

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

The Heart Of The Matter

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Mark 7:14-23

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 7:14; that’s on page 843 in your pew Bibles. You heard from Pastor Jody last week that in Mark 7 we see another round of significant conflict between Jesus and traditional Judaism. You remember back in Mark 3 there was a huge conflict with the political and spiritual leaders of Judaism after Jesus healed the man with the withered hand. Right after that healing Mark says:

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.
(Mark 3:6 ESV)

So this is a pretty serious conflict here and the stakes are very high and it has to do with what the Bible is really all about. More than that, it has to do with who God really is. You remember we said that the healing of the man with the withered hand was not really about the brother with the withered hand – he was like a canary in a coal mine – his healing and the weird reaction of the Jewish leaders to his healing revealed that there was something DEEPLY WRONG with how the Jewish people were reading the Bible and how they were understanding and worshipping God. Jesus is very upset with what he sees in them in that story. He basically says, “if you are that upset by this act of mercy – just because it happened on the Sabbath – then you don’t know God at all.” And this story, in Mark 7 is a continuation of that theme.

Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 14:

And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: 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.” 17 And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 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, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:14–23 ESV)

Now obviously you can't read this passage in isolation from the passage that Pastor Jody preached on last week. This is part 2 of that story. In the first part Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for prizing their traditions over and against the word of God. They ruined Jewish worship by holding up man made traditions that actually lead away from the truth of who God is. In VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, God says. Your worship isn't helpful, in fact, it is the opposite of helpful. It is vain, deceitful and destructive.

That's what Jesus says and it is a huge rebuke.

And now in this text, he doubles down.

He pulls the people together and he says, now listen to me very carefully and he goes on to diagnose the essential problem with 1st century Pharisaic Judaism.

The Problem With Pharisaic Judaism:

The first thing he says is that:

1. They are reading the Bible wrong

They've become obsessed with a certain small slice of the Bible at the expense of the over all message – and they don't even understand the slice that they're obsessed with. By the way – that can happen even in the church today. Think of all the people who are absolutely OBSESSED with Biblical prophecy at the expense of everything else in the Bible. And isn't it true that the people who are usually obsessed with Biblical prophecy don't have a clue how to interpret it.

They are obsessed and they are WRONG and that's not a good place to be and that is where the Pharisees are according to Jesus.

The Pharisees have missed the fact that the ceremonial law in the Old Testament was essentially proverbial. It was a SIGN. It was God condescending to our essential weakness and ignorance and speaking to us in simple and even childish ways. It was God getting down on the carpet and speaking to us in BABY TALK. It was a dramatic play. It was never about the sheep, or the guy who came around to deal with the weird stain in your tent. It was never about bacon or shell fish or clothes made with mixed fibres. All of that was an acted parable that was intended to point us towards more important things.

And the Pharisees missed it! They were like dogs who stare at the Master's finger instead of looking at where the Master is pointing! My dog is like that and its terribly irritating. I throw something and then I point at it and I say: "There it is! Look! Go get it!" and instead of looking where I'm pointing she comes over and licks my finger. That's not helpful! But that's what the Pharisees are doing.

Now John the Baptist got it. He looked at all the ceremonial law, he understood what it was. He saw God pointing and he followed the finger and he said:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 ESV)

Do you see that? John got it! He understood that the ceremonial law was PROVERBIAL COMMUNICATION. He understood that it was pointing to BIG GOSPEL REALITIES. It was saying things about who God is, what sin is and how God will fix it. John GOT IT. The Pharisees did not.

Like dogs they didn't look at what the Master was pointing at, they came over and licked the finger. They built an entire religious system around the finger. They enlarged the finger and made an idol of the finger – a big giant burdensome finger that was crushing the people of God.

That's what happens when you read the Bible wrong! When you read the Bible wrong you get God wrong and you get the Gospel wrong – that's what happened to the Pharisees, and that's

what happened to the Sadducees. Jesus says the same thing to them later in Mark's Gospel. They come to him in chapter 12 with their messed up understanding of God and Jesus says:

"Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?" (Mark 12:24 ESV)

When you get the Bible wrong you get GOD WRONG and that's a serious problem. The Jewish religion was completely off track because their leaders had been reading the Bible wrong. They'd lost the plot and as a result they had misunderstood a bunch of really big, important truths. Specifically here, Jesus says that they no longer understand what really separates people from God.

2. They don't understand what really separates people from God

The Pharisees think that the big problem in the universe is that people aren't washing their hands the right way and they've been eating too many hot dogs. That's the big issue – that's where they've landed and Jesus is like "You've got to be kidding me. You think that's the problem? You think the problem with the universe is improper hand washing technique and pork products – that's where you've landed? Because if you think that, you don't know God and you don't know sin at all and you are not where you need to be to see and understand the grace of God in Christ. You have completely lost the plot."

You see the essential plot of the Bible is that God is holy; he made a good universe and he made us to be under him and over everything else and it was going to be great BUT we fell. We fell away from God and away from each other and away from ourselves. We are not now who we were created to be. We are fallen, defiled and away.

