

# Mark 7:1-23

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[ 0 : 00 ] So tonight we're going to be looking at Mark chapter 7. If you want to turn there in the pew Bible, whoever gets there first can shout out the page number. And what is it, Beth?

842. That was quick. Thanks. So Mark chapter 7, we're going to look at verses 1 through 23 tonight. Am I wearing this in the right spot, Jonathan?

All right, let me read Mark 7, 1 through 23 for us. Mark writes this, Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, that is Jesus, 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, holding to the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the marketplace, 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 around him said, asked him, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?

[ 1 : 20 ] 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.

For Moses said, Honor your father and mother, and whoever reviles father or mother must surely die. But you say, If a man tells his father or mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is korban, 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, Hear me, all of you, and understand, There's 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 into his heart, but his stomach and is expelled?

[ 2 : 44 ] 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.

All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. Well, as I was preparing for tonight, I was reminded of a story about G.K. Chesterton.

He was a writer and critic who lived about 100 years ago. He was incredible with words. Some of you know that if you've read some of his writings. He wrote fiction. He wrote art criticism. He kind of wrote across the board. And he was a devout Christian and also wrote just massively beautiful works about the faith.

In fact, his book titled Orthodoxy is probably one of the better Christian works of the 20th century. Some would say the best, but that's a superlative. We'll stay away from that. Orthodoxy. Great. So a great Christian writer.

And supposedly the story goes that a newspaper once wrote Chesterton and asked him to write a piece discussing what's wrong with the world. And I'm sure they were expecting a few hundred words of finely crafted prose to answer this probing question.

[ 4 : 02 ] What's wrong with the world? But in classic Chesterton style, his reply was simply this. Dear sir, I am. Yours, G.K. Chesterton.

You see, what's wrong with the world? Chesterton says, I am. End of discussion. Now our text tonight is perhaps one of the most illuminating analyses.

One of the most sort of insightful discussions of the human condition. It shows us exactly where our problem lies.

And it actually points us to where the solution is found. And that's really important, right? Because if you get the problem wrong, you never get the solution. Right?

If you go to the doctor and the doctor can never give you the right diagnosis, you'll never get the cure. So tonight as Jesus takes us into his analysis, into his sort of checkup, into his prognosis of what our condition really is, it's incredibly important.

[ 5 : 07 ] And what we see is that the problem of our human condition doesn't come, Jesus says, from anything outside of us. Our problem isn't in our environment and it's not in our circumstances. Ultimately, he says, it comes from inside of us.

Jesus says it's our hearts that are the problem. Now in verses 1 through 5, the Pharisees come to Jesus with a question about his disciples, right?

And the issue that they bring is, hey, why don't your disciples follow the tradition of the elders and wash their hands before they eat? Now the hand washing thing here isn't just, you know, washing your hands before you sit down at the table.

We have a two-year-old, so we're always telling him to wash his hands before he eats because he's two and he gets into really gross stuff. That's not the kind of washing that they're talking about.

They're talking about a ceremonial ritual thing. You see, the Pharisees had all sorts of regulations that had been developed over time to try to make sure, so they could try to make sure that they were staying ceremonially clean.

You see, the Mosaic Law did have regulations for ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness. If you've ever read through the Old Testament, you know this. And what these clean and unclean ritual ceremonial laws were meant to be was a way of teaching God's people about God's holiness and their sinfulness and their need for forgiveness and their need for cleansing.

[ 6 : 27 ] But what happened over time is that a whole bunch of human traditions were added to the ceremonial law to make extra sure that no one became unclean or defiled.

They were, as it were, attempts to sort of build a fence around the law, to sort of spread it out even just a little further so that no one got even close to becoming unclean. And what happened was that keeping these traditions started to become the sign that you were really serious about following God.

If you did all these extra traditions and extra rituals, then you were a true worshiper of God. Then you were in the right with God.

And in verses 16 through 13, we have Jesus' reply to the Pharisees. And he basically says this, Now that's pretty harsh words for guys who, if you would have asked them, took the law incredibly seriously.

Took it so seriously that we made extra laws just so we could keep the law. But Jesus is so insightful here. He says, Though your lips are honoring God, your heart is far from him.

[ 7 : 52 ] In fact, he goes on to say that by creating all these human regulations, you actually end up rejecting and even at times disobeying God's commands to keep your traditions.

