

September 1, 2024

St. Mark 7:18b-23:

The Evil Within

- I. What Goes In
- II. What Comes Out
- III. What About *The Evil Within*?

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Emile Durkheim was a French sociologist and social evolutionist. He has been referred to as “the principal architect of modern social science.” His years were 1859-1917. He has been mentioned here in the past. He stated:

It can no longer be maintained that there is one, single morality which is valid for all men at all times in all places. We know full well that morality has varied... The purpose of morality practiced by a people is to enable it to live; hence morality changes with societies. There is not one morality, but several, and as many as there are social types. And as our societies change, so will our morality. It will no longer be in the future what it is today. (True For You But Not For Me, by Paul Copas, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 2009 Revised edition, p. 88.)

As I thought about his statement, “morality changes with societies,” I thought about this Word of God that was given before the flood, from Genesis 6: “The Lord saw that the wickedness was great in the earth, and that every intention of (man’s) heart was only evil continually...the earth was corrupt (and) filled with violence (vv.5,11).” I thought about God’s Word given after the flood, “for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth (Gn.8:21).” I thought about Jesus’ words, “For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man (Mt.24:37).” And then I thought about Durkheim’s statement, “It can no longer be maintained that there is one, single morality for all men at all times.”

What Durkheim and many others who have followed him have stated is not an ever changing morality to enable people to live. It’s a delusion because they can’t or refuse to see that the immorality of the past has always been the same. It always leads to decay and demise of common sense, decency and the love to protect and cherish life. It’s the failure to understand that “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” It’s delusion that refuses to acknowledge the reason for the rise, decline, and failure of one culture after another: Sin. It’s delusion, as Paul reminds us, “Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thess.2:11,12).” We’re considering . . .

THE EVIL WITHIN

I. What Goes In

Our Text begins: ““Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled.’ (Thus he declared all foods clean.)”

The context of what Jesus said is revealed in these words, also from St. Mark 7; these statements found in verses 1-8:

“Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes...they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed...

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not walk according to the traditions of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’ And he said to them ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines commandments of men.” You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

It was in the mid 1970's that Lutheran pastor Louis H. Valbracht told of this incident that took place in his church:

A third grade boy in our parish finished a course in our Church School, and on the last page of the workbook there was a questionnaire. One of the questions was "What rules for life have you learned in this course?" And he had written, "No drinking on Sundays."

Well, that became a tradition for a number of church bodies. And a delusion. Unfortunately for such thinking Jesus, God in the flesh, instituted His Supper with the bread and wine of the Passover meal. What Scriptures teach is abuse of alcohol.

II. What Comes Out

And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a person (vv.20-23)."

So, have evil thoughts ever come to mind? Could you count the number for one day? Any, so far this morning? Right now? Has anything on that list ever popped into your heart and then grew into thoughts, and some into words, and some into deeds? You know, the list: "evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." And what kind of consequences are any of us experiencing because of something we thought, or said, or did, or didn't do?

We can get angry and run away from the truth, but the truth is that wickedness rests in every heart. The issue of social evolution is absurd. John Patrick of Augustine College, Ottawa, Canada said: "It is time to reintroduce courageously, even abrasively, specific religious understandings..." Well, let's try this understanding from Scripture: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one (Rm.3:10-12)." Listen: this is about where we are without Christ. It's thoroughly abrasive to the self-righteous.

The Lord informed us through the Psalmist, "I said in my alarm, 'All men are liars (Ps.116:11).'" And here's a sharp slice of truth none of us can escape; from Solomon: "...the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead (Eccl.9:3b)." We can deny any statement we've heard from Scripture. It doesn't change the truth: "Madness in their hearts while they live." Would you like to talk about the craziness and hellishness of everything that's happening in this country; this world? And then the words that stop us dead in our tracks: "...He knows the secrets of the heart (Ps.44:21b)." We have none.

III. What About *The Evil Within*?

And so, the question: What about *The Evil Within* that manifests itself in so many ways, and is, above all, against God? Well, let's start with the Word of God through David: "Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgement (Ps. 52:4)." My sin is my sin! I cannot blame others or circumstances. I did it! And we cry these words from David:

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God... O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you (Ps.60:1-3,5).

All this is Confession. It's where we have to start. As the Lord tells us through David, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps.51:17)." And John gives us the promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I Jn.1:9)." And then comes the Gospel: "...the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin (I Jn. 1:7b)." As Jesus said, "...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn.3:16b)."

You might recall that Hezekiah, a noted King of Judah, became very ill. We're told "he was at the point of death (Is.38:1b)." God miraculously healed him and gave him 15 additional years. Please listen to these words of Hezekiah's prayer: "Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back (Is.38:17)." This is what Christ did for us at Calvary. He delivered us from the pit of eternal destruction. His blood has cleansed away all our sin. God has cast all our sins behind His back. He won't look at them! They're gone!

But, among many others, there are two more Scriptures that are always there to give great comfort and assurance. First, from Isaiah 44:22a: "I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist." They's can't be seen. And these ever so familiar words that should make us poor miserable sinners cry with joy: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rm.8:1). No condemnation. None. Forever gone.

This is what has happened to The Evil Within. The struggle is still there. But in Christ we are not condemned. That's The Good Within! That's the Gospel!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott