



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Prepared by Rev. James R. Wilson, D. Min.
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church • July 18, 2010

Sermon Title: A Matter of the Heart

Sermon Text: Mark 7:14-23

Related Texts: Jeremiah 17:9; Galatians 5:22-25; John 7:37-38

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

Take a few moments to “check-in” with one another. What two or three words would describe how you are doing at present. How have you evidenced God’s presence this past week?

II. Introduction

Mark has included two instances in which Jesus condemns the traditions of the religious leaders of Judaism that have prevented them from 1) hearing and obeying God’s word (Mark 7:1-13) and 2) recognizing what being “unclean” really means (Mark 7:14-23). It’s the latter that we look at in the study before us and in doing so discover that it is a matter of the heart.

III. Study the Text –Read the Gospel of Mark 7:14-23

- 1) This passage begins with Jesus calling the crowds to him and then teaching. Did you notice this is one time Jesus called the crowd to come and listen rather than the crowds eagerly pursuing and surrounding Jesus? In verses 1-13 Jesus criticizes the religious leaders who have allowed human tradition to prevent people from hearing and obeying God’s word. With this in mind, what is significant about Jesus calling the crowd to himself and saying “listen to me... and understand this?”
- 2) Notice verse 15. By the way, verse 16 does not appear in most of the best manuscripts and has been omitted in most Bibles. The word “defile” (in the NIV) is from a Greek word that means to “make common, impure, or profane.” In the context it would refer to being ceremonially unclean. With this in mind, how would you explain what Jesus means in verse 15?
- 3) If this is a little unclear, don’t feel bad. Even Jesus’ disciples needed further explanation and they turn to him – verses 17-19 – for further explanation. How does verse 19 help to explain what Jesus is driving at?

Note: The word “heart” is a significant part of this passage. “Heart” is in reference to the human inner being, the inner self, one’s inner being that we think of as including the mind, personality, volition (will) and capacity for spiritual connection with God. One expression that was familiar to Jesus was the heart as the “wellspring of life,” the inner source of one’s character and behavior.

- 4) So, how would you summarize the “heart of the matter” regarding what makes a person unclean and defiled? How do verses 20-23 further describe the human condition?

- 5) Why is it important for people to understand that the human heart is, as the prophet Jeremiah states, “deceitful above all things and beyond cure...” (Jeremiah 17:9)?
- 6) Look at John 7:37-38. What is the cure for our polluted hearts that vomit out all kinds of vile things? What does Jesus offer to human beings whose hearts (“wellsprings of life”) are polluted by our pre-disposition to sin?

A Comment: Reformed theology has always recognized human depravity that results from our inner selves being – by nature and pre-disposition – at enmity with God. This has been identified as “original sin” inherited from our ancestors who first rebelled against God’s rule, turned from God’s presence, and willfully sought to live apart from God. Apart from God’s grace we would be forever plagued – and condemned – by such depravity and inability to rectify the situation.

- 7) Jesus is conveying an important spiritual truth – connection with God is not interrupted by external things such as unclean hands or foods but by internal things such as sin at the core of one’s being. Look at Galatians 5:22-25. How does turning to Jesus for living water (as per John 7) and allowing the Spirit of God to fill you result in a transformed inner person? What flows from within a person who is filled with the Spirit?
- 8) Look at Galatians 5:24-25. How is the problem of a polluted heart solved? What is suggested about the heart (or inner life) of a believer by the admonition to “keep in step with the Spirit” in verse 25?

IV. Pray It – Reflection and Responding in Prayer

Take some time to reflect on your “inner self.” What do you recognize there? Are there things like those Jesus mentions that seem to continue to flow from your inner person?

Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit by whom you will bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Pray for opportunities to speak with friends, family, and neighbors about the life-transforming effect of being in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The world wants to think that there are good people and bad people, good countries and bad countries. The world wants to think that innocence and guilt can be established in the context of law. This is not how Christianity sees things. Christians see every person as guilty before God, subconsciously guilty at all times. External actions, as Jesus said, are not as important as internal motives. And internal motives are the most compromised of all data.

*Paul F. M. Zahl
in Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life*