

Where Bad Stuff Comes From

Mark 7:14-23

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Haddon Robinson, who arguably has written the best book on preaching called, *Biblical Preaching*, once told a group of young preachers, “*When you stand up to preach, people are bored...and they expect you to make it worse.*”

I don't ever want to bore people when I'm preaching but I'm sure I've delivered more than a few snoozer sermons. That reminds me of some bulletin bloopers I've collected over the years. Thankfully these didn't appear in our bulletins but as far as I know they are real announcements.

- The Rev. Merriwether spoke briefly, much to the delight of the congregation.
- Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Nelson's sermons.
- During the absence of our pastor, we enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing a good sermon when J.F. Stubbs supplied our pulpit.

This morning we get the privilege of hearing a great sermon delivered by Jesus himself. When I first studied Mark 7:14-23 I struggled to find the key to unlock it. I did my exegetical work and tried outlining it to no avail. I read about 25 commentaries and listened to several sermons on this section of Scripture and I still couldn't figure it out. I then decided to wake up real early on Thursday morning so I could meditate and marinate on the verses. I kept poring over the passage until finally it clicked that this is a brief sermon preached by Jesus.

I wrote down 8 elements that Jesus included in His sermon. If you get bored, it will be your own fault and you'll have to take it up with Him.

1. Jesus uses an attention-getting introduction. As we learned last week, Jesus condemned and corrected the religious leaders for focusing on outward hypocrisy instead of inward holiness. *The religious leaders were adamant about having clean hands; Jesus was all about having a clean heart.*

Look at verse 14: “***And He called the people to Him again and said to them, ‘Hear me, all of you, and understand.’***” The crowds may have stepped back a bit

when Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders so now Jesus bids them to come closer because He has something to say to them. The word for **“hear”** means to *“listen or hearken”* and **“understand”** has the idea of comprehending. Both words are in the imperative tense, meaning they are commands. Actually, they’re the only commands in the passage. In short, they were to listen *and* learn because what He is about to say is extremely important. I’m reminded of Psalm 49:1: **“Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world.”**

What Jesus is about to say is going to blow their gaskets and crush their categories. This is a monumental moment and He doesn’t want them to miss it. Bible Commentator William Barclay suggests that this is *“the most revolutionary passage in the entire New Testament.”*

2. He states a provocative proposition. The sermon proposition is the summary of the sermon in one sentence. It’s the theme, the big idea, or the main point. The preaching proposition last weekend from Mark 7 was this: *The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.*

Jesus is about to say something shocking to people who have been taught their whole lives about the importance of keeping the outside looking good. Many today believe something similar. His preaching proposition is so radical that He’s going to repeat it several times. Check out verse 15: **“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.”** The word **“defile”** is used twice in this verse and is used three more times in the passage. It refers to corruption, pollution and being *“unclean.”*

This statement actually answers the question from the religious leaders back in verse 5. Nothing external can contaminate because the contamination is already on the inside. The word **“nothing”** means that there is not even one thing. The word **“can”** refers to *“being able”* and is in the passive voice, meaning that nothing done to you or outside of you can defile you. Notice that the word **“things”** is plural, meaning that there are multiple gross things that come gushing out.

This is radical because the religious thinking at that time was that if you could just stay far enough away from all defiling agents, you’d be good before God. They had concluded that sin came about from external stuff like things you eat, touch and wear. Jesus blows this up by showing that we’re spiritually defiled because we are sinfully depraved.

My fundamental problem is not my environment or education or my upbringing. My problem is sin and it resides in my heart. *The heart of my problem is the problem of my heart.* That's why outward things like education, politics, self-help programs, social reform and even religious practices are powerless to change the human heart.

3. He makes a personal appeal. As Jesus often does, He now drives this radical teaching into the hearts of the people. In verse 17, we see that Jesus moves from the crowd to the core: ***“And when He had entered the house and left the people, His disciples asked him about the parable.”*** The disciples want to discuss this some more because they have never heard anything like this before.

