

# The diagnosis of spiritual sickness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The ward that I worked on was infectious diseases and I did a bit of respiratory medicine as well. But whatever area of medicine or treatment in a hospital, it's true for all areas of medicine I suppose.

But often, often, the symptoms that someone presents with don't reveal the full picture of what's going on today. What the real problem is or where the real problem lies perhaps.

I was once looking after a patient, it was infectious diseases but it was also tropical medicine. And I was once looking after a patient that had something called Lola Lola.

Lola Lola is a parasite that comes from a fly bite that can happen anywhere on the body. But the larvae that comes from the fly bite that tends to find the best place to sort of grow is in a patient's eye.

So you can get bit anywhere in your body by this and eventually you will end up with a larvae in your eye. It sounds pretty disgusting. It is pretty disgusting. I did watch one get removed.

[ 1 : 1 7 ]     So you can see the problem. The patient comes in with an eye problem, has no idea that actually the real problem was that they had an insect bite somewhere else on their bodies.

Normally, I think it's a bug that comes somewhere in Africa. But to treat the illness, the disease, the parasite, and this goes for a majority of medical conditions, whatever it is, you need to know the root of the cause, the problem.

The symptom will only tell you so much. You need the right diagnosis. What is true for our physical health is true of our spiritual health.

There are symptoms that demonstrate the state of your spiritual health. And this is exactly what Jesus is talking about. And it's what we're going to get onto today, that the symptoms of spiritual health, but what is the diagnosis of spiritual sickness?

The symptoms of spiritual sickness and the diagnosis of spiritual sickness. Before we get going, it's just worth reminding ourselves where we're at in Mark's Gospel. In this section of Mark, we looked at 1-4 quite a while ago.

[ 2 : 3 3 ]     We're now in chapters 5-8. And Jesus is continuing more and more to reveal Himself, who He is. He's becoming a more prominent figure in the world that He lives in.

And whilst this is happening, the discipleship of His 12 best friends, the apostles, is quite clearly on the agenda. We saw last week Jesus called and sent the 12 out.

And then we saw when they'd done a lot of ministry, this was just last week, they'd done some ministry, they'd healed people, they'd cast out demons, they'd preached repentance. But when they came back, we saw something strange about them.

After feeding 5,000, walking and water, verse 52, we read that the hearts of the disciples were hardened. That's in chapter 6. Verse 52, that the hearts of the disciples were hardened.

It's quite a puzzling thing to understand after doing ministry, after seeing Jesus perform two amazing miracles, that their hearts were hardened. We know it must have some connection to Jesus revealing Himself as God.

[ 3 : 40 ] They didn't have understanding and some connection to them coming back from ministry. And then we come to chapter 7, which is all about the heart.

Their hearts were hardened. And then the very next chapter is all about the heart. And so what we read actually, I think, subtly sheds some light on what is going on with the disciples.

In their hearts, why they were hardened. And the opportunity comes for Jesus to teach them when the Pharisees pay them a visit. The symptoms of spiritual sickness.

The symptoms of spiritual hard-heartedness. And then the diagnosis. Just to set the scene, we know the Pharisees and teachers, there's a fair amount of them.

They come all the way from Jerusalem. Just bear in mind that Jesus was doing most of His ministry up in Galilee. We know that the disciples, when Jesus sent out the twelve, they were in the Decapolis, which is just south of Galilee.

[ 4 : 44 ] So from Jerusalem to Galilee is not round the corner. It's a 160 mile round trip. That's eight days of walking. So it's a lot of effort for the Pharisees and the teachers of the law to get there.

So you would expect, if they're travelling all that way, that it must be pretty serious business. They pull Jesus up because His disciples don't wash their hands before they eat.

Verse 5, why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating their food with defiled hands? Make no mistake, this is no right matter to us, it might seem, that they're talking about things that are true.

But make no mistake, what the Jewish elite accuse Jesus and His men of is, it is serious. It's got nothing to do with hygiene, but of being spiritually unclean before God.

