

# A Clean Heart

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I want to begin this morning by asking us a question. A question that I'd like us to be honest as we seek to answer it in our heart. And the question very simply is, how is your heart?

What I mean by that is, spiritually speaking, how is your relationship with God? You might be thinking to yourself, well I don't know, Andrew, how my relationship with God is.

Or you might think, yeah, I'm really content. I know and love God and I'm enjoying Him and enjoying being in His presence this morning. Today we're going to have a spiritual checkup, as it were, to test and see if our Christianity has really transformed our hearts.

Or is it some superficial skin-deep religion? And I trust today that we will discover from the words of Jesus in this passage, the very serious condition of our hearts.

They'll discover the treatment and the remedy offered only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And this morning we're continuing our studies in Mark's Gospel and we've now arrived in Mark chapter 7.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] Mark chapter 7 is a critical and decisive passage in Mark's Gospel because it defines, it gives us two very important points. One, it highlights a conflict between Christ and the Pharisees that will ultimately lead to the death of Jesus.

The second thing it does is it defines for us our need for the cross. Because this passage shows us the condition of our heart that Jesus came to die for, to shed His blood for, so that we could be forgiven and know what it is to have a clean heart.

Today we're going to look at this passage in two sections, verses 1 to 13, under the heading, hypocritical hearts. And in this section we're going to see the reality of skin-deep religion.

And then verses 14 to 23 we're going to look at under the heading of the unclean heart. And we'll see the diagnosis that Jesus makes of all man's hearts. And we'll finish by considering the great remedy that is in offer in the Gospel.

Now one thing that makes for good TV or a good film, and it's sad to say it, but it's conflict. You just have to think about today what will be on the television, the Adam, the Raderbe, the Hibbs and her.

[ 2 : 3 7 ] I'm sure there'll be many people tuned in. Or a good film, it'll be a conflict between two of the main characters or two groups of people. Well in this passage before us today we have a conflict.

A conflict between some heavyweight legalistic theologians in one corner, and Jesus and his motley crew of disciples in another corner.

And what makes this conflict so significant is this is a conflict that will nail Jesus. They will get evidence to nail him and pin him down so that they can plot to kill him.

Mark informs us in verse 1 that some of the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law have come up from Jerusalem. They've travelled some 90 miles from Jerusalem to Galilee on an investigatory mission.

They're here to investigate this one who has had large crowds falling him. They're here to see what the big fuss is about. As we've been going through Mark's Gospel we've already encountered them and how they're so suspicious about Jesus with their apparent niggling and constant fault finding attitude.

[ 3 : 53 ] Every time Jesus said or did anything that they didn't like they would either declare it blasphemous or unlawful. Do you remember in Mark chapter 2 and worse consider them the story of the paralytic man?

And he's lowered down by his friends from the roof and then he's lying there and Jesus says to him, Son, your sins are forgiven. Mark informs us that the Pharisees and the disciples were thinking in their heart, who can first give sin but God alone?

And so they declared him a blasphemer. And then on other occasions they challenged Jesus because of the people he chose to associate with.

Namely the tax collectors and the sinners. On another occasion they pointed the finger at him because him and his disciples didn't fast like all the others. In short these Pharisees were scoffing at Jesus because they did not like this rogue radical rabbi who was stealing all their spotlight and was actually exposing the hypocrisy in their hearts.

And so Mark says in verse 1 to set the scene, the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law, gathered around Jesus. Now this picture in my mind of these men standing there with clipboards ready to take down a note of everything he says he does, the people he talks to.

[ 5 : 19 ] They would stand there with eyes glued to him, looking for that one bit of evidence that they can get to nail him. And they get it because in verse 2 Mark says, they saw some of his disciples eating food with their hands unwashed, unclean, that is unwashed.

I'm sure of all of us remember how our parents taught us when we were growing up to wash our hands before we eat. These Pharisees aren't concerned about our hygiene like our parents are.

Their big bone of contention was that these disciples were not following the tradition of the elders. The ceremonial ritual of washing your hands of these Pharisees had now applied to every ordinary Jew when the Bible actually said it was only for the priests and the Old Testament.

See these Pharisees they only cared about external religion, what it looked on the outside. That's why Mark adds in the extra information in verses 3 and 4, the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.

When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. Just imagine it for a moment, a good Jew goes out to the marketplace to do a bit of shopping.

