

“Spoiled Rotten”
The Gospel According to Mark 7:14-23
April 15th, 2018

Think back with me to the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, after an unpopular decision by a grand jury not to bring to trial police officers charged with the death of a local young man. Television cameras and social media broadcast the rioting and demonstrations, police cars smashed and burning, and businesses being looted that followed the announcement. It was disturbing to watch masses of people smashing windows, breaking down doors, and stealing things from stores in their neighborhoods where they likely shopped and knew the proprietors.

I remember thinking, *what on earth did those store owners do wrong? What goes through people’s minds when such corrupt behaviors appear?* Not much, really. It’s been called ‘herd mentality’ or ‘mob behavior.’ Such dishonorable reactions to injustices, real or perceived, are *never* excusable. Lest we forget, we must remember what Scripture plainly teaches us about this world. Mankind – you, me, and everyone else – apart from the righteousness of Jesus Christ given to us - is bad; wicked; depraved. We are, by nature, evil.

Not everyone believes biblical truth; instead, many are captivated by unbiblical ideas that suppose people are basically good; or at least come into this world in a neutral state. Proponents of such ideas say our interchange with environmental factors determines our worth to society.

Who among us, though, hasn’t been disappointed by the behavior of others? And, who among us hasn’t been disappointed in our own behaviors? Such disappointments are inevitable because humanity is fallen; we have inherited the sin nature from our parents and they from theirs, stretching back to the sin in the Garden of Eden by our first parents, Adam and Eve. We are damaged goods spiritually; we are flawed, defective, and imperfect. The depravity of mankind is what Jesus teaches in the passage of Scripture before us this morning (**Mark 7:14-23**).

The Gospel According to Mark 7:14-23:

“When He (Jesus) had called all the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: ¹⁵There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. ¹⁶If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

¹⁷When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable.

¹⁸So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?” ²⁰And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.

²¹For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

I’ve always enjoyed the comic strip Peanuts by the late Charles Schulz. One of the lesser known characters travels around in his own private dust storm – *his name?* Pig Pen.

Friends, each of us – without exception – is a spiritual ‘Pig Pen.’ That is, if we are not covered by the blood of the only good Person ever to walk the earth – Jesus Christ. Left to our own devices, we are filthy, vile, and helpless. We are totally depraved. We are spoiled rotten!

Someone has written, “If depravity were blue, we’d be blue all over!”

Total depravity is the doctrine before us in this passage. And, what we have in this passage is Jesus’ direct reply to the question asked of Him by the scribes and Pharisees in verse 5 of this 7th chapter of Mark, which we studied last Sunday morning. There, we read, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” These religious leaders taught a person is cleaned of the pollution of sin (usually others sin) if they merely washed their hands before eating.

Jesus’ teaching in verse 15 of today’s passage is that people are not ruined (defiled) by what they eat, even when their hands are not properly washed. He says, “There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.” Rather, Jesus’ point is that people are ruined (defiled) by what is in their hearts. The stomach of a person is not the heart of a person.

Jesus declares that message to all of the multitude around Him, not solely to the scribes and the Pharisees who first asked the question. With verse 17, the audience shrinks in that Jesus’ disciples gather with Him in a house away from the crowd. They asked Jesus to explain this doctrine He had just declared. So, take heart, my friend, if you find it difficult to accept that in your own merit, you are a corrupt person. Jesus’ friends hearing this teaching from His lips found it difficult!

Let’s hear it from Jesus’ mouth – there are verses 18-20 again:

¹⁸“Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?” ²⁰ And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.”

Now, we should understand that Jesus is not advocating here that you should eat or drink things that are poisonous or in some other way harmful. Of course, such foodstuffs will bring harm to the person taking them in! Jesus’ emphasis is spiritual pollution, not merely physical pollution. What corrupts us is already within us. *We* are our own enemies. We cannot look within ourselves to find goodness, merit, worth or salvation from sin. What is bad about us is within us – our heart, will, conscience, mind, memory and understanding – all of these are stained with sin and depravity.

To illustrate His point, Jesus gives a list of sinful behaviors that no one had to teach us – they come to us naturally in our fallen condition. These are in verses 21 & 22, beginning with “evil thoughts.” Thoughts are the parents of deeds. They stand behind the evil actions of men. And such evil actions continue in the list. I’ll not touch on all of them, but most.

