

Mark 7:1–23

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[0:00] Again, that's Mark 7, 1-23. Please stand with me as you're able for the reading of God's word. Now when the Pharisees gathered to him with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem,!

they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly.

Holding to the tradition of elders. And when they come from the marketplaces, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition 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 the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. And he said to them, You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

[1:26] For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother, and whoever reviles father or mother must surely die. But you say, If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban, that is, given to God, then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down, and many such things you do.

And he called the people to him again and said to them, Hear me, all of you, and understand. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him.

But the things that come out of a person are what defile him. And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, Then are you also without understanding?

Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart, but his stomach, and is expelled? Thus he declared all foods clean.

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.

[2:57] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning.

It's good to see everyone here this 4th of July weekend. So glad that you've joined us this morning. There are some rules in life you never questioned as a kid growing up.

In my house, one of those rules was wash your hands before dinner.

It wasn't a suggestion. It was more like a family ordinance. You could try to walk into dinner after playing outside all day, but before you even touched a piece of chicken, you'd hear it.

[4:08] Did you wash your hands? And you know how kids do. You run into the bathroom for three seconds, turn the water on long and loud enough to create the illusion of washing.

You run your fingers under the faucet, dry your wet, dirty hands, on the towel for dramatic effect, then come back to the table and proclaim yourself clean.

But mothers always know. She would grab my hand like a crime scene investigator, smell them, check under fingernails, cross-examine any witnesses, and say, you didn't wash these hands.

Wet doesn't mean clean. Go back and use soap this time. My mother was teaching me about the need for clean hands, but today, Jesus is using a similar context to teach us about an even bigger need.

I know you heard the scripture reading read so well this morning, but let me be clear, Jesus is not against washing your hands. Please do.

[5:39] Any young people still here in the room, don't try to use our passage this afternoon with your parents, saying, Pastor Pace said, dirty hands don't seem to bother Jesus.

Why should they bother you? No, here in Mark chapter 7, by way of just a quick flyover of the text, Jesus walks into a moment where hand washing had become something bigger than hygiene.

The religious leaders weren't upset because the disciples might spread germs. They were upset because the disciples had violated religious tradition. And what begins as an argument about dirty hands becomes a confrontation about dirty hearts.

Hold on, because Jesus is about to teach one of the most uncomfortable truths and make one of the most revolutionary statements in all the New Testament. The greatest problem in your life is not outside of you.

It's inside of you. That's the tension of the text. We are often naturally convinced that our biggest issue is something external.

[7:01] We blame culture. We blame politics. We blame upbringing. We blame stress. We blame the economy. We blame our family tree. And certainly, external influences may help explain us, but they don't excuse us.

Jesus is not going to let us off the hook today. today. He says, the deepest problem is not what's around you. It's what's within you.

So, this morning, briefly, if I may, I'd love to draw your attention around this simple thought. The matter of the heart is all that matters.

Matter of the heart is all that matters. In Mark chapter 7, Jesus exposes two competing realities. First is tradition versus truth. The chapter opens with the Pharisees and scribes arriving from Jerusalem.

[8:08] Don't miss that little detail because this happened also back in chapter 3. This isn't some random group of religious folks asking curious questions. This is an official delegation, a spiritual inspection team.

Jesus' popularity is growing. Crowds are following him everywhere. Miracles are happening. And the religious establishment is getting nervous. So, they come looking for something to criticize. They come looking for dirt. And notice what they focus on. Not the blind receiving sight. Not demons being cast out.

Not people being healed. Not the fact that he just fed over 5,000 people with a two-piece fish sandwich. No, they are upset because the disciples are eating without ceremonially washing their hands.

Isn't that amazing? The Son of God is standing in front of them. And all they can see is dirty hands. Here's the thing about religion, church.

[9:25] Religion without relationship always majors on minors. Jesus is healing broken people.

And they're worried about table etiquette. Mark explains parenthetically in verses 3 and 4 that these washings weren't really about cleanliness.

They were about traditions handed down from the elders. Over time, religious leaders had built fence laws around God's commandments.

The idea was, if we stay far enough away from breaking God's law, we'll be safe. It may have even started with good intentions. But now, these fence laws were becoming as big as the commandment itself.