[ 6 : 45 ] Man, he's walking through the busy bustling marketplace, he brushes his shoulder against an unclean Gentile. This Jew has been indoctrinated by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law to believe that he is now unclean.

And so the Jew would get home from his day shopping and the first thing he would do is he would wash his hands. Believing that if he touched any of his food and then put it in his mouth with unclean hands, he would contaminate his heart.

And so here we have Jesus' disciples caught in the act, caught in the act of eating their food with unclean hands.

And the Pharisees take their opportunity to pounce upon Jesus. Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders?

Instead of eating their food with unclean hands. You can pick up how smug these men were, can't you? Religious leaders often are, and they often feel goody-good when they challenge people and accuse people.

[ 7 : 59 ] I'm sure you've met people like this yourselves, the self-righteous sort, the whole-earth-and-thou sort. They look down upon you because of things you do or do not do.

But at the same time, let's be honest. All of us have seeds of Phariseeism in our own hearts, don't we? I know that I have. I've looked down upon people because they haven't met my standards.

They're not as committed or involved as I think they should be. How foolish and how judgmental we can be as Christians.

I wonder, brothers and sisters, are there times in our lives when we are more considerate about another person's heart than we are our own?

Are there times in our lives when we are considerate about another person's heart than we are about the state of our own heart? Surely this indicates our desperate need for a clean heart.

[ 9 : 00 ] And so verses 1-5 really highlight the problem of skin-deep Christianity. It is only concerned with the outward appearance.

It is only so that you can be seen by men. The Bible says, God, man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart.

These Pharisees and these religious leaders had missed a point. And so now in verses 6-8, Jesus responds to their question. And he does so by exposing their hypocrisy.

And he says to them, Isaiah was right. Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. As it is written, these people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain. Their teachings are but rules taught by men. Here Jesus confronts these Pharisees in a totally unexpected way.

[ 10 : 06 ] Because with a shattering blow he gets to the heart of the problem. Namely, the problem of the heart. He says to them, your hearts are far from me.

In other words, what Jesus challenges is he challenges their sham worship. In verses 6-8 we are seeing the vain and empty worship of a hypocritical heart.

And friends, we have the same challenge here today. Where are our hearts?

Where are our hearts this morning? Are we only interested in the form of Godliness but denying its reality and power? Are we just paying lip service to the words on the screen while internally our hearts are somewhere else?

Let's pause for a moment and do some heart examination. We were singing earlier, my Lord, supreme in my heart. Jesus, supreme in my heart. The question is, is Jesus really supreme in our lives?

[ 11 : 20 ] We were saying earlier, my heart is filled with thankfulness. Is your heart, is my heart really filled with thankfulness?

You see, I think sometimes we can fall into a trap where we are supreme in our own lives. Sometimes I think we can live and think like Pharisees. We start to believe that what we do impresses God.

We might start thinking that because we came to church today that God is impressed with us. When in reality our worship in church was nothing but shame, empty, vain, hypocritical worship.

Our minds were thinking about something else and someone else as we sung songs to him in praise. During the word hypocrite in the original language literally means to be an actor.

The man who is a hypocrite has a mask on his face. Friends, honestly, are we wearing a mask?

[ 12 : 25 ] Heart examination is not easy. I found myself preparing this message, I really had to ask myself, is my heart in this?

Do you know the great hope of the Gospel? Even though God hates hypocrisy, is that we can go to him and we can be honest to him and we can admit our sin.

Because he promises in his word that he is faithful and just to forgive us of all unrighteousness. I wonder when we go from here this morning, will the people we come into contact today, one day through this Saturday, will they know that we are a people who spend time in the presence of the living God, worshipping him?

Will we carry the fragrance of Christ into our lives after spending time in his presence? Will there be any evident mark in our lives, the people around us, that we have a heart relationship with God?

You can just imagine how startled these religious leaders were when they heard this, you hypocrites. You can just imagine how their blood would have been boiling.

[ 13 : 40 ] Jesus has just exposed their hypocrisy and covering their superficial outward appearance and covering their vain empty worship. And he continues in verses 9 to 13, he uncovers their hypocritical service.

He says in verses 9 to 13, I can imagine taking a deep breath when he said this, you have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions.

For Moses said, honour your father and your mother. And he also said, anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death. But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban.

