



Peninsula City Church

Jesus Said...

It's a Matter of the Heart

Michael Podhaczky

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It's a Matter of the Heart

An Introduction

Q. Can you hear and understand your heart?

You are probably familiar with the saying, "It's like opening a can of worms." It usually means a situation that is messy and difficult, which is out of control. Well, I was wondering about the origin of this saying. This is what I found out. It has been suggested that,

"The evidence suggests that the original cans of worms were real cans with actual worms in them, collected as bait for fishing. (The can in this case being a smallish metal container with a handle and a lid). Here's one in a largely forgotten work of 1914, *Diane of the Green Van*, by Leona Dalrymple: 'There are times, alas, when even fish are perverse! Thoroughly out of patience, Diane presently unjointed her rod, emptied the can of worms upon the bank, and returned to camp.' Fishermen have told me that the most annoying aspect of opening a can of worms is that, being live bait, they crawl out and are difficult to put back."¹

One time the Lord showed me a vision of a can of wriggling worms. He used it with me in relation to my heart and the work that He needed to do in my heart. He said to me that, "My heart had more moves than a can of worms and it needed to deal with it." He saw straight through to the heart of the matter that is, my heart was full of moves. I was unable to fully hear and understand my heart, but He could as was revealing to me.

1. Jesus saw straight through to the heart of the matter

Q. What was it that Jesus saw when He looked at their heart?

We read in Mark's gospel in chapter seven of an account when some Pharisees and teachers of religious law arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They noticed that some of His disciples failed to follow the Jewish ritual of hand washing before eating and ate with unwashed hands. The Jews and especially the Pharisees did not eat anything until they had poured water over their cupped hands washing with the fist as required by their ancient traditions to make one righteous. This was not a requirement of the Old Testament Law, but it was simply a requirement of the elders. Likewise, they did not eat anything from the local market until they washed their hands in water, as they also did with cups, pitchers, and the like.

So they were horrified when His followers did not follow these traditions. In the eyes of the religious leaders, Jesus' followers were declaring that they were unrighteous due to not ceremonially washing their hands. They saw His followers as being ritually unclean and it had nothing to do with their hygiene.

But Jesus saw straight through to the heart of the matter. Matthew chapter 15:3 states,

"Jesus replied, 'And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God?'" (Matt 15:3 NLT)

He challenged them as to the higher authority of righteousness and it was not their religious traditions. Jesus was very strong in His language to these religious leaders when He said,

⁶ "**You hypocrites!** Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me (or held far off from Me).'⁷ Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.⁸ For you

¹ "Can of Worms." <http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-can1.htm> (21st March 2017). See Dalrymple, Leona. *Diane of the Green Van*. (Booklasic, 2015). <https://books.google.com.au> (21st March 2017).

ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition.' ⁹ Then He said, 'You skilfully sidestep God's Law in order to strongly and faithfully hold on to your own tradition'" (Mk 7:6-9 NLT).

Here Jesus quoted from Isaiah 29:13 who spoke about the distress coming upon Jerusalem because of their defiant and blind and drunkenness with their disobedience of God. Jesus drew a comparison of Jerusalem in Isaiah's day and the day in which He was quoting this passage. He said that they had cancelled out as invalid the Word of God in order to hand down their own traditions.

So, Jesus called to the crowd to come and He commanded them to hear that is, really listen and try to understand what He was really saying here, (Mk 7:14. He then said that,

"It's not what goes into your body that defiles (makes common) you; you are defiled (made common) by what comes from your heart" (Mk 7:15 NLT)

The idea of being defiled here has to do with becoming common or unacceptable in the presence of God. It is nothing that is done externally, like washing or not washing or the eating of certain foods. Instead it is the unrighteousness that is in the heart and overflows into the rest of our lives. As it has been pointed out,

"The heart is the core of motivation, deliberation, and intention. Food does not enter the heart, and what does not enter the heart cannot make a person unclean."²

Jesus took the Law of God and showed the real understanding of it. It was not given for a legalistic lifestyle or system, but rather for living a holy and righteous life in the presence of the One who is holy and righteous in His nature.

The followers of Jesus did not understand what He meant, so they asked Him to explain it to them, (Mk 7:18-19). Jesus went on to explain that He sees straight through to the heart of the matter and wants His followers to be able to do the same.

²⁰ "And then He added, 'It is what comes from inside that defiles you. ²¹ For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts and meditations, things like; sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. ²³ All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you'" (Mk 7:20-23 NLT; see also Matt 15:1-20).

Therefore, to get His point across Jesus went back to some of the Ten Words (a better translation than the Ten Commandments) and showed that it is a heart issue. Now there is no sense try to force Scripture to line up exactly here, but I am sure that we can get the idea. For example,

- Honor your father and mother: Ex 20:12; Mk 7:10
- Theft: Ex 20:15;
- Murder, adultery: Ex 20:14; Mk 7:21,22
- Deceit, slander: Ex 20:16; Mk 7:22
- Lustful desires, sexual immorality, envy, greed: Ex 20:17; Mk 7:22

That is He went to point out the heart of the matter.

