

From the Inside Out

Mark 7:1-23

- Many of you know that we were recently in the market for a new-to-us minivan.
- We set a budget and researched what we wanted, and then we hopped online and started looking at what was around.
- We found two that we liked but they weren't local, so I took a day off work to drive around and look at these vans.
- One was down at a dealership in North Carolina. The listing said it had all the options we wanted, and the pictures online looked like it was in great shape. I called the dealer and asked about it, and he assured me it was in great shape.
- So, a few Mondays ago, we loaded up the family in my car and headed down to check it out.
- We saw it on the lot as we drove in, and it looked really good.
- The dealer brought us the keys, and as soon as we opened it up, everything changed.
- Nothing on the inside was as it was supposed to be. The interior was in terrible shape with massive stains in the carpet and it didn't have the features it was supposed to.
- Despite our reservations, we decided to test drive it, and as I went to pull out of the parking lot, I realized that the power steering pump was dead. As we drove it for a minute or two, it was obvious that there were some major problems going on under the hood of that van.
- We turned around and took it back, never to go back to that dealer again.
- As we thought about what went wrong in our search for this van, I realized something very important.
- In the pictures, the van looked great. And yes, it was pictures of that specific van.

- However, there was something missing: There were no good pictures of the inside of the van.
- Sure, the outside looked great, but the inside was dirty, dingy, and broken.
- Many of us approach our lives that way. You don't have to be a Christian to know that there are parts of the way we act that you could describe as "unclean."
- All of us have attitudes, actions, dreams, and desires that we don't want others to know about.
- So, what do we often do in churches? Well, we make sure that the outside looks clean. We come to church on Sundays, and we reduce what we hear down to a list of do's and don'ts.
- As long as we make sure we look good on the outside, then we must be okay.
- Sometimes, we fight tooth and nail to make sure no one challenges what we think looks clean, even if it may not be clear in Scripture.
- Some of us here this morning may not be as familiar with Jesus yet, but you realize there are things that aren't right and you plan on coming to Jesus just as soon as you can clean things up.
- Whichever category you fit in, if you are trying to be right by doing right, you need to listen to this message this morning.
- In the passage we see today, we see people who were more concerned with clean hands than being right with God.
- As Jesus corrects both their understanding and ours, we are going to see this truth this morning: Cleanliness comes from a changed heart, not clean hands.
- That will make more sense as we go along, but for right now, know that means that a right relationship with God is found

in letting him change your heart, not in you doing all the right things externally.

- Let's see that this morning as we look through **Mark 7:1-23**.
- Jesus is clearly teaching us that cleanliness comes from a changed heart, not clean hands.

- Like the Pharisees, it is easy to get our focus off our hearts and onto our hands, isn't it?
- After all, our actions are easier to see than the thoughts of our hearts.
- Plus, when people see us doing the right thing, it sure looks good, which makes us feel good because others think we're doing the right thing.
- Additionally, we can control what we do on the outside to a point without God's help, can't we? We can retrain ourselves to avoid a certain habit or not to do certain things, but what we can't do is change the heart.
- So, we focus on what we think we can do, which is our hands, instead of our heart.
- We see three outcomes in this passage from when we focus on our hands instead of our hearts.
- **First,**

1) We add to God's commands.

- The Pharisees weren't rebuking Jesus' disciples for breaking Scriptural commands. They rebuked the disciples for breaking the tradition of the elders.
- Go back to **verses 3-5**.

- What were those traditions?
- In the Old Testament, God set out a number of laws that governed his unique people, the nation of Israel.

- As time went on, people had more and more questions about what those laws meant, so different teachers would add their interpretation onto it.
- As the centuries passed, many Jews regarded those traditions as authoritative as the original command God gave.
- We saw this a few months ago when we looked at Jesus healing on the Sabbath day, back in **Mark 3**.
- The Pharisees, who were religious leaders, and the scribes, who were the ones who passed down those traditions, got mad at Jesus for healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath because it violated one of those traditions.
- In the Old Testament, God said that the Jews were to set aside one day a week and not do any work.
- The scribes and teachers of the law throughout the centuries went to great lengths to define, “work,” and healing someone of a non-life-threatening injury broke their traditional definition of work.
- They added all kinds of commands, including ones about ritual washings, so by Jesus’ day, it was almost impossible to keep track of everything!
- There is something important to notice in this: these traditions didn’t start out as bad things!
- It came out of good, godly people trying to figure out how to honor God best.
- However, as time went on, those good intentions changed into an iron-clad set of rules that God never intended.
- I have to ask myself and us as a church, in our zeal to honor God, are there any traditions we have added to the level of God’s commands?

- When you get ready to defend something as right or wrong, are you able to go back to the Bible as the source for your answer, or is it just because you've always been taught that it was right?
- Over time, we can see what we have always done as a command from God, even when it is simply how we have done things.
- By the way, before the younger folks in the audience start pointing fingers at the older folks, remember that it doesn't take long for something to become tradition.
- Those of us under 40 can be just as dogmatic about our preferences and ideas as those over 40.
- We need to make sure that we aren't doing the same thing the Pharisees did by focusing on what we think makes our hands clean in the eyes of others instead of what makes our hearts right before God.
- What did Jesus have to say to those who do that? Look at **verses 6-7**.
- I just used a word, "dogmatic" or "dogma". Those words are often used synonymously with the word "doctrine" Jesus used in **verse 7**.
- Those who put human tradition at the level of biblical teaching and doctrine are not genuinely worshiping.
- Jesus said your heart is far from him, no matter what your lips say.
- Why is this such a big deal?
- These traditions started out as good ideas from godly people, so why are they bad?
- **Because when we add our traditions to God's commands,**

2) We override God's commands.

