

Jason Upchurch - Mark 7:20-23 - The Good News Addresses the Heart

We've spent the last few weeks talking about religious hypocrisy. And at the heart of religious hypocrisy is man trying to create a way to be right with God. It's man made religion.

The Pharisees said the real spiritual problem plaguing people is ceremonial defilement and the solution is washing and cleansing. Jesus says that's absolute nonsense. The real issue is not what's outside but what's inside. The true spiritual problem we have originates in our heart.

And by heart we mean the center of our emotions and affections. It's what we desire on the inside. And the uniform witness of the Bible is that since the Fall our hearts have been corrupted by sin.

Gen. 6:6 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and the every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Things had become so bad on the earth - wickedness was so rampant - that the Lord drowned the entire earth in a global flood except 8 people. You've got to admit it's pretty crazy that things are so bad God has to eliminate the entire planet because it's irretrievable. But that wickedness was an expression of the heart.

And even though the flood eradicated the absolute rampant chaos that the earth had devolved into, the Lord says this after the flood: the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. **Gen. 8:21**

Psalms 14:1-3: The fool says in his heart there is no God. They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt there is none who does good, not even one.

That's pretty pervasive. All people are completely corrupt. That's really at center of the need for the gospel, isn't it? The gospel isn't "do your best and Jesus will do the rest." The gospel isn't "well, I'm not perfect but I'm trying." "I'm bad, but not as bad as Hitler."

No, in order for someone to be saved by the gospel they actually have to come to a point of realizing that every aspect of their being - from the heart outward - is completely corrupted and abominable before God.

That all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags as **Isaiah 64:6** says. An unbeliever's best deeds, on their best day, with the purest love they can muster are like filthy rags - like used menstrual cloths. Bloody tampons in the sight of God. Gross.

That is the teaching of the Bible from cover to cover. We often call this total depravity. Total depravity doesn't mean that we are as wicked as we could possibly be, but that sin has affected every aspect of our being and spoiled all of it.

People reject this teaching because they really don't like the idea that not only are we sinners, but that we are accountable for our sin.

Psychology rejects this. Psychology says we are a product of our mental faculties. Products of evolution and chemistry and our problem isn't sin, our problem - most often - is some sort of chemical imbalance.

They don't actually test for chemicals, let alone know what the proper balance of chemicals is. But modern psychology pushes back against categories of right and wrong and sin in and righteousness instead seeks relief in ways that have nothing to do with the truth.

Anthropology says we're a product of our experiences. It's what goes on around us that shapes us. Our parents and childhood and the things we did. How much money we had or who we were exposed to shapes who we are.

Sociology the study of society says we're just a product of our culture. If we had been born in Africa or Brazil who we are would be much different and what we consider right and wrong would be altered.

This goes against the universal nature of the law being written on our what? Our heart. Stealing is stealing no matter where you go. Adultery is adultery no matter where you go. Lying, stealing, idolatry.

And of course liberalism in general just denies that there is even a good or evil. Most of us have seen interviews and opinion pieces that talk about how rape is not objectively wrong, murder is not objectively wrong, pedophilia is not objectively wrong. When you remove God from the equation there is no wrong. There are only preferences.

This is the world we live in.

In contrast to all of that Jesus says simply: we are evil from our hearts. Evil is objectively wrong, will be judged by God, and there is only one cure for an evil heart.

The issue, Jesus says, isn't that we're defiled by food or Gentiles. The real issue is much worse. We are defiled by our hearts and what comes out of our hearts.

And he lists off 13 specific sins that come from the heart. Now, this is not an exhaustive list of all sins. It's missing some obvious ones: homosexuality, idolatry, lying, laziness, gluttony, cowardice, drunkenness, swindling, so on.

This is just a snap shot to help us understand that every sin originates in the heart. And while we might be tempted from the outside, ultimately we succumb to temptation because our heart wants sin.

So I want to go through this list and expound on what our Lord says.

1. Evil thoughts. Jesus says that out of our hearts come evil thoughts. This is little phrase is important for several reasons.

