**Honor God with Your Heart**

**(Is My Heart Clean?)**

June 14, 2020

Mark 7:1-23

Key Verse 7:6b “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

Due to coronavirus, we are constantly reminded to wash our hands; We have to wash our hands properly, for 20 seconds with soap and water. Washing hands protects us from coronavirus. 2,000 years ago there were a group of people who washed their hands more diligently. They were the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They believed that eating without washing hands would make them defiled. They also believe that certain foods make them defiled. That is why they don’t eat pork. But today Jesus teaches us a basic biology. Everything we eat does not go into our heart but into our stomach and then out of the body. So what we eat with unwashed hands does not make us defiled. It is the defiled heart that makes us defiled. It is our hearts which are corrupt. Today many people believe that problems in our society are environmental. That is, what corrupts us is outside of us: namely, many become evil because society makes them. That is not what the Bible says. The Bible says problem is not outside of us; problem is inside of us. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (NLT) You hear people say all the time, the reason I did this, the reason I have this problem, the reason I have this anti-social or criminal behavior, is because I was misunderstood as a child; I was molested as a child; I was unloved as a child; I was bullied: All of these external things have created this kind of behavior because I have lived in this toxic environment. That is not what the Bible teaches. The problem is not outside of you, the problem is inside of you. Your heart is corrupt. May God help us to have clean heart through the blood of Jesus Christ so that we may honor God with our heart.

Look at verse 1. “The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus.” Jesus had been healing all kinds of people. Jesus’ love and power were flowing freely to anyone who had faith. So Jesus and his disciples were very busy serving many people. As they took a short break for lunch, some Pharisees and teachers of the law from Jerusalem gathered around them. Obviously they came to investigate the activities of Jesus. Quickly they realized that Jesus’ disciples were eating with “unclean” hands. Here “unclean” does not concern poor hygiene. It refers to ceremonial uncleanness. The Pharisees’ tradition was to give a ceremonial washing of their hands before eating. They believed that this purified them from defiling elements of the marketplace, and it made them clean before God. They felt that someone with coronavirus touched the door handles and they touched the door handles, and so they became contaminated. They also washed cups, pitchers and kettles to keep them ceremonially clean (3,4). Feeling very self-righteous, they asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?” In fact, the Bible does not say anything about washing hands before eating. They added this tradition. In actuality, these men came to discredit and destroy Jesus. In chapter 3, when Jesus had healed a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath, he exposed their utter selfishness. Jesus also revealed his own genuine love and life-giving spirit to save men. How nice it would have been if the Pharisees had learned Jesus’ compassionate heart. Instead, they decided to kill Jesus (3:6).

How did Jesus respond? Jesus could have called down leprosy on each of them or frozen the muscles in their mouths. Instead he taught them the truth. Look at verse 6. “He replied, ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”’” Jesus said plainly that the Pharisees were hypocrites. The main problem of a hypocrite is that his heart is far from God. The Pharisees came all the way from Jerusalem. All they saw was unwashed hands. They could not see the great work of God being done. Why? Because their hearts were far from God. Instead, they gave their hearts to worldly things. They loved their own honor and tried to impress people. They loved money. They were adulterous. Still, before people, they said all the right things. They fascinated many, but they made God very sorry. When they gathered for worship, they sang well and performed ritual ceremonies with precision and skill. However, their worship was in vain (7). Worship is the time to honor and love God from our hearts. To do this, we must accept the word of God with repentance and faith. But the Pharisees had no word of God in their hearts. They clung to human traditions.

Jesus said in verse 8, “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.” Here the commands of God are absolute truths of God that are eternal and unchanging, such as the Ten Commandments. The traditions of men are of human origin. They may be beneficial for a specific generation or a culture, but they are not authoritative or binding. We must discern between the commands of God and the traditions of men. At first, the Pharisees studied the Bible well. They formed their traditions based on the word of God. This made them strong. Traditions are like hiking trails in the mountains. Hiking trails make us easier to climb the mountains. Traditions should lead us to God’s commands. But the religious leaders emphasized traditions so much that they elevated traditions as high as God’s words themselves. We must always go back and study the Bible newly to evaluate our traditions in light of God’s absolute word. We must not elevate traditions too highly. We must honor God’s word highly. We must constantly evaluate our lives and ministries before the word of God. We must not do things habitually and without consideration. We must always ask “Why?” And we must be able to answer based on the living word of God. What God is looking for is our hearts that are devoted to him. He wants us to give him our hearts out of love for him. This means that when we do anything for God, it should be based on his word in the Bible and out of love for God. If we attend Sunday worship service habitually out of duty, then we fall into habitual, superficial and meaningless worship. Then we will have no joy.

