

Do We Have an Internal Problem? Can It Be Healed?

“We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself... We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil.”

— Carl Jung, BBC interview, 1959

“‘There isn’t anyone to help you. Only me. And I’m the Beast... Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!’ said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. *‘You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you? Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go. Why things are what they are?’*”

— William Golding, *The Lord of the Flies*, p.130 – 131, italics mine¹

The world will suffer another financial crisis, former Federal Reserve chief Alan Greenspan has told the BBC. “The crisis will happen again but it will be different,” he told BBC Two’s *The Love of Money* series... Speaking a year after the collapse of US investment bank Lehman Brothers, which was followed by a worldwide financial crisis and global recession, Mr Greenspan described the behaviour as “human nature”... Blamed by some for not doing more to prevent the crisis, Mr Greenspan denied any responsibility for the problems gripping the global economy. “It’s human nature, unless somebody can find a way to change human nature, we will have more crises and none of them will look like this because no two crises have anything in common, except human nature.”

— BBC News, Market crisis ‘will happen again’ (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8244600.stm>)

¹ In this story, a group of young British schoolboys survive a shipwreck and get stranded on a jungle island. An older boy named Ralph becomes their leader. They find a conch shell on the beach, and it becomes Ralph’s symbol of authority and a prized possession. At first, everything is fine. The boys build a fire as a signal to anyone searching for them. They try to keep the fire going, but some of them want to just hunt on the island, as if they could settle there forever. Another older boy named Jack challenges Ralph. He is the best hunter; so then comes a mutiny: Jack leads some of the boys away to just hunt. Some of the boys follow him. They kill a pig, do a savage dance around it while chanting this weird chant, and put its head on the top of a stick. Flies land on it, and it’s called the Lord of the Flies; it symbolizes the beast they’re afraid of, which they think they’ve mastered. Jack wins over almost all the boys and sets up another tribe where he is the chief. Then, as they get caught up in the game and the fears of the beast, they surround and kill one of their own, a boy named Simon. It was an accident; it was nighttime; there was thunder, so they couldn’t hear Simon’s cries. But the next victim is a chubby boy named Piggy. Piggy confronted the savage hunter boys: “Which is better -- to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill... Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?” Then another boy named Roger dislodges a huge rock from up a hill, which strikes Piggy and knocks him off a cliff. From that point on, lone Ralph becomes the hunted prey in a life and death struggle. Roger takes a stick and sharpens it at both ends, which means that he wants to put Ralph’s head on it. But British sailors from a battle cruiser appear just in time to rescue all the boys from the island, and themselves. But who will rescue the adults, in the adult war they’re in?

Matthew 3:13 – 4:11

^{3:13} Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ ¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, ‘Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he permitted him. ¹⁶ After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’ ^{4:1} Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ ⁴ But he answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’’ ⁵ Then the devil took him into the holy city and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you’; and ‘on their hand they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’’ ⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.’’ ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to him, ‘All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.’ ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only.’’ ¹¹ Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to him.

Cultural Background

- The biblical story contains a diagnosis of human nature: God created us good, but we corrupted ourselves. Hence, God’s desire to bring humanity back to a garden land with Him has, until this point, been thwarted by a problem internal to humanity. Jesus was resolving this problem.

Adam and Eve	Noah & family	Israel
Gen.1:2 the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters ... ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (God then placed humanity in a garden land .)	Gen.7:24 The water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days. ^{8:1} But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. (Noah then planted a garden .)	Ex.14:29 But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians... (Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years until God placed them in the garden land .)
Gen.5:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.	Gen.8:21 The LORD...said to Himself, ‘...the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth...’	Dt.30:6 The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants... Ps.51:10 Create in me a clean heart , O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Jer.31:33 ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it... Ezk.36:26 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. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you... Mt.15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Questions (shorter session: Jesus' struggle to cleanse human nature)