Don't miss that Jesus loved to gather in a **“house”** to drive His message into the lives of His followers. That's one of the reasons we're so committed to *Growth Groups* here at EBC. We believe life change happens best in a group setting. We have growth groups that meet Sunday mornings and others that meet during the week. It's where your questions can get addressed and where accountability and encouragement take place. If you're not in a group, I urge you to plug in this fall.

In Matthew 15:15, we see that it's Peter who once again speaks up for the group. The Savior responds to this question by asking them a question in verse 18. In short, He wants to know why the disciples are so dull: ***“Then are you also without understanding?”*** The religious leaders don't get it and the crowd is confused but shouldn't His core group comprehend what He's saying? Notice the use of the word **“you”** as He personalizes his preaching.

Biblical preaching must always be personal. As a preacher I aim to first apply God's Word to my life before I can pass it along to others. I try to keep Ezra 7:10 in mind: ***“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”*** I must first *learn* it and then *live* it before I can *lead* others to apply it.

One of my favorite responses after a sermon is to have someone come up and say, *“God used that sermon to speak to me”* or, *“I felt like you were in my home this week and that you preached that just for me.”* I love how God customizes and personalizes His message for each one of us. I wonder what He has for you...and for me today?

4. He restates the proposition. After personalizing the preaching, Jesus goes back to the main point of his sermon and restates it from a slightly different angle

in the last part of verse 18: ***“Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him.”*** Because this is such a radical idea, Jesus is pounding the proposition into their minds.

5. He gives an unforgettable analogy. In order to help them grasp this concept not just intellectually but also at a gut level, Jesus next uses an analogy that they would never forget in verse 19: ***“Since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?”*** The word for ***“heart”*** represents the inner nature of who we are, not our physical heart. Certainly some foods are not the best for heart health and some foods can mess with you like when I ate a gyros sandwich and fries for lunch the same day I ran the Bix at 6 a couple years ago. I’ll spare you the details. Some people have allergies or other health conditions that don’t allow them to eat certain types of food.

But Jesus isn’t talking about this. In this brief anatomy lesson, we’re reminded that when food enters the mouth it goes into the stomach and then comes out the other end. Some of you just woke up! The word for ***“expelled”*** is a polite and proper translation. More literally it means, *“to go down into the latrine.”*

After reporting what Jesus said here, Mark gives us an editorial comment that would have unsettled those from a Jewish background who were all up into what foods were considered “clean” and which were “unclean.” We see this within the parenthesis at the end of verse 19: ***“(Thus He declared all foods clean.)”*** To a people that were all about following detailed dietary laws, this was extremely radical.

Jesus wasn’t wiping out the laws from the Old Testament but rather He was fulfilling them as stated clearly in Matthew 5:17: ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*** Because He fulfilled them, we no longer need to follow them.

This radical repurposing of the dietary laws took a long time for people to accept because they were so used to avoiding anything “unclean.” Peter himself really wrestled with this, so much so that God gave him a vision of a bed sheet coming down from heaven filled with animals who were “unclean” in it. Peter was hungry and so God told him to ***“kill and eat”*** in Acts 10:13. Peter pushes back by saying he has never eaten anything unclean. A voice from heaven then says, ***“What God has made clean, do not call common.”*** This happened three times, which shows how reluctant Peter was.

Incidentally, there are some groups like Seventh Day Adventists that believe the Old Testament dietary dictums must still be followed. This is addressed in 1 Timothy 4:3-4 where we're told that in the later days some will: ***“require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”***

These Old Testament dietary laws accomplished their function and have now been fulfilled in Christ. Thus, there is no need to avoid pork chops or lobster or gyros (except when you're running in a race).

6. Jesus repeats the proposition. This is now the third time the Master Teacher repeated the main point of the passage. Look at verse 20: ***“And He said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him.’”*** He's pivoting from the analogy to show that food that goes into a body is not what makes the person unclean but what is expelled from the body as part of the digestive system is extremely unclean and even repulsive. Food is not dirty but what is expelled is dirty.

Now that He has their total attention because some of them are getting grossed out, Jesus now lists some specific examples in verses 21-22 to show that everything starts in our hearts: ***“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts...”*** Evil is not just “out there” somewhere, its “in here.” The cesspool of sin is in the human heart and evil thoughts literally “gush out” of our insides.