That's what 16 through 13 is all about, about this deal with honoring your father and mother and Corban and all of that. He's saying you've developed a practice that actually, if you follow through with that human tradition practice, you disobey God's law.

In essence, Jesus is showing us that the more we focus on human traditions, the less we start to care about God's commandments. And inevitably what happens is that an increasing obsession with our own rules and our own regulations will lead us to trust more and more on ourselves.

After all, we're the ones who made them and we're the ones who have to keep them, so we end up trusting ourselves. But you see, that's not the way it was meant to be.

God's law, God's word was meant to be enough for God's people. And really attending to God's law was meant to drive people not to trust in themselves, but to trust in God.

[ 9 : 09 ] You see, it was meant to be set up so that the more and more God's people heeded God's commands, the more and more they would have to depend on God. Because, you see, the law

goes straight to the heart.

It reveals our true spiritual condition. And that's where Jesus goes in the last part of our text. In verses 14 through 23, Jesus tells us what really defiles a person.

And he says it's not what goes into us from the outside that defiles us, but that it's what comes out from within, from the heart. He says you can control your environment all you want, and you can create all the traditions you want, but ultimately none of those can keep you from being undefiled. They won't stop the corruption, and they won't take away the stain. Because in essence, Jesus says, you are the problem. This, this couple weeks ago, well, just last week, Beth and I were down at her parents for Christmas, hanging out with the family.

And we have a niece who's going to be in eighth grade. She was actually the wedding, the flower girl at our wedding, and she was like two. So it's really weird to see her now.

[10:24] She's like 13 and this tall. But anyway, so she's growing up, and she brought to the Levis family gathering her copy of The Hunger Games. We were all talking about The Hunger Games.

And, you know, some people were saying how they couldn't believe people were reading The Hunger Games, and it was so bad. And then someone said, well, kids read The Lord of the Flies in school. What's worse than The Hunger Games?

And I hated that book too, you know, so. But interesting, it got me thinking about The Lord of the Flies. Now, what's the point of The Lord of the Flies? Do you remember this book? Remember what happens in The Lord of the Flies? Yeah? There's a group of high, I think they're high school kids, right?

They end up on this island all by themselves. You know, it's Russo's perfect project. Untainted by external controls or society or anything else, just pure, undefiled humanity on an island to just start afresh.

And what happens? They just eat each other alive. It's just pure barbarism by the end. You see, the point of that book is that the problem's in us, not outside of us.

[11:30] That's the point that Chesterton was making with his short little reply to the time so many years ago. What's wrong with the world is our hearts. After all, where do the things that really break God's law, not our traditions, but the things that really break God's law, where do they come from?

Look at verses 21 through 22. Where do evil thoughts come from? Where does sexual immorality come from or theft? Or murder? Or adultery?

Or coveting? Or wickedness? Where does deceit come from? Where does sensuality come from? Where does envy come from?

How about slander? Or pride? Or foolishness? Where do these things come from? They don't come from the foods that we eat or don't eat.

And they don't come from whether you do or don't wash your hands in a particular way. And they don't come from any of the other human traditions that we think we have to keep. All these things come out of our hearts.

[12:36] It's not what goes in, but what comes out that defiles us. That's what makes us unfit for God. And that means we don't need more and more and more human regulations and external rituals, because those things just distract us from God's true commands and distract us from the heart problem that we have.

You see, because what Jesus is showing us here is that we don't just need external rituals. We need new hearts. If the problem is our hearts, if that's where it comes from, then our only hope of redemption is to get a new heart.

You see, that's the point of the law. The law shows me that I'm the problem, and it's supposed to drive me to the gospel. And the gospel says that through faith in Christ, who died for my sins, God gives us a new heart.

A heart that loves him, and a heart that worships him, and a heart that has a relish for God and the things of God, and wants to please him, and wants to be with his people. God gives us a heart through Christ that treasures him above all things.

Now, if that's what Jesus is saying here, stop for a minute and consider this. If what we need is a new heart, if it's things that come out of us that defile us, consider what that means.

[14:01] Most of us, I think, default, tend to believe that we're basically good, and from time to time we make some mistakes, right? I'm basically a good person.

Sometimes I make mistakes. And you see, when you hold to that belief, the idea that God would judge us, sounds kind of harsh, doesn't it? After all, how could God judge me if I've just made some mistakes?

But you see, Jesus' analysis of our human condition is very different. According to Jesus, the bad things we do aren't mere mistakes, but they're symptoms and they're evidence of the inner reality of our heart, the inner trajectory or the inner disposition of our hearts.

