

Jesus Confronts Hardened Hearts

Mark 3:1-6

August 24, 2025

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¹Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ²And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." ⁴And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Have you wondered what makes some people so resistant or apathetic to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

The Bible describes why this is so:

1 Corinthians 2:14 – *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him"*. When Paul uses the word "natural" he means unspiritual or worldly.

2 Corinthians 4:4 – *"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God"*

Ephesians 2:1 – *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked"*.

So unsaved people are naturally *apathetic* or *resistant* to the Gospel because they are unspiritual, blind or dead in their sins.

And, in this passage, our Lord Jesus Christ puts the spotlight on the Pharisees, and Jesus exposes the unsaved condition of the human heart.

What is this condition? It is hardness of heart.

Paul writing to the Ephesian church says this was our past condition and gives instructions as to how you and I are to live or conduct ourselves as Christians.

Ephesians 2: 17-20

"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!" Ephesians 2: 17-20

You see that? The reason why unbelievers are apathetic to the Gospel is because their hearts are *hardened!*

You as believers or as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ have been rescued from this condition. So, my prayer is that this passage will help you see where you once were and appreciate what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you.

So far, in the Gospel of Mark, chapters 1 and 2, we have seen Jesus serving others, answering the questions of the Pharisees and Jesus defending his disciples from the accusations of the Pharisees. Today we are going to see another side of Jesus.

Jesus is the one asking questions.

Jesus is in the offensive position. Jesus confronts his opponents. The opponents of the Gospel are the religious elites who would rather see man-made rules followed than do good to those in need.

Our Lord Jesus Christ in a synagogue. There he intentionally picks someone from the crowd and heals him from his sickness. He does this to make a point. To expose the true motives of the Pharisees. Their hatred for Jesus appears to grow with every passage we see. They will do anything for the sake of guarding their religion. Their religion was not just outwardly. It was false religion. It was just a show. There was no sign of inward repentance or grace.

In our day and age, when we see false teachers who promote a Jesus who is always nice and friendly but never confronts, you end up with a false Gospel and false salvation.

Jesus is nothing like them. He is full of compassion, full of grace, always attending to the sick and the poor and the needy soul.

And Jesus knows the motives of the Pharisees as he is omniscient.

Let's look at verses 1 to 3 of Mark chapter 3.

1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ² And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here."

Go back Mark chapter 1 verse 21 – *And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.* But there in the *"And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him."*²⁷ *And they were all amazed.* The previous healing was on a Sabbath too but there was no opposition.

Jesus is again in the synagogue (the Jewish place of teaching and worship) and there was a man with a disabled hand, a shriveled hand, a hand in paralysis.

They were watching him. Who are these people? They are the Pharisees and scribes. We see that in verse 6. What were they doing and what was their intent?

They were watching him so they can find a way to trap him. And the Sabbath was the perfect opportunity. The Gospel of Luke tells us he knew their hearts.

So what happens? Mark the Gospel writer does not tell us the man with the withered man came to Jesus. Rather, Jesus picks this man from the crowd.

The literal translation is “Rise up and stand here in the middle”.

So the man comes and stands. Then he confronts the Pharisees with a question.

Verse 4

⁴ And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent.

The parallel account in Mathew 12:11 says, *He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?”*

The rabbis had a rule that if someone’s life was in danger or if there was a life-threatening emergency, then people could work on a Sabbath in order to save a life.

But here we do not see any immediate danger to the life of this man.

Why would Jesus ask such a question? The Pharisees hadn’t done any evil. All they were trying to do was safeguard the Sabbath. Or so it might seem. But you see Jesus is able to diagnose the heart condition even before the action takes place. It’s as if Jesus was reading out aloud the intent of their hearts before they went out of the synagogue. Their insistence to honor the Sabbath was really a mask, a façade or a front to cover their sin. Their hearts were sold to jealousy, envy, evil and even murder.

Jesus has two points to make.

1) Doing good is always the right thing to do, even on a Sabbath.

2) Ignoring human suffering, being callous, being insensitive to needs is equal to being evil and can equal even murder.

The irony is that the Pharisees in their strict observance of the Sabbath were even willing to conspire and plot murder even on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were very concerned with the little details of the Sabbath but were consumed with rage so much so that they were ready to break the sixth commandment

“You shall not murder”.

Jesus knew this and confronts them with the truth.

They had no answer when confronted. Their hearts were not right with God. They did not desire the good of others.

And how does Jesus respond to them. Verse 5.

⁵ *And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.*

Notice Jesus’ assessment of the heart condition. Their hearts are hardened. This is the word *porosis* in the Greek language translated as “hardness of the heart”. This can be described a condition of *insensitiveness, numbness, obtuseness, dulling* of the faculty of perception to the things of God. The Pharisees cannot see outside of themselves. You also see *two* adjectives used to describe Jesus’ response in view of their heart condition.

Anger and grief.

God’s anger and wrath are very real.

- When the people of Israel turned to idolatry by making a golden calf this is what God said. “*For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you’*” Exodus 33:5. Being stiff-necked or hardened in heart are the same thing.
- When the exiles returned to Jerusalem after a 70-year exile, the prophet Zechariah spoke to the people about their heart condition. “*And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, ⁹ “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, ¹⁰ do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” ¹¹ But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear.¹² They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts.* Zechariah 7:8-12
- In Acts 6, when Stephen preached the Gospel he used similar language – “*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you*” Acts 6:51

So, an unrepentant and hardened heart can bring God’s anger.

However, God's anger is not like the unrighteous anger of man.

God is "*Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*" (Exodus 34:6). If not for God's steadfast love and faithfulness, no man would be left alive.

And we see that Jesus' anger is followed by his grief.

Jesus' grief sounds very similar of God's evaluation of humanity in Genesis 6.

"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart" Genesis 6:5-6

So your condition before you had become a Christian was hardness of heart. You were a recipient of God's wrath. God grieved over you. You could not save yourself. And one day you heard the Gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. And God softened your heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 *"And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh"*.

So, Jesus tells this man "stretch out your hand". Notice, Jesus' healing was always in public view. In the plain view of everyone he is restored to health.

However, in spite of the good our Lord does, the Pharisees do not relent. Their enmity and hatred grows even stronger. They are going to do the unthinkable!

There are some people who for the sake of their pride and ego will do just about anything. What happens sinful anger or rage takes over? Reason departs. This was the state of the Pharisees. Jealousy, hatred and pride dominated their hearts and minds.

Verse 6

⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

On one hand they desire to uphold the Sabbath and here we see they are ready to kill. Inconceivable!

You could trace back and see a pattern of thinking that led to their actions.

Wrong thinking leads to wrong reasoning. Wrong reasoning can lead to wrong motives. Wrong motives lead to wrong actions.

How do we guard ourselves against hardness of heart?

By heeding to God's Word. By exhortation. By encouraging each other.
That is why we gather as a church, for fellowship and Bible study.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:12-13

Jesus did not concede to the lies and deception of the opponents of the Gospel but he confronted them with the truth.

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" Hebrews 3:7

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Jesus Confronts Hardened Hearts? Mark 3:1-6

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Jesus look at the Pharisees with anger and grief? What was their heart condition? What is a hardened heart indicative of?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Has God softened your heart to the things of God? How? 1 Peter 2:1-3
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What will you do to keep from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin? Hebrews 3:13