First, we see that the heart and the mind are intricately connected. Some people want to make a big distinction between the heart and the mind as though the heart and the mind are separate entities. This is very common in psychology and Christians who are influenced by secular psychology.

But Jesus says they are virtually the same. Where do our thoughts originate? They originate in the heart. The heart is the soil from which all these various evil thoughts flow.

The second thing we see here is that wicked thoughts are sinful in the sight of God just like wicked actions are. God is concerned even with what we are thinking about. That's a big deal.

I don't know about you but the biggest problem I have isn't with my mouth or my actions - though I need to be sanctified there. The biggest issue I have is with my thoughts. The evil thoughts I have are what concern me the most in my own life because it's there that the true condition of the heart is made manifest.

If you aren't working to actively control what you set your mind on, to set your mind on things above where Christ is, to put to death sinfulness in your mind there is no hope in the rest of your life.

As an elected official I'm am subject to public accountability laws - FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) where people can ask for every email I've ever sent, every electronic message. And that happened recently and I have to turn it over. And there's a feeling of exposure and vulnerability. I haven't done anything wrong, but how is this going to be used or used against me?

Imagine having to turn over every email you've ever sent so that all the world can see. Or every text message. Imagine there was a live recording of you acting your worst to people. Imagine Elon Musk somehow got Neuralink in your brain and there was a detailed transcript of everything that's ever gone through your mind. You guys, that's what God has on us on the day of Judgment.

That's pretty sobering, isn't it? Now, let me ask you. Do you really think God cares what kind of meat you eat? What you do with washing your hands? No. That's not going to defile you. It's your heart. It's my heart.

2. Sexual Immorality. Jesus is going to make a distinction between sexual immorality and adultery. Sometimes those terms overlap but when they're used together they're a little more technical. Sexual immorality is the Greek word *porneia* where we get our word *porn*. And it refers to all sexual sin outside of the marriage covenant. Many translations call it fornication.

And sexual immorality begins in the heart. This last week I was reading through **Proverbs** and in chapter 5-7 are the warnings against both sexual immorality and adultery.

And to warn against sexual immorality Solomon says several times in there "treasure up my words in your heart. Treasure them, love them, desire them like gold and silver. Solomon is getting to the heart of the issue: If you want to live then value his commands and teaching like gold and silver. If you want to die, value the prostitute, the wayward woman like gold and silver.

Your heart will treasure something. It will desire something. The question is what will it desire more?

The desire to take what is not ours for sexual pleasure begins in the heart. Are there outside temptations? Of course there are. And I would be remiss to not remind both men and women - especially in summer time but all year - we are called to modesty. We are not called to short shorts or tight pants or low cut tops or no shirts or playing in water in basically our underwear.

It amazes me that swimwear for little girls is basically lingerie, while little boys wear shorts and a swim shirt. There's a reason for that: the culture is setting their expectations for girls.

Yes, if someone lusts in their heart that's on them, but we have to ask: are we causing other people to stumble? Are we dressing helpfully for our brothers and sisters in Christ and for the world?

Are we helping their hearts or stumbling their hearts? We guard our own hearts, but we also guard our bodies.

3. Theft. This is pretty easy: it's stealing. Taking something that's not yours. It's Adam in the Garden taking the fruit. It's Judas helping himself to the money bag. It's Ahab and Jezebel killing Naboth and taking his vineyard.

It's using company property for personal gain without permission. It's taking candy when your parents told you not to. It's taking your siblings toys. It's wrongly hiding money from the government. It's recording you worked more hours than you actually did, or not paying people for the work they did.

Sometimes it's because we have a greedy heart and just want what we want. Sometimes it's because we have a lazy heart and want a shortcut to get what we want. Sometimes stealing is revenge to get back at others when they've wronged us.

Whatever it is, it originates in the heart. It's a desire to take and take what is not ours to have.

4. Murder. Is the wrongful ending of a life. It is one of the most heinous sins a person can commit. There is no undoing murder. There is no bringing back the life. Once life is gone, it's gone and eternity for that person begins.

The root of murder is in violence and undoing what God has done in giving life. And it happens for a variety of reasons.

