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Lord's Day Morning
February 1, 2009
'Things God Hates' Series
#5

"A Heart that Devises Evil Plans"

Matthew 15:1-20

Introduction

What are your dreams? If you were totally and completely honest, what would your heart desire? It's an important question because your priorities and decisions and values will to some degree be shaped by your dreams. Too often our dreams follow a selfish course. We dream about having a million dollars. We wonder what it would be like to have a certain talent, a dream job, that one possession, more influence over others, a particular position or title. What if you lived in a different place – or what if you had the courage to tell your boss what you really thought? While you may not pursue the particulars of a dream, your dreams do tell something about the longings of your heart.

What if our dreams were shaped by a different set of questions? If you could accomplish anything for God, what would you want to do? How could it happen? What would you need? What kind of skills, resources, and help? How would the glory of God be manifested if your dream came true? Is it possible? Is it God's calling?

This morning we are going to discover that our hearts *will* devise things. God created us to dream dreams. He made us to be like Him – to plan and think. But he wants us to devise plans that will bring glory to his name. Our natural dreams center around our own success. And here's the truth:

anything that seeks first our own glory is an evil plan. An evil plan is any plan that is developed without thought or attention given to the purpose and glory of God. So let's talk about how a heart that devises evil plans can become a heart that works for the praise of God's name. We are studying things that God hates – and hearts that devise evil plans is #4 on the list.

[Matthew 15:1-20]

What is the heart? Physiologically it's that organ in your chest that keeps you alive. It pumps life giving blood throughout your body. It's no wonder God uses the heart as the symbol and metaphor for our life and soul. It's the thing that is alive within us. Too often we romanticize the heart and think of it as that emotional part of our being. We learn this as a very young child. Valentine's Day is just around the corner and you know that as soon as you were old enough to handle a pair of scissors, you learned to fold a piece of paper in half and cut out the shape of a heart. We were taught early on that the heart represents love and feeling.

But the heart is so much more than just your emotions. The Bible teaches us that a person is made up of two parts, his body and his soul. And so whenever the Bible speaks of your heart, mind, soul and spirit – it's speaking about this part of you that you can't see, but that makes you, you. The heart is the place we not only feel, it is also the place we think and make decisions. Your heart is you. Proverbs 27:19 says *as in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man*. Do you want to know what a man is really like? Look at his heart. Luke 6:45 teaches that *the good man, out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good,*

and the evil man out of the evil treasure, brings forth what is evil.

The heart therefore is the place of action in our life. It is the thing in us that is alive. And for our purposes this morning, it is the place where we devise things. *Devising* in and of itself is neither good nor bad. Proverbs 14:22 asks *will they not go astray who devise evil? But kindness and truth will be to those who devise good.* So devising is simply imagining and planning and thinking about things we will do. Our hearts are designed to devise things, just as God lays plans and purposes, and devises His counsel from generation to generation.

So today, in our study of things God hates, we learn that God hates a heart that devises evil plans. Let's consider first:

I. The Problem with our Heart.

I think we understand the nature of man enough to know that man's heart is naturally evil. Our second outreach booklet which is being finished up right now addresses the subject *how good are people.* The fruit of the fall is a fallen nature. When God destroyed the earth with the flood it was because *every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* The Bible says *he who trusts in his own heart is fool because his heart rages against the Lord.*

There's a great illustration of that in our text this morning. The scribes and Pharisees were upset with Jesus because his disciples didn't keep the tradition of the elders. Jesus was upset with the elders because they didn't keep the law of God.

But the example of sin that Jesus uses is very interesting. He doesn't just accuse them of sin in a general way – *you don't honor your parents enough.* He shows how they had labored to devise an evil

plan to promote their own selfish interests. If their parents needed financial help or other resources that their children could offer, the Pharisees taught that you could avoid giving up your assets by simply telling them that what they needed you had already dedicated to God. In this way you wouldn't be guilty of violating the 5th commandment to honor your father and mother.

The honest truth is it took some creative thinking and plotting to devise such an evil excuse to hang on to one's possessions. And it was just that kind of scheming that Jesus went on to say is a result of an evil heart. One doesn't have to be taught how to come up with wicked ideas and plans.

Our hearts are ready to do the wrong thing. It is influenced by:

- a. Our own base nature. *The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.* We sin when we are carried away and enticed by our own lust. We don't need others to devise evil for us. We are plenty capable on our own accord.
- b. We are subject to the allure of the world. Those around us are more than happy to contribute to our corruption. So we are warned not to love the world or the things of the world.
- c. The craftiness and enticements of the devil. He stands ready to add to our creative musings against the law of God.