To knowingly go against God's law was to suggest that Jesus and His men were breaking fellowship with God by their actions. It's a serious accusation.

[ 5 : 51 ] Jesus with razor precision, razor precision, sees what's going on. And He calls out the symptoms of their spiritual sickness.

There's two really that I think are going on. The first symptom of spiritual sickness He calls out is legalism. Now just to pause, what do we mean by it?

Sometimes we have that word legalism, it sounds like kind of an academic theological word. What is a legalistic relationship? It is any situation where some form of reward is given for meeting some standard.

And in some environments, legalistic relationships are not a bad thing. Workplaces are in the main legalistic relationships.

If you tick all the boxes of things you're supposed to do, you get a pay right. You earn further with your employer based on your performance. We understand that it's how the world works.

[ 6 : 58 ] And in one sense, that's not wrong. But when we talk about our legalistic relationships spiritually, it means trying to earn favour with God by ticking the right boxes.

Doing the right things. Jesus sees that's what's going on. He quotes Isaiah and pinpoints very precisely what is going on with the Pharisees.

These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain. Their teachings are merely human rules. Their outward performance, being seen to do the right thing, is more important than anything else.

They honour, they worship, they clean their hands, they do the right thing, and it presents to everyone else that these are the ones who bear in favour of God, who are close to God, who know God, who actually should be listened and respected.

Who have the authority and the licence to tell the people how they should lay. They do the right thing on the outside. They meet the required standards.

[ 8 : 07 ] Not for a pay rise, but to be, but almost to feel like they deserve to be more accepted by the living God. It makes them feel better about themselves, and they look down on those who don't do the same, who don't live the same.

So that's the first problem, legalism. The first symptom of spiritual sickness. The second symptom of spiritual sickness is hypocrisy.

The reason Jesus calls them out as hypocrites is because he calls out for the disciples, they call out the disciples, these Pharisees, for not following this hand washing law, but he demonstrates to Jesus that in another area of their life they don't follow the law either.

Now, this does require a little bit of explanation because I think that it is quite tricky to understand. There's a strange word that comes up. You'll notice it, that word Corban.

It means, that Corban means an oath where something was dedicated to God. This is how it worked. It's the name given when someone would take something of theirs and dedicate it exclusively for God's use only.

[ 9 : 21 ] By stating that something was Corban, you were saying that it was for God alone, God's alone exclusively, and it wasn't for human use. If it was a business, for example, you would say this is for God and all the prophets are going to go to it.

If it was your house, this is for the work of the Lord and it's not for human use, only God's work for God in here. You think, when we hear that, in and of itself, that is not a bad thing, is it?

Dedicating something unto God for his use, not a bad thing. But the Pharisees turn the world over its heads. They insist that a Corban power was more important than anything else, and even greater than the fifth commandment to honour their parents.

Hypothetically, it meant that a son, or a child, a son or daughter, could dedicate everything he had to the Lord, and even if his own mother and father came to him in need, say they'd run into hardship and were destined to, needed help, according to the Pharisees, it would be sin for the son to help them out.

You can only imagine, can't you, how that might be helping to abuse. You could imagine, perhaps, where a son might spitefully make something Corban, so that he didn't have to help his family.

[ 10 : 54 ] Whether in spite or not, that's kind of a side-going. It's not right that another law should supersede the law to love your parents, to honour them.

The spirit of the law, we know, was to love God and love neighbour. Love is more important than legal loopholes and keeping unwritten traditions. Jesus highlights their error.

The error is, for them, the hypocrite. They're quite happy to point out where they tick the box of cleaning their hands, and others fail. But equally, they're quick to hide their faults that disqualify them.

They're legalists. Now, you might think, you might think, if they follow the law themselves to the letter, then fair enough.

But they turn people away from the law by saying that honouring your father and mother doesn't really matter. Which is worse. Who's worse?