Those things that come out aren't just sort of slip-ups. They're proof that our hearts are unclean, that our hearts are in rebellion against God, the God who made us and who loves us.

And if our hearts are truly the problem, then that means we're in a very desperate condition, doesn't it? Because after all, you can change all sorts of things on the outside.

[15:16] You can make all sorts of rules and regulations and traditions, and you can even keep them all. But none of that changes your heart. Because if your heart is selfish, you'll just keep all those traditions and rules and all those regulations for selfish motives.

And if your heart loves human approval, if that's what it lives for, you'll just keep traditions to get human approval. Or if you're someone who loves control and has to have control, then you'll just keep all those things to feel in control.

And no matter how much you change the outside, you see you're still on the inside marching to the same beat. You're still worshiping the same thing. You're just wearing a new mask. You're still not worshiping God.

And you're still leaking all these things along the way, like evil thoughts and envy and pride. Do you see how serious our problem is?

That nothing you can do can change your heart. And you can try all you want and wear a thousand different masks and do a thousand good deeds and take the most strenuous religious rituals upon yourself, and you'll wake up and find that your heart's still bad.

[16:35] But not only does this show us how serious our problem is, it also shows us how amazing the gospel is. Because Jesus came not just to give us more rules to follow or to give us different traditions that we have to keep.

Jesus didn't come to clean us up on the outside and make us look presentable to one another. Friends, Jesus came to give us new hearts.

And that's what Jesus himself taught. Let's do some Bible flipping for a second. If you have your Bible open, or if you don't, open it. Turn to Mark 14. Mark 14, verses 22 through 25.

Just go over a few pages from where we are. Mark 14. Beth, did you find the page number? Not yet. Too fast. Mark 14.

So this is Mark's telling of the Passover meal, the last Passover meal that Jesus ate with his disciples. This is when Jesus institutes what we call the Lord's Supper or communion. Let me read this for us.

[17:39] And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them and said, Take, this is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they drank, and they all drank of it.

And he said to them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. What Jesus is telling the disciples here is that the bread and the cup represent his upcoming death on the cross for us, for us sinners.

But how does Jesus describe it? He says that through his death, he's setting up a covenant. Now, a covenant is a binding relationship.

It's like an oath. It's like an unbreakable bond or agreement between two parties. And what's the covenant that Jesus is setting up with his death? Well, it's the one that the prophets had been speaking about for hundreds of years.

It's the one that they called the new covenant. Okay, turn to Jeremiah 31. Back in the Old Testament. If you look at Jeremiah 31, 31.

[18:50] Let's take a look at this new covenant that Jesus is setting up with his own death. Did you find it? I could look at the page number.

What is it, Antoine? Oh, thanks, Ant. 660. Okay, good. We all there? Look at Jeremiah 31, 31.

Behold, Jeremiah says, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant, there it is, with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my

covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Jesus says, this is what I'm doing through my work on the cross. Jesus says, this is what I'm doing through my life. He's doing something with our hearts, right? Now, one more passage.

[ 20 : 10 ] Look at Ezekiel 36. Ezekiel also talks about this new covenant that God is going to affect. Just over a couple pages.

Ezekiel 36. Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, chapter 36. Verse 22 through 27. Therefore, say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, it's not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I'm about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you've profaned among the nations of which you came.

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God. When through you, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness.

And from all your idols, I will cleanse you. And I'll give you a new heart and a new spirit I'll put within you. And I'll remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

[ 21 : 30 ] And I'll put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. So you see, friends, if Jesus has come to establish the new covenant through his death and through his resurrection, that means he's come to fulfill all of these promises for his people, to cancel our sins and to give us new hearts, hearts that finally want to love and obey and cherish God.

So let me close with three things. First, maybe you're here tonight and you're still kind of exploring Christianity. Maybe you're not a Christian. Maybe you're not sure whether you are.

But maybe you kind of feel like you've got it all together. Maybe you're pretty good at being moral, at keeping your nose clean, at being respectable. And maybe even kind of pride yourself on being a good person.

Friend, tonight, if that's you, I urge you to listen to what Jesus says in this passage. That it's possible to have it all together externally and still have a heart that is far from God.

You know, maybe you've even seen glimpses of how unclean your heart is. Maybe you catch yourself kind of getting angry or sort of frustrated at work with coworkers and you sort of snap out at them. Or maybe you've even caught yourself sort of bending the truth at times, you know, to save face.