Let me give you a practical example. I'm sure many of you have heard the phrase, cleanliness is next to godliness. Okay, that's a cool statement.

[10:35] But that phrase is nowhere in the Bible. Somehow, down through the years, it's been quoted so many times that in some corners, it's become elevated to the level of Scripture.

Even though it's not in there. And that, church, is dangerous. Because anytime tradition ignores truth, or you try to make human opinion carry divine authority, it becomes toxic, legalistic, and leads down a dark path away from God.

Jesus, here in our text, is about to call them out on it. Starting in verse 6, Jesus says, You guys are unbelievable.

You know what? Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. He quotes Isaiah chapter 29, You're lying that this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

You actually leave the commandments of God and hold on to the tradition of men. You look religious.

[11:52] You seem disciplined. You appear moral. You're church people, but your hearts are far from God. Christ Church Chicago, is it possible to be around Jesus and not know Jesus?

Is it possible to attend church, sing worship songs, pray eloquently, quote Scripture, and your heart still be far from God? Honoring him with your lips.

In other words, you know the language. You know when to say amen. If you grew up in church like I did, you know church culture. You knew how to look spiritual, but you still aren't connected to the one you say you worship.

I'm glad this weekend you are here. Your body is here at church this morning. But does God have your heart? Because the heart is all that matters.

Jesus then further calls them out by, in essence, saying, you're requiring things of my disciples that you find ways not to even follow yourself, the nerve of you.

[13:16] You want to talk about commandments? Okay. Let's do it. Verse 10. Verse 10. Moses said, quoting Exodus 20, to honor your father and mother.

A top 10 verse in the Pace household growing up. And then Exodus 21. Whoever curses his father or mother shall be put to death.

These are bedrock commands of God, then and now, that every Jew would have considered binding. But you found this loophole around honoring the command by using this tradition called Corban.

Let's take a quick trip back to our time in Leviticus. Corban basically meant at that time that you could dedicate something to God, and then it couldn't be used for another purpose.

So here's how it would work. Let's say a man had a nice-sized bank account, and his parents are in great financial need. What he does is he takes his big bank account, and he says, it is Corban.

[14:28] It is dedicated to God. It is unto you, O Lord. And then when his parents ask for help, he says, Mom, Dad, I'd really love to help you, and I know I have all this money, but I can't give any of it to you because it's all dedicated to God.

It's almost like a religious way of declaring bankruptcy. They were basically using religion as an excuse to dishonor their parents.

And avoid obedience to God in the name of God while ignoring the actual heart of God. That's why Jesus calls them hypocrites.

Hypocrites. That word actually translates from the Greek term for actor. One who wears a mask, takes the stage, and plays a role.

Interestingly, it's a term used exclusively by Jesus in the Gospels. But check this.

[15:43] Jesus never calls tax collectors, prostitutes, cheaters, or even notorious sinners hypocrites.

No, he reserved that title for people who looked holy on the outside while their hearts were far from God. His harshest words were not for broken people who knew they needed grace.

Those who failed or sometimes fell short. Hypocrite was for religious people, church people, play actors, pretending to be something before others.

They knew they were not before God. Thanks. This is why we must be careful, mindful, examine ourselves.

Because this is no small matter. This is a familiar indictment that the world has leveled against the church and many professing Christians for generations.

[16:46] And here Jesus is doing it. Let me tell you what it's like. It's like the story that's told of a man while walking down the road, passes by a barn and sees arrows right in the bullseye of several targets around the barn.

He's impressed. And so he asked the farmer how he became such a good shot with the bow and the arrow. And the farmer says, well, it's easy.

I shoot into the barn. Then I go and I paint the target around the arrow. This is what happens when our ways replace his ways.

The target moves. When our thoughts replace his thoughts, the target moves. When our tradition replaces his truth, the target moves. It moves to the point where verse 13 says, it makes void the very word of God.

The religious leaders effectively canceled their subscription to Holy Book Weekly so that they could selectively practice religion on their own terms.

[18:09] They called themselves Christians. Jesus called them hypocrites. Look, there's nothing wrong with tradition.

Traditions are passed down through families and cultures, and they give a sense of family pride and identity. But that identity can never come before your Christian identity.

