



12th Sunday of Pentecost

Message Transcript

What's stored in your heart?

Main verse:

"The things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person"
(Matthew 15:18-20a)

Main Point:

What do you allow to remain in your heart? What is stored there?
Past hurts, bitterness, jealousy, angry revenge, regret, guilt, unforgiveness?
Jesus calls these 'evil thoughts', which later make themselves known through evil behaviours.

While Jesus was confronting the pharisees about their hypocrisy,
He spoke of the importance each person has to guard the storeroom of their heart,
not allowing evil thoughts to remain. If these evil attitudes do remain,
they will eventually spill out of our mouth, defiling our entire being.

What if I told you that I have a heart condition? What would your reaction be?

Most likely, you would respond with gasps of "Oh no! How serious?" Then a flood of questions would arise, "What prognosis have you been given? Is surgery necessary? What medication have been you prescribed?"

Hopefully, someone will eventually say, "We'd better kick the prayer team into action!"

The truth is, I do have a heart condition ... and so do you.

In fact, every human, to some degree or another, whether they are a believer or a non-believer, has a heart condition; a condition which impacts every aspect of our lives.

Of course, I'm talking about my spiritual heart, the place in the core of my being which represents my true self.

Today, we normally use the word 'heart' to describe our emotions, "I just don't have the heart to do such and such", or "My heart is filled with love for you ...".

However, in the Bible, our heart is a much broader term, representing our entire inner being. *(Note: Even more specific: the heart is described in the Bible as the place where we ponder (Mark 2:6-7), store God's truth (Job 22:22), make decisions and determinations (Ezra 7:10, Luke 21:14), hold attitudes (Matthew 11:29) and shape our moral character (1 Kings 9:4).*

That's why the first commandment God's people are given is to love God with "all of our heart, soul, mind and strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 11:13 and Matthew 22:37).

That's why so much of Jesus' teachings dealt with matters of the heart. In fact, we could say in many ways, the condition of a person's heart was one of the hottest topics on Jesus' preaching schedule.

Why? Well, our heart is the initiator for everything we do.

That's why Proverbs 4:23 reads, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

Did you notice that - 'everything you do flows from it.'

So ... that makes the condition of our heart – whether it is in a healthy condition or a diseased condition – very important.

Let's step into our Gospel passage and see why Jesus addresses this topic.

The pharisees have once again confronted Jesus, questioning him and his teachings. Now they are also criticising how he manages his ministry team. They ask why his disciples don't adhere to the traditions of the elders (Matthew 15:2).

Instead of reacting or justifying his reasoning on the matter, Jesus throws back a question to them, designed to uncover their own hypocrisy.

He pinpoints that they were also neglecting God's commands, replacing them with human traditions. Their motive was to make them appear righteous, but it had no effect on their heart.

The consequence was that their worship of God had become vain and shallow. That's what happens when too much attention is given to focussing on human developed rules, rather than drawing near to God with a pure, genuine heart (15:6-9).

Then Jesus decided this was a wonderful teaching moment for everyone.

He explains that it is not the food that we eat which defiles us, rather it is what we have stored in our heart, revealed by what we say that defiles us. (15:10)

Let's pause for a moment and consider what 'defile' means.

We don't really use that word today. We would say something has been contaminated or polluted, or violated, or corrupted. We hear these words a lot today, but mainly about objects or places, rarely about people.

But in Jesus' day, something became defiled, if it came into contact with something or someone that God had declared unclean or was prohibited. (Leviticus 11:32)

The entire Jewish life revolved around keeping yourself undefiled or religiously clean, otherwise you would be unable to enter the temple, and so cut off from the entire community.

So, when Jesus said that it isn't food that defiles a person, he was revealing an entirely new way of understanding what causes something or someone to become corrupt in the eyes of God.

Rather than defilement being caused by something on the outside, touching something, tasting something, or going somewhere, Jesus was saying that defilement arises from what is stored in a person's heart.