[ 22 : 55 ] Or maybe you catch yourself lusting after a neighbor or a colleague. Or maybe you find yourself envying after some of the things that your friends have or your neighbors have.

Maybe tonight you've got it externally all together, but you sort of see these things coming out from within. And the lie that we tell ourselves that they're just slip-ups. They're just mistakes. They're not the real me. I was tired.

I was frustrated. I'm basically a good person. But don't you see, Jesus says it's what comes out from the inside that tells you what you really are. Imagine I was holding a piece of fruit in my hand. And on the outside, it was just a beautiful-looking piece of fruit. The color was just right. You know, the skin was nice and firm. And then imagine I just kind of punctured it with my thumb.

And what came out was sort of this brown, oozy, smelly stuff. What would you say about that piece of fruit? It's bad.

[ 23 : 54 ] It doesn't matter what it looks like on the outside. The fruit has gone bad. Friends, the things that we call those mistakes or slip-ups are the indicators.

They're the warning signs, actually. That something deep in our hearts is broken and needs to be fixed. That we're unclean and we need the new hearts that Jesus can give. And Jesus says that it's actually hypocritical to act otherwise.

He says that if you see those things coming out and you still pretend like you're a good person, you're just putting on a show and wearing a mask. And this passage is saying, enough's enough. Take off the mask and stop putting on the show. And admit that evil things are coming out of your heart. And that you're not basically a good person who makes mistakes, but that we're sinners. That we're sinful people whose actions are symptoms of a heart problem. Friend, it's not until you admit that fact that you'll ever find hope to really answer your problem.

[ 25 : 01 ] If you don't get to that place, you will keep going from remedy to remedy to remedy to remedy to remedy. And none of them will work. And you will never find the cure for what you are looking for.

Second, maybe you know full well that you're unclean. That your heart is unclean.

Maybe you look over some of the things that Jesus mentions in verses 21 and 22, and you actually see how many of them come out from within you. And maybe the Holy Spirit has even begun to convict you that your heart is unclean.

That you're a sinner. That you're rebelling against God. And that you're separated from Him. And if that's true, then you're under His judgment. And you know it's not your circumstances.

And you know it's not your upbringing to blame. You know that it's you. Friend, if that's you, then tonight, Jesus is calling you to place your trust in Him.

[ 26 : 02 ] You see, Mark 7 is here. It's not meant to just have us leaving us in our guilt. It's meant to drive us to the gospel. It's meant to drive us to the fact that with His death, Jesus has established a way for your sins to be forgiven and for your heart to be renewed.

That when He died on the cross, the penalty of your sins were completely canceled. And His resurrection demonstrated that it was paid in full and there was nothing left to be done to reconcile you to the Father.

And that everyone, absolutely everyone, who turns from sin and trusts in Christ will be forgiven and made new.

That He'll take out your heart of flesh and give, take out your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And finally, your heart will start beating with a new desire that you had never even imagined before.

A desire for the things of God. For a beauty and a majesty unlike anything you've ever imagined. So tonight, if that's you, if you feel that tug on your heart, by all means, put your trust in Christ.

[ 27 : 20 ] In a few minutes, we're going to take the Lord's Supper. Use that time. Even a simple prayer of commitment to Christ. He hears. And He'll receive you.

Third, and last, if you are a Christian, what does this text have to say to us? If you are a Christian, you've placed your trust in Christ, my guess is that you still struggle with sin.

Christ has given you a new heart. You see how you're sort of spiritually alive in all these new ways. And yet still, even though you have this new heart, you see that parts of your old self and old life still seem to hang on and hang around, right?

It seems as if that sort of old person keeps kind of coming out. Even though you know that Christ has redeemed you and given you new life. Well, how do we deal with that?

Well, again, this passage Jesus is saying, go to the heart. If you want to see lasting growth as a Christian, you need to be living out of the new heart that God has given you in Christ.

[ 28 : 22 ] You need to be exercising, as it were, that new dynamic heart that He's given you. And there are really two ways of doing that. Two ways of sort of working out this new heart.

Two of them. One, keep reminding yourself of your new identity. I heard this example. Someone give this example. And it was a good one because I resonated with it.

So I'm going to use it tonight. When Beth and I moved into our apartment building, we used to live in number seven on the first floor. We'd come right in. Boom. There we were. Number seven. And then we moved up to 54, the complete opposite end of the building.

