

The famous mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal said this about the human heart. "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing." In other words, there are words and actions that come out of the heart that defy human reason. These words and actions that defy human reason can be incredibly good, courageous, and heroic. A person running into a burning building, risking his or her life to save others who are strangers, can defy human reason. A soldier throwing himself on a live grenade, sacrificing his life to save the lives of his company, can defy human reason.

But I think you know where I am going today. It's not to the courageous and heroic. There are words and actions that come out of the heart that defy human reason and also defy any sense of what is moral and good and proper. I remember back in the 90's the famous comedian, and filmmaker Woody Allen was riding high in Hollywood. Then his personal life began to unravel. He and his longtime girlfriend actress Mia Farrow had just broken up, and it was revealed that Woody got romantically involved with Mia's adopted 17-year-old daughter. The outrage against his behavior came at him from every direction. When one reporter challenged his behavior, he defended his actions, then concluded the discussion by declaring, "The heart wants what it wants."

The heart wants what it wants. As disturbing as that statement is when we hear it, it reflects a truth that Jesus brings out in Matthew 15. The heart is the control center of a person's life. Who we are and what we do is ultimately determined by the condition of our hearts. We are not robots pre-programmed to function a certain way. We are not animals who can be trained to behave properly.

We are human beings, who are born into the curse of original sin, and we are human beings who continue to have our own sin influence how we think, speak, feel, love and make choices in this life. And all our thinking, speaking, feeling, loving, and decision-making all intersect at the center of our being, the heart. In any given situation our heart will reveal who we are and our heart will determine what we do.

And the condition of our heart matters to God. The God said to the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, "*People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*" Proverbs 3:5 says, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*" Jeremiah 29:13 says, "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.*"

But Jeremiah also warns us about the heart when he says in Jeremiah 17:9 "*The heart is deceitful above all things...*," and we get that!

And this is why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*" This raises all kinds of questions. Who are the pure in heart? Why will they see God? And how will they see God? And the most unsettling questions of all, how pure is my heart and how pure is your heart and how do our hearts become purer?

And so far in our study of Matthew, we have learned a lot about the heart. From Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we learned God is pleased with people who have desperate hearts. The people of God know in their hearts their desperate need for God. And we learned God is pleased with people who have broken hearts; hearts that break over their own sin and the sins of the world. And we learned that God is pleased with people who have surrendered hearts; hearts that humble themselves before God and others. And we learned God is pleased with people who have hungry hearts; hearts that want more of God, more of his presence and power in their lives. And we learned God is pleased with people who have tender hearts; hearts that look beyond other people's faults to see their needs and how they might help them.

We continue to learn about the heart. Because as Jesus tells us, the condition of the heart matters. The heart is more than our mind, more than our emotions, more than our choices, it's the place where all these come together to shape our life and faith.

In chapter 14 we saw Jesus feed 5,000 people and walk on the Sea of Galilee. These two miracles were "God has come in the flesh miracles" for sure. In fact, those miracles send a blunt message to all who saw and heard and for us who read about them today. The message, this Jesus must be God. That is what his disciples on the boat finally realized when Jesus walked on the water. Those two miracles said to the disciples and say to us, whatever our need, God will provide. If I am in the middle of the storm, I can trust and not fear because the I AM says, "Don't fear, I AM is here." These miracles end with the disciples in the boat with Jesus, worshipping, confessing, and proclaiming the words, "*Truly you are the Son of God.*"

The boat landed in a little town called Gennesaret. The townspeople recognized him and brought him all who were sick and begged Jesus to let the sick people just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched were healed.

It was amazing. Jesus fed 5,000, walked on water and healed the masses. We pick up the story where the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, also known as scribes, came up from Jerusalem, the religious center of the world to ask Jesus a question.

So what kind of question should you ask such a man after seeing such a display of the power and glory of God? How about, "Who are you?" How about "What must I do to follow you?" Let's look at what the religious leaders asked him.

**Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" (Matthew 15:1-2)**

They don't ask anything about Jesus. They ask a religious question, but it's the wrong question. It's like a reporter who asked a person who just

rushed into a burning building to rescue a child if he planned to fast on Fridays during Lent?

