I thought it was.

I was a little bit like, not to the same degree, but a little bit like this guy that Jesus healed. He can see, but his vision's blurry. Now, let's think about how Jesus healed the man, because Jesus, he seems to anticipate the fact that this healing is not complete, that the man's eyesight is not fully restored.

That's why he asks, do you see anything? It's not because he's second guessing himself, like, oh man, did I do a good enough job this time? It's on purpose. He knows the man's vision isn't restored.

[ 9 : 39 ] He's inviting the man to tell him, all right, tell us, what are you seeing? And apparently, this man used to be able to see. He knows what trees look like.

He knows what people are supposed to look like, because he says, I see people, but they look like trees walking. Well, that's very blurry vision. So Jesus completes the healing, and now the man has 20-20 vision.

His sight was restored. He saw everything clearly. So what's going on? Why does Jesus choose intentionally to heal the man in two stages like that?

Why does he only half heal him, and then ask him, then fully heal him? Well, let's think about this event like this.

It's a parable in real life. This is a parable in real life, and what I mean by that is this. Jesus, he tells a lot of parables, a lot of stories that illustrate spiritual truths.

[ 10 : 43 ] In this case, he doesn't just tell a story. He creates a story in real life that illustrates a spiritual truth, and especially when you read through the Gospel of Mark, you'll find that surrounding this, there's indications of people who have blurry vision, spiritually.

Jesus is showing how we often come to see spiritual things. He's showing us how we come to interpret, how we come to understand who Jesus is, who we are, and what Jesus has done for us.

Sometimes we see the truth, but it's blurry. It's unfocused. Sometimes we hear the truth, but we hear it all mumbly and indistinct.

We need hearing aids. We grow resistant. We grow stubborn. We develop hardened hearts, and it blurs our vision. It blocks our hearing.

And things come through blurry. Things come through mumbly. And this sort of scene plays out. That sort of reality plays out over the course of the four Gospels that make up the New Testament.

[ 12 : 00 ] In fact, it's one of the biggest themes of the four Gospels. One of the biggest challenges Jesus faces in his ministry is this phenomenon that we see illustrated here.

Jesus has chosen twelve disciples to follow him everywhere. He's chosen these twelve disciples. They're with him. He's training them to carry out his ministry to carry out his ministry, especially after he returns to heaven.

And all twelve disciples have got problems. Oh boy, do they have problems. They have problems with their spiritual vision. They see Jesus.

They see their own lives. They see the world. But they don't really see very clearly. Everything that Jesus does is just confusing. It's blurry. It's just baffling to them.

That's why they seem so thick-headed. No wonder Jesus, by the way, is concerned that word of this healing power will spread. Why he says, don't even go back into the village.

[ 13 : 01 ] He's frequently warning people to be careful about talking about him. No wonder Jesus is concerned that his countrymen will misunderstand him because they do so often. As we're going to see, Jesus recognizes that even his own disciples have hardened hearts.

Even his own disciples have hardened hearts. And here's the question we need answered this morning. How do genuine Christians have such hardened hearts? How do genuine Christians have such hardened hearts?

Because the experience of the twelve disciples as they follow Jesus around, that experience is in some ways shared by many of us.

Because sure, we have far more light given by the Holy Spirit, far more light on this side of the cross and resurrection. The cross where Jesus died, the resurrection where he was raised from the dead, how he ascended into heaven.

All of these things help put his life and ministry in context. So what was dimly lit for them is now in the daylight for us. But just because you're in the daylight doesn't mean your vision isn't still blurry.

[ 14 : 11 ] There are ways in which we too have blurry vision. There's ways in which you and I still have hardened hearts. In the Gospel of Mark, all of this plays out immediately before the story of Jesus healing the blind man.

There's something that happens right before that that just shows us what this looks like in practical terms. And Mark is using the story of the blind man to help us understand something troubling that has just taken place.

Something that really troubles Jesus about his disciples. And here's what's been happening. By the time that we have reached Mark chapter 8 verse 11, Jesus has just worked two of the greatest miracles of his ministry.

Probably the miracle that took place at the absolute height of Jesus' fame and the height of his popularity. The one that pushed a crowd almost to the point of crowning him as king and putting him in front of them to go take on the Romans.

The Roman oppressor. Is the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus feeds an enormous crowd of 5,000. It says 5,000 men let alone women and children.

[ 15 : 21 ] So it's 5,000 families basically of people. And he does it with five small loaves of bread and two fish. He multiplies the loaves and the fish. And there's even food left over.

