

Meet Jesus: As he diagnoses the inner self

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, we're continuing our series in Mark's Gospel, and we're in Mark chapter 7, and we're reading from verse 14. It's on page 843.

Mark chapter 7 from verse 14. And Jesus called the people to him and again said to them, Hear me, all of you, and understand, there is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.

And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him?

Since it enters not his heart, but his stomach, and is expelled. Thus he declared all foods clean.

And he said, What comes out of a person is what defiles him.

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[1 : 17] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. So, the passage before us today, it explains why every single human being without exception needs Jesus.

Friends, this passage is about, as you might have gathered, the human heart. It's about the human heart, which, as you know, is a Bible metaphor for the inner self, you know.

The inner self, the motivation of us, and the driving force within. Our first point is the state of the human heart.

Last week, we were looking at the Pharisaic tradition, weren't we? Do you remember chapter 7, verse 8? Just look there at chapter 7, verse 8. Jesus said to the Pharisees, You leave the commandments of God and hold to the tradition of men.

And this is the age-old problem with humankind. It's not just the Pharisees. Jesus could have said those words to us.

[2 : 32] Adam was a prototype, wasn't he? We let go of the commandments of God, which means that we abandon the outside, the objective truth, and we can run our lives by our own thoughts, the subjective.

Do you see? It's called sin, isn't it, in the life of a Christian? Or else, if you don't yet know the Lord yet, it's the whole course of your life. We edit out the objective truth, and we run our lives by the subjective truth.

Well, what's wrong with that? You might be saying. Well, actually, nothing at all is wrong with that, you see. Nothing at all is wrong with it, unless, from the beginning, the Bible declares that we're owned by God.

Do you see? Now, that might be a shock to many, being owned by God. You say, well, I'm a free agent. But the Bible says that we're owned by God.

Are you with me? And so we're therefore accountable to Him. We like to think we're our own property, don't we? You know, both the Old Testament and the New Testament are clear on this.

[3 : 46] You might remember the Old Testament starts with Genesis and God creating things out of nothing. The Latin is *ex nihilo*. He creates out of nothing.

You know, the creation just didn't appear out of its own volition one morning. The whole cosmos out of nothing. It contradicts all scientific theory. And the Bible says that God was the creative force, the intelligence behind it all.

He's the creator. And so if he's the creator, he's therefore the owner of the cosmos and the owner of you and me, do you see? And John's gospel is just the same in the New Testament.

John starts with the CV of Jesus Christ, his previous job. Listen to this. Chapter 1, verse 3. Through Him all things were made.

Without Him nothing was made that has been made. And God the creator is the motto that punctuates the New Testament.

[4 : 46] Acts chapter 17. Romans chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1. Hebrews chapter 1. I could go on and on. It's a biblical refrain.

It sort of rings like a bell outside. God is your creator, the Bible says. And you know, when you and I, when we consider our environment, when we look around at the world, you know, don't we sense something of the creative hand?

You know, doesn't the Bible seem to ring true? Cosmologists, they sort of look through the lens of radio telescopes. Microbiologists, they look at screens from electron microscopes.

And what's the verdict? What's the conclusion that best fits the data? Well, intelligent design is the conclusion that best fits the data.

The empirical evidence is that there's an outside intelligence that put the whole show together. An external creative power. Now, just think about the world at the moment.

[6 : 00] Just think how we live in this world at the moment. Paul says, he says, God lays on visual aid par excellence, which is the creation, the cosmos, life itself.

But he says, we blind ourselves to it. We suppress the truth. We keep it away from us. And this, friends, is an affront to God. We ignore the vertical reality.

And we run our lives from horizontal lines of communication. Are you with me? Generally, that's how society operates. And it's like these Pharisees here. Chapter 7, verse 8.

You leave the commands of God, that's the vertical component, and hold to the traditions of men, the horizontal component. And friends, there's consequences, isn't there, to our actions.

Think about society. Think about the society in which we live today. It's immoral freefall, isn't it? Do you see? Without right and wrong. Do you see?

[7 : 04] Are you with me on that? We're sort of, we're like a rusty, sinking ship. You know, you try and patch up a hole somewhere, but the water bursts through somewhere else.

Here's last night's evening times. Murders up 50%, but cops could be axed. 60 people were murdered between last April and December.

That's up 19%, almost 50% on the same period the previous year. And if you've been looking at the news, you know that euthanasia has been in the headlines of late.

And there's nothing wrong with that, friends, if we're just a bunch of chemicals. If that's all we are as human beings, it's the tradition of men. Trouble is, friends, think about this.