That tradition, no matter how dear to your culture, tribe, nation, or church, can never have supremacy over Christ. Christ is not after rituals.

He's after relationship. He's not after performance. He's after people. Yeah, it's good to follow the advice and the tradition of washing your hands before a meal.

But Jesus is saying it's wrong to think that that makes you holy before God. Because the matter of the heart is all that matters.

[19:11] Jesus concludes his dressing down of the religious leaders with them having nothing to say in return. And he turns his attention to the people.

Verse 14 leads us to the second movement and competing reality of the text. It's outside in versus inside out.

After confronting the Pharisees, Jesus gathers the crowd and broadens the conversation from ceremonial hand washing to what is it that actually makes a person unclean before God.

So then he says something extraordinary. Dare I say revolutionary. Verse 15. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him.

But the things that come out of a person are what defile him. That statement would have sent shockwaves throughout the crowd. For generations, Jewish dietary laws and purity rituals shaped their understanding of holiness.

[20:27] Their whole religious framework centered around staying away from external defilement. Don't touch this. Don't eat that. Don't be around those people.

But now Jesus rocks their world by shifting the focus from external actions to internal realities. Saying nothing outside of you can defile you by coming inside you.

The defilement comes from what's already inside you that's coming out of you. Let me be clear. Here, Jesus is not saying that external conduct does not matter to God.

The list of vices Jesus gives later in verses 21 and 22 clearly indicate that Jesus wasn't afraid to call sin out. But what he's saying is that doing the right thing doesn't make you right before God.

Acts of kindness, faithful service, charitable giving doesn't make you right on the inside. Church, you can't address spiritual defilement by cleaning up the outside.

[21:39] Let me see if there's another way I can get this across. If the engine in your car stops, a car wash won't fix it.

It's internal, not external. Now, as has often been the case in the mark, when Jesus is teaching the crowds, the disciples are all in there going, Yes!

Amen, Jesus! Hallelujah! You better preach! And then as soon as they're along with him, they say, Now, what did you mean by all of that you just said?

Could you please explain that to us? Because we missed it. So then now, starting in verse 18, Jesus begins to explain further, You all just don't seem to get it.

You're still worried about what's going in rather than what's coming out. You still think food, for example, makes you clean or unclean.

[22:46] Let me clear that up right now. Let me take that off the table. The food you eat goes in the mouth, through the stomach, into the digestive system, and is expelled out, and it never touches the heart.

It has no effect on what kind of person you are. The stomach can produce waste, but it can't produce holiness.

So Jesus is saying defilement is not a dietary issue. Stop confusing tradition with truth. Food with faith.

Mark then inserts his inspired commentary or interpretation of what Jesus just said in parentheses at the end of verse 19.

If defilement doesn't come from food, but from the heart, then the Old Testament ceremonial food laws that pointed to holiness have fulfilled their purpose in Christ Jesus.

[23:53] Then effectively, Jesus has declared all foods clean. Now, I know many of you have your own convictions about what you can eat and what you shouldn't eat.

Some are vegetarians, pescatarians. Sometimes my wife would say, I'm a carnivarian. I know that's not a word. I just happen to like steak with my salad. But it's a matter of personal conscience.

If the person who's a vegetarian thinks that's best for them and for their health and for their life to be a vegetarian, God bless them. And for the person who's going to leave here today and go to McDonald's and get a Big Mac large fry and vanilla shake, God bless them too.

What Jesus is saying is that the biggest issue is not what's going into your mouth. It's what's coming out of your heart. Because the matter of the heart is all that matters.

[25:08] What comes out of a person is what defiles him. Verse 20. What comes out of the heart. The heart is who we really are underneath the skin.

It's the internal switch that controls what we think, what we choose, what we feel. Be careful when your friends tell you, just follow your heart.

I'm not sure if they're actually giving you the best advice. Jeremiah 17 says, the heart is deceitful above all things. And desperately sick.

Who can understand it? Jesus says, sin doesn't merely come at you. Sin comes out of you. And to prove it, he starts just listing these sins that come from the human heart.

Verses 21 and 22. Evil thoughts come from an evil heart. Sexual immorality proceeds from a sinful heart. Theft comes from a heart of greed. A heart that's not content with what you already have.