What exactly does it mean to devise an evil plan? And are we, as *Christians*, capable of such a thing?

There are two levels – to spheres in which we can devise evil plans. We can do intentionally and we can do it unintentionally. But both are sin.

1. Unintentionally –

When we make plans without considering the perspective and desires of God we are making evil plans. The Bible calls this kind of decision making carnal. Turn over to I Corinthians 2. Paul is talking to a very young and immature Church. And his great concern is that they will use their own fleshly or carnal wisdom to make decisions. Look at verse 5. The kind of wisdom that excludes God is foolishness to God. It seems rationale to the world, but it is contrary to the will of God. Proverbs 14:12 says *there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

Paul lays out a different way. Through the Word of God, the Spirit of God will give us a new way to think and plan. (Read vs. 10-12) If you make plans apart from considering the will of God you are like the natural man spoken of in verse 14. Your plan will be evil because its focus will be your own glory rather than the glory of God. That's why places like Proverbs 3:5-6 say *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.* If you are not spiritually minded and Spirit directed you will devise plans that are evil without even thinking about it.

2. Intentionally

Sadly men also devise evil plans consciously aware of the fact that they are opposing God. Some of the really intriguing Bible stories have this kind of evil plotting at the center. Laban schemed how to keep Jacob working for him for years – by swapping daughters on the wedding day and other conniving tricks. Haman devised a plot to kill the Jews. Judas planned how to betray Jesus. The Jews formed a conspiracy to kill Paul on his way to his trial. Ananias

and Sapphira devised a plan to lie and steal so that might be thought of as super Christians.

But in each of these cases you might say *sure but all of these were not Christians. I can see how they might devise evil plans, but surely a Christian would never.* What about David? While you might argue that his one night stand with Bathsheba was spontaneous and impulsive, there's no way the same could be said about the cover up and murder of Uriah. Jacob's sons sat around the campfire at lunchtime and devised a way to do away with their brother Joseph.

The truth is we are all capable of doing this thing that God hates. Which one of you has not committed a sin and then spent a considerable amount of time figuring out how to hide it? Have you ever known that an upcoming weekend would be one in which your parents would be gone – or your spouse – and you've planned in your mind and heart some activity that you knew would please neither them or God?

If you have ever planned how you could get away without paying taxes you rightfully owe, or how to get credit for work at college that you didn't really do, or how to get away with viewing pornography, or how to get credit for a little more time at work without actually working, or how to convince your spouse or parents you were doing something different than what you were really doing – then you understand what it means have a heart that devises evil plans. And God hates it. These evil plans flow from a problem in our hearts.

II. The Solution for our Heart

First, you need a changed heart.

- It starts with faith. We need a heart of faith. There is no changing the patterns of

your life - the way you think and plan and devise - if you do not believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Only God can give you a changed heart. So, if you are not a Christian, you need to cry out to God and ask Him to give you a believing heart.

- We also need a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26-27 is a great verse for all of us to pray. *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.* As a Christian you need to walk in Spirit. You need to be so connected to Jesus Christ that His life flows into your life and you receive from Him the power and ability to do what is right.

You need a changed heart. Only God can change a heart. So pray for your heart. Paul prayed all the time for the hearts of those He was helping. Go read the prayers in Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians.

Second, you need to take responsibility for your heart. Proverbs 4:23 says *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life.*

You can do that by saturating your heart in truth and wisdom.

- Proverbs 3:3 - *Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.*
- Josh 1:8 – Meditate on the Word day and night.

- Pro. 4:20-22 - *My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.
21 Do not let them depart from your sight;
Keep them in the midst of your heart.
22 For they are life to those who find them
And health to all their body.*

Finally, I would say to you, let your heart imagine and devise wonderful things. Don't be afraid to dream. But dream and think and plan and pray and devise things for the glory of God. God hates a heart that devises evil plans. But He loves those who would plan to pour out their lives for His kingdom.

We are going to sing Psalm 57. It is a prayer and song of commitment. It is dedicated to the glory of God. But the commitment is this: *My heart is fix, my heart is fixed O God. I'll sing. I'll praise. My glory, wake . . . at dawn my song I'll raise.*

May God help us to fix our hearts on His glory!