² Strauss, Mark L. "Mark." In *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. Clinton E. Arnold. (Ed). (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 727.

2. So what is the heart of the matter?

Q. Let's cut to the chase, how is your heart?

So, it is the case that, Jesus got to the heart of the matter with His followers, when He said,

“All these vile things come from within; they are what continually defiles you” (Mk 7:23 NLT).

An observation is that, as the young Church of Jesus Christ they had traditions. As Christ-followers they may have been forming traditions and these could be good and helpful. They can be things that will stand them in good stead in the future as the Church. These are such things as practices or beliefs that they will hold and passed on from generation to generation.³ As good as these traditions may be; they will always need to be secondary to the Word of God. So, it has rightly been said that,

“CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE MINDFUL that they also have oral traditions that direct their behavior and dictate their beliefs. These are necessary for preserving the Christian heritage, drawing boundaries to set them apart from an unbelieving world, and mapping out how they can be expected to live. But these traditions can become snares that will trip up believers if they regard them as sacred and inviolable or apply them to repulse those whom God wishes to embrace. Christians, too, must guard against accentuating minutiae and making such things paramount while ignoring the weightier commands of God's law.”⁴

A second observation is that, it is not from outside in that they were made common, but from the inside out. It is a heart matter that is the issue here and not a tradition one. Therefore, the solution needs to follow this pattern that is; a person needs to be transformed from the inside out and not the other way around. It simply does not work to attempt to be transformed from the outside in; it only leads to religious slavery. That is why Jesus said,

“Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God’” (Jn 3:3 NLT).

A third observation is that, for humanity and even for Christ-followers (who should know better, but, are in fact a work in progress) the heart of the matter is being unthankful. The whole issue of the Ten Words is as God's children we have been gifted with what we need. So, we need to be thankful for what we have and not unthankful leading to murder, adultery, stealing, testifying falsely against our neighbour out of pride, and even coveting our neighbour's house, wife, or anything else that belongs to them.

So when Jesus picks this matter up, He is also challenging a thankless heart attitude of those around Him and especially His followers. That is why He got to the heart of the matter with them naming some of the unthankful heart issues,

²⁰ “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. ²¹ For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. ²³ All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you” (Mk 7:20-23 NLT)

That is, when they were not thankful,

- They might have evil thoughts, commit theft, or murder, wickedness, slander, be greedy, or deceitful, envious, filled with pride, and foolishness towards those around them.

³ “Tradition.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tradition> (21st March 2017).

⁴ Strauss, “Mark.” In *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 725.

- If they were not thankful for their God given husband, wives, sisters, brothers in Christ, then they might unthankfully turn to sexual immorality, commit adultery, and have lustful desires.

This is not a new idea that was introduced by Jesus. Jeremiah in dealing with Judah's sinfulness pointed out how the Lord highlights how deceitful the heart can be. It is only God who is able to properly search and know the heart. God said,

⁹ "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" ¹⁰ But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve" (Jer 17:9-10 NLT).

So, if Jesus' followers were really thankful for what they had already been given, then they would not have a deceitful heart full of these things. Instead they would have had a heart full of thanksgiving towards the Heavenly Father. So, we see that although they will hurt those that they take from, it is ultimately against the Heavenly Father that they sin. The sin is that of not being thankful. We all have so much to be grateful for in our lives and we need to learn the kingdom of God language of the expression gratitude.

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. Can you hear and understand your heart?

Jesus taught and modelled the right perspective of the true heart in His life. He sees straight through our attempts to hide the true intent of our heart on the matter of being unthankful. But, all of this needs to begin with a new birth through the Spirit of God. Only then, can there be the transformation of the heart towards having the Kingdom perspective. That will include having a thankful heart attitude for the blessing and promises from our Heavenly Father. Can we say with David? "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me" (Ps 51:10 NLT).

Solomon in Proverbs pointed out that it is all a matter of the heart when he said,

Guard! Your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life" (Prov 4:23 NLT)

So how can we respond? As individuals we are responsible for our own hearts. Today is a day of checking and if need be readjusting our perspective on our heart. If we stop here all that has been said to this point will just be academic. We need to bring the message from there and then of Jesus' day to the here and now our day by way of application. Remember, we are looking for an application from the teaching and theology of what we have just read. Any application will come from the passage itself. Do not read into it. Respond in light of what we have just read. Then we need to respond to what the Holy Spirit has said to us here and now from the there and then of Jesus' day and words.

Attempt the following:

- i. What is God saying to me?
- ii. What are you going to do about it? "How should I respond to what is being said?" or, "so what?"
- iii. What do you need to do to respond?
- iv. Pray and respond