

Of Pigs and Pearls

Say What? The Hard Saying of Jesus: Pt. 3

What we're doing each week in the fall – right up to Thanksgiving – is choosing hard sayings of Jesus, things Jesus says that are difficult to accept or difficult to understand. These are in no particular order, I'm actually deciding on Tuesdays the verse we will do on Sunday – so we're kind of jumping around.

And today we're going to look at Matthew 7:6. That's the hard saying we want to look at, because actually v. 1–5 are music to modern people's ears. There's nothing hard or particularly difficult about the first five verses. But in the context actually of the entire passage which I'm about to read, you can see why v. 6 is extremely difficult for people to understand and accept. So let's take a look at the text. **Matthew 7:1–6.**

1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." - So far so good, but here comes trouble - "6 Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

Now what's so difficult about v. 6? It's not that hard to see, especially when you put it in context – which is why I read the whole thing. Jesus has just said "Don't judge others. Don't condemn. Don't be a hypocrite." – we love that - and *then* he turns around, and he is calling *somebody* a pig. He's calling somebody a dog. In the old KJV, it says, "Don't throw your pearls before swine."

So Jesus is calling somebody swine. And that seems not only to be a complete contradiction to what we just saw in v. 1–5 – I mean, he says, "Don't judge anybody...you *swine*. Don't you are better than others...but stay away from the *dogs*." That's bad enough, but it also seems to go against many other places where Jesus commands his followers to take the good news to *everyone*. Does this contradict that generous spirit?

A couple of years ago, an older minister who I have admired since I was a teenager, was involved in a pretty amazing national news story and God actually gave him some supernatural revelation that he shared with law enforcement and it broke the case wide open and potentially saved a bunch of lives. The FBI agent credited this minister openly. And so a large, very well know news organization contacted him and asked to interview him about his story. And he told them “no.”

And I asked him, rather incredulously, “Why not? I mean, this is an incredible story and you’ve got an opportunity to testify to the goodness of God before more people than have probably listened to all the sermons you’ve ever preached put together!” And his response was that you can’t trust the mainstream media and they’d probably twist it around. But then he added, “And God told me, ‘Don’t cast your pearls before swine.’”

Now, whether or not he should have done the interview is really between him and the Lord, but something about how he quoted that scripture, I knew was off. It was like when you hear a piano chord that doesn’t fit. Just jarring. Because he was using this verse to mean some lives are so dirty, some minds are so hostile, and some hearts are so hard that you might as well just not go to them. Don’t *try* to give them the truth. Don’t *try* to help them in any way. Just stay away. They’ll just hurt you. Just forget them.

And that minister is certainly not alone in reading v.6 that way. But to read this as Jesus saying, “Look, there are some people who are so dirty, so hostile, so bad, so hard, it’s best just to stay away from them,” that is a *misunderstanding* of the teaching. Total misunderstanding. And a damaging one. So let’s look at it more closely.

Now it’s true that in the biblical times dogs could be wild *or* they could be domesticated. They could be pets. So for example, in Jesus’ dialogue with the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7, at one point she says, “Now you know the dogs under the table are fed from the master’s hand.” In other words, dogs could be wild, but they could also be domestic.

But pigs were *never* domestic. You never fed a wild pig. You didn’t have wild pigs around. And neither were they pets. So these pigs are livestock. And so here’s the picture Jesus is drawing. You have animals in your care. And you *give* them something which is very, very valuable, but it’s something they *cannot* digest. And as they bite into it, it causes them pain – it’s like the jawbreakers we’ve been using as an analogy these hard sayings of Jesus. It either hurts them as they bite into it or else they choke on it, and then the animals turn toward you and they attack you. Why? At least *you* are edible.

So what has happened is you have animals under your care. You've given them something they can't digest. You've pushed upon them something that might be good in itself, but it's something they cannot comprehend, something they cannot handle, something they cannot digest, and what Jesus is saying is, "Don't be surprised if they attack you. Don't be surprised if they turn on you." In other words, Jesus is not castigating the *animals*. He's castigating the *caregivers*.

And when you understand the metaphor like *that*, when you understand the parable like *that*, it opens up. And we begin to realize Jesus is both implying and directly giving us answers to some of the most fundamental and ancient questions about human nature and about how we find ultimate reality and truth. And I'd like just to divide it by saying let's look at this little verse and ask "What does it teach us about the hearts we *have* and the help we *need*?"