That is devoted to God. Then you no longer let him do anything for his father and mother. Now let me just explain what this means. In the first century Israel, if you had the financial resources, if you had money, you could give it to God.

You could say to the priests, the Pharisees, the religious leaders, you could say, I want to give some of my money to God. I want to give it to his work, the extension of his kingdom.

[ 14 : 59 ] And they would freely do that. The money sometimes wouldn't be literally given, it would be a vow that they made. One of the complexities in the first century Israel was that there was no welfare government.

And so young people would have to look after their parents once they retired as it were. And so young people, there might come a day when their parents say, look son, I'm in financial difficulties.

I need some money. And the young man should be able to approach the religious leaders and say, look, I need to take some of this money that I had devoted to God and give it to my parents.

But these Pharisees, they twisted it and said, no, you cannot do that. You cannot do that. This is money devoted to God. And so Jesus exposes their hypocrisy by quoting to them the fifth commandment.

Verses that they were very familiar with, honour your father and mother. Because in order to honour your father and mother, you need to care for them. You need to look after them.

[ 16 : 05 ] The only really sad thing of the Pharisees here was that they believed that they were actually serving God and doing this. By adding this invented law, they thought that they were giving God their best when they were actually preventing people from keeping the Ten Commandments.

They had filled themselves into believing that they were keeping the law of God when in actual fact they were undermining it. We think, well, how is this relevant for us today?

Because there's a danger that we can also fall into. That we think that we should be busy serving God in the church, busy doing this and that area, busy in that area.

And we can think we're doing God's will when in actual fact we're running away from our God-given responsibilities. I've got a friend who's very, very busy in the ministry.

I see two children. And often I look at them and I ask myself, they're young, but you're never there with them. He's out in the church. He's out ministering. He's out giving it his all.

[ 17 : 13 ] But at home there's his wife looking after two children. See, we can often fall into the danger of thinking we're serving God when in actual fact we're not doing what he's called us to do.

Our God-given responsibilities. And this is a good day to remind ourselves of this. It's his mother's day. It's a day where we can think, do we actually honour our mothers? Do we take care of them? Do we love them? Do we give them the attention and the appreciation they deserve?

These hypocritical leaders had filled people with their outward behaviour, had filled people with their vain empty worship and were filling themselves with their false superficial service.

Let's not just move from this point. We've got to really ask ourselves, is our Christianity hypocritical? Is it only skin deep?

Well Jesus now goes on to teach the people the reasons why hypocritical hearts appear. And that's verses 14 and 23.

[ 18 : 25 ] And we're going to look at this just very briefly under the heading of an unclean heart. Verse 14, Jesus calls the crowd to him and he says, Listen to me everyone and understand this.

Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.

Essentially what Jesus is teaching the people in this section is that all human beings have a heart problem. The great physician makes a diagnosis and he says, do you know the big problem? It is your heart.

Contrary to what the teachers of the law and the Pharisees believe, defilement doesn't come from the outside. Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him.

It's what is in a man that comes out of him that makes him unclean. Any of us can be tempted to think that our greatest danger is something external to us.

[ 19 : 26 ] The reason we sin is because we live in a day and age where there's so much things around us that causes us to sin. For those who struggle with lust, there's billboards, there's TV programs, there's internet.

For those who struggle with materialism, there's far too many shops and they're big windows and they're offering all these things and I just cannot resist. We live in a blame culture and we love to blame other things.

Sometimes a parent will say the reason they're son/daughter is in trouble at school was because of the company they were keeping, because of the circumstance. Jesus says no. That's not the problem.

That's part of the problem. The big problem is what is in you. The big problem is your own heart. It is only the evil within our hearts that links us with the evil that is outside us.

Think of David the Noctistheme. David was described as a man after God's own heart. And there's that day when he's on his temple, his palace roof, and as he walks out he sees Bathsheba bathing.

[ 20 : 40 ] And it was that the reason why he fell into adultery. It was because the seeds of lust were in his own heart.

It was because the seeds of lust were in his own heart. And Jesus says that in verses 21 to 23. He said, What comes out of a man makes him unclean? For from within or from within, out of men's hearts come evil thoughts.

And he gives us list. Sexual, immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean. Here Jesus gives the disciples and everybody around him a catalog of their own sin.