BUT the hope of the Old Testament is that God will come and rescue us and defeat our adversary and restore us to our former glory and calling. That's the essential plot line of the Bible and the Pharisees have lost it right here. (G2) They have completely misunderstood what it is that separates us from God. They think it is external. They think it is ritual. They think it is outside – they think it is things out there that might get in here - but Jesus says, "no you have it exactly wrong. It isn't about things in the universe out there corrupting us in here – its about what's in

here, leaking out and ruining everything out there. The universe isn't ruining you. You are ruining the universe."

Wow. Wow.

It is impossible to overstate the significance of what Jesus just did there.

Mark tries to help us. He inserts a little editorial comment. He says:

(Thus he declared all foods clean.) (Mark 7:19 ESV)

Which is a concise way of saying: "Thus he wiped pretty much all of Judaism off the table." This is a huge statement! Jesus is basically saying the whole parabolic drama of the ceremonial law can now come to an end because I am here – it was pointing to me and I'm here now so there is no longer any need for that. The play is over, go eat a hot dog.

Right? I mean this is huge! In fact, it took the church a long time to really understand this. Remember this is Peter's Gospel. Mark's Gospel is Peter's Gospel. Mark was Peter's scribe and he wrote down all Peter's recollections. It was Peter sitting in that inner room having this all explained to him by Jesus – Mark wasn't there. This editorial comment is Peter's comment but we know for a fact that it took Peter a long time to put this all together. Remember the vision in Acts 10? In Acts 10 THREE TIMES a sheet comes down from heaven and a voice from heaven says, "Arise Peter, kill and eat." And three times Peter says: "Sorry Lord, I can't do that. I'm not a hot dog man, and I like to keep the ceremonial law." Three times Peter told a voice from heaven – no thank you. God had to tell the brother what the vision was trying to say. Acts 10:15 says that a voice had to interpret the vision for Peter saying:

"What God has made clean, do not call common." (Acts 10:15 ESV)

This was obviously hard for Peter to wrap his head around. Paul got there first. You remember that? In Galatians we hear that Peter was still working his way through this and he was vacillating. Sometimes he was hanging out with the Gentiles at the hot dog table but then when more scrupulous and observant Jews were around, he would go over to the kosher table. And

Paul rebuked Peter to his face. He says you've got to stop vacillating on this issue brother because you are obscuring the Gospel. And then finally, Peter got it and it stuck and it shows up here now as an editorial comment.

Remember while the Gospel of Mark narrates events that took place before Acts and the Epistles it was written AFTER. The Gospel of Mark was written at the end of Peter's life – while Peter was in prison – just before Peter was executed. Meaning it was written after the visions in Acts 10 and after the rebuke in Galatians. At the end of his life Peter was all the way in on this most important point. He understood and he wanted us to understand what it is that really separates people from God.

And Jesus begins to speak about that in verses 20-23. He says:

What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:20–23 ESV)

Do you know what has poisoned the universe, Jesus says. Do you know what has propelled you away from God and from each other and from your original purpose and calling? Its not hot dogs. Its the well of evil and wickedness that has taken root at the very centre of who you are. There is a river of filth coming out of the human soul that has spoiled the universe and separated you from a holy God.

That's what the Pharisees missed – and there is no excuse for that because had they ever lifted their noses out of their obsession with the ceremonial law and studied the rest of the Bible they would have seen it. This problem was clearly diagnosed by the prophets. Jeremiah said:

The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

I have that memorized in the NKJV but the ESV is probably even more helpful, it says:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

The Hebrew word there means “incurable”. The prophets said that the problem with the universe was the essential sickness of the human heart. I guess the Pharisees didn't read that far. They

were still staring at the finger and they missing the larger point.

The point is that the human heart is a well-spring of evil. Out of it comes all manner of evil thoughts, inclinations and desires. Jesus lists 12 of them – it is obviously a representative sample but, it is interesting to note what he says first. Out of the broken, deceitful, incurable human heart flows first of all:

1. Sexual immorality

Now let's pause here for a second. It is interesting that Jesus mentions that first. We hear all the time now in the wider Christian church that we have made too much of the whole issue of human sexuality. That we have raised it to the level of a Gospel issue – well maybe that's because IT IS A GOSPEL ISSUE! Right here Jesus is saying that sexual immorality is one of the chief things that separates us from a holy God. Therefore I think its worth talking about, and Jesus does. He goes right at it. And he uses a word that has a technical meaning. He uses the Greek word “*pornea*” which, as NT scholar James Edwards writes:

can be found in Greek literature with reference to a variety of illicit sexual practices, including adultery, fornication, prostitution, and homosexuality. In the OT it occurs for any sexual practice outside marriage between a man and woman that is prohibited by the Torah.¹

So Jesus uses a term that references a laundry list of prohibited sexual desires and expressions including adultery, fornication, prostitution and homosexuality. So let's just state the obvious. The contemporary conversation about same sex marriage IS A GOSPEL ISSUE. According to Jesus homosexual behaviour, regardless of the context, is one of the things that separates us from a holy God.