First of all, what does it tell us about The Hearts we Have. Notice the animals are not infuriated, they're not choked, because they're given *poison*. They're not choked because they're given, say, rocks. The problem is they are not given something *below* their capacity, but something *above*. The pig is expecting corn husks. In comes a pearl.

And of course, the pearl has a value. It's *immeasurably* more valuable than a corn husk, immeasurably more important and better than a corn husk – actually you could argue that the pig could take the pearl to market and buy corn husks for life! But the pig has never read Adam Smith. The pig doesn't have the ability to either perceive or assess that value, or leverage it, or trade it in, or do *anything* about it.

Now what does this tell us? Well we said because we've seen Jesus is not talking to us about some kind of especially vicious set of animals; therefore, he is telling us something about normal human nature. See these animals are acting in accordance with their nature. Jesus is saying, "Don't be surprised if you do this. This is the way animals are." And therefore, he's telling us something about our normal human nature, the way *we* routinely are.

What is it? He's talking about our spiritual insensitivity, our spiritual imperception. In our natural, routine state, we are completely unable to even *perceive*. This goes even beyond the idea of spiritual blindness. That when the gospel truth comes our way the Bible tells us we're blind and we need to have our eyes opened. This is even more profound in some ways. When animals find something valuable like a pearl, it's not that they can't *see* it. "There it is!" It's something more profound than that.

And Jesus is getting across where *we* are normally. What is normal human nature? Why are we so imperceptible of what is really valuable and what's really out there? We trample upon it. In fact, we might even be irritated by it. Why? I believe what we have here in the contrast between the pig and the caregiver, the pig and the person who does understand what pearls are like, is we actually have an insight into what eternal life really is.

Eternal life is one of the main themes of the New Testament. What is eternal life? I think people tend to misunderstand this as much as any term in the Bible. I think for most people "eternal life" means comprehensive spiritual insurance – heaven when I die. Something we look ahead to. The trouble is Jesus talks about people having eternal life *now*, getting it *now*.

Or maybe some people think of it as spiritual superpowers – the supernatural ability to get things done. This is better. Still not quite it. Eternal life is a higher order of being, a higher order of life, a higher order of sensitivity, awareness, and perception. The pig is very alive. As it takes a bite out of your leg, yes, it's very alive.

Human beings are very alive. And yet if a human being was ever, through an injury, to be brought down to the pig's level of awareness and perception, we would call that a living death. We wouldn't call that really living at all. So there are orders of life, and eternal life is the next order. What do I mean? Let me lay this out. There are levels of living things – I'll skip fungi, protist and monera and go straight to plants.

Plants are alive, unlike rocks. Why? Because they can sense something about their environment. They can sense something about reality. They can sense something about what's out there. They can sense cold and heat. They can sense light and darkness. So they are able to have some sense of their environment. Not too much. They don't have sight. They don't have hearing. They don't have pain sensors – it's not cruel to mow your lawn! A plant is unaware of *most*, but it's able to sense *some* of reality.

However, along comes an animal. Animals have a higher level of sensation. They're able to *sense* more. They have hearing, they have sight, *but* they can't sense the difference between justice and injustice. They can't sense the difference between happiness and tragedy. Yes, I know your dog can tell when you're sad, but that's not what I'm talking about. But they have more senses than plants – for instance they *do* have pain receptors and so a civilized society has laws against cruelty to animals.

So you have a hierarchy of plants to animals and then comes human beings. I don't care what PETA tells you, human life is of a higher order than animal life – that's biblical anthropology. And so if you come upon a person who doesn't understand the difference between justice and injustice, that's a troubling situation – unlike with a pig can't see that. A pig can't sense that part of reality. A pig can sense a lot of parts of reality the plant can't, but the pig can't sense all sorts of reality the a human being can.

However, Jesus is talking about spiritual realities, as we're going to see. This is beyond biological kingdom. What is a human *being* like without eternal life? A human being is like a pig who looks at the pearl and says, "So?" A human being without eternal life looks at the glory of God and says, "So?" They are lacking a sense of reality.

Eternal life is the next order of life. It's the ability to see *all* of reality – material and immaterial, things visible and things unseen. That's the difference between a human being with eternal life and a human being without. Eternal life is the next level. It's the next level of perception. It's the *final* level of perception. It's the ability to see *all* of reality, not just justice and injustice.

To have eternal life means you sense the awesome holiness of God; the electrifyingly sweet grace of Jesus Christ; the astonishing death for us on the cross; the infinite, eternal value of the human soul; your own resistance and even hostility to God. You *sense* all these things. Without eternal life, you either find what I just said to you intellectual nonsense, *or* you believe them because you were raised that way, but they don't ravish your soul like a blazing jewel.