And you know what happened when I would come, like, after the first, like, few months? Like, even though we'd been living there for months, when I would come into our building, you know where I would go when I came to the building? Number seven. You know it. Every single time I'd come in and go to number seven, even though we didn't live there anymore.

Right? Come on. I'm not the only one that's happened to you. I know. It's kind of an idiotic thing to do. But I did it, you know? And the guy who lives there now is the Yale rowing coach. He's a cool guy.

[ 29 : 24 ] But, you know, I didn't want to eat dinner with him. So, you know, I had to go back up to 54. Isn't it the same way with us and our new life as Christians? You come to a decision.

And because you're so habituated to go this way, you have to stop and you have to remind yourself, that's not where I live anymore.

That's not my home. That's not my heart. I'm here now. So, in the midst of temptation, how do you exercise your new heart? You remind yourself of your identity.

I'm not the old person anymore. I'm the new person. This is who I am. This is who I love. This is where I live. But the second thing is not just reminding ourselves of our identity and where we live or where our heart is, but also you have to kind of get the blood flowing in your new heart.

You have to get it beating, right? Now, this is what I mean. The heart is the thing in you that worships, right? It's the thing that loves, that desires. It's the very core of who you are. And we all worship something.

[ 30 : 29 ] And the only way that will stop worshipping other things is by worshipping God more. Do you see that?

Because when you sin, there's an act of false worship going on. That's what Jesus is saying in this passage. It's out of your heart. It's out of the worshiping core of who you are that all these bad things come out. Under every act of disobedience is an act of false worship.

When I lie, I'm worshipping something other than God. Do you see how that works? Now, me, I'm very prone to human approval. So when I'm tempted to lie to someone, why do I lie to someone? Because I don't want them to think bad of me. If I forgot about an appointment that I made with someone, this happens a lot. So if I forget an appointment with you, it's because I'm just forgetful and I need a better day planner.

But no, when I forget an appointment with someone, they call me, hey, where are you? I'm so tempted to be like, hmm, you know, I can make a thousand excuses right now and bend the truth because I don't want this person to think less of me.

[ 31 : 33 ] What's happening in that moment? I'm worshipping their approval. I'm worshipping their thinking well of me instead of worshipping God who loves me and has created all things.

You see? It's like that with every single sin. Not just lying, but lust and pride and envy. Underneath them all are hearts craving something other than God.

And the only way that you're going to break down the worship of those other things that your heart is going after is by worshipping the true God more and more. Paul says this in Galatians.

He says, there are two principles that were within you, the spirit and the flesh. And the one you feed the more is the one that's going to overcome. So how do we do that? All sorts of ways God has given us.

Gathering together like this, meditating on his word, taking a walk outside, taking in creation, starting a journal and just writing down all the things you're thankful for.

[ 32 : 39 ] Let me exhort you as we're starting a new year to begin practices of private worship. Get your heart satisfied in God and you'll find that you're sinning less and less.

One of the last things that Jesus has given us to really get our hearts enlarged for him is what we're setting up right behind us, the Lord's Supper. As we just read, Jesus, on his last night with his disciples, instituted this thing.

When we remember through bread and through a cup, his death for us, his dying on the cross for our sins, in a most tangible and sensory way.

Isn't it amazing that Jesus gave us something that appeals to all of our senses to get our hearts longing for him? That in the Lord's Supper, we take something in our hands and we feel it and we eat something and we taste it and you can smell it.

Because this is what Jesus wants us to do with what he's done for us. To just immerse our senses in it and to get our hearts loving it and remembering it more and more and more.

[ 33 : 48 ] So we're going to do that tonight with a few minutes of the Lord's Supper. We're going to celebrate the cross. And we're going to use this time, if you're here and you're a Christian, use this time to just do some self-examination, to repent of sins, to confess to God some of those false gods that have been vying for your heart's worship.

And as you do that, remember that his death for you has taken away your sins. If you're here tonight and you're not a believer, if you're not sure that you're a Christian, if you've placed your trust in Christ, you don't know about all this stuff with having a new heart and all that, instead of taking

the bread and cup, pray to the one that these things are meant to signify.  
Pray to God who hears. Pray to Jesus Christ who can actually give you the new heart that you're  
longing for. So Greg, why don't you come on up and we'll go ahead and take it up.  
And guys, if you want to go up so we can sing together, we'll do that as well.