Jesus then fed a smaller crowd of 4,000 people with seven loaves and a few fish. And both of those are recorded in Mark. So two spectacular signs that demonstrated that Jesus he is more than a mere man.

He is more than a mere prophet. He is the good shepherd. He is God's Messiah. He is God's anointed king who cares for his people. And then Jesus and his disciples right after feeding the 4,000 Jesus and his disciples are confronted by a group of religious leaders known as the Pharisees.

And we'll talk in a moment about who the Pharisees were what they were all about. But this group of religious leaders the Pharisees here's what happens in Mark chapter 8 beginning in verse 11.

And this is right before Jesus heals the blind man. The Pharisees came and began to argue with him seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.

[ 16 : 38 ] And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you no sign will be given to this generation.

And he left them. got into the boat again and went to the other side. Now they had forgotten to bring bread. And they only had one loaf with them in the boat.

And he cautioned them saying watch out beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.

And Jesus aware of this said to them why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?

Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? Do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?

[ 17 : 45 ] They said to him twelve. and the seven for the four thousand. How many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?

And they said to him seven. And he said to them do you not yet understand? Now all but one of Jesus' disciples was a genuine follower of his.

all but one of them really did believe in him. They really did believe that he was the Messiah. Peter confesses it only a few verses later. But Jesus challenges these genuine disciples are your hearts hardened?

Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? Do you not remember? Do you not yet understand? Now certainly you and I know we know people like this.

We know fellow people who seem to be genuine Christians in our churches but boy okay let's be honest boy do they seem clueless and hard-hearted about the way they're living.

[ 18 : 54 ] It seems everyone but themselves can see what they don't see about their lives about the way they're living about the choices they're making and here's the scary part what if it's you?

Ooh what if we're the ones who are blind to ourselves? What if we think that we understand but actually we don't? That person has been me before.

In some ways it still is me. It might be a good idea to ask some wise and trusted friends hey are there things about me that I am not seeing?

Do I have blind spots in the way that I think and behave? Because you and I certainly do. In this respect we're not that much different from Jesus' disciples.

Mark included this story in his gospel to give us pause to reflect on our own hearts and how they respond to Jesus. So what is happening here?

[ 20 : 00 ] how do genuine Christians have such hardened hearts? How do genuine Christians have such hardened hearts? Well let's consider what Jesus is correcting his disciples about.

When we go back to verse 11 we realize that Jesus has just been challenged by the Pharisees. They have challenged him to produce a sign from heaven.

Does that strike you as a little bit odd? Jesus has just fed two huge crowds of people with only a few little loaves of bread and a few little fish.

Oh no no no but we need a sign from heaven. The Pharisees request it is not a request made in good faith.

They are not really wanting a sign from heaven. The Pharisees are not out to understand. They are not out to learn.

[ 21 : 03 ] No amount of evidence will ever be enough for them. They just want to score points against Jesus. They just want to win an argument. And I guarantee you they walked away from this interaction, this exchange going, ha, see, he doesn't have a sign from heaven.

These guys have got hearts that are as hard as granite. They are utterly blind and deaf to the extremely obvious. And Jesus, you know how he responds to people who do not engage with him in good faith.

Jesus refuses to play their rotten game. The only winning move is not to play. And so he sighs in exasperation. He tells them he will not give them a sign. He gets in a boat and he leaves.

That's what love looks like when someone is not engaging with you in good faith. It walks away. It's not going to play that game. Jesus is not going to waste his time on fruitless arguments with people who don't want to know.

So now we find Jesus sailing away in the boat with his disciples. And so it makes sense now why he tells them, watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

[ 22 : 17 ] And you know, leaven is the yeast that you work into bread. And the thing is when you put yeast into bread dough and you knead it, the yeast gets everywhere and then that's what causes the dough to rise.

And Jesus is warning them that hey, the Pharisees, these religious authorities, Herod, the political authorities, they have a contaminating influence and they are going to get everywhere.

Watch out for them. They're going to get all and work their way into your hearts. They're going to contaminate. But his disciples hear Jesus talking about leaven and their minds go in a little bit of a different direction.

Verse 14, they had forgotten to bring bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And so they've got bread on the brain. You know, there's nothing like rowing across a lake to get your appetite worked up and to get your mind on food and then to realize you've only got a little bit of bread with you.

And so when Jesus mentioned leaven, they start thinking bread. Oh no, Jesus is chiding us for failing to bring enough provisions with us. Oh no, we don't have enough bread. Oh no, Jesus, he must be hungry too.