You don't *sense* them. They don't affect you. They're not reality to you. And therefore, eternal life is a higher order of perception. It's moving *from* a kind of spiritual animal level to becoming fully, spiritually human. And Jesus is saying the natural state we have is very, very simple. Let's summarize all this.

Jesus Christ is saying you do not have the ability to take in spiritual truth. You don't have the ability to see all of reality. And what you need is not just to become a fatter pig, because that's all the pig is concerned about, as we're going to see in a minute. You need to become a higher order of being. You need not just to be reformed; you need to be transformed.

You need to be brought up. You need to evolve. You need to become a new creation. You need to be raised to a whole new level. That's the heart we have. It's not just simply, "I don't believe in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and now I do." There are all kinds of people who intellectually believe, but they don't *sense* it. They look at it, and they say, "So?" That's what a pig does. And therefore, Jesus Christ is showing us ourselves. He's not just talking about a particularly vicious, monstrous kind of person.

He's talking about unaided human nature. He's talking about human nature without eternal life. That's what he's looking at. See he's giving us an example of the hearts we have. He's giving us a very *vivid* picture of the hearts we have. So how do we *get* those kinds of hearts? How do we get eternal life? How do we move beyond being a dog or a pig, spiritually speaking? How does that happen?

This verse also shows us, secondly, The Help We Need. And if you've ever heard another sermon here at SWFF, you can probably guess what this is. It's not going to be a gotcha...you need these vitamin supplements! No, even money says it's "Jesus", right? That's right. Specifically I'm going to say we need The beauty of Christ.

See our heart shows us what the pig is. Let's ask ourselves what the pearl is. What's the pearl? What does it signify? Why has a pearl been chosen? If Jesus had just kept the first sentence, "Don't throw to dogs that which is holy," we would really be in trouble. Of course in that day a lot of dogs weren't domestic, so with just the first line you really could interpret this as saying, "Don't waste your good things on vicious dogs; don't bother with trying to share the truth with these kinds of awful people."

But with the second line, that changes. The pig and the pearl clarifies. Why the pearl? You have to understand – here's that pesky context again – that Jesus Christ has given us *two* little parables of pearls in the book of Matthew. You not only have this one here in Matthew 7, you also have one in Matthew 13. See Matthew 13 tells us about a man who finds "the pearl of great price." And when the man finds that pearl of great price, we're told he sells *everything* he has to get it.

Now what is the pearl of great price in Matthew 13? We're told it's the gospel of the kingdom. It's the message that through Jesus Christ the kingdom power of God, the healing power of God - the power of God to heal *all* of life - has come *through* Christ and can be yours *in* Christ. That's the gospel of the kingdom. But why would the gospel of the kingdom be shown here as a pearl? Here's how the metaphor helps.

Look at the pig. Why is the pig unhappy with the pearl? The pig is unhappy with the pearl because the pig has a belly to fill. And because it doesn't see how the pearl is going to meet his immediate need, the pig looks at the pearl and says, "You can't eat it. It tastes terrible. I know what I need. I need to be full. This is not going to help me." He has a very consumeristic approach.

He says, "Is this of any use to *my* agenda? What is my agenda? To feel full. That's what will make me happy. The pearl doesn't help." It's very much like a man or a woman who says, "Christianity? Okay. If I go to church, if I pray, if I obey the Ten Commandments, if I follow the example of Christ, then will my life finally go right? Will my prayers get answered? Will I experience inner fulfillment and happiness? If Christianity will do all that, I'll be very happy to come. Will that happen?"

And that's how we *all* start, but that's how a pig looks at a pearl. That's why the pig doesn't understand the pearl. What we have in the pig looking at a pearl is an example, a beautiful picture, of why the natural human heart looking at the gospel through a religious grid doesn't get it. The natural human heart looks at the gospel through a **religious grid** like the pig looks at the pearl.

What do we mean by a religious grid? What's religion? Here's what religion is. Religion says, "I know what I need to be happy. I need health. I need career. I need success. I need romance. I need my family to go right. I need things to go right. I know what I need. Will *this* – ritual, sacrifice, discipline, belief system, whatever – give it to me?" It's a consumeristic approach. "Will Jesus be *useful* to me?"

In the Old Testament, a perfect illustration of this is Joshua the night before the battle of Jericho. Joshua was Moses' right hand guy and when Moses dies, Joshua takes over. Moses never made it to the Promised Land – he got the people right up to the border and then Joshua led them in to the conquest. So he's the general, and the next day Israel is going to try to sack this big city. So on the night before the battle, Joshua walks out, as you can imagine, just really obsessing, "Am I doing this right? Is my strategy right?"

