



**Sermon Notes: Cameron Webber,**  
**“The Heart”**

**23 March 2025**

**Readings: Mark 6:53-7:23, Jeremiah 17:5-10, Colossians 3:1-4**

---

**Pre-Introduction**

Good morning and thanks to those who have read for us from God’s Word. Keep your Bible or Bible App open at Mark 7 as we continue our series looking at ‘*the Beginning of the Good News about Jesus, the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God.*’ (Mark 1:1)

We have been seeing Jesus doing and saying things in keeping with that description: teaching about the Kingdom of God and doing miraculous things which show the Kingdom of God in action.

Not surprisingly Jesus has been drawing crowds. In the last few verses of chapter 6 - just before where our reading began - we hear how people from the whole region (around Lake Galilee), bring sick people on their beds to wherever they heard Jesus was. And wherever he went - villages, towns or countryside - they placed those who were ill in the market-places. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed. (6:55-56)

And as chapter 7 opens, ‘The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus,’ but in sharp contrast to the crowds, these leaders are not there to hear, or to be healed. And if you’ve been here through the series it would hardly have come as a surprise that they are not happy!

Rather than seeing the good news in action, with their blinkers firmly in place, they see in verse 2, some of Jesus’ disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. We heard an explanation in verses 3 and 4 of that ceremonial washing and then the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?” (7:5)

And then Jesus gets stuck in! ‘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. (7:6)

So let’s pray as we look at their hearts, and ours.

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, as we consider your words spoken so long ago, speak to us through them and by your Spirit. Save us from presuming to lightly hear your word or lightly preach your word. As we look at your word together now, give us ears to hear what you are saying to us and the **hearts** to respond. Amen.

**Introduction**

The Heart:

That hollow muscular organ which, by rhythmic contraction and dilation keeps the blood in circulation throughout the body. Pumping every second, of every minute, of every hour of every day, ... on and on. A miracle of God’s creation.

***The Heart: A poem...***

*My heart is a garden of dreams  
Where you walk when day is done,  
Fair as the royal flowers,  
Calm as the lingering sun. (Bliss Carman)*

The Heart: We use the word in different ways....

- The Heart - a blood pump that sits behind the rib cage
- The Heart - metaphorically used to speak of the emotions particularly the emotion of love.
- Sometimes we speak of head vs heart; of intellect compared with emotion.

But in the Bible, the word heart refers to more than the emotional. The biblical meaning of heart includes intellect and emotion and more. There are different nuances, but generally it is best understood as our inner frame, the centre of our entire personality and being; the focus of all desires, motives and moral choices. The heart is who we are as a person.

Jerry Bridges says, 'Generally the heart denotes the whole soul and all its faculties, not individually, but as they all work together: The mind as it reasons, discerns, and judges; the emotions as they like or dislike; the conscience as it determines and warns; and the will as it chooses or refuses - are all together called the heart.'

And in a world that seems obsessed with the external and how insta-worthy it is, we need to remember the Lord's word to Samuel. *'The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'* (1 Samuel 16:7)

## **1. The Heart's Location** (7:6; Jeremiah 17:5)

And the first thing that Jesus draws attention to is the **heart's location** and the location of their hearts is **'far from God.'**

It might look like their hearts, and so, that they, are close to God. They do the 'right thing', they say the 'right thing', but what God said through Isaiah hundreds of years earlier applies to the Pharisees, 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.' (7:6)

They can have the washing of hands down pat, but the external ceremony, the external ritual doesn't make up for a heart that is far from God. What they are doing, the washing, is as Mark describes it (7:3b), 'holding to the tradition of the elders.' The Pharisees themselves, also describe it as being, 'according to the tradition of the elders.' (7:5)

It sounds lofty and important - 'the tradition of the elders' - but Jesus pulls their ceremonies, their rituals, down a notch or three, when he calls them, 'mere human rules and human traditions.' (7:7-8)

Remember a couple of weeks back, back in chapters 2 and 3, when there was the confrontation with Pharisees over 'keeping the Sabbath.' We noted that at its best, the man-made rules began with at least something of a good intention. Lower-level rules were specified to put a 'fence' around the law, so you made sure you didn't come close to working on the Sabbath.

But here, the motives seem to lack any hint of a godly idea. Jesus tells them, 'You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! (7:9) And after giving an example (7:10-12) he says, 'You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.' (7:13)

They play off one law of God against another. They elevate their man-made extras. Their hearts are far from God. And in our reading from Jeremiah, we heard a similar rebuke: *'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD.'* (Jeremiah 17:5)

Ritual, ceremony, tradition. It was a problem for the Pharisees in the time of Jesus. But which way did it go? Were their hearts were far from God because they had elevated ritual? Or did they elevate ritual because their hearts were far from God? Or maybe it's both.

It's easy to criticise the Pharisees, it's easy to see how their mere human additions cause or reflect hearts that are far from God. And it's easy to look at other churches (or even other congregations within our own big church family) and observe mere human traditions. And of course, not all traditions, not all practices and habits, are always bad, but hearing Jesus' words to the Pharisees ought to cause us to pause and ask,

**'What is My Heart's Location?'**

There is always a danger of drift if we are not holding fast. We help our hearts stay in the right location by reading the Bible, by praying, and by spending time with Christians who can encourage us in the things of the Lord.

**2. The Heart's Condition** (3:5, 6:52; Jer 17:9)

The second thing that we see in the broader context is the heart's condition and the condition of their hearts is **'hard.'**

Back in chapter 3 with the interactions around the Sabbath with Pharisees, we saw how Jesus was deeply distressed at their hard hearts.

