



Hard Sayings of Jesus

Lesson 4 Jesus Challenges Our View of Ourselves

Opening Prayer

Introduction

People hold very different views of what human beings are like “by nature.” Name three of the most common views the world has on what humans are like by nature.

Out of all the views, which one seems to be dominant in our culture today? Give some examples of what leads you to say this.

Why do you think this is such a popular view?

Studying God’s Word

Without a doubt, Jesus speaks some surprising words about what this world is like and the nature of the things we do. But more difficult and surprising than those, at times, are what Jesus has to say about *who we are*. The Lord knows! The one who made us completely understands what our hearts are like. He speaks to us about them so that we understand them too—and know where true renewal is found!

Mark 7:1-2,14-23 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ² saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. ...¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’” ¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’? ¹⁹ For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”) ²⁰ He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’” ²¹ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’ ”

1. The Pharisees noticed that Jesus' disciples had eaten without giving their hands a traditional ceremonial washing. Why was this such a big deal? What did they believe this did to the disciples?
2. Jesus used this as a chance to address the Pharisees' misunderstanding of the dietary laws of the Old Testament. The Pharisees saw eating the wrong food in the wrong way as separating one from God and making the person "unclean." By doing so they had made the material action sinful in itself, rather than a sign for deeper spiritual realities. How does Jesus show that the physical properties of animals and foods does not make people spiritually unclean?
3. Where does Jesus say the root our uncleanness lies?
4. This teaching is largely rejected by our world. What difficult truth about ourselves does Jesus call us to face?
5. What evidence do you see that what Jesus says is true?

Matthew 6:19-24 ¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴ No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

6. Jesus says that we can either serve God or money, but not both. Explain what makes this saying so hard.
7. Look closely at Jesus' words in verse 24. What might be some warning signs for a Christian who professes love for God that his heart might not be in the right place?
8. Jesus goes on in verse 25 and 26: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" What difficult (but wonderful!) thing does God want to accomplish in us?
9. As someone to whom God has given faith in Jesus, you have a new heart. As you consider how God talks to us about money (or adultery, or hatred, etc.), define God's greatest concern for us.

Summary

- Jesus' words make us face the difficult truth that our hearts are, by nature, wellsprings of evil.
- As believers, our new hearts are daily faced with choices of what (and whom!) we'll love.
- God gives us encouragement to keep our focus on him because he wants to give our hearts true peace.

During the week...

1. Pay attention to the news you hear and conversations you're a part of. Consider how easy it is for this world (and for us!) to assign blame to everyone and everything else while insisting that we're basically good people.
2. Spend time in thought this week about some of the conflicts in your life. How many have you blamed on others? on your circumstances? These may be real factors. But give real consideration to the ways your own stubbornness, jealousy, self-righteousness, or fear might play a role in the conflict. If you feel comfortable, consider putting the situation in front of a trusted friend and asking for his or her insight as well. Repent of any sins you realize, take comfort in God's forgiveness, and seek to make amends.

Prayer