[ 12 : 03 ] Pharisees and Pharisees. Neither of them, the people who aren't washing their hands. Neither of them are following the law. Grout, hypocritical, legalists, what scandals. These guys are the worst, right?

These guys are the worst. Isn't that how we think when we hear about the Pharisees? And naturally, naturally for each of us, when we look at the Pharisees, we think, these guys are awful, aren't they?

They're just awful. In the Bible, they're like the pantomime body, aren't they? As soon as you hear the term Pharisees, you almost know what's coming. Boo!

Look how bad they are, these Pharisees. Now, don't get me wrong, they're against Jesus for the last majority of the time. But what you realise is actually they're not much different to those arguments.

That is normally the point. There is shock value. You're not supposed to see the Pharisees and say, what rotten, horrible scoundrels. You're supposed to see them and realise that whilst their actions aren't good, deep down on the heart level, they're just the same.

[ 13 : 13 ] It's what Jesus wants the disciples to see. And it does actually give us a clue as to what was going on in their hearts when he walked on water.

And they were hardened because they didn't understand the laws. They were proud hypocrites too. They were given, you remember the 12? Given authority to cast out demons, to preach repentance to new people.

saw amazing miracles, came back from their ministry exploits, shouting, celebrating. And given that this episode comes immediately after, I take it to me, they too had started to think too, I need to tell this.

Just like the Pharisees did. They've ticked ministry boxes that no one else could tick. Spiritually, they're a great success story. And we can be just the same.

We love, don't we love people to see when our servant had in nature? We love to talk about great times of prayer or what God has shown us in the word.

[ 14 : 19 ] And special spiritual experiences as if other people just aren't on the same spiritual plane as we are. And yet we hide and make excuses, forget those times when we do see when our, because our mistakes are not as bad.

There are genuine reasons aren't they? When we behaved the way we did, we were tired. We've been under a lot of stress. It's totally understandable that we got angry and said things we regret.

So what is the diagnosis?

What is the diagnosis? The reality is that when it comes to spiritual sickness, the symptoms look different in everyone. There are symptoms that are common, which one of us has not acted hypocritically before and treated God's commands as a tick-tock exercise.

We've all done. But they can come out in all sorts of ways. That's the same as we mentioned, someone with a physical illness. You think of someone with flu.

[ 15 : 28 ] Some people get a bad headache. That never seems to go away. And for others, the headaches are not that bad, but they feel more lethargic and fatigued. But whilst the symptoms might be different, the thing that causes those symptoms are the same.

And sometimes the underlying cause is not at first obvious. It's exactly the same when it comes to spiritual sickness. The symptoms of the sickness are the sins that we can see visibly that people do.

But if we only concentrate on what people are doing outwardly, the problem will never be fixed. If we only take paracetamol with flu, it won't sort the flu out.

It will get rid of your headache, but the source of the headache will still be there. If you just focus on not being a hypocrite, or not being a legalist, or whatever the cities are not getting angry, you won't treat the problem.

Behaviour will be modified. You'll look better on the outside, but the inside will be a little better. Jesus gives the diagnosis.

[ 16 : 39 ] Verse 14. Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

You know it's important. Out of everything he said, he makes a point of pulling everyone's attention in. Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them.

Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. The disciples still don't get it. They quiz him. Are you so dull? he asks. Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them?

If it doesn't go into the heart, into their stomach, and then out? What comes out of a person is what defiles them. You see the diagnosis that Jesus did, it's not the same or the less.

The symptoms come back because the root of your problem is that you have a heart sin sickness problem. It comes from within. And each person is suffering with the same sickness.

[ 17 : 44 ] What that does is completely level the playing field. Which is shocking for us to hear. It is shocking.

Jesus is rewriting their point of reference. Your obedience of the law is actually coming from the place that is revealing that your heart is coming from the inside.

It's your heart that is pulling to you. It's not coming externally. It's coming internally. He's telling the disciples whose hearts are hard. They are no different to them.