- “adulteries, fornications.” Sexual immorality is sin. The sexual union of any two or more people not properly married to each other is sin – this includes a man and a woman (not related to one another) living together outside the bond of marriage. Such an arrangement brings great temptation to enjoy the benefits of marital union without the commitment of marriage. It surely includes intercourse among those married, but not to each other. Other variations of these sins would include rape and pornography. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus extended the breadth of this sin to include lustful looks at someone who is not a spouse. Sexual immorality is never to be condoned or defended by the people of God because it breaches the marital bond and is an affront to a holy God.

- “murders.” Unjustly taking the life of another person, whether inside the womb or outside of it. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, equated hatred of another person as murder.

- “thefts.” Includes shoplifting, loafing on the job, and squandering the gifts God has given us. And, on what is normally “tax day” (April 15th), I might add it is theft not to report your income to the Internal Revenue Service. Christians are to render to Caesar what is Caesar’s. (**Mark 12:17**)

- “deceit.” – In his account of the gospel, Matthew calls this ‘false witness.’ Lying is a sin that arises in the heart of every man, woman, and child.

- “lewdness.” This is open immorality, sensuality. It includes the parading of deviant sexuality by those thumbing their noses at God and His Word. **Ezekiel 22:11** gives additional examples where we read, “One commits abomination with his neighbor’s wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; and another violates his sister, his father’s daughter.”

- “an evil eye.” This is envy, which is being displeased seeing someone else have something you do not have.

- “blasphemy.” Abusive speech against another; slander. It is our sinful nature that causes us to defend our actions, even when we clearly are wrong, or out of accord with God’s Word!

- “foolishness.” The fool, the Bible says, is the person who does not know God, nor desires to know him. (**Psalms 14:1**)

Interestingly, many of these sins are addressed by the Ten Commandments. God gave us Commandments 6-10 to address sins that impede our good relations with others.

- * The Sixth Commandment – you will not murder.
- * The Seventh Commandment – you will not commit adultery.
- * The Eighth Commandment – you will not steal.
- * The Ninth Commandment – You will not bear false witness.
- * The Tenth Commandment – You will not covet.

Moral filthiness is our great problem. Somerset Maugham, the writer, once said, “If I wrote down every thought I have ever thought and every deed I have ever done, men would call me a monster of depravity.” *What would people call you if they knew your every thought and deed?*

What can be done to improve our lot? Well, for one, we must compare ourselves to Jesus Christ, and not to other people.

J. Dwight Pentecost wrote, “The doctrine of depravity has to do, not with man’s estimation of man, but rather with God’s estimation of man. We are the heirs of generations of the teaching of evolution which sees man in an ever-ascending spiral, rising higher and higher from the depth from which he has sprung, until finally he will reach the stars. So widely accepted is that concept that we have come somehow to feel that there is so much good in the worst of us that man is not so bad off after all. When we measure men by man, we can always find someone who is lower than we are on the moral or ethical scale, and the comparison gives us a feeling of self-satisfaction. But the Scriptures do not measure men by man; they measure men by God Who created them. The creature is measured by the Creator and is found to be wanting.”

Second, we must realize that gaining increased knowledge of God’s Word is the key to godly living. A great deal of emphasis in our society is placed on education. And, let me say, I believe education to be very important. But the kind of education is important, and how to put it to use makes all the difference in the world. Consider a national example – let’s see if you can guess which country I’m describing.

By the late 19th century, this country was Europe's most cultivated, and certainly its best-educated country. This country had the world's finest elementary school system, the highest literacy rate and the best universities; by 1913 more books were published annually in this country than in any country in the world. Its technical skill, its industry, its relentless business savvy marked it off as among modernity's singular successes. But, this country – Germany – soon led the world into two world wars with unprecedented destruction of life and property. Over 40 million military and civilian casualties in World War I (20 million deaths, 21 million injured). World War II casualties are double those numbers.

We must grow in our knowledge of God and His Word. Our challenge is to see all of life through the lens of sacred Scripture. The pursuit of the trivial and the worldly is not the educational goal for God’s people. Becoming more like Jesus is!

Thirdly, we must plead with God to eradicate the tangled web of sins yet in our hearts. Even as professing Christians, we must deal daily with sins that so easily entangle us. We must run with perseverance the race that God has marked out for us. We do not do that in isolation from one another, but with one another. Pray, pray, pray for God’s grace to flood our heart and mind.

If a lion is in a cage, and you put before him a bowl of meat and a bowl of wheat, *which one will the lion choose to eat?* The lion will always choose the meat; he would never choose the wheat, because lion’s don’t eat wheat. That is what they are.

Total depravity is like this, in that our nature, using its freedom of choice, will only choose sin! *Why?* That is who we are! It must take an act outside of ourselves to change what is going on inside of ourselves. A new will; a new nature, found only in Jesus.