[ 23 : 32 ] He's getting mad at us. You know, they don't talk to Jesus directly. They're whispering and discussing with each other. It's because we didn't bring enough bread. That's why he's saying this. Now let's take a step back.

Let's, you know, let's get out of the boat therein and let's think about the situation for a second. Okay? Not only, I mean, it's really obvious when you're not in it and you're not hungry and you're not rowing across a lake.

It's really obvious. Jesus isn't talking about physical bread. But here's what makes us even more absurd. What two miracles has Jesus just done? What two miracles has he just done?

What's that? He's, he fed the 5,000 with what? Bread. And he fed the 4,000 with what? Bread.

Do you think Jesus has difficulty when there's not a lot of bread around? No. He gives his disciples a memory test right there in the boat.

[ 24 : 34 ] Hey, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up? In other words, everyone ate till they were stuffed. Was there any leftover guys? Do you remember? Was there anything leftover?

The last thing Jesus is worried about is running short of bread. Jesus can multiply bread whenever he wants. How could they possibly think that Jesus was the least bit worried about bread?

Well, Jesus calls them out on this. His disciples are kind of like horses that are wearing blinders. You know why sometimes people put blinders on a horse, right?

Because horses can get distracted. They see things off to the side that frighten them or that interest them and then they can go off after those things. We are blinders on a horse to keep them focused on one thing.

On one thing. And the problem is sometimes we have blinders too and we get focused on one thing. Jesus' disciples are only able to see in one direction, the bread direction.

[ 25 : 33 ] They're only able to see things from one perspective. And they're like people with blurry vision, people with poor hearing. Jesus challenges them in verse 17.

Don't you yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see? Having ears do you not hear? Do you not remember? Do you not yet understand?

What happened here? What just happened? The disciples, what happened is they got locked into a certain frame of thinking.

They got locked into a certain mindset and they're thinking about physical bread and their need to provide physical bread. And so they hear Jesus' words and they look at Jesus' words through that frame, through that lens.

And it was the wrong frame to use. The wrong set of glasses to put on. And so they totally misunderstood Jesus. Now, have you ever been on the receiving end of that?

[ 26 : 34 ] Where you talked with a friend or a family member or, you know, God forbid, your spouse. This never happens in marriages where you're talking about an issue and then your spouse thinks you're saying something totally different than what you meant.

Or your child thinks you're saying something totally different than what you meant. Oh, that never happens, does it? Well, it happened to Jesus, so I think we can certainly expect it to happen to us.

Sometimes, someone misinterprets what you say and then not only that, but they latch onto that misinterpretation. I've had that happen. We're, you know, managing apartment rentals for college students and, boy, you have to be really careful what you told them because if you just said one thing that was wrong and then you tried to correct yourself, it didn't matter.

You couldn't undo what you just said. It was now locked into their minds and they would remember it forever. Sometimes we latch onto an interpretation of what someone says and we are unable to break free from it.

And, boy, it drives the person talking nuts. And so Jesus asks his disciples, are your hearts hardened? Now, why does he ask this? He asks this because Jesus' own disciples are misinterpreting his words.

[ 27 : 48 ] They are caught in an error and this error is somewhat like the error of the Pharisees. They have eyes but they aren't really seeing.

They have ears but they aren't really hearing. Their minds have filtered out the memories of two spectacular miracles. They are completely out of focus, out of sight.

Their minds are concerned with physical bread and, boy, we need to get that and make sure we take care of that. Instead of understanding what Jesus is concerned with, they are not concerned with the things that Jesus is concerned with.

They are not on the same wavelength as Jesus right now. These disciples, they are being contaminated by the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. That's what's scary.

How did they get there? How do genuine Christians have such hardened hearts? Well, let's dig a little bit deeper.

[ 28 : 45 ] We've seen how the disciples seem to have this issue and if the disciples have hardened hearts, if they are in some ways imitating the Pharisees, well then, let's go back to the source. Let's learn a little bit about the hard hearts of the Pharisees.

Maybe then we can figure out how people get hardened hearts in general. What happens? We can look at the Pharisees and ask, how did Jesus' enemies get such hard hearts?

How did Jesus' enemies get such hard hearts? And it turns out that Jesus actually calls out the Pharisees for their hard hearts a few chapters earlier in the Gospel of Mark.

So let's flip back. Mark chapter three, verses one through six. So Mark chapter three, verses one to six. Listen carefully and notice that phrase, hardness of heart.

It shows up here. Consider what happens here when the Pharisees try to, they're not engaging with Jesus in good faith here either. But notice how they are trying to look for a reason to accuse Jesus.