In other words, what Jesus is saying to them is, look, this is what your heart is capable of doing. This is the seeds of sin that lie within your heart. Jeremiah and the Old Testament, he put it like this, the heart is deceitful.

[ 21 : 42 ] Above all, beyond cure. Who can understand it? You know, I think this is one of the unpopular parts of the Bible.

One of the difficult parts of the Bible, one of the least palatable parts of the Bible. This is the bad news. But with a great physician, with any doctor you go see you, you might diagnose you and give you bad news.

But hopefully it will also give you the good news. And Jesus, we know in later on in Mark's Gospel that we not only read about the good news, we see it.

Because Jesus Christ, the great physician, he diagnoses our problem. And then he purchases the medicine for our problem.

The shed blood of Jesus at the cross. Our sins cannot be forgiven. Our hearts cannot be made clean unless we are covered in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

[ 22 : 48 ] That is unless we put our faith and trust and hope in Him. I love the words of an old hymn. Oh, for a heart to praise my God.

A heart from sins set free. A heart that always feels I bleed. So freely shed for me. This is the good news that we need to remind ourselves of every single day, especially those of us who struggle with hypocritical hearts.

This is the news that we need to daily depend upon. His shed blood. The prophet Ezekiel, he prophesied about this great treatment in the Old Testament when he said in Ezekiel 36, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

I will remove your heart of stone and I will give you a heart of flesh. In other words, the promise in the Old Testament of the Gospel to come was a promise that I am going to extract your sinful heart.

I am going to replace it with a new one and a clean one. A holy heart transplant. This is the surgery that took place at Calvary.

[ 24 : 07 ] Jesus came into this fallen, broken, unclean and sinful world. He lived the perfect life. He was the only one who ever had a pure heart.

And in a sense, he became like a heart donor. Because a heart donor has to die to give someone else his heart. And Jesus, the Savior of the world, died on the cross so that we could know what it is to have a holy heart transplant.

Friends, this is the Gospel. Jesus became our substitute. He took the death that we deserved.

Unclean hearts deserve God's wrath. Unclean hearts are not pleasing to God. But this morning and every day until He returns, what is an offer is a clean new heart.

If you are not a Christian here this morning, do you know that great offer of the clean new heart? Maybe you are a Christian and you have been living like a Pharisee.

[ 25 : 20 ] You have been living like a religious hypocrite. And Jesus would say to you today, what is an offer is a clean new heart. Perhaps you feel like you have this new heart, that you have been living far from God.

You have not been keeping your heart in the best condition. In other words, you have not been keeping your relationship in the best condition. Jesus would say, I will cleanse your heart.

Because we must not be like the Pharisees who settled for cosmetic surgery, who only tried to modify the outward behaviour. We must come to Jesus and ask for that new heart.

I referred back to David earlier on. Do you remember after David committed that sin of adultery and then murder? Do you remember when he prayed in Psalm 51, prayer of repentance?

He first of all said, surely I was sinful at birth. In other words, he recognised that his problem was a problem that he was born with.

[ 26 : 30 ] And then as he confessed his sin, he said in verse 10, create in me a clean heart.

We are going to finish our worship of the service today by singing that very Psalm. And I hope it will be a prayer of repentance for all of us. If you don't know Jesus, I hope it will be a prayer of repentance where you can come to know what it is to have a clean heart in Jesus Christ.

And if you are a Christian who has struggled with a hypocritical heart, outward religion, then I pray that you would know the joy of living with a new heart.

And friends, Christian friends, when you are deeply moved by this radical grace, how can we ever look down upon anybody else because of their own clean hearts?

Because we know how bad our own hearts are. And we should go forth from here today with this great gospel message that there is medicine, there is treatment for our heart problem in the person of Jesus Christ.

[ 27 : 48 ] I finish this sermon by asking the question, how is your heart? Let's pray. Father in heaven, we come before you and we have hearts filled with thankfulness for him who bore our pain, who plumbed the depths so that we could have life again.

Father, we thank you for this timely reminder that our hearts are unclean, that we can so often fill ourselves by living with hypocritical hearts.

We pray, Lord, that we would ever come before your throne of grace, pleading for that blood that was shed for us, that it would cleanse us from you us.

Father, we would know the joy of a clean heart. Father, if there be anyone here who does not know you, would they come before you today and claim the new heart that is in offer?

Father, we thank you and we praise you for this glorious message in Jesus' name. Amen.