As a sidebar – here we see again how Jesus is reading the Bible. He is saying in the same passage, that the dramatic parable of the ceremonial law with its animal sacrifices and dietary practices is OVER and in the same passage he is saying, but the moral law is unchanged. God is always who he is. His opinions do not change. His perception of sin does not change and that's important because in the Bible the strongest words about God's reaction to sin are used in

¹James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 213.

reference to human sexuality.

In Leviticus 18:29 where a variety of sexually immoral practices are detailed – including incest, fornication, adultery, bestiality and homosexuality, the Bible says:

For everyone who does any of these **abominations**, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. 30 So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 18:29–30 ESV)

The word abomination is a translation of the Hebrew word *toevah* and it means, literally, “hateful”. Sexual immorality – fornication, prostitution, adultery and homosexuality – are HATEFUL to God. They function like negative magnetism pushing us away from God, further into exile and ruin.

This is a Gospel issue. This is a big part of the plot. Sexual immorality is one of the chief things that flows out of the human heart and that separates us from a Holy God.

But its not the only thing. Jesus mentions 11 other things, most of which are self explanatory. These also are disordered desires and they too come from a broken and fallen human heart:

2. Theft
3. Murder
4. Adultery – notice this gets special mention. I think a decent argument can be made that the most hateful form of sexual immorality is not homosexuality, it is adultery. That’s worth saying.
5. Coveting
6. Wickedness – some of your Bibles will have that as ‘malice’.
7. Deceit
8. Sensuality – this means “filthy lusts” – you could probably write in your margin “pornography” here and be pretty safe.
9. Envy
10. Slander
11. Pride
12. Foolishness. This one refers to moral recklessness. William Lane says it means:

“The man who is morally and spiritually insensitive; he does not know God and he does not wish to know him.”²

That’s probably right, after all the Bible says:

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. (Psalms 14:1 ESV)

The last one is probably intended as a summary of the whole.

The human heart oozes rebellion, lust, greed and malice. It oozes a defiling muck that separates us from God, from each other and from ourselves.

That is the real problem Jesus says. Not hot dogs, hand washing or bacon bits. This is what its all about – this is what defiles people! This is what ruins us and puts us in conflict with ourselves, our neighbours and our Holy God.

The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

Now, if that’s where the story ended, this would be the most depressing message of all time. But Jesus didn’t say all of this just to depress us, he said it to position us to see and receive the grace of God in Christ. You see that was the problem! The Pharisees lost the plot HERE (at G2) therefore they will ill positioned to see and receive this (G3) and that was why Jesus had come in the first place!

Jesus had come to FIX what was wrong with humanity. Jesus had come to heal what was incurable and to bridge that which was unbridgeable. That’s the Gospel! The Gospel is the Good News of what God has done IN CHRIST for our salvation. Its about grace. Grace is what God gives to address our desperate need – and if you get the desperate need wrong then of course you get the Gospel wrong.

This teaching is about getting people back on plot so that they can receive all of what God is

² William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 257.

doing in Christ for our salvation.

So properly positioned – back on plot – let’s finish the story and see afresh the grace of God in Christ.

Back On Plot

Now we are ready to ask: What did Jesus do that uniquely addressed the desperate situation of fallen men and women? Three things in particular come to mind:

1. He walked the path

He obeyed God perfectly. You see the human heart was broken. Our compass always led us astray. It pointed north but not true north and so whenever we followed our hearts we ended off the path, in the ditch, in the dark.

Moms and dads, please understand that the absolute worst advice you can give your kids is to follow their hearts. Our hearts are broken – our compasses lead us astray. Don’t follow your heart! Follow Jesus! Because he did it perfectly. He walked the path. He obeyed the commandments and more than that, he loved everyone perfectly – even to the point of death. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

You see, God has designed the universe to release all the blessings of heaven into the realm of men through obedience to his commands. But we could never keep those commands and so we forfeited the blessings. But now, here is Jesus and he has walked the path perfectly and he has thus inherited ALL OF THE PROMISES AND BLESSINGS OF GOD. He has in himself every good thing God ever promised to give. And it is there now to share with his brothers and sisters.

Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He walked the path.

2. He paid the price

He paid for what we have done in his body on the cross. Peter understood this one very well. He

says:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24 ESV)

But there is more. Not only has Jesus earned all that was promised, not only has he wiped our slate clean, he has also given us his Holy Spirit.

3. He gave his Spirit

Jesus is fixing our desires from the inside. That's the job of the Holy Spirit. Once your heart has been sprinkled with the blood of the cross, the Spirit enters in and he begins to untangle all your disordered desires. And slowly but surely he straightens them and purifies them and directs them in line with the person and nature of Jesus Christ. That is a great big, glorious Gospel truth and that is why 2 Corinthians 3:18 is one of our favourite verses here at this church.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Isn't that great? Isn't that amazing? Isn't that exactly what we need given what is wrong with us as a people? Don't we need help and forgiveness and healing? And isn't that exactly what we receive through the life and death and resurrection and session of Jesus Christ?

Jesus is what God gives for the salvation of the world. God knows us. God loves us and if we will turn from our sins and see Jesus for all of who he is and all of what he can do then in Jesus God will HEAL US. He will forgive us, he will restore us and he will bring us safely home.

That's the plot. That's the Gospel. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.