[ 29 : 46 ] Again, he 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, come here. And he said to them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?

But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart. and said to the man, stretch out your hand.

He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him how to destroy him.

It's really unbelievable. The Pharisees, they are so stubborn, so locked into a certain way of thinking, so hard-hearted that they are conspiring to have Jesus killed.

[ 30 : 58 ] And why? Well, because he healed someone. Because he did it in a way that they didn't like, that they didn't approve of. Because he violated their own man-made tradition about what was okay to do on the Sabbath day.

How did Jesus' enemies get such hard hearts? To understand this, we have to understand, you know, what made the Pharisees tick? What is it that made the Pharisees tick?

And we have to understand why the Pharisees, why they were so scrupulous, so deeply concerned about what was and what wasn't and what was and what wasn't permitted on the Sabbath day. You see, the Pharisees were very concerned about their cultural situation because the Jewish people were under the governing authorities, under the Roman oppressor, and they were concerned that the Jewish people were being corrupted by Greek and Roman influence, and you know what?

They were right to be concerned. It really was happening. The Pharisees' desire was to keep the Jewish nation holy to God, separated from this corruption, and you know what?

They were right to want that. The Pharisees were passionate about strict obedience to God's law found in their own Old Testament, and this was a good passion to have.

[ 32 : 21 ] In all these respects, the Pharisees are actually very much like Jesus himself. Jesus, the political and religious group in the Jewish nation at the time that Jesus would have been closest to was the Pharisees.



But the Pharisees, oh, they went a step further. They were so concerned about these issues that what they did is they started developing a complex superstructure of tradition and customs that they would layer on top of God's law because they wanted to make extra sure that God's law was not being broken, that his people were extra holy, that they were just making absolutely, absolutely, absolutely sure that they were pure and that they were obeying and that they were doing the right thing.

And so the Pharisees actually wanted a good thing. They wanted God's people to stay pure and obedient to his law. If you read the Old Testament, you find books like Ezra where that zeal is important and commendable.

But the Pharisees, they had blinders on. They were so fixated on this, so locked into this one frame of thinking, this fear that people might contaminate themselves, that they might accidentally disobey in all these little ways.

So they're so fixated on this, so locked to that frame of thinking that they simply made themselves blind. They blinded themselves to what God's law is even about.

[ 33 : 42 ] They were so zealous to protect the purity of the Sabbath commandment, this commandment to rest on the seventh day that they forgot why God instituted the Sabbath in the first place.

Jesus calls them out on it. It might seem obvious to us how crazy that is. This whole situation, the synagogue to us, it's like, what in the world?

You just have to be there to understand, I guess. Right? It's easy when you're, you know, you're 2,000 years later and not in the same culture and not under the same pressures and not in the same situation. It's easy to look at that and to judge them.

To be like, oh, good grief. What a bunch of ridiculous people. I would never be that way. I'm not like the Pharisees. You know, it reminds me a lot of, it makes me think of, you know, all the cultural controversies, all the culture wars that are happening in our own time.

And boy, people 200 years from now, they're going to look back on this time and actually be baffled by how crazy we all are. If you've ever grown up in a church that is a single-minded obsession with purity and separation, and that's all they seem to care about, then you get, you totally get how the Pharisees could become so blind and deaf to what matters to God.

[ 35 : 06 ] You get how they could become so hardened in heart towards Jesus. So we've set out to answer this question, how do genuine Christians have such hardened hearts? And to find the answer, we've introduced another question.

How did Jesus' enemies get such hard hearts? And so now we can start reading backward through the Gospel of Mark. We can start reviewing chapter 2 of this Gospel, and we're going to see that this incident in the synagogue, it is actually sort of this final straw.

This is the one that now they're so mad at Jesus they're going to find a way to kill him. But there has been a growing resistance to Jesus from the Pharisees. What started out as astonishment and then irritation has settled into hardened opposition to Jesus.

And so we can watch exactly what it is about Jesus that hardened the hearts of his enemies. Because there are things about Jesus that people respond to and their hearts get hard. Today that's what we're going to focus on.

What is it about Jesus? What is it about Jesus that, boy, we don't like? What we learned starting in Mark chapter 2 is that a hardened heart is resistant.

[ 36 : 21 ] A hardened heart is resistant. And specifically, a hardened heart is resistant to who Jesus Christ really is. A hardened heart is resistant to who Jesus Christ really is.

A hardened heart will accept certain things about Jesus. It will allow Jesus to, he'll be a certain way. Stay in your lane, Jesus. You know, he can be a respected rabbi.