And he walks out to maybe get one more quite view of the battlefield, and to his shock, he sees a huge man of war with a sword that's drawn. And Joshua looks at him, and says, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" And I love the answer, (**Joshua 5:14 ESV**) "*And he said, "No;"* – No!?! But then he says, - "*but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.*" And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "*What does my Lord say to his servant?*"

You see, this was the Angel of the Lord. But here's what the Lord is saying, "When you say, 'Are you for me or against me?' those are the only two categories? I'm sorry. I don't *fit* in those categories. When you say, 'Will this help me or will this not help me?' what you're doing is you're using me as a means to an end. You're asking me if I'm *useful*."

"You're being a pig. You're saying, 'I know what I need.'" Anybody remember the movie *The Jerk*? I need this lamp...and this ashtray...and this chair...and that's all I need. I need these things. Will this get them for me? And the Lord says "No. Don't be a jerk. Don't be a pig. I *will* not be put into one of those categories. It's not a question of whether I'm on your side or not. Are you on *my* side? That's the only question there is. I explode your categories."

That's what he's saying. What is spiritual "piggishness?" What does it mean to be spiritually obtuse? Why do people continually look at the gospel, holiness of God, grace of Jesus Christ dying on the cross? You may have been looking at it for years and years and years. You may believe it happened but still not really get it, because you're constantly saying, "Will this help me get to the things I know I need to be happy? Will this help me become a balanced person, a moral person, a decent person? Will this be a good basis for my society, a good basis for my family? Will this make me successful? Will this help me be the kind of person I want to be?"

What the angel said, what the Lord said, to Joshua is, "Don't ask me if I can get you what you need. I *am* what you need! I am *all* that you need. I am what you need. I *am* your success...or don't have anything to do with me. Don't make me a *means* to your success." A pig looking at a pearl is the way the natural heart looks at the gospel through a grid of religion. And as a result, over and over and over we see it, but we don't get it.

But, here's how eternal life happens. Here's where you begin to start getting transformed. To become a Christian is *not* to be what the pig wants. What does the pig want? The pig wants to be a *bigger* pig. The pig says, "I want to eat. I want to put on weight. I want to be bigger." The pig wants to be a bigger pig. And God is calling us to become a fully spiritual human being, a higher *order* of being.

He doesn't just want us to be nicer and better, He wants us to be new and transformed, a whole new kind of person, a new creation. And that begins happening *when* you start moving from the way the pig in Matthew 7 looks at the pearl, to the way the man in Matthew 13 looks at the pearl. The pig says, "Will Jesus enable me to get more of what I have?" The man gets rid of all he has to get Jesus. Two utterly different approaches. Why?

The pearl is beautiful. The man sees it's beautiful. The pig asks, "Is it useful?" What does beauty mean? As Jonathan Edwards says in *Religious Affections*, a very simple example...He uses some philosophical terms, but I still think he's pretty easy to understand. He says, "The grace of God may appear lovely two ways; either as *bonum utile*, a *profitable good* to me, what greatly serves my interest, and so suits my self-love; or as *bonum formosum*, a *beautiful good* in itself, and part of the moral and spiritual excellency of the divine nature. In this latter respect it is that true saints have their hearts affected, and love captivated, by the free grace of God." (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 281)

An illustration I often use - some of you have heard me say it before - I took Jazz Appreciation at UT. So I listened to jazz music to get an A, so I could have a good GPA, so I could get a good job. So ultimately, I listened to jazz in order to make money - *bonum utile*. But today...I got into vinyls records over the pandemic and as of today - and I make no promises for tomorrow - I have 108 jazz albums in my collection. Meaning today I spend a lot of money to listen to jazz. Why? Because jazz is no longer a means to an end. It's a beauty in itself - *bonum formosum*.

What does it mean to be beautiful? A beauty is something that is not a commodity anymore. It's not useful for getting at something else. It is satisfying in itself. You stand before it. You sit before it. You drink it in, and this is what you want. You begin to become, not a pig, but a person. You begin to actually become a new creation the moment you move from religion to the gospel.

The moment you go from religion, which just says, "If you scratch my back, God, I'll scratch yours. Quid pro quo. If I do this and this and this, then you owe me that and that and that; and you will reward me and you will do all these things," to saying, "Because of who you are, I want you in my life. Because of who you are, I must give you my life, just because of who you are, just because of the *worth* of what you are, just because of the *greatness* of what you are. I want *you* in my life. I don't want you as a means to my success. I want you to *be* my success. I don't want you as a means to finally get the man or the woman I love. I want you to be the One I love," as soon as that begins to dawn on you, there's a difference.

