

2. The Inward Reality

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[0 : 00] Let us hear then the Word of God. Now, when the Pharisees gathered to him, that is Jesus, when the Pharisees gathered to 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.

And here in verse 3, Mark gives us comment, because he knows he is writing predominantly for a non-Jewish audience, so that we will understand. 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 asked Jesus, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands? And Jesus said to them, Well did Isaiah prophesy about 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 Jesus said to them, You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to establish your tradition.

[1 : 32] 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 have gained from me is corban.

And again Mark gives his comment to understand this, Jewish religious practice. Corban, that is a gift, given, set apart, devoted to God.

Whatever you have gained from me is corban, then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father and mother, thus making void the word of God, by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do. And Jesus 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?

[2 : 37] Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? Since it enters not his heart, but his stomach, but his stomach, and is expelled. Thus Jesus declared all foods clean.

And Jesus 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.

Let us have a moment of prayer. Father, we come here today from many different backgrounds, all of different ages and different stages of our Christian walk.

But in our time together, Father, we pray that what we know not, you would teach us, that what we have not, you would give us, and what we are not, you would make us, for Jesus' sake.

Amen. We began a two-sermon series looking at these verses a fortnight ago. But just to refresh our memories, and as a helpful way back into the passage, I thought I would open up again with the illustration that I used a fortnight ago.

[4 : 20] Probably because most of you don't remember, or probably never understood anyway. So here we go. My good friend Hugh McKenna, told me a number of years ago, he had just moved into

a house, a new house in Jordan Hill.

And he'd only been there a couple of days, when there was a knock on his door. And it was his next door neighbour. And his next door neighbour informed him, that the tree that Hugh had in his back garden, had been broken, and smashed the neighbour's wall to bits.

And Hugh said, I didn't even know I had a tree in the back garden. So Hugh, followed by the neighbour, walked into the back garden, and sure enough, this 80 foot tree, how Hugh could miss it, I don't know.

But the 80 foot tree was snapped, and there it was, the big stump was there, and the rest of the tree was lying over the neighbour's wall, and the neighbour's wall was smashed to bits.

And Hugh said, Terry, when I looked at the tree, when I looked at the big stump that remained, it looked strong, it looked healthy. And he said, the bit that had broken off, and had smashed my neighbour's wall to bits, it had big branches on it, and they looked strong as well, and the branches had lots of green leaves on them.

[5 : 41] But when I got up close to the tree, I saw that what was on the inside was a different story. The tree was absolutely rotten to the core.

It looked good on the outside, but rotten on the inside. And as we come to these verses in Mark chapter 7, we have a similar contrast.

If you gaze your eyes over Mark 7, you will notice that the word defiled, defiles, defiled, has been mentioned seven times. So the presenting issue here in Mark chapter 7, is moral purity.

How is it that we can be defiled? And more importantly, how can we be made clean before God?

Well, if we do what Jesus instructs us to do in verse 14, hear Him, every one of us, and understand, Jesus will take us to the heart of the matter.

And He will show us it is a matter of the heart. A fortnight ago, we considered verses 1 to 13 together, under the heading, The Outward Ritual.

[6 : 48] And what we observed from these verses, was that before we could ever get to the issue of purity, Jesus had to deal with the issue of authority. You see, friends, if we hope to be made clean, to be made pure before God, then we have to be absolutely sure of where we place our hope, where we place our trust.

And if you gaze your eyes over verses 1 to 13 with me, you will see that the Pharisees and the scribes of verse 1 were putting their hope, their trust, in the traditions of men.

Verse 3, And we see from verse 5, their main point of contention with Jesus.

Why do your disciples not walk? Why do your disciples not live? According to the tradition of the elders. Well, in verse 8, 9, and 13, Jesus tells them why.

Verse 8, You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. Verse 9, You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

[8 : 13] Verse 13, Thus making void the word of God by your traditions that you have handed down. You leave, you reject, you make void the word of God by observing your traditions that you have handed down.

Jesus exposes that their religion is man-made. The authority on which their outward rituals are set is the commandments of men. And it didn't matter how many ceremonies or rituals they went through.

Their outward rituals left their hearts far from God. And their worship was in vain. Verse 6 and 7, Jesus exposes that outward rituals will just not do as the authority on which they are set is the commandments of men.

And now in verses 14 to 23, Jesus teaches that outward rituals will just not do as it's not dirty hands that are the problem.

It's dirty hearts. So now we come to consider our verses for today. Having dealt with the issue of authority in verses 1 to 13, we move to verses 14 to 23 to deal with the issue of purity.

[9 : 29] And the title for today's talk is The Inward Reality. The Inward Reality. Well, verse 14, Jesus calls the people to him and said to them, Hear me, all of you, and understand.