The Pharisees would have been fine with that. He could be a virtuous sage. He could maybe be a mighty miracle worker. The Pharisees would have been fine with that too.

Perhaps he could even be a challenging prophet like John the Baptist. But there are certain things that Jesus' enemies don't want Jesus to be.

And when Jesus acts out exactly who he is, when he stays true to who he really is, their hearts get hard. And they prove themselves blind, they prove themselves deaf, and never for a second do their stony hearts let them understand who he really is.

[ 37 : 31 ] So what is it about Jesus? What is it that a hardened heart is resistant to? Now there are many answers to this question. We're not going to cover all of them today.

We're just going to cover up five of the answers that show up in Mark chapter 2 and 3. We'll work through those five answers and then next Sunday we're going to come back.

The next Sunday we are going to learn how does a heart, how exactly, what's the progress of a heart that gets hardened towards these things? How does this take place bit by bit? And then we can learn how does it get undone?

How does a heart get softened? And that's for next week. And so I want to lay that out for you that there is real hope for a hardened heart. I mean, Jesus' disciples had hardened hearts, somewhat hardened.

They had blurry vision. And yet these are the same men who spread the gospel throughout the world and we've received it today because of them. God can do a work of softening a hardened heart.

[ 38 : 29 ] But first we have to understand a hardened heart. And so what about Jesus is a hardened heart resistant to? You'll want to follow along in your Bible. We're going to speed quickly through chapter 2 and then the beginning of chapter 3 as we move through these five answers.

So here's the first answer. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who forgives our sin. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who forgives our sin.

chapter 2 verses 1 through 12. Jesus heals a paralyzed man who is lowered through a roof. Now, the miraculous healing, that's not what sets off the local religious authorities, the scribes.

They would, you know, presumably be okay with that. What sets them off is Jesus' word of assurance in verse 5. Son, your sins are forgiven.

Son, your sins are forgiven. And the scribes who are listening, they are scandalized that Jesus would claim such authority. This is blasphemy.

[ 39 : 35 ] Who can forgive sins but God alone? They're not wrong. At least they're not wrong about that last part. Who can forgive sins but God alone?

What they're wrong about is, this isn't blasphemy. This is real. And you know you've got a hard heart when you don't see Jesus having that sort of authority.

You don't see Jesus, he's just, he isn't divine. He doesn't have that authority. Well, you know, he does not have the authority to pronounce forgiveness of sins like that. Worse, maybe you don't want Jesus to have that authority.

That's something BK has been preaching on from Jonah. Boy, once you reach the end of the book of Jonah, sorry to spoil the end of the series, but Jonah isn't happy about God forgiving the people of Nineveh.

Some people, there may be people whose sins you hope Jesus never forgives. You don't like the possibility of forgiveness. Or worse, maybe you know you have sinned, and you don't want forgiveness.

[ 40 : 46 ] You want to handle your sins your way. I'm going to make it up to God. I'm going to be a good person. I'm going to do as many works as possible, and maybe, you know, and the big balance beam of life.

The sin will be on one side, but my good works will be on the other, and maybe it'll tip over, and I'll be good enough, and God will accept me. You try to earn your forgiveness. And so a Jesus who comes in and says, you can't do that.

The only way is to be forgiven of your sins by me. Oh, you don't want that. I don't want a Jesus like that. Or worse, you don't really buy this sin thing at all.

You think of yourself as basically a good person. I'm not Hitler, so I'm pretty good. I've made a few mistakes here and there, but I'm doing better.

You don't need forgiveness at all. No matter which of those mindsets you have, you are resistant to a Jesus who forgives our sin, and you've got a hardened heart.

[ 41 : 54 ] Jesus believes that sin is real. He calls it sin right here. Jesus really does believe that we've responded to our good and gracious God with rebellion rather than gratitude.

The God who has not only created the world, but filled it with good things and cared for and provided for us and showed kindness upon kindness. And Jesus really does believe that when we disobey this gracious, kind God, we are rebelling against him.

Jesus really does believe that the wages of sin is death. He really does believe that hard hearts deserve God's wrath. Just as he is angered against the hard hearts of the Pharisees.

Jesus really would agree with the Apostle Paul when he writes in Romans chapter 2. Do you presume on the riches of his kindness, his forbearance, his patience? Not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.

But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. This is completely in line with the way Jesus responds to the Pharisees.

[ 43 : 03 ] He does good and gives life in front of them and they have hard hearts. And he is angry. This is why Jesus chose to die. Because we need rescue from our hard hearts.