In the original the phrase, ***“evil thoughts”*** precedes the verb so it's the main idea. Everything else flows from this. It's the root and what follows is the fruit. Proverbs 23:7: ***“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”***

So, here's a question. Do our problems originate outside of us, or within us? To frame it theologically, are humans basically good or basically evil? Let's do a little survey. How many of you think people are generally good? How many of you would say that people are inherently evil?

I started keeping track of different news headlines from just this week and then I stopped because it was way too depressing – an 18-year-old from Germany murdered 9 and especially targeted children, a stabbing in Japan killed 19, there was an attack in Somalia and a Catholic priest had his throat slit by ISIS during a mass in France and another policeman was murdered.

Where does all this come from? The comic strip character Pogo once said, “*We have met the enemy and he is us.*” G.K. Chesterton was once asked to answer this question in a newspaper article: “*What’s wrong with the world?*” Here’s the answer he submitted: “*Dear Sirs, I am.*” Bible commentator J.C. Ryle put it like this: “*We have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven.*”

If you think that humans are basically good, ponder these two verses.

- Genesis 6:5: “*The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*”
- James 4:1: “*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*”

I’ve been thinking about this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson all week: “*Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.*”

What begins in our minds comes out in our attitudes and actions. Decadent desires are often fleshed out in dark deeds.

7. He lists specific examples. Jesus then spells out a dozen sins in verses 22-23 that have their beginnings on the inside and make their way to the outside. This list is extensive, but not exhaustive. Interestingly, the first six are in the plural tense. I’ll list each one and give a brief explanation.

- **Sexual immorality.** This is the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get pornography and refers to sexual sins in general, including premarital sex and homosexuality.
- **Theft.** This is the word *klepto* from which we get stealing.
- **Murder.** This literally means, *to slaughter* and refers to the taking of innocent life, which includes abortion. Jesus equates anger with murder in Matthew 5:22.
- **Adultery.** Refers to sex outside of marriage. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:28 that we commit adultery if we look at someone lustfully.
- **Coveting.** This literally means, “*to desire numerically more*” and is the root of many other sins. It’s often caused by greed and self-centeredness and refers to an insatiable craving for that which belongs to someone else.
- **Wickedness.** This is similar to malice and refers to deliberate meanness.

- **Deceit.** This word was used of trapping an animal through deception.
- **Sensuality.** This involves having no moral restraint and includes sexual abuse of any kind.
- **Envy.** This literally means to gaze with an evil eye and refers to jealousy.
- **Slander.** Any kind of defaming speech.
- **Pride.** The boastful exalting of oneself or literally, “*to show oneself above.*” This would include the sin of racism.
- **Foolishness.** Those who have become morally and spiritual desensitized.

8. Jesus ends with a convicting conclusion. After exposing their hearts, no doubt the disciples are feeling pretty down. Jesus doesn’t move too quickly to bring relief because He wants to give them a convicting conclusion in verse 23: ***“All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”*** Our problems are not the result of surrounding influences but of internal evil that is already in our hearts. Jeremiah 17:9: ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”***

Every one is capable of every sin on the list the Lord just laid out. There is no heart where sin does not lurk. Romans 3:10-12, 23: ***“None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”***

What do we do with all this? Isn’t this a bummer way to end a sermon? It depends on how you look at it. If you’re into just trying to clean yourself up, you’ll be pretty discouraged. But if you have no doubt about the depravity in your heart, you’ll be ready for a new heart. Listen. The gospel will only be good news to you to the extent you are convinced about the bad news of the depravity of your heart. The good news is only good news in the context of really bad news.

I close today with two challenges. You need a new heart and you need some new habits.

- **You need a new heart.** Trying to keep external rules won’t work. Doing good works is not good enough. You and I need brand new hearts because we stand guilty and condemned before a holy God. Ezekiel 36:25-27: ***“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove***

the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

When confronted with his sinfulness and the horrors of his unholy heart, David prayed this in Psalm 51:9-10: ***“Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”***

Fellow sinner, your heart needs the help of heaven. Cry out to Jesus right now and ask Him for a new heart. Tell him that you want to be born again.