People can sense, people can sense that there's something isn't quite right when the world begins to try and live by its presuppositions.

[8 : 08] You know, to be consistent with them. I think you know what I might be speaking about here. So the Jews were a distinctive people, weren't they? They were supposed to live by God's law, but they weren't.

Chapter 7, verse 8, you leave the commandments of God and hold to the traditions of men. And that's very much the world in which we ourselves find ourselves in. Before the days of political correctness, there used to be a phrase, the lunatics have taken over the asylum.

And this is the world that we interact with each day. So to recap, us humans, we don't naturally like authority.

We don't like the concept of being owned. And so the objective truth is laid aside and the subjective truth rules the roost on planet Earth.

And friends, all of us are susceptible to this, Christians or not. We're all susceptible to it. And the question is, listen to this, if God was to offer us a new heart, a new self, a new life, will we turn to him?

[9 : 24] And that's our second point, the renewal of the human heart. Genesis chapter 12, and you might remember that through Abraham, God's message is going out to the world.

God sent his people into the world as ambassadors, ambassadors of right thinking and truth. And so God's people, they go out into the world, don't they?

Bearing his message. And the consequences of that were that they were living a distinctive life amidst this mixed up world. Are you with me?

Listen to this, Leviticus. Listen to this, chapter 20, verse 26. You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

So the Jews were a distinctive people, weren't they? Governed by God's law. You know, the objective authority that we've been thinking about in our first point.

[10:27] They were holy because they obeyed God. They exhibited obedience. Not that obeying the laws made them holy. Rather, it was a sign that they were God's saved people and they were living accordingly.

They were sort of symbolizing in the way that they lived a relationship with their creator. Adam rejected his creator, didn't he? But God, through Israel, has called a people back to himself, back to the creator.

Without wanting to be irreverent, thinking about the Israelites, it was like they were wearing their national football shirt. You know, you could see who they belonged to by the way that they conducted themselves.

You know, it symbolized, the way they lived symbolized their belonging. And everyone knew about their Hebrew way of life. Are you with me? They were distinctive in this world.

So, it was nothing less, the Jewish people were nothing less than the, think about it, the living entry point into God's kingdom. That's what they were. A people living like the creator, imaging him in this mixed up world.

[11:45] Think about it, they were living under God's authority, authority, and God was living with them. It's like Eden, revisited. But as we noticed last time, as we're getting back to the passage here, the law of Moses had gradually been supplemented so that they had a whole list of evasive tactics.

Soon, listen, outside authority was distorted by tradition. They went horizontal again. It was as if they were sort of going back into our first point.

Chapter 7, verse 8, you leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. So, God's people, what are they doing? They're slipping back, aren't they?

It's regression. They're going back to the world's ways. And it's you and me, friends, at times, you know, in our lives, in particular temptations, we can slip back into the world's ways.

We can lose our distinctiveness. Do you see? Do you see the message here to the Christian church? And last week, we looked on, didn't we? As Jesus noticed their hypocrisy, you honour me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me.

[13:01] Said Jesus, you might remember last week, I said, what would that be like, having a relationship with somebody like that? They honour you with their lips, but their hearts are far from you. Listen, their religion had become central rather than their God.

Do you see the situation that they're in? And do you remember how our passage that we've read today, it was triggered from earlier on in chapter 7.

Chapter 7, verse 2 actually, where the disciples are eating without having washed their hands and the disciples zoom in and they spot it. Chapter 7, verse 2, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled.

That is, unwashed. You see how our passage picks up from that. This was Gentile territory, it was around the lake of Galilee, you see, and it was like the disciples had missed out on quarantine.

They're supposed to keep away from the Gentiles, but the Pharisaic hand washing, it had become an arrogant display of their rejection of those who aren't Jewish, do you see?

[14:13] It was like a surgeon scrubbing up, it was elaborate, everybody could see what was going on, it caught your eyes, but not washing to remove bacteria, no, they were washing to symbolise the rejection of the Gentiles, moral supremacy, do you see?

And when Jesus' disciples, when they didn't follow suit, the Pharisees, their eyes sort of pop out like organ stops. If they had cameras back then, you'd see all the flashbulbs going off.

And so, chapter 7, verses 6 to 13, Jesus explains to these Pharisees that they themselves are no better. They're no better than the Gentiles.

Chapter 7, verse 9, he said to them, you have a fine way of rejecting the commandments of God in order to establish your tradition. So friends, let's just pause for a moment here.