Cain murdered Abel. What had Abel done? He offered a sacrifice that pleased God. He was murdered for doing the right thing in worship. Jealousy was wrapped in murder.

Sometimes it's revenge, sometimes it's hatred. But whatever specifically motivates it, it begins in the heart.

That's why Jesus says in **Matt. 5:21ff** that murder arises in our hearts. Even hatred and vile words come from the same heart of murder. I think it's safe to say that we've all been angry at people at some point in our lives, we've all said foolish insults. Maybe we've even desired to kill someone. That arises out of a heart of sin.

5. Adultery. Moicheia in the Greek refers to specifically violating the covenant of marriage through sexual sin. This is the husband who runs off with another woman. Or the wife who has a one night stand. Though it's hard to rank the exceeding sinfulness of sin, I think that adultery is even more heinous than sexual immorality because the person who sins not only transgresses, but also violates their oath before God, their spouse and witnesses.

We also know that from **Eph. 5:22ff** that since marriage is a covenant picture of Christ and the Church, then adultery is the most heinous pollution of picture.

The same desires might motivate adultery as motivate sexual immorality with the common theme becoming one with someone who is not your spouse.

And husbands and wives both have to guard their hearts from this sin. Many times the heart behind this sin is discontentment in one's own marriage, difficulty with one's own spouse, lack of intimacy, a whole variety of reasons. But it all starts in the heart.

6. Coveting. What is coveting? It's really a form of greed. It's desiring more and more and more. BDAG: It's an insatiable desire for more things, more money, more gadgets, more toys, more games, more, more more.

It's rich fool in **Luke 12:13-21** who gets a windfall crop and wants to kick back and live his best life now forever. Tear down those old shabby barns and build bigger barns!

It's a continual lack of contentment for what God has given us right now. We always want the next thing, the next thing, more and more.

7. Wickedness - is a catchall for all kinds of mischief and evil.

In the Lord's Prayer we are commanded to pray: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil - or the evil one" meaning Satan.

In the Bible, God is good. "Who is good but God alone?" Jesus asks. And if God is good then Satan is the precise opposite of God, he is evil. Actually, anyone who has not been born again is called a child of the devil.

1 John 3:10: By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

That wickedness that pops into our minds comes from our hearts. For those who are not believers it's because they are children of the devil, for those who are believers it's because we have the remnant of the old man we still have to put to death.

8. Deceit - this is a form of lying. It's trickery, underhandedness. Dictionary says it's taking advantage of someone else through underhanded methods.

It's the proverbial used car salesman. It's saying something that's technically true, but you know is not actually true. It's presenting something as one way when it's really not that way. It's false advertising, bait and switch. Whatever you want to call it.

It's taking advantage of someone. It comes out of the heart.

9. Sensuality this is often used in reference to sexual pleasure in the Bible, probably because sexual pleasure is the height of good senses.

Really, the aspect here is a loss of self control as it relates to our conduct.

Eph. 4:19: says people have become callous and given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

That's the idea: people who lose all self control and just dive into sinfulness because it fuels their passions.

I remember talking to a drunkard years ago who was trying to quit alcohol. He said with beer "One is too much but 10 is never enough." And basically the idea is he can't have even one beer because if he does he can't stop. That's sensuality expressed in drunkenness.

It's one look at porn and 5 hours later. It's when we want a small bowl of ice cream and 4,000 calories later. It's the prescription pain med addict.

Interestingly, the sin of sensuality is usually grouped with these other types of sins: drunkenness and sexual immorality and passions and orgies.

Rom. 13:13: Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, in in quarreling and jealousy.

1 Pet. 4:3: For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

2 Cor 12:21: Paul grieves over those who have sinned and not repented "of the impurity, sexual immorality and sensuality they have practiced."

They're all linked together in out of control, insatiable lust for sin. And it starts in the heart.

10. Envy - sinfully desiring what other people have. Not being content with what the Lord has or has not given us. Where our lives are always a competition with other people and what they have. It's constant comparisons.