The religious leaders came all the way from Jerusalem to ask Jesus about his disciples' new eating habits. What were they really concerned about? They were concerned about defilement. A person who was defiled was ceremonially unclean. They could not enter the tabernacle, they could not celebrate festivals, they could not worship. They could not have their sins atoned. A person could become defiled in a number of ways. A few are by coming in contact with a dead body or diseased person, by eating unclean animals, or by contact with a Gentile.

When we think about world religions, this type of thinking isn't so unusual. When I was in India last fall, I never had the opportunity to eat beef in that Hindu culture because cows are sacred to them. I remember seeing evidence of the lower caste of untouchables when I saw shards of broken clay drinking cups scattered about. Those were cups that were used by the untouchables, and they had to be destroyed because if anyone from an upper caste had accidentally drunk from a cup that an untouchable had drunk from, they would have been made unclean. They broke the cups so they couldn't be reused.

In Jesus day, it became so important in the Jewish religion to protect themselves against defilement, that the leaders developed an elaborate system of rules and regulations around hand washing, traditions that went far beyond what God had called for in Scripture. It was a system recorded in what was called the oral law. Washing was done something like this: First, one holds their hands out with fingers up. Then one ran water down the hands until it drained off the wrist. After that, they then held the hand out with fingers down and poured water over them again. They then rubbed a fist into each hand. They did this before worship, before eating, even before every course of a meal for the most strict. Keeping these hand washing rituals became a mark of spirituality. The more you washed, the better you washed, the more godly you were. Clean hands had become the evidence of a person's faith. The fact Jesus' disciples failed to wash like this was a scandal, and so they complained to Jesus.

**Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' (verses 3–4)**

Jesus knew all about their washing rituals, and he also knew it didn't come from Scripture, it came from the oral tradition, which said if you didn't wash right you offend God. Remember Jesus? He is the one breaking these traditions right and left. He touched lepers, dead bodies, associated with tax collectors, and Gentile sinners, defended picking grain on the Sabbath, and what did he do? He answered them, not from the oral tradition, but from Scripture. He answered them with a question from the ten great commandments of Scripture, the 5th commandment to be specific.

He is about to show them they broke the actual fifth commandment of God for the sake of their religious traditions.

**But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. (verses 5–6)**

Let me explain this, and you will feel the sting of Jesus' hit. The phrase, "*devoted to God*" means that a person could take an oath to officially dedicate all their money and property to go to God and to the Temple after they die, and while alive continue to use it for their own pleasure. So he could avoid the responsibility of honoring or helping his father or mother in need by telling them, "I'm sorry mom and dad, I know you are old and need help but I can't give you anything because I've devoted all my belongings to God." It was a practice written by a scribe and inserted in the oral tradition.

And Jesus confronts them because they wiped away the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother for the sake of their tradition. If that's not enough, Jesus pointed out that many sons started down this road, recognized their error, repented wanting to revoke their oath and do the right thing to help their parents, but the religious leaders wouldn't allow it, telling them it went against God to break an oath. This is what we might call spiritual abuse of the sheep.

It's a weird devotion to God, which hurts God, because it hurts people. Jesus is revealing they look clean and spiritual on the outside, but their hearts are dirty. The point for us this morning is a clean heart trusts in scripture, not unscriptural traditions.

### **A Clean Heart Trusts in Scripture, not Unscriptural Traditions**

Every church has their traditions. At CPC, we have communion on the first Sunday of the month. We do Easter, Christmas Eve and Good Friday services every year. Every service includes a prayer after we sing some songs. Then we have an offering. Then we have a sermon. That's our tradition. I don't know what many would do if we moved the sermon to the beginning of the service and worshipped through song at the end. If we ever switch that up, please send your emails directly to Mark Mitchell.

Our traditions include community groups, WBS, and Men's Fraternity. We separate our students and children for their own classes during Sunday services. I think our tendency is to look at this passage and say, okay time to purge some more tradition because Jesus is against tradition. Jesus isn't against tradition. Jesus is against tradition, which force God's people to ignore or reject Scripture or as he says, "nullify the word of God."

What happened in Jesus time was the same thing which happened in Isaiah's time centuries before. They had lost the heart of worship. Look at what Jesus said,

**You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' (verses 7–9)**

He said, "Stop pretending to honor God and admit you are really trying to honor yourselves. Beware, because there is a big divide between your public life and your private life. Outwardly your ducks are all in a row; inwardly, your life is a mess."