As soon as you move from using God by trying to be a good person so God will have to bless you...to responding to His grace, to responding to His glory, to responding to His beauty and to giving yourself to Him unconditionally, you have begun to move from being a pig to being a person, from being an animal to being a fully spiritual human being. From animal life to eternal life.

Somebody is going to say, “How does that happen?” I’ll be as practical as I possibly can be. It happens in two stages. First, when you stop looking so much at what God can do for you or what you want Him to do for you **in the future**, to what he has already done for you **in the past**. Look at this verse for a second.

Dallas Willard wrote a book called *The Divine Conspiracy*, which is a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, which is where this passage occurs. And Willard says the standard interpretation of this text has bugged him for years – like it has me. He says, “That use suggests that we may have certain wonderful treasures, of truth and of service perhaps, that we could give to others. Perhaps the ‘treasure’ is the very gospel itself. But there are some who are not worthy of those treasures...They are the ‘pigs’ or the ‘dogs’ in question. And we are not to waste our good things on these worthless or evil people.”

“So goes the standard reading of verse 6. But it is hard to imagine anything more opposed to the Spirit of Jesus than this. Indeed, the very coming of Christ, the pearl of God, into the world, would be a case of pearls before pigs thus understood.” (*Divine Conspiracy*, 228)

He says if that’s what Jesus is saying, then he is the biggest living contradiction you’ve ever seen, because Jesus Christ did *exactly* what verse 6 looks like, what people are saying you shouldn’t do. **Colossians 2:3**, talks about Jesus Christ, “*in whom are hidden all **the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**”* Jesus Christ was the greatest *treasure* of his Father. And he was offered to us, he was given to us...and we turned on him and we trampled him into the dust.

And when he was on the cross, as he was dying, what does he do? We looked at this last week, he quotes Psalm 22, because it starts out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” But if you know Jesus, you know he was thinking of that whole psalm. And in the middle of that psalm, **Psalm 22:12-13**, it says, “*Many bulls surround me...roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.*” Jesus Christ *himself* was cast to us, the pigs and the dogs, the lions and the bulls – *animals* who had no idea what value was before us, and we tore him apart.

This is a picture of what Jesus has done. And here’s what I’m trying to tell you. Instead of looking and saying, “What is Jesus going to do for me? How can he...?” Don’t. Stop being a pig. Look at what Jesus has *done*. Why did he do that? Why did he say, “Roaring lions surround me, but I *give* myself to them”? Why did *he* get trampled? Why did he offer himself?

Because he loved us, because he had to pay the penalty for sin. He had to come and live the life we should've lived and die the death we should've died so God can be both just and justifier of those who believe, so God could accept us, because Jesus paid the penalty we owe, so that God could embrace us.

If you see that, and *as* you see that, you're going to be melted by the beauty of it, and then you'll start to turn from a pig into a person. There it is. Do you see the beauty of Jesus? The beauty of the cross? Do you see the gospel as beautiful? Or merely useful?

If Jesus Christ is the ultimate beauty in your life, you are free. If he's not, you are like an animal. You're driven by your belly. You're driven by your instincts. You're driven by your hunger. You have to get people's approval. You have to get success. You have to get romance. You *can't* let this person jilt you; otherwise, you have nothing else, because those are your pearls, in a sense. Those are the things you need. You're just driven by them. You're enslaved to them.

John Newton says this in a wonderful hymn...

Our pleasure and our duty,
Though opposite before;
Since we have seen his beauty,
Are joined to part no more...

The gospel of Jesus Christ has transforming power. One kiss from the gospel can turn a frog into a prince. Or a princess. It transforms an animal who's basically being driven by all the things we *have* to have...into a human being who can make choices because, "I'm not fazed the way I used to be. If I lose approval, I lose power, I lose control, I lose comfort, those things don't *control* me anymore. I'm a human being, an *eternal* being. I'm no longer just a miserable creature driven around by my wants and needs."

Therefore, if you see his beauty, don't come to him asking whether he's useful. Come and see he's beautiful by looking at what Jesus Christ has done on the cross. Seeing the beauty of it. That *smashes* through your consumeristic grids and makes you live a whole new life. The beauty of Christ, the pearl of great price. *That's* what will satisfy – not just your rumbling stomach – but your everlasting soul.

Let's pray...