And verse 23 couldn't be any clearer, could it? All these evils come from inside. and personal. It's the truth we do, I want to admit.

Our hearts are just the same. Any sin that we do, any sin that we do, no one else is at fault for our sin but us. No one. In the garden, Eve, she's tempted by the snake, but she was the one who decided to listen. It was her decision to eat the fruit.

[ 18 : 56 ] No one else was responsible for what she did. On a deep level, we're all the same. The symptoms might be on a spectrum of things that are not as bad as to truly awful.

We're left at this juncture. If we were to leave it here, we are left in a pretty despairing place because we all have the same problem. We know that's the case. Ignore it.

because we see the effects of it everywhere, in our lives and in our world. The only way, the only way, good, could come out of you and not evil, as Jesus puts it, is if someone external comes and cleans your heart and gives you a miracle.

God's love. It's the only way. Like medicine that heals a physical sickness, Jesus is the lamb. He's the one who heals.

He sees the symptoms, he makes the diagnosis, and he brings the cure. He brings and gives you himself with his, but by the power of his Holy Spirit comes to live in you and cleans you from the inside.

[ 20 : 10 ] and it's all of grace. A leopard can't change its spots and neither can we. Everyone wants to change, but no matter how many self-help programs you may be all on, how many books you read, how many new starts you make, you'll only be ever making changes to your behavior while the real root of the problem remains.

But Jesus Christ comes to give you a new heart. He's the spiritual physician. To be pure and holy and live as the person he wants you to be.

The people, the church, who he wants us to be. He wants us to be the temple that is not made with human hands. The church, the people of God, where he dwells.

And if you call yourself a follower of Jesus this morning, that process has already been. There's three things that are true. Your heart is changed.

Your heart is being changed every day. And one day, your heart will be completely changed forever. You are saved.

[ 21 : 23 ] You're being saved. And one day, you will be saved forever. It's the good news. This is the good news in the New Cross Bowl that no matter how bad the bad news is, it emphasises and magnifies just how good the good news of the gospel is.

No matter how sick and how sinful you think your heart is, it is not beyond being cleaned by Jesus. There's no one that is too sinful that cannot be rescued by the blood of Jesus Christ who won't come dwell within us as his people.

And what a joy, what a joy, that we know that this is, the process has begun and he will lead us to a place where we will know sin no more and that our hearts will be trimmed and that our hearts will be trimmed.

So, what starts as a place of real contemplation and meditation upon who we are, what we are, it is challenging to think this is what we're like, this is who we are on the inside, that we do behave as hypocrites, that we do behave as people who love tick boxes and it's worth reflecting on that for ourselves.

But don't stay there. Don't stay in that despair because we know that the gospel removes our despair and gives us hope as the people that he wants us to be, as the people that he wants the church to be.

[ 23 : 00 ] When the kids come back in, we're going to be taking the Lord's Supper. It's a good opportunity to reflect as we draw near to God and reflect on our sin and repent of the ways that our heart has become polluted and to know that as we meditate and think on the good news of the gospel that Jesus is changing us, that he has saved us and that we will one day be truly free.

Let me pray. Almighty God, we do thank you for your son.

the Lord Jesus. And as we come to you, we just recognise that the state of our hearts is alarming, it is challenging and it is shocking.

And I thank you that you do tell, you don't hold back from telling us what we're really like. You do reveal to us what we need to know.

We need to know the diagnosis. we need to know that the depths of our sin is truly awful. But what a joy it is to know that you are not left that way.

[ 24 : 19 ] And I pray that for each of us you'd help us to take that on, to acknowledge it, to respond, to be responsible for the ways that you want us to change and to acknowledge the ways that we have fallen short.

And so I do pray that you'd help us to do that. Bless us, we pray. We pray that the word that we've heard would resonate and we'd meditate on it and it would be like that bound to our soul we pray that you would come and be that great position to us.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.