[26:17] Murder is an attitude of the heart before physical action takes place. We could keep going. Coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, slander, pride, foolishness.

Charles Spurgeon comments here, The source from which these rivers of pollution proceed is the natural heart of man. Sin is not a splash of mud upon man's exterior.

It is a filth generated within himself. Jesus says, all these evil things come from within.

Not my environment. Not my background. No, Jesus says the human heart itself is fundamentally broken. In some ways, we know this to be true.

Think about it. Nobody teaches children how to be selfish. How to disobey.

[27:23] You don't sit with toddlers and sit them down and say, Johnny, today's lesson is about lying. No, they seem to come with some of that software pre-installed.

One of the worst times I got in trouble as a child, if you can believe I got in trouble as a child, one of the worst times I got in trouble as a child was over a powdered donut.

I won't eat them to this day. I walked into the room and my dad stopped me and said, have you been in those powdered donuts?

I stood there, looked him dead in the eye, and said, no, I have not. I'm unaware.

I had powder all over my face. Like I said, I don't eat powdered donuts anymore.

[28:36] It's too triggering for me. But what I did was not learned behavior. Nobody coached me in how to do that.

It was simply evidence of a fallen heart. This is so important, church, because if sin were merely external, then education could solve it.

Government could solve it. Money could solve it. Technology could solve it. But the human problem is a heart problem. That's why many of the things people try in order to fix their lives don't work.

Self-help, positive thinking, image management, behavior modification. That's because behavior modification can never replace heart transformation.

Lord help you. You may think you need a plastic surgeon, but I'm here to tell you what you really need is a heart surgeon.

[29:47] And boy, do I have a recommendation for you. His name is Dr. Jesus. He's never lost a patient.

Only Jesus can change a heart. That's why the gospel is such good news. Jesus doesn't merely expose the human heart.

He redeems it. He takes hard hearts and softens them. He takes guilty hearts and cleanses them. He takes sinful hearts and transforms them.

God promised this centuries ago, before Jesus even came back in Ezekiel. He prophesied, I will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. That's why Jesus came.

He didn't merely come to improve people. He came to transform people. Religion says, clean yourself up. Jesus says, I'll give you a new heart.

[30:46] Religion says, try harder. Jesus says, be born again. Religion says, fix the outside. Jesus says, I'll change you from the inside out. The beautiful irony of this passage is this, church.

It's this. The only true, clean person in the whole story is Jesus himself. The Pharisees looked clean externally, but were defiled internally.

The disciples had dirty hands. The crowd had sinful hearts. But Jesus alone was pure, perfect, holy, sinless. And yet, the clean one would eventually go to the cross for the dirty one.

That's the gospel. Jesus took our defilement upon himself, our sin, our shame, our rebellion. And at the cross, the spotless lamb of God was treated like the guilty one.

So guilty people like you and me could be declared clean before God. We're about to mark that at the table in just a moment. David prayed in Psalm 51, create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

[32:06] That's still the prayer today. Not, Lord, help me look better, but Lord, change my heart. Because when Jesus changes the heart, everything changes.

When the heart changes, your speech changes. Your relationships change. Your desires change. Your priority change. Not because you're performing religion, but because Dr. Hackley, as the old gospel song would say something on the inside is working on the outside, and it brought about a change in my life.

That's the question this text leaves us with this morning. Not how good do I look externally, but what condition is my heart in before God?

Because one day, the masks will come off. One day, the performances will end.

One day, appearances won't matter anymore. And on that day, the only thing that will matter is whether your heart has been transformed by Jesus Christ.

[33:24] So don't settle for polished religion with an unchanged soul. Don't settle for church attendance without true surrender. Don't settle for looking holy while remaining distant from God.

Because at the end of the day, the matter of the heart is really all that matters. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you and we praise you for your sacrifice. Thank you for fixing us from the inside out.

Let us be less concerned about what the outside looks like than what the heart looks like that then fixes the outside.

God, we love you and we humbly bow at your feet saying, clean us, Lord. Fix us, Lord. From the inside out.

[34:29] We give you thanks, glory, and honor in your son's name we do pray. Amen.