

This is a prerecorded sermon, preached @ Good Shepherd Baptist Church
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Text: Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28

Theme: From the Heart Comes.....

One day, I was having lunch with a friend. As we were talking, he said something hateful. After recovering from the shock, I said to him, "Wow! Where did that come from?" Without hesitation, he said to me, "From my heart to my head and then to my mouth!"

Note, he didn't say from his stomach to his mouth, but from the heart to the mouth. So, from the hearts come.... good and evil.

When Jesus called the crowd to Himself, He told them something so common yet crucial to understand. What defiles a person is not what enters their mouth, but what comes out of the heart and through their mouth.

When the disciples told Jesus that the crowd took offense from his remarks, Jesus reminded the disciples that the reason why the crowd took offense is because they are blind, guiding the blind.

When Jesus said that, even the disciples were confused, because looking at the crowd, they could see almost everyone had eyes. So, wanting to understand what Jesus meant. Peter asked Him to explain the meaning of the parable.

Again, Jesus emphasized that it is what comes from the heart and out of the mouth that defiles a person. He goes on to mention some of the things that come from the heart, such as "*evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander*" (Matthew 15:18).

This is a loaded list of things. For they defile or rather affect not only an individual but the entire society. I hope you all understand what this means in our society today.

I believe what Jesus was pointing out is the hypocrisy. People were pretending to stick to traditions, but in their hearts, they were constantly devising wicked schemes. These schemes included not only the above-mentioned things but also evil ways of undermining those they despise, and even get rid of them if necessary.

I suppose the story of the Canaanite woman who went to Jesus, begging Him for mercy, and to heal her tormented daughter is a clear indication of what Jesus was talking about. If you read Matthew 15:23, Jesus's disciples asked Jesus to "send her away" they claimed that she kept shouting at them.

Brothers and sisters, even the followers of Jesus themselves did not understand the pleas of the Canaanite woman--that her daughter was suffering at the hands of demons. All they could see was a foreign poor woman and decided she deserved no mercy. And to look good, they accused her of "shouting at them."

I bet they laughed when Jesus said to the woman that, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (15:26).

By the way, we are not talking about American dogs. We are talking about a culture where dogs were not of great value (1 Sam 24:15, 2 Sam 9:8; 16:9). So, the use of the term dog was intended to deeply humiliate and degrade someone.

Let me point out that this where Jesus is misunderstood by many; but allow me to defend Jesus here. In this case, I don't think Jesus was insulting this Canaanite woman, but rather he was echoing what he was hearing from people's hearts. People who because of their self-righteousness, were careful not to embarrass themselves opening by calling her what they thought of her -- in this case, a dog.

I don't want to dwell on the explanation about the dog, but understand that the Jews considered themselves better than Canaanites.

And I believe this is the reason why Jesus calls the Jews lost when he said that "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (15:24).

If you read Luke 12: 2-3, you will notice that Jesus had already warned his disciple against people's hypocrisy, saying, "*There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and whatever you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.*"

You know, we worship a God who sees what is in our hearts. And He knows when people sugarcoat their words so that they will not be accused of being mean or malicious. But what is in their hearts is far more dangerous than you can imagine.

In this case, the disciples thought they could flatter Jesus by telling Him that the Canaanite woman was shouting at them, instead of directly telling Him that she was no less than a dog.

This brings us to my point. Today there is so much going on, especially regarding the coronavirus. The battle between medical experts and our political leaders has left many people flustered and confused. For example, to wear mask or not to wear. To reopen business, churches and schools or not to reopen?

Today, many people are crying for help so that they don't lose their homes. Today, people are crying just for food to survive. Today people of color are crying out, begging the police to let their sons, daughters, husbands, wives, friends, and other relatives live instead of shooting them like animals. Today, people are begging the government to spend more money on helping minority children get a good education instead of sending them to prison.

And the question is. Is there anybody listening and understanding their pleas?

The sad thing is, those in power who are supposed to hear their cries and help them have hardened their hearts. All they hear is pointless shouting, not pleas for help. And the response? "It is what it is" "We are doing fine."

Really, are we? My call to each one of us is to be persistent, like the Canaanite woman. We must continue praying to God and at the same time continue asking for help from the officials who will soon be begging for our votes.

And let us continue encouraging each other in every way possible.

I thank God and pray for those who in their own ways, have responded to the cries of the oppressed in any way they can. This includes members of Good Shepherd Baptist Church, whom I have personally witnessed respond to the cries of the needy. For example, contributions to food banks, collecting socks to keep the homeless warm, gift cards for less fortunate teenagers as Christmas gift, and even the Shepherd's Village. I believe this has inspired other churches to follow suit.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, material things are not the only things that matter. Even just a few words of kindness can impact someone else's life greatly. Proverbs 18:4 tells us that *"a person's words can be life-giving water; words of true wisdom are refreshing as a bubbling brook."* But that's not what is happening today.

For example, consider the false information circulating about COVID-19. Leaders are spreading this, even church leaders, and exposing their blatant disregard for the truth. Regarding the issue of reopening churches and schools, as a believer in God's protection, I would like to remind us all of the wise African saying that "God is good, but do not dance with a lion." God is calling us to be wise, and like the Canaanite woman, be resilient yet gentle with each other, for "gentle words brings life and health; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit" (Proverbs 15:1). "And above all else, let us guard hearts, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Let us all continue seeking the Lord with all our hearts.

May God bless you and keep you all safe. Amen.