Let's just pause and think about what's happening. I was a bit slow last week to pick this up here, what's going on. Think about it. The Jew-Gentile divide is slowly dissolving before our eyes, isn't it?

[15:25] Do you see what's happening? Just listen to Don Carson what he says here. He says, the old does not support the new. It points to it, prepares for it, and then gives way to it.

And here, Israel are no longer a shop window into God's kingdom. These Pharisees aren't anyway. And so listen, Jesus now turns his attention, and we're getting close to us here.

He turns his attention to the universal problem of humankind. He puts his finger on the source of all that's wrong in the world. All that makes up the terrible headlines that we read in our papers, and it's our hearts, friends, isn't it?

It's our hearts. Our deep presuppositions. We reject God's ways. Do you see what he's done? He's suddenly levelled the playing field.

He's saying to all of humanity, think it through. It's your heart. I don't know about you, but this rings true with me, with my heart.

[16:38] Verse 20, he said, what comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, etc.

And so it's blanket coverage, isn't it? Do you see? It's like we're all caught red-handed. We're all guilty, Jew or Gentile. We've got the same problem.

It comes out of your heart, says Jesus. And so King David, do you remember King David? King David, his adultery began, didn't it, with his eyes and his thoughts.

It was, you know, do you remember, do you remember when King David was confronted by Nathan, the prophet? Do you remember King David? He does go to his heart. He knows what the problem is.

He wants more than forgiveness, doesn't he, King David? It's as if he's saying, there's no future with this heart of mine. You know, I've got no future in this state.

[17:40] Recreate me. And he prays, doesn't he? Psalm 51. Just listen to this. This is the prayer of King David. Listen to this.

For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. I wonder if you've ever prayed a prayer like this, friend. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, your delight, you delight in truth in the inward being and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all of my iniquities.

And then David, verse 10, he goes back to the creator God. Create in me. Do you see? He's picking up. He knows his God. He knows he can create. He knows that he could have a new heart through God.

[18:46] Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. So David prays, doesn't he? He prays that prayer and the sky goes dark at Calvary.

Are you with me? And the answer came. It came, didn't it, through the Son of God as he was executed on a cross. And the majestic power of God's mercy is that our creator, think about this, takes to himself a people who have rejected him.

He turns us around, takes the consequences of our rejection. And in these verses, Jesus has been reaching through the barriers, hasn't he, of ethnicity.

He's been reaching through time and he's been wooing us to himself to enable us to see what he has done. It's the antithesis, isn't it, this, of hand washing the gospel.

Think about it. And this is why God took upon himself human flesh. He came to give us his heart.

[19:59] Isn't that amazing? Isn't that a wonderful message? It's the gospel, isn't it? Sinclair Ferguson. Sinclair Ferguson says this.

Well, actually, he quotes from a guy called Kuyper as well. Sinclair says, what a redeemed soul needs is human holiness. Angelic holiness will not serve fallen man.

If we are to be holy, that holiness must be wrought in our humanity. This is what Christ accomplished. And now the Spirit, out of his union with the incarnate Son, brings those resources to bear upon the lives of believers.

Because of his ministry in Christ, he can now indwell us to reproduce the same holiness in our lives. And so, adds Kuyper, the Holy Spirit finds this holy disposition in its required form, not in the Father, nor in himself, but in Emmanuel, who has the Son of God and the Son of Man possesses holiness in that particular form.

And my question, as we finish, here's my question, and it's a question for Christians. Do people see in us a hand-washing type religion, or do they see in us our Saviour, Jesus Christ?

[21 : 29] Christ. So here it is, this Wednesday. This is what it is to be a Christian. It's not made-up religion that pleases God, but the heart of his Son.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the incarnation. We thank you that you stepped into this world around 2,000 years ago in the body of your Son, Jesus Christ, and you took him to Calvary to die for us and take all the sin, all the rebellion, all those things that we've been thinking about.

He took them to himself and he encountered your wrath. And as your Son said the words, those solitary words as he hung on the cross, Eloi, Eloi, Lima Sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

In those words, he was reconciling ourselves to you through his blood. And we thank you for that. We thank you, Father, that our lives in consequence would radiate what it is to be yours, that they would radiate the heart of your Son, which is ours through him.

We thank you, Father, that even though we struggle with sin, that we have the purity of your Son, Jesus Christ, that purity that theologians call imputed righteousness.

[23 : 01] We thank you, Father, for all that it is to be a Christian. And so we lift this prayer to you. We ask that we live accordingly. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this day and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So thank you for coming. Amen.