In chapter 6, Jesus had seen the people as sheep without a shepherd and he had compassion on them. Well, here in verse 14, it's the same. But Jesus here doesn't give them compassion.

He feeds them with information. He doesn't want them to be caught up in the religious outward ritual and practices of the Pharisees. So he cries out, Hear me. Listen to me.

Not to them. Listen to me, all of you, and understand. So this is of great importance. So we need to open our ears and our minds to hear and to understand what it is Jesus is saying.

So if the person beside you looks as if they're about to just drop off having eaten their lunch, now would be a good time to slap them in the back of the head. Okay, we're ready.

[10:41] Well, 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.

You see what Jesus is saying? It's not outward things, but internal things. And you can see why he wanted the people to hear this. Because the Pharisees believed it was the other way about.

They believed it was the world outside that defiled them. That's what all the ritual washing was about. Washing off the contamination of the world. But Jesus is saying, No, no, no.

These guys have got it all wrong. The flow of defilement isn't outside in. It's inside out. Jesus says, Nothing that goes into a man.

And you can see there at the end of verse 19, Mark gives us a comment. Thus Jesus declared all foods clean. Jesus declaring all foods clean is remarkable. And it must have been really controversial at the time.

[11:39] Exodus chapter 19 shows us that God set aside the nation of Israel apart for a special purpose. which he would choose to work through them. Then in Leviticus 11 and 20 God gave them certain food laws to make them distinctive as a nation.

Some foods were to be ceremonially unclean. But there was nothing intrinsically evil about the food. This was how they were to express their distinctiveness and their obedience as a nation.

Therefore, Mark 7.15 must have shocked him. But to the casual reader, the casual observer would maybe say, Well, wasn't Jesus just doing what he accused the Pharisees of doing in verse 8, 9 and 13?

Leaving, rejecting, making void the word of God? Well, no, he wasn't. Because Jesus had the authority to handle the written word of God. The authority to interpret it, to fulfill it and to speak it to them.

And this is what he was doing here. Here we see the new patch of unshrunk cloth pulling away from the old garment. The new covenant written by Christ's blood would replace the old covenant of Sinai, which the prophets promised would happen.

[12:56] You see, friends, the uncomfortable truth for the Pharisees is that their setting aside of the word of God didn't stop with the Old Testament. They continued to set aside God's word as they rejected God's Son the living word.

Well, verse 17, we move, as we often do in Mark's gospel, from public to private. Jesus is now in the house with his disciples and they ask him about the parable.

In Matthew's account of this story, he tells us that it was Peter who asked Jesus to explain the parable because he just doesn't get it. I wonder if you were ever faced with a situation like this, maybe when you were at school or university where you just didn't get it.

I had it many times when I was under the tutorage of Edward Lobb and Bob Fyre at the Cornhole training course. Sometimes they would be lecturing and it would just go right over my head.

And being my height, most things go over my head. But they would be lecturing and it would be going right over my head. And I was so thankful sometimes when someone else in the class would put their hand up and say, Go on, explain that again because I don't get it.

[14:14] Please explain that again. And I'd be sitting there thinking to myself, I'm so glad you put your horn up there because I don't get it either. Well, verse 18, And Jesus said to them, Then are you also without understanding?

Are you so dull? 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?

You see, Jesus is saying it's not a question of defiled hands or defiled food. What you eat can't make you defiled and what you abstain from can't make you holy.

It's not about defiled hands and defiled food but a defiled heart. That's the inward reality. Jesus says, What comes out of a person, verse 20, 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.

[15:21] All these evil things come from within and they defile a person. Well, I suppose you could sum up what Jesus is saying with a saying that I'm sure you're all very familiar with.

The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. And what Jesus is saying here is this. Every one of us, every single one of us, every human being is exactly like Hugh McKenna's tree, absolutely rotten to the core.

Does that surprise you, friends? Does that shock you? I'm not going to go through all the lists, but we can see that some of these things are thought, some are word, and some are deed.

Everything that a human being does is permeated with this condition. This condition has defiled and polluted us because we are walked at the very center of our beings.

In chapter 12 of Mark's gospel, Jesus is asked, what is the most important commandment? And Jesus replied, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

[16:44] And the second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Friends, who here has been able to live up to that? not a single one of us, because sin has polluted our hearts.

We are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. God has had all of nothing.

And because we don't love God the way we should, we don't love our neighbor as we ought. And friends, this isn't a first century problem only. This has been man's problem since our hearts turned from God and sin entered the world.

And you don't have to go far to find evidence of this. you would only have to go home today, pick up your newspaper, or turn on the television and watch the news. And you will find evidence of everything from this list, every single one you will find today.

that's why we've got hundreds of allegations being made against high profile celebrities of being a pedophile. And apparently, lots of other people including high profile celebrities turning a blind eye to it all.