- **You need some new habits.** Once you have a new heart, you need to cultivate some new habits. Specifically, you and I must put good things in our hearts if we want to change. 1 Peter 2:2: ***“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”*** In John 17:17 Jesus prays this for us: ***“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”***

Listen. In order for things to change, you must put good things in your heart. Specifically, it’s the Word of God that changes us, from the inside out. I remember after I had been saved for a couple weeks I got really down about how much I was swearing and cussing. I tried willpower but that didn’t work. Finally, one of my friends reframed it for me and asked how long I had been using bad language. I told him that it was years. He told me it would take time. The other thing he told me is that once I cultivated new heart habits, that I would eventually stop swearing. He was right.

In Matthew 23:25-26 Jesus reminds us that change works from the inside out: ***“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.”***

Most of us need some help growing, don’t we? We need resources to equip us and tools that will help clean us up.

As you wrestle with your limited financial resources, wouldn’t it be helpful have Dave Ramsey right in your living room to give you God’s game plan for money?

After hearing about the persecuted church, wouldn't it be amazing to be able to watch the "I am N" videos from Voice of the Martyrs on your phone with a friend?

When struggling with doubt and wondering if there's any solid evidence for the Christian faith, wouldn't it be incredible to pull up Ravi Zacharias on your tablet?

When your kids are clamoring to watch TV, wouldn't it be nice to have a full video library of solid content like Veggie Tales, Adventures in Odyssey and Chuck Swindoll's series for children called, "Paws and Tales?"

If you're married and going through a rough spot, wouldn't it be beneficial to watch material by Francis Chan, Dennis Rainey, Gary Smalley and Chip Ingram?

If your Growth Group wants to dig deeper into the text of Scripture, wouldn't it be valuable to instantly access, anytime and anywhere, Bible studies from Tony Evans, Matt Chandler, Max Lucado, J.D. Grear, and Kay Arthur?

When discipling a younger person, wouldn't it be encouraging to watch videos with him or her by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, Louie Giglio and Andy Stanley?

Edgewood has some very exciting news – we have a FREE gift for you!

The leadership of EBC is committed to doing whatever it takes to equip you to grow. Our vision of helping people to *Gather, Grow, Give* and *Go* are not just words up on banners. The most important way to grow is by reading, studying and applying the Bible...and sometimes we need some assistance and greater understanding to help us grow and to develop some new habits.

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Check out this brief video that will explain more details.

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We're thrilled to offer this free online streaming resource to everyone affiliated with EBC! It's exciting to leverage technology for the glory of God and for our growth as Christ-followers so we can establish some holy habits that will equip and unleash us to live on mission.

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The early disciples went everywhere preaching the good news and this tool will help us GO with the gospel to our friends, family members and neighbors. You could even stream a video for a study group at your workplace during lunch.

And did I mention that this gigantic video library is totally free? This is no gimmick. It's our gift to you in order to help you grow. You don't need to be an EBC member. If you're a first-time guest, you can also get it free of charge. We're sending information to all of our missionaries as well.

Let me also say that this is not a replacement for *gathering* with God's people in our weekend services but is rather a resource for *growing* and *going* with the gospel throughout the week!
Here's how you can access it.

- You should receive an email Sunday morning with a link to click that will take you to a landing page where you can register for free.
- If you don't receive an email, it means we don't have it, or we don't have your new one, or it's in your spam filter.
- We have some "Quick Start" cards in the lobby that walk you through the process.
- You can also go to edgewoodbaptist.net and click on the Right Now Media link in the rotating banner, which will take you to an easy-to-use landing page
- We'll also post a link on the Edgewood Facebook page.

Jesus preached quite a sermon, didn't He? I sure hope you weren't bored by it. The real challenge now is what are we going to do with what we now know?

When you're feeling like a failure because of your sinful heart and your sinful habits, make sure to ask for a new heart and begin practicing new habits.

I've been thinking about a song this week that goes along with what we've learned together.

Close your eyes while I read these words.

*What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Membership Saturday Night – Sonya Patterson