1. Discuss the human nature quotations for 5 – 10 minutes. It serves as a good introduction to the passage.
2. Remember from last time that Jesus retells Israel's story through his own life, and will retell our stories by coming into our lives. I'm going to go more in-depth into that first, and then we'll look at the passage together.
3. (optional) Here's an analogy: Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo took the Ring in order to take it back to Mount Doom where it was made. His aim was to destroy this thing. But as soon as he put it on, it started to struggle against him. The closer the Ring got to Mordor, the stronger it became. It became heavier on Frodo. It put fear and hate into his mind. It eventually poisoned his mind, and he failed. But Jesus took on our fallen humanity in order to destroy the corruption in our humanity. He struggled with it, as we see here and also most visibly at the Garden of Gethsemane. He was going to kill the thing that was resisting him by dying on the cross. But Jesus couldn't just put his humanity down. It was part of him. But as he lived and died and rose again, he bent his humanity back to the way God had always wanted humanity to be: filled with His Spirit, soaked and saturated with the love of God. Matthew 3:13 – 4:11 gives us an insight into what Jesus' experience was like.
4. (optional) Here's another analogy: Harry Potter. When Harry Potter was 1 year old, the most powerful evil wizard of all time, the Dark Lord Voldemort, killed Harry's mother and father. But when Voldemort cast a killing curse on Harry, it rebounded back onto Voldemort. The reason it didn't kill Harry was because Harry's mother had sacrificed herself first, and thus given a magical protection to Harry. The reason it didn't kill Voldemort was because Voldemort had already split his soul into objects outside his own body, and had achieved a kind of immortality in a very evil way. Now the problem that Harry Potter faces is that Voldemort re-embodies himself. Voldemort regathers his army and starts to take over the wizarding world again. This time, Harry is commissioned to fight the Dark Lord. In book 7, Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione have to find the objects in which Voldemort put pieces of his soul. They have to destroy them. But in the last part of the story, Harry discovers that he has a piece of Voldemort's soul in him. It got implanted by mistake when Voldemort tried to kill him as a 1 year old. And the only way for Harry to destroy that piece of Voldemort's soul is for Harry to die, at the hands of Voldemort himself. He dies, destroying that piece of soul, and rises from death to defeat Voldemort. This is similar to Jesus (J.K. Rowling also said that in order to understand her books, we need to understand her faith). Human beings now have something in us that never should have been there. The Son of God came in the person of Jesus to acquire a human body, including the corruption that should never have been there. He died to destroy that corruption, and rises from death to offer us a God-soaked, God-drenched new humanity. Matthew 3:13 – 4:11 gives us an insight into what Jesus' experience was like.
5. Think about Jesus as being God and being human, and going through all this stuff. Jesus is succeeding where everyone else failed in facing temptations. That's why last time we said that Jesus retells our stories, when he comes into our lives. He was retelling the story of his people Israel when he came to be with them. Now, notice what is Jesus doing with his human nature in this passage?
 - a. At his baptism, he acknowledges that his humanity needs to be cleansed. So he outs us, too! He confesses the sinfulness within human nature, just like every other person who got baptized would have confessed their own sinfulness.
 - i. Application: Jesus has exposed our human nature for what it is. This is what makes it easier to confess our sins.
 - ii. Even though Jesus didn't sin in the sense of act against God in word, thought, deed, or emotion, he still acknowledged that human nature needed to be healed through his faithful obedience, which only he could do.
 - b. Jesus was continuing to receive the Holy Spirit for us! He was adjusting his humanity to make it fit for the Spirit to dwell in, so he could share his Spirit-filled new humanity with us.
 - c. He receives the Father affirmation of his identity as the Son for our sake, so that by connecting us with himself we too would share in the affirmation of an identity as daughters and sons of God.
 - d. In the wilderness, what is Jesus really struggling against? Yes, he's struggling against the devil, but he's also struggling against something in his own humanity. Something in his own humanity, that he was wearing, wanted to be self-centered. But Jesus refused it. Is he really tempted? By what?
 - i. Illus: C.S. Lewis, who lived through both World War I and II, says that you only know the strength of the German Nazi army unless you fight them, all the way down to the last man. If you surrender, you don't know the strength of their army. Because you gave in.