11. Slander. Speaking evil of other people. The Greek word here is blasphemia; which is where we get what word? Blasphemy. When we think of blaspheming usually we think of speaking ill of God, bringing his name into disrepute. Using it as a curse word. It's dragging God's name through the mud.

Well, we can blaspheme people as well. If our goal is to tarnish their reputation, to drag them down in the sight of other people.

And the idea here is doing this in malice. Not to legitimately warn someone of someone else. Or to loving caution people.

If there were a false teacher I'd warn you. If there was a con artist, we'd warn each other. There are appropriate times to warn people and appropriate ways to warn each other.

Slander is going far beyond that. It's vindictiveness and vengeance against someone. It's seeking to ruin their reputation in any way possible.

This happens all the time in politics, and we see it particularly with Supreme Court nominees. People drag out every possible thing they've ever done wrong to discredit them and destroy them in the court of public opinion.

Maybe we can't hurt them financially or physically or any other way, but we can destroy peoples' opinions of that person. That originates in the heart.

12. Pride. Pride is not knowing our place in the grand scheme of things. It's thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. Or thinking of other people as less than what we ought.

Many times pride is called the root of all sins because in some sense all sin is rejecting God. Rejecting his commandments or rejecting his prohibitions and deciding that we're in charge. Pride is saying we're in control of our lives.

I mean, this whole month of June has been given over to "Pride" - people are celebrating what God has condemned. They have rejected the natural, God-given order. That pride - and all pride - begins in the heart.

13. Foolishness - is an interesting word. It basically means someone who has bad judgment. And it is often related to childishness. Children have poor decision making abilities that's why we don't allow them to make major decisions until they're 18 years old. Before that we realize that there is a level of immaturity.

Part of the job of parents is to bring their children out of foolishness and into maturity, into sober minded thinking. This means we think through the consequences of our actions

How does this relate to the heart? Well, have you ever met adults who are just foolish or childish? They act like children. I'm not trying to pick on kids but I think even you know that adults shouldn't act your age. They should act their age.

Well, that's how it is in the spiritual world as well. Sometimes we come across people who just do really foolish things. Maybe we can't put our finger on a specific sin but they do things where they should know better.

I knew a guy who like Star Trek and wanted to collect Star Trek stuff. He was like 60 years old. And he would hit Wal Mart and TOys R Us and all these toy stores for their Star Trek paraphernalia. He even knew the delivery days and times so he could be the first in line. And he had thousands of figurines and games and so on. And he made okay money, it wasn't killing him financially. But he justified buying all this stuff because it was a great investment. "I could sell this whole collection for 4 or 5 times what I paid.

Well the came when he wanted to sell it because it was just taking up too much space. And instead of 4-5 times the investment, he was looking at pennies on the dollar. It was just foolish.

Many times it's what people say that's foolish, how they interact with people. The career choices they make. The relationship choices they make.

Maybe we can't point to a specific sin, but it's all foolishness. It all begins in the heart.

That's quite a list of sin, isn't it? It all comes from the heart.

Imagine going in for a checkup at your doctor's office and the doctor says, "Bad news. Your heart is about to fail - arteries are completely clogged. It's really a miracle you're alive and talking. Here's what I need you to do to get better: wash your hands before every meal. If you go out into the marketplace, be sure you bathe yourself before coming in and for goodness sakes wash all your utensils before eating because something unclean might have touched them."

That'd be pretty ridiculous, wouldn't it? That's what the Pharisees were trying to do: they were trying to fix a spiritual heart problem with man made religion.

What the Bible says is that we need a new heart. We need a transformation. The God who made us knows our heart, knows the wickedness in it and will judge us for that sinful wickedness.

And what we need, and what we have in the gospel - the good news - is that through faith in Jesus God gives us a new heart. He takes out the wicked heart of stone and puts in a heart of flesh. He forgives our sin and he gives us new desires for righteousness. That's conversion. That's salvation.

That's what Jesus offers that no man-made religion can ever offer: a change of heart that truly cleanses us from our sin. A change of heart that removes the wrath of God, and plunges us into the grace of God in Jesus Christ. **Pray**