[18:03] That's why we have a son attempting to murder both his parents and succeeding at murdering his mother. Baby faced thugs being sentenced to life in prison for kicking a man to death outside his home.

Underworld gangs flooding our streets with fake tobacco and drugs. And trafficking human beings as if they were scrap metal. And what would the world say is the cause of all this?

Well, they tried to explain it away. They tried to put it down to things like environment, education, example. I suppose the Johnny Cass song would fit their assessment of human behaviour perfectly. Well, my daddy left home when I was three. He didn't leave much for ma and me. Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of booze. Now, I don't blame him because he run and hid, but do you know the meanest thing that he ever did?

Was before he left he went and named me Sue. Well, he must have thought it was quite a joke, and it got her a laugh from a lot of folk. It seems I had to fight my whole life through. Some girl would giggle and I'd get red.

[19:16] Some guy would laugh so I'd bust his head. I tell you, life ain't easy for a boy named Sue. Education, environment, an example.

Now, it's true, friends, these things are factors in each of our lives. But the Bible always says that our defilement, our behaviour begins from within.

That's what Jesus says in this passage. And that's what James says in his letter. James writes, by our own evil desires we are led away and enticed. Temptation is outward.

The desire to do it is inward. I was speaking to a lady from our church some time ago, and she was telling me that she had been with some friends, and they'd been talking about some of the shocking goings-on in the West End.

You know how the West End is supposed to be the nice part of town? And they were shocked because there had been slashings, stabbings, and murders. But the lady from this church said, the thing that shocked her friends the most was that these crimes were committed by people in suits, professional people.

[20:30] But friends, as we read this list, it shouldn't shock us as Christians, because we're realists. we know that everybody has the potential to do the most keenest of things, whether they wear a shell suit, a blue suit, or a bailer suit.

And what Jesus says here in verse 21, for from within, out of the heart of man, Jesus doesn't have a particular man in mind. He's not talking about a Glaswegian man, or a man from a housing scheme.

No, he's talking about man, all men, and all women. We all have a tendency, don't we, to see other human beings as the problem.

Well, I know I do. I sometimes think to myself, the world would be a much better place if we didn't have dodgy policemen, dodgy politicians, or greedy bankers.

Maybe your list is something different. But friends, it's not someone else who's the problem. The problem is us. It's you, and it's me.

[21 : 40] All that is wrong in the world, is all that is wrong in us. My best mate wrote a song called, Let Glasgow Flourish.

And in that song, there's a wonderful line that says this, I once helped ruin Glasgow. Yes, I'm in part to blame. And you see, my friend gets it.

he knows that all that is wrong in Glasgow is all that is wrong in him. And Jesus says, verse 18, Do you see? Do you see and understand that this is the inward reality of your heart?

And he is saying, not just because you read it there, but because you recognize it here. Friends, Jesus doesn't just want to be the revealer of the problem.

He wants to be the redeemer from the problem. Only he can deal with our hearts. Education can't, legislation can't, and rehabilitation can't.

[22 : 49] Only the transformation that Jesus Christ brings can deal with our sin and the defilement of our hearts. Well, how does he do this?

Well, back in chapter 2 of Mark's gospel, the Pharisees came and they questioned Jesus because he was sitting eating with tax collectors and sinners, people that were defiled. And they said, why do you sit and eat with tax collectors and sinners?

And Jesus answered, those who are well have no need of a doctor, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

And friends, you see what Jesus is saying here? Jesus is saying, he's the doctor. He is the spiritual surgeon, skilled enough even to deal with the sickness of our defiled hearts.

But the Pharisees, they rejected his claims. And they continued with their own alternative therapies, which we have already seen didn't work.

[23 : 53] Their religious cloak left them far from God and their ritual ceremonies left them far from clean. their religion of ceremonies and rituals didn't work, friends.

But Jesus Christ offers not a religion of rituals and ceremonies of outward ritual. Jesus offers a religion of inward relationship.

A relationship with Jesus Christ can make you clean from the defilement of your sin, can bring you into a true and living relationship with a one true and living God, and give you a new heart.

Well, which one will you choose, friends? Will you continue with outward ritual, observing mere externals, all the while becoming more defiled and more further away from God?

Or will you accept what Jesus has revealed about the inward reality of your heart? And in accepting that truth about your heart, will you trust all that Jesus has done on the cross to redeem you?

[25 : 04] Let us pray. Let us pray. When I realized my own sinful condition, and that Jesus had paid the penalty for my sin, I wanted somehow or another to respond.

maybe from your heart this afternoon you want to cry out to God. Well, if that's you, maybe you can join me in this prayer. Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever before believed.

But through you, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you for paying my debt, forbearing the punishment for my sin, and offering me forgiveness.

I turn now from my sin, and receive you as my Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.