Such a suggestion startled everyone – not just the pharisees, even the disciples couldn't understand it. They just put it down to 'one of Jesus' strange parables' (15:15).

So, what was Jesus talking about?

We've all heard the expression, 'they're a bad apple'. It means at the core of their being, beneath what we can see, they are rotten. In other words, they have a bad character.

Well, a little earlier, Jesus used a similar expression, saying that each person was like a tree that either produced good fruit or evil fruit.

In Luke chapter 6,

"A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart." (Luke 6:45 NLT)

Notice that word 'treasury'. That means 'storeroom'.

Not only does every person have a heart, but within each person's heart is a storeroom – and in some people what is stored is good and in others what is stored is evil.

Point 1 | We are born with the seed of sin and death in our heart. Those who accept Jesus undergo a heart transplant, receiving a clean heart in which is planted seed of life.

Do you remember a few weeks ago, we listened to Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds? He explained that the wheat which was planted by God represented the 'people of the kingdom', while the others were 'the people of the evil one.' (Matthew 15:38)

Of course, wheat grows from a wheat seed, while weeds grow from the seed of a weed.

That's the imagery Jesus uses in verse 13. He explains that there is a seed at the core of every person's heart. In some there is the seed of sin and death, which grows evil fruit, and in others there is God the Father's seed of life, which produces the fruit of righteousness.

I don't have time today to go into it, but both Paul and Peter used the same metaphor (see Romans 5:12 and 1 Peter 1:25).

Let me summarise: We were all born with the seed of sin planted in our heart.

But Praise the Lord! Whoever entrusts their life to Jesus, undergoes spiritual surgery – a literal, yet spiritual, heart transplant! – the very one that Ezekiel prophesied about.

"And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart, ..." (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26)

However, even though the hard work has been done by the Spirit of God, it doesn't mean our hearts are perfect for the remainder of our lives.

Unfortunately, even the newly cleaned and tender heart given to us by the Spirit of God can become defiled, or polluted and corrupted (see 2 Corinthians 7:1) – to such a degree that our heart condition can be spiritually fatal!

Point 2 | Our hearts are like a storeroom. We choose what thoughts we allow into our heart and what thoughts we allow to remain in our heart.

Today, Jesus reveals, the condition of our heart will depend upon what we allow to enter and what we allow to remain in the storeroom of our heart.

Think of your heart as a huge archive system. And the filter or security door which protects what is stored in this archive system is your mind.

Do you notice that Jesus specifically identifies 'evil thoughts' as being the first cause of what should not be stored in our heart?

An evil thought is an imagination or an argument that originates from the evil one. We know that it is from the enemy because it will be contrary to God's revealed will, word and character. In other words, it will be a lie against God's revealed truth.

And Paul tells us it is our responsibility to capture these evil thoughts and make them obedient with God's word of truth. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

How do we do that? We replace the devil's lies with God's truth.

And if we don't do this, if we let these evil thoughts hang around in our heart ...

... our heart will become 'hard'.

There are plenty of places that Jesus warned us about the consequences of allowing unforgiveness, bitterness and offence to remain in our hearts (Matthew 6:15-16; 1 Peter 5:10).

Application | We must intentionally and diligently protect the storeroom in our heart, choosing what thoughts we allow both in and to remain in our heart.

So ... let us ask the Spirit of God to give you eyes that can discern what is currently on the shelves in the storeroom of your heart. Are evil thoughts stored there? Are there past hurts and offences which remain?

If you open the door and see that there are indeed many old boxes which contain lots of evil thoughts ... maybe it's time to partner with the Spirit of God for a spring clean.

May I recommend the resource that I prepared at the beginning of this year ...



Let's pray.

Just because you didn't do the spring clean at the beginning of the year, doesn't mean you can't do it now!

If you know that there is some evil thoughts lingering in your heart, it is time to confront them, with the Spirit of God and clean them out of your heart.

This 21 day devotional will take you through a spiritual spring clean – sweeping and sorting all the junk that so easily accumulates ... So, open the windows and let the fresh summer breeze of the Holy Spirit blow through.