We need rescue from our sin. This is why John the Baptist said about Jesus, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Because Jesus died as that sacrifice.

He took the punishment for sin that we deserved. And Jesus did that so that everyone who entrusts themselves to him, everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, will no longer have their sin accounted against them.

And Jesus rose again to new life so that everyone who believes in him will not perish. But will one day rise to life with him, never to sin again, to be set free.

It is Jesus who offers forgiveness of sin. But a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who forgives our sin. And so that's one answer. That's one thing about Jesus that a hardened heart is resistant to.

[ 44 : 07 ] A hardened heart, second of all, is resistant to a Jesus who honors us with his presence. This is one that maybe you're not used to hearing. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who honors us with his presence.

This is an extremely important, critical perspective, critical way of looking at Jesus that is all over God's word is so important.

And many people do not see this clearly. I, oh, so many Christians I know really, really, really don't seem to get this. Here's what I mean. Many Christians, and this is so true, especially in Western culture, individualistic Western culture, we're so well-versed in the truth that Jesus forgives our sin.

You'll hear that in a lot of churches that are faithful to the gospel. And that's so important. I mean, I just spent a lot of time on that. You have to look at Jesus that way. But even if we believe that, boy, how many people do I know who still walk around all day and deep down, maybe they won't admit it, but deep down they feel horrible and lousy about themselves.

We feel a sense that we're pathetic, we're failures, we're losers. Feel like we're imposters in our workplace and in our families and when we come to church.

[ 45 : 28 ] We feel weak or stupid or untalented. We're horrible little worms full of sin. If people found out who we really were, they'd be disgusted.

And that's all there is to say about us. And unfortunately, there are churches that that's all that he'll say about you. And no matter how many times that we hear, Jesus forgives your sin, Jesus forgives your sin, and it's so true and so liberating, life-giving, and yet we're told that that's supposed to set us free, but we still feel horrible, we still feel lousy.

And if that's you, if that's where you're struggling, it's because there is something more you need to hear about Jesus, something that does not get taught well in Western culture. I think in a lot of Eastern cultures, they do this a lot better.

You need to hear about a Jesus who honors us with his presence. You need to hear about a Jesus who honors us with his presence. Because in Mark 2, verses 13 through 17, we see Jesus, and he is inviting a tax collector to follow him as his disciple.

Now, we don't really like tax collectors in our culture. No one wants to get a call from the CRA. But, you know, it's just, it's an irritation, it's a frustration, maybe you'll go on social media and vent about it. But in the end, you know, if a dinner guest came over and they said they work for the CRA, we would still be friendly towards them and just not tell them about our tax situation.

[ 46 : 58 ] That's not what the tax collectors were like in Jesus' day, in that culture. Tax collectors were hired by the Roman government to get as much money out of people as they could.

And if you skimmed a little bit off the top for yourself, great. They would hire out the person who promised to get to squeeze the people for the most money. Tax collectors were seen as traitors.

They were collaborators with Rome. They were cheats. They were the mafia of the ancient world. It was shameful to be a tax collector.

It was horrifying. The only people who would hang out with tax collectors were drunkards, sinners, prostitutes. They were on the margins.

And Jesus is invited to a dinner party with tax collectors. These shameful, disgusting people. And Jesus goes.

[ 48 : 01 ] And he gladly joins them. And he sits down at a table with them. And the Pharisees, they are horrified. Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? They ask.

Why would Jesus associate with people like that? And Jesus replies, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

If you are an outcast, if you are defiled, if your sin and weakness is exposed for the world to see, for all these things, Jesus will never cast you out.

Jesus actually moves toward you. And he wants to be with you and to cover you with his honor and his presence. Jesus beckons you with the same words that he said to Levi.

I, follow me. Be with me. I will be with you. Jesus knocks on your door.

[ 49 : 09 ] And he comes in. And he sits with you for dinner. He clothes our nakedness. He washes us free from defilement.

He welcomes us back in and welcomes us back home. The shame he covers with honor. And it is a hardened heart that doesn't want to hear that.

It's a hardened heart that says to this wonderful, amazing Jesus, you know what, Jesus? I got this. I've got this shame thing covered. I'll handle it myself.

I found a way to make myself look good, to elevate myself, to feel good about myself. Okay? I don't need you. You go away. I got this. It's a hardened heart that not only says that about themselves, but then looks at other people and says, oh, man.

Ugh. Jesus, just keep clear of those people. Please, I don't want anything to do with them. Don't let them come into the church, please.

[ 50 : 16 ] Please stay out. Second, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who honors us with his presence. And third, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who shatters our conventions.