Last week after the miraculous feeding and the walking on water, it was the disciples who were 'completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.' (6:51-52) And the after another miraculous feeding Jesus asks them, 'Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?' (8:17)

In a chapter or two Jesus (talking about the People of Israel at time of Moses in relation to divorce laws) says, 'It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law.' (10:5)

And in Jeremiah we read, 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?' (Jeremiah 17:9)

How often do we hear, 'Follow your heart'? Perhaps that's not such good advice! And the question we must ask is, **'What is My Heart's Condition?'**

In Hebrews 3 quoting the author quotes Psalm 95, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.' It wouldn't be a command if it weren't an ever-present danger.

There are degrees of hardness I'm sure. The disciples' hardness was no doubt a bit different from the Pharisees' but the question remains, **'What is My Heart's Condition?'** Is it hard or soft? How can I keep it soft? By reading the Bible, by praying, and by spending time with Christians who can encourage us in the things of the Lord.

The Pharisees were focussing on the external, not the heart. The disciples were defiled in their eyes, but Jesus says, 'Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.' (7:15)

The disciples are a little slow to grasp, so Jesus repeats, 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.' (7:18-19)

And then Mark adds, 'In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.' And bacon lovers are forever glad of that. Bacon might not be that great for your heart - as in the pump - but it doesn't make your heart - as in the real you - defiled.

And it's the heart, the inside, the real you; it's what we are really like in our hearts; it's what we are really like inside, that is important. And what we see on the outside is the overflow of the heart, its **production**.

### **3. The Heart's Production** (7:21-22)

And Jesus says, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, **from a person's heart**; that evil thoughts come - sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.' (7:20-23)

It's a fairly depressing list, but that is what hearts that are far from God, and that are hard, it's what they produce.

So **how's your heart, what's it producing?** We like to think we are not that bad, but as Jesus points out elsewhere, it not just the physical acts of murder and adultery, but the heart behind those actions.

That the heart could be a bad thing is seen in Jeremiah: 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.' (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

And we know what we deserve; we all fall short; we know our conduct and our deeds. At least part of the function of the Old Testament law was to show the people of Israel what they were really like and to point to their need for God. And Jesus does that here.

The law, by itself doesn't change our hearts - but it points to God. The rules of the law show us what God is like and emphasise the importance of relationship with him, but the external law, as such, doesn't change people's hearts. So with external rules not doing the job, the prophets looked forward to a new time as we read in Jeremiah 31.

### **4. The Heart's Transplantation** (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36; Colossians 3)

'The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt ... This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD, 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their **hearts**. I will be their God, and they will be my people.' (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

It's got to be an internal thing and in Ezekiel, just how this will happen gets slightly clearer: 'For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a **new heart** and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:23-27)

If we eat too much New Covenant bacon, the cardiologist, (the heart doctor) will tell us to watch our diet and to exercise!

But at its heart, the New Covenant recognises we don't need our heart (our inner self) patched up, or to be exercised more. We don't need a stent or bypass. We need a new heart; we need a **heart transplantation**.

And the Good News is that the transplant is available because that time that God spoke of through Ezekiel, has come in Jesus! Jesus came as the king who always walked faithfully, with all his heart. His heart was fully devoted to the LORD his God; he never sinned, his heart never

turned away; he did not deserve God's anger and yet he took the judgement and the punishment for all our turning away from God, our turning to other gods.

God cannot ignore sin, but on the cross of Christ, God's anger and his grace meet as our sin is punished in Jesus. And as we accept God's verdict that we have sinned; as we accept that the price has paid by Jesus, we can live with God as our King, Father, and Friend now and forever.

And we are cleansed, from all our impurities, given a new heart and a new spirit. The heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh. And we are given His Spirit to move us to follow His decrees and be careful to keep His laws.

So where is your heart located? What is its condition? What is your heart producing?

With a new transplanted heart all should be fine, right? We know how easily we fall back to the old heart, but having been given a new heart and the Holy Spirit we are under an obligation to keep in step with the Spirit and to keep growing in a lived-out holiness.

As Paul writes to the Colossians, 'Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above. ... Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

We will not be perfect this side of heaven, but we are called to be being transformed, to be holding fast, keeping in step with the Spirit, all of which require us to be active, not passive. As Paul goes on to say, 'Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another, if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive, as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.' And so we pray in the words of the old song, 'Change my heart O God, make it ever new.'

## **Conclusion**

For your pump heart: Talk to doctors and medical people. Watch what you eat, and don't forget to exercise. Keep your heart pure to do your best to avoid a myocardial infarction, stents and bypasses or a transplant.

For your Heart: See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving **heart** that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today', so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. (Hebrews 3:12)

Isaac Watts, the well-known hymn writer said, 'The Lord sees and judges the heart; He has no regard for outward forms of worship, if there be no inward adoration, if no devout affection be employed therein. It is therefore a matter of infinite importance, to have the whole heart engaged steadfastly for God.'

May we say with the Psalmist...

With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (Ps 119:10-11)

So let us be those who read the Bible and pray and spend time with Christians who can encourage us in the things of the Lord. And when we fall short, remember, we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God. ...

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

And in the words of the old hymn we pray...

*Come Thou fount of every blessing,  
tune my heart to sing Thy grace.  
Streams of mercy never ceasing  
call for songs of loudest praise.*

*O to grace how great a debtor  
daily I'm constrained to be.  
Let Thy grace Lord, like a fetter,  
bind my wandering heart to Thee.*

*Prone to wander, Lord I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love.  
Here's my heart Lord, take and seal it,  
seal it for Thy courts above.*