### **A Clean Heart is an Undivided Heart**

Isaiah's words open our eyes to the capacity we have to live double lives. His words open our eyes to our capacity to act one way at church and another way at home, at the office, or at school. We must understand we can easily get entangled in this. Most of us do not see ourselves as actors, but it's not that hard to play act. Some of us could win Academy

Awards. Some of us have mastered being one way at church, but away from church, we speak abusive words and have ugly thoughts.

What are we supposed to do about this? I got this picture this week that helps me imagine what an undivided heart looks like. I picture my own heart, and I imagine my heart covered and washed by the blood of Christ. Now understand when we imagine our hearts to be undivided, it's pretty much guaranteed that God will reveal places in our heart where our hearts are divided. A picture formed in my mind of some dark corner or chamber in my heart where the cleansing and life-giving blood was not flowing. Yes, my heart was beating. Yes, God gave me a new heart, but there were still compartments where I did not want the blood of Christ to flow.

There are places in my heart, I don't want to surrender and be changed. An undivided heart is willing to be fully exposed to the flow of Christ's cleansing and life-giving blood. An undivided heart is an obedient and trusting heart, willing to surrender to God those chambers that need to be cleansed and healed. For us to have an undivided heart, we need to invite God into every compartment of our heart.

Spiritually dead heart tissue comes back to life when Christ's blood flows through it. That's called revival.

The cross is our focal point for us in all of this. The cross reminds us of his love, his forgiveness, and that our sins are covered by his blood sacrifice. The cross reminds us of Christ's power over death, Christ's victory over death. The cross reminds us of his power to forgive, cleanse and revive the heart. The cross reminds us there is victory in Jesus!

This is an undivided heart: where no compartment is sealed off from the Lordship of Jesus Christ. An undivided heart doesn't think in terms of God's money or my money, of God's time and my time. It does not think in terms of here at church it's sacred, and out there is the real world, and I must be secular to survive it. We live one life. We live it for God, and we are being changed from the inside out.

As we continue in the passage, the scene changes. The religious leaders fade into the background, and then Jesus called the crowd to him.

**Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them." (verses 10–11)**

The exception to this may be pâté. Our Foster City staff had a staff-planning day last week, and someone asked me to bring pâté for lunch. So I went to the store and found pâté. I read the ingredients on the back. Do you know what pâté is? If ever there was an exception to what Jesus is saying here, it's duck or pig liver on a cracker. But Jesus is saying no food that goes into the mouth defiles. Even pâté!

**Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" (verse 12)**

I'll give you one guess why the Pharisees were offended when they heard this. Their food laws were what kept them separated from the Gentiles. Maintaining a kosher diet is what made them Jewish, chosen, and special to God. It's good to know that one is special and chosen by God. But to not eat with sinners because of it? Jesus ate with sinners. If he didn't eat with sinners, how could he reach them? How could he die on the cross bearing the uncleanness of our sins? How could the

kingdom of God spread to all nations if we can't rub shoulders with the people of the world? Jesus just told them that it didn't matter what they ate if what they ate was going to block them from loving and reaching people. And then he warned the crowd about these leaders who refused to see the one true God in the flesh right in front of their faces.

**He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."**

**Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."**

**"Are you still so dull Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? (verses 13–17)**

Eating impure foods literally harms no one. J. A. Bengel said, in this way, "The filth of the toilet is not so great as the filth in the human heart not yet cleansed."

**But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them." (verse 18–20)**

Then Jesus goes back to the Ten Commandments. He said, *For out of the heart come evil thoughts* (the tenth)—*murder*, (the sixth commandment) *adultery, sexual immorality*, (the seventh commandment) *theft*, (the eighth commandment) *false testimony, slander*, (the ninth commandment). Jesus used the Ten Commandments to spotlight the human heart. He said, "Let's look closer. Your heart may be beating, but it's diseased." As it was then, it still applies today. We can serve on some ministry team, attend a community group, and be a part of the best worship services in town and yet our hearts can remain unfazed and untransformed.