We've got a lot of conventions and customs. Every culture does. In Mark 2, verses 18 through 22, the townspeople, they're surprised. Jesus' disciples aren't fasting.

The Pharisees fast. The Old Testament did have a couple of prescribed fasts, but the Pharisees, of course, they added on a whole bunch more that good people were supposed to do.

And so the people in that culture were like, well, everybody's supposed to fast all the time for all these reasons. That's what good people do when they want to please God. And Jesus tells the people who are asking about this, he tells them, hey, it isn't appropriate to fast.

Why? Because I'm here. Fasting is not what you do when the bridegroom, you don't fast during a wedding festival when the bridegroom's there. Jesus says it's time to celebrate because I'm here.

[ 51 : 24 ] And so all the customs, all the conventions of his time, Jesus compares them to old garments, old wineskins. If you try to insert Jesus into your old customs and your old way of life, Jesus will not fit.

Jesus will tear them apart. Jesus will burst them apart. Boy, how often does this happen at churches that have been set in their ways for so long, the certain set of cultural conventions and customs that this is what, this is what a good church does.

This is what people do. Here's all the things that we traditionally do, all the ministries that we run. Here's how we ought to dress. Here's how we ought to eat and drink and sing and dance. Here's how you date people.

Here's how you raise your kids. Here's how you do all these things and all these things and all these things. And some of those come from scripture and ought to be, we ought to, you know, we ought to hold tight to those.

But boy, many of them are just man-made customs that we have layered on top of scripture. Just like the Pharisees' customs of fasting. And we think, that's what good people do. That's what good Christians do.

[ 52 : 24 ] But Jesus is not interested in adhering to our conventions. Jesus shatters them. We don't like it when other people don't follow our customs and rules. We try to instruct them in all the things that a good Canadian does.

All the conventions of church culture. But Jesus is not interested in perpetuating our carefully crafted way of life. Jesus brings the Pharisees back again and again to what does God's word actually say?

What's really important in the mind of God? A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who shatters our conventions. So fourth answer out of five. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who interprets God's expectations for us.

A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who interprets God's expectations for us. So this happens when the Pharisees, they challenge Jesus again in chapter two, verses 23 through 28.

His disciples, they're picking grain on the Sabbath. They're walking through a field, picking grain on the Sabbath for a quick snack. And the Pharisees call them out on that.

[ 53 : 33 ] They're working. You're working on the Sabbath. You're doing harvesting. And Jesus challenges them with, he takes them back to the Bible again.

He reminds them that his own ancestor, King David, did something very similar. And then he concludes, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Now sometimes, it's not just man-made conventions and customs are fixated on. You know, the Pharisees, they're rightly pointing out that work is forbidden on the Sabbath. They're rightly jealous for God's law.

But they don't interpret it correctly. And we do the same. We, and boy, like Jesus challenges this. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5 through 7 is really great for this.

We see the commandment, do not murder. We're like, okay, check. Haven't killed anybody today. I'm doing pretty good. We think it doesn't condemn us because we've never done, we never killed anyone.

[ 54 : 36 ] But Jesus interprets this commandment as condemning, not merely murder, but it goes all the way down into our hearts and condemns hatred and anger against one another.

This rage that wants the destruction of the other person, that wants our pound of flesh. Sometimes we don't go far enough with God's law and we need Jesus to interpret us, interpret it for us and show us the heart of the law.

And then other times we go too far. We condemn behaviors just in case they're wrong, just in case. We police one another's behaviors, not because it's forbidden in scripture, but we want them to be extra, extra safe.

Just in case you're doing something wrong, I'm going to tell you to stop. And that's what's happening here with the Pharisees. Jesus is okay with his disciples plucking grain the Sabbath.

But the Pharisees, they don't let Jesus interpret the law because they want to make sure everyone is a good little Jewish boy and behaves properly and safely according to their own standards of behavior. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who interprets God's expectations for us.

[ 55 : 48 ] And then fifth and finally, a hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who helps us flourish. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who helps us flourish.

And so we return to chapter 3 verses 1 through 6 that showdown in the synagogue. And here we have the culmination of all of these conflicts, all of these misinterpretations that the Pharisees have of Jesus.

And their hearts are getting harder and harder with each interaction. The confrontations are growing more intense. And then when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day, he challenges them.

Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? And Jesus is building in what he said before. Hey, the Sabbath was made for man.

It's made for our good. It's made so that human beings will flourish under God's care. Man was not made for the Sabbath. We're not made, the Sabbath isn't just the ultimate end.