- When we elevate our ideas to the level of God's word, we actually put our ideas above God's command.
- You see, God knew exactly what we needed to know to be who we need to be.
- He prescribed the commands we needed, and when we add to that, we end up contradicting what he told us.

- Jesus uses an illustration from their traditions to show this.
- Let's walk through **verses 9-13** together and explain this.
- God clearly commanded, through Moses, that we are supposed to honor our parents.
- Part of the way we do that is by helping them as they age, both financially and physically.
- However, the people in Jesus' day didn't like to do that, so they devised a plan.
- They could declare their money "corban", or "devoted to God," and then it couldn't be used for anything else.
- If their parents got into a bind and needed help, it was too bad because all that money had already been earmarked for God. If it was property they owned or some other material good, they couldn't sell it or give it to their parents because it was God's.
- Interestingly, it seems like they got to keep those items and use them until they died, so they still got to enjoy them.

- Do you see the irony?
- "I am going to devote my property to God so I can willfully and blatantly disobey his command to care for my parents."
- When we start adding our tradition to God's commands, we end up contradicting what he commanded us to do in the first place!

- When we think people have to dress like us or talk like us or look like us or do things exactly like we do if they are going to be right with God, we break God's command to move forward in unity on clear matters of Scripture and give grace on matters that may not be as clear.
- We come down harshly on things God didn't make clear, and in so doing, we put ourselves in God's shoes.
- We allow our traditions to become more important than his commands when we focus on the hands instead of the heart.
- **All of this shows that ultimately, focusing on the hands instead of the heart causes us to...**

3) We miss the point of God's commands.

- Read with me **verses 14-16**.
- Jesus, speaking to the crowd, says that it isn't what we eat that makes us morally unclean.
- Essentially, he says, "It isn't about your hands."
- The disciples didn't understand, so he explains it in greater detail in **verses 17-19**.
- Jesus says that the food we eat goes into a non-moral part of our body, our stomachs, and our body takes care of it.
- In pointing this out, he is saying that the ceremonial laws of clean and unclean were never strictly about the food.
- They were commanded not to eat pork or shellfish and other things, not because those meats were somehow more sinful or corrupted by the fall, but because God wanted to demonstrate his purity through his people in a unique way.
- If they violated the commands, it wasn't that somehow the bacon going down their throat had a demon attached to it that made them unclean. The uncleanness came from a heart choice to disobey God's command.

- The essence of God’s commands, which they missed and we missed, is a heart that is subjected to him.
- It wasn’t about dotting the ‘i’s and crossing the ‘t’s; it was about willingly submitting our hearts to him.
- Don’t get me wrong here: actions do matter, but they are a secondary matter to what is in the heart.
- Read **verses 20-23**.
- Many of the things Jesus describes here are actions, but his point is the actions are proceeding from a wicked heart.
- That’s what makes us unclean before God: a heart that is sick with sin.

The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9, CSB)

- The solution to a sin-sick heart isn’t washing your hands; it is begging God for a new heart.
- When God’s people wandered away from him, he spoke through the prophet Joel to tell them to turn their hearts back to him.
- Jews would often tear their clothes as a sign of mourning, but God wants more than torn clothes:

Even now— this is the LORD’s declaration— turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your clothes, and return to the LORD your God. For he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and he relents from sending disaster. (Joel 2:12-13, CSB)

- Yes, that results in a change in what we do with our hands, but only as a result of a changed heart.
- If you focus on cleaning yourself up to be right with God, you will never get it.

- You can wash your hands in any way you think you're supposed to, but unless God changes your heart, you will never be clean.
- How do we get clean, then? By turning to Jesus and begging for a new heart.
- Look back at the list. Some of those words describe you, either in action or in the thoughts and intentions of your heart.
- If nothing else, every one of us in this room has been so full of unhealthy pride that we tell God we don't need him.
- You can't clean yourself up. You can't!
- Instead, why not, right where you are this morning, surrender to Jesus and ask him to change your heart?
- Be honest with him about where you are and where you know you have sinned. Ask him to take over your life, not just so you'll act better, but so that you will be better!
- You see, the Bible says that when you call on the name of the Lord, when you call out to Jesus like that, you will be saved.
- You are immediately clean in the eyes of God because Jesus took your sin, your filth, and put it on himself as he died on the cross.
- When he rose from the grave on the third day, he proved that the penalty had been paid, your filth was gone, and now, he could give you his righteousness in its place.
- As we have said all morning long, cleanliness comes from a changed heart, not clean hands.
- However, I don't want you to leave here thinking that your behavior doesn't matter.
- If your heart has been changed, everything about the way you look at life should change.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully. (Psalm 24:3-4, CSB)

- You won't want dirty hands, and you will want to obey the commands God gives, because you have a new heart.
- If you're here today and you know Jesus, are there traditions you are putting above God's commands?
- Why not confess those this morning, and ask God to help you to honor him from a pure heart, allowing you to see what he is doing in others around you?