You only know how strong they are if you fight and resist. The same is true for our battle against temptation and sin. We all gave in too quickly. We give in too quickly. Only Jesus knows what it's like to fight temptation and sin all the way down to the source because he never gave in. Just because he was also divine doesn't mean it was easy for him. Yes it's true that he would never actually sin. But that doesn't mean that it was as easy as flipping a switch for him. No: his commitment to never sin meant that he experienced the fierceness of the battle and the struggle more deeply than any of us.

- ii. I've often wondered what that was like for him. We have very little idea what it means to resist the evil and self-centeredness within ourselves, because we give into that self-centeredness fairly early on. Like how many of you guys are virgins not because you've resisted temptation, or is it just because you've not had the opportunity? That's the difference here. Like how many of you choose not to go shopping when it's offered you, and instead, give that money to children in poverty'? The only way we know how strong our own evil is, is to resist it. And the longer we resist it, the more we feel it. If you read the saints of the past, they were really aware of their self-centeredness because they were pushing so hard against it. We're not really aware of our self-centeredness because we pamper ourselves so quickly. We eat when we want, change the channel when we want, customize our play list and our shopping list to our comfort. We have no idea how evil we can be because we protect ourselves from it.
 - iii. Do you believe that Jesus' human nature craved sin? Sex? Physical comfort? Bitter anger against the Romans for oppressing his people? Revenge? Do you believe that Jesus had a mind like ours, which wanted to think private thoughts apart from God? But he always, always did one thing. When his own human nature wanted to just have an easy life, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his own humanity wanted to lash out at his enemies, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his own humanity wanted to sin, Jesus said, 'No. I belong to God. I am the beloved Son of the Father and nothing else.' He constantly took his own humanity and redirected it to God, to receive the love of God to the fullest, to love God absolutely. Jesus was healing the human nature he had taken on, so he could offer it back to us.
 - iv. Illustration: Here is what John Calvin said about that: 'When it is asked how, after abolishing sins, Christ removed the discord between us and God and acquired a righteousness, it may be replied generally that he provided us with this by the whole course of his obedience...From the moment he put on the person of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation for our redemption...In order, however, to define the manner of salvation more surely, scripture ascribes it to Christ's death as its property and attribute. Yet there is no exclusion of the rest of the obedience which he performed in his life; as Paul comprehends the whole of it, from the beginning to the end, when he says, 'he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'...Nor was this without inward conflict, because he had taken our infirmities, and it was necessary to give this proof of his obedience to his Father. And it was no mean specimen of his incomparable love to us, to contend with horrible fear, and amid those dreadful torments to neglect all care of himself, that he might promote our benefit.' (John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.5) Calvin himself says that it's not just Jesus' death. It's his whole life that was atoning. His whole life was the undoing of human sin and the forging of a new humanity.
 - v. The three temptations also matched Adam and Eve's temptations in the original garden: In Genesis 3:6, Eve took the fruit because she thought
 1. it was 'good for food' (turn these stones to bread),
 2. it was 'a delight to the eyes' (see the nations of the world), and because
 3. it was 'desirable to make one wise' (be respected by others). Hence, Jesus was undoing the original sin of humanity, reliving the temptation by Satan, without giving in. Jesus was determined to succeed in the wilderness where Adam and Eve had failed in the garden (in addition to where Israel had failed).
6. APPLICATION: Here's a comparison of ways that different belief systems have of dealing with human evil. What do you think about them?

- a. Change external circumstances, make better laws, let each person work off the evil (through good deeds): (secularism, Rabbinic Judaism, Islam, Mormonism)
 - b. See good and evil as one continuous whole; have no desire for change, but only desire to escape this world for another; have no attachments to this life (Hinduism, Zen Buddhism)
 - c. Transform human nature itself in one person and then offer people his new, fresh, purified humanity. (Christianity)
7. APPLICATION: Have a conversation with other people about whether human nature needs healing and transformation?