[ 56 : 49 ] The Sabbath is a means to an end. God gave his law not to crush human beings. God gave his law so that they would flourish. When we walk faithfully, the unfolding of your words gives light.

It imparts understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments. He gave his law to us for our good because we were made to live for him.

We flourish when we live a life of faithfulness and worship, honoring him when we trust our heavenly father. God gave this law for our good.

some of us, we just want life to be a set of rules to keep all the other people well behaved. We're offended by the idea that Jesus wants us to flourish as human beings. He wants us to not only receive life, he wants us to give life.

Jesus wants us to become as much like him as any human being can possibly be. All the law is, is here's what Jesus looks like. And bit by bit, the Holy Spirit is making us to be like Jesus, those of us who are true Christians so that your character, your personality, all of who you are becomes more and more like Jesus with each passing day.

[ 58 : 12 ] And oh, that's a beautiful thing. Jesus wants us to show his compassion, speak with his honesty toward one another.

That's his heart for us. Sometimes it's not our heart for ourselves. ourselves. We have our own ideas about what's best for us. We have our own ideas about what's best for other people.

Sometimes we don't care about the effect our decisions have on one another. We just want everybody to just behave yourself. Just behave yourself. But that's not what Jesus is about.

Jesus wants us to flourish. A hardened heart is resistant to a Jesus who helps us flourish. And these are not the only ways a hardened heart is resistant to Jesus Christ.

There are more. But maybe that's a good starting point. And I give that to you just to ask the question, if you're being honest with yourself, are you used to thinking in all of those ways?

[ 59 : 15 ] There may be a reason why when you open the Bible, you look at there's certain parts of the Bible and they baffle you and you're like, what?

This doesn't make, I don't get it. I don't get it. I don't get it. You don't have eyes to see. I don't see how this is beautiful. I don't see how this is good. You don't have eyes to see. Your heart is hardened.

When we get locked into a certain frame of thinking, we've got our one way of thinking about things, it's easy to lose sight of all of who Jesus is, both as fully man and as fully God.

I want to assure you that if you sense, oh wow, maybe I do have that hardened heart, I want to say there is real hope because Jesus does not leave us with hardened heart.

He didn't leave his disciples with hardened hearts. He's at work. His spirit is at work. And we're going to keep working on that. We're going to see how God grows grows and matures us.

[ 60 : 17 ] We're going to see how God takes a person with a blurry vision and lays his hand on us. And now we see. We're going to see Jesus' newly healed eyes, hear him with newly healed ears.

And so I want to reassure you, if you are humble enough to sense that your heart has hardened against God, against Jesus, against your neighbor, I want to reassure you it is possible to have your heart softened.

And by the power of the spirit, you can have eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart that isn't hardened, but understands. And next week, we're going to look at how, not only how a hardened heart is nurtured, how it gets hard, how the progress happens.

Then we're going to learn how God undoes that. And how we respond to God in a way in which our hearts become soft and softer and softer.

And we look more and more like Jesus, who sees all things clearly and knows how to care for each person. Right now, we might not be seeing right, but your sight can be restored.

[ 61 : 25 ] And you can begin to see everything clearly. Are your hearts hardened? They can be made soft. Our Father, we need this.

Oh. I know that I've gone through much of my life without, with blinders on, seeing people in only one way, not from all the different perspectives Jesus sees them with.

Seeing your law in only one way. Seeing your son in only one way. And we miss out. We don't get to, we don't take your law and just say, wow, unfold it, open it up, hold it up like a diamond and examine it from all directions and see it sparkle in all its facets.

See the beauty of a Jesus Christ who is everything and more. who speaks in a way that addresses all the struggles and all the problems, all the difficulties, all the sin and the shame and the suffering in our lives.

Lord God, soften our hearts, we pray. Have mercy on us. We got ourselves into this. But you can get us out.

[ 62 : 48 ] And so Lord God, we need you. We confess our weakness. We cry out to you for help. And I pray that we may delve more and more looking at Jesus, learning how he thinks, learning how he sees, learning how he looks at himself, at you, at the world, at one another.

Lord, may we become like him in every possible way that a human being can be. And I pray that for each and every one of us here today. And if there's someone here who hears this and they're thinking, I think I may have a hard heart.

Lord, may they look for help. We are not meant to do this on our own. We need one another to see into the blind spots, to remind each other because we forget. We forget just like the disciples did.

We forget all that you've done. We forget all of who you are. But we need to be reminded again and again and again until we learn. Soften our hearts. Amen.