### **A Clean Heart Produces Clean Thoughts and Clean Words**

What we say is an indication of what is really going on inside our thoughts and imaginations. This is especially true when we are tired and unable to filter what we say well. We all know how we talk about our spouse tell us and everyone within earshot how we feel about the quality of our marriage. The same is true about a father and a son, boss-employee, co-workers. Jesus already told us in chapter 12 verses 36–37 that we will give an account for careless words we speak.

So it's right for us to search our hearts. There is a story, which illustrates this well. One of the best-loved characters in children's literature is Winnie the Pooh.

In one adventure of this down-to-earth, lovable toy bear, Pooh, attempted to trap an elephant or, as he mispronounced it, a Heffalump. Pooh dug a hole to catch the Heffalump and decided to bait the trap with some of his own favorite food: honey. But fond as he was of honey, he could not bear to leave a whole jar of it in the trap, and so began to eat some himself. He excused himself with the thought that it's important to make sure it really is honey, all the way down. It wouldn't do to have anything else, perhaps cheese or something, at the bottom. And of course, by the time he was quite sure it really was honey all the way down, the jar was empty.

For Pooh what matters is what the jar really contains, all the way down. If it's only got honey at the top, but something quite different

underneath, one needs to know. And that lies at the heart of what Jesus is saying to us

What's all the way down? What is the point of doing all this uncomfortable all the way down work to have a clean heart? So we can be the sort of person God always had in mind. What sort of person did God always have in mind for us to be?

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**  
(Matthew 5:8)

I love the Message version of Matthew 5:8. *"You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world."*

I think Jesus means two things here. He means the pure in heart will see God in the life to come, what we call our life for eternity with God. When our hearts have been changed by faith in Christ, we know we will spend eternity with God and see him in all his glory.

### **A Clean Heart will See God**

I also think Jesus is telling us when our hearts are pure we will see God in this everyday life. In ordinary moments, we will see God. When our hearts are after God, we will see God through his handiwork in our spring gardens that are now blooming. We will see God through the beauty of enjoying a good dinner out with friends while our wives are away at the women's retreat. We will see God in the opportunities God gives us at work. We will see God as we see our paychecks as an opportunity to provide and save for our families, and support the work God on the peninsula and beyond.

We see God through our oneness in our marriages. We see God through our trials and hardships as opportunities to know and trust him more. We see God through the poor as objects of His special attention. We see God through knowing that every individual is created in the image of God and in need of a Savior.

What a great way to live. No wonder Jesus says, *"Blessed are the pure in heart."*

### **What if My Heart is Not Beating Right?**

How do we get that kind of clean heart? Jesus offers a deeper vision for spiritual transformation. It begins with the first words of his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* We never should get beyond this. We can never transform our own hearts. God does the work as we keep receiving his mercy and grace,

and surrendering to his resurrection power. Maybe you have been one with the greatest intentions to change your own heart; maybe you have tried to change your heart hundreds of times.

I had the privilege of speaking at our Higher Power recovery ministry on Friday night. The dear CPC folks, who run that wonderful ministry, know the truth about this. When we try to fight spiritual battles on our own, if we try to master something dark and dirty on our own strength, we are doomed to fail. And not only that, the thing we are fighting against takes more the role of master over us.

If our spiritual heart is not beating right, we need to continually acknowledge our powerlessness over our sin and our desperate need for Jesus every day.

And then we surrender, and we continue to surrender. And then we trust, and we continue to trust, and then we gratefully accept the new mercy he shows us every morning. As we receive that flow of mercy, we will slowly grow to love God (by obeying God) and to love our neighbor (show our neighbor mercy).

Trust me, when we choose to go down this path of heart-healthy living, and go all the way down, like Pooh with his jar of honey, fully surrendered. The progress may feel slow. We will falter some. Sometimes we will feel like we are walking on water, and other times we will feel like we are sinking, but we will also feel something solid forming under our feet. This solid rock of Jesus' words will begin to lift us up and grow more and more sturdy under our feet.

That's called God's favor. That's called God's transforming grace. God's grace transforms those who have the courage to admit that God's grace is enough. Those who are continually poor in spirit and desperate for God will be transformed, and their hearts will be renewed.

They will claim God's promise from Ezekiel 11:19, *"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh."* Only God can give you that kind of heart—a heart that wants what God wants, and only what God wants, and always what God wants. May that kind of heart-beat in each one of us.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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