The Pharisees were like wolves in shepherd’s garments. Jesus rebuked them sharply. Look at verse 9. “And he said to them: ‘You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!’” Then Jesus gave them an example. Look at verse 10. “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’” This is the fifth of the Ten Commandments. Jesus quoted the command both in positive term and negative term to show that this is an absolute command, a matter of life and death. Obedience leads to life; disobedience leads to death. There is no middle ground. God gave this command to keep order on the earth. When we keep this command, we please God and enjoy long life in this world. But those who dishonor their parents grieve God and will be punished by God. This simple truth should have been absolute to the Pharisees. However, the Pharisees found a way to circumvent this command, using the tradition of corban, meaning, “devoted to God.” Basically they pledged their estate to God, effective at the time of their death. Still, they could enjoy it during their lifetime. When their parents asked for help, they said, “Mom, Dad: I have devoted my estate to God. I cannot help you. Sorry.” In modern terms, younger ones would say, “Sorry, mom and dad, I can’t clean my room, I have a meeting at church.” Jesus clearly said that such practice nullified the word of God for the sake of tradition. This was just one of many examples. Jesus says, “then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother.” The influence of the Pharisees spread far and wide. Their elevation of human tradition above the word of God damaged the people and the nation terribly. When the word of God is not honored, chaos ensues.

Jesus’ absolute attitude toward the word of God and his clear insight into the hypocrisy of the religious leaders disarmed them completely. They could not say anything to Jesus, and seemed to just run away from the scene. Then Jesus gathered all the sincere people around him once again and told them, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.” (14) After he left the crowd, his disciples asked him about the parable. Jesus first rebuked them, “Are you so dull?” Then he taught them two very important truths.

**First**, Jesus declared all foods clean. Jesus said, “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (18) Mark adds the parenthetical comment, “(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)” Jesus is nullifying dietary and ceremonial laws. God originally gave the law regarding clean and unclean food as a way of making them a holy nation, separate from their godless neighbors. For example, it is not a good idea to eat bats or squirrels because they may carry diseases. The Jewish people considered pig, dog, and shrimp and others as unclean. They thought that eating such meat would make them defiled. But Jesus says that it is not what we eat that makes us defiled. He is saying that we do not become unclean by the kind of food we eat. The basic principle is that it is O.K. to eat any edible food unless it has obvious health risks. We should not criticize people for what they eat, how they eat, or how they wash their hands. It is not the food that makes them defiled. It is their hearts that are defiled. The kingdom of God is not about eating but about changed hearts.

**Second**, we need clean hearts. The real problem of all people is a heart problem. Look at verses 20-23. “He went on: ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s hearts, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed (i.e., uncontrolled desires for more), malice (i.e., evil intention not yet realized), deceit (i.e., fraud and falsehood), lewdness (i.e., the visual display of a corrupt heart in the way one dresses, speaks and behaves), envy (i.e., unhappy reaction toward others successes and blessings), slander (i.e., speaking evil of others), arrogance (i.e., belittling others out of selfish pride) and folly (i.e., stupid action coming from the lack of wisdom and insight). All these evils come from inside and defiles a person.” When a man’s heart is evil, he is evil. No matter how many ceremonies he does or how careful about his diet, he is evil. He will grieve God and damage others in many ways. The real problem of each person is in his heart. We must be most concerned about our hearts. That is where wicked thoughts, wicked words, and wicked deeds originate. However, in dealing with our hearts we need great wisdom.

First of all, we must know that our hearts are corrupt. In the time of Noah, people thought they were pretty good. They were very strong and smart. They praised one another in many ways. But God looked into their hearts and saw they are only evil all the time. Genesis 6:5 says, “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the human heart was only evil all the time.” A popular saying is, “Follow your hearts.” But we cannot trust our own hearts. We must examine our hearts in light of the word of God. We must acknowledge that we are evil because the Bible says we are evil. We must accept this by faith and believe it in order to discover the wretchedness of our hearts. When we see our hearts as they truly are, we shudder at the evilness there. Then we face another problem. We have no way to cleanse our hearts. Our hearts are beyond repair. The wickedness is ingrained that we can do nothing. So St. Paul confessed, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Ro 7:18). He found that he could do nothing to help himself. Though he was one of the most disciplined men in the world, he could not solve his heart problem. All he could do was cry out to Jesus to rescue him from his body of death. So it is with us.

King David was known as a man after God’s own heart. God called him and anointed him as a shepherd for his people, a godly king, the shadow of the Messiah. But one day in the warm spring, David became lazy and did not join his men as they went out to fight the war. His idle heart was captured by a beautiful woman and, to make a long story short, David committed adultery with her and then murdered her husband in order to cover up. His heart was overwhelmed with wickedness and evil. He did not confess his sin willingly. Rather, he tried to hide his sin. But he was rebuked by the prophet Nathan. When he was rebuked, he repented and began to cry out to God. He said, “Have mercy on me, O God...Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:1,10). Then God forgave his sin and restored David’s heart. Then David could enjoy the blessedness of being right with God once again (Ps 32:1). Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” According to Jesus, those who have impure heart are not happy. Those who have impure heart are miserable. If our hearts are impure, our thoughts become impure, our languages become impure, and our lives become impure. If our hearts are pure, our thoughts become pure, our languages become pure, and our lives become pure. Most of all, if our hearts are pure, we become happy because we can see God.

We need new hearts. Only Jesus can change our hearts through his blood. Jesus can make us new. But we must come to him as we are, crying out for his help. May God help each of us to have a clean heart by faith through Jesus’ blood.

Big Idea: Is my heart clean?