

#56

January 6, 2019

Mark 7:1-23

Good News: Better thoughts-Better actions

⁷ The Pharisees and some legal experts from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. ² They saw some of his disciples eating food with unclean hands. (They were eating without first ritually purifying their hands through washing. ³ The Pharisees and all the Jews don't eat without first washing their hands carefully. This is a way of observing the rules handed down by the elders. ⁴ Upon returning from the marketplace, they don't eat without first immersing themselves. They observe many other rules that have been handed down, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and legal experts asked Jesus, "Why are your disciples not living according to the rules handed down by the elders but instead eat food with ritually unclean hands?"

⁶ He replied, "Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you hypocrites. He wrote,

*This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far away from me.*

⁷ *Their worship of me is empty
since they teach instructions that are human words.*

⁸ You ignore God's commandment while holding on to rules created by humans and handed down to you." ⁹ Jesus continued, "Clearly, you are experts at rejecting God's commandment in order to establish these rules. ¹⁰ Moses said, *Honor your father and your mother*, and *The person who speaks against father or mother will certainly be put to death.* ¹¹ But you say, 'If you tell your father or mother, "Everything I'm expected to contribute to you is *corban* (that is, a gift I'm giving to God)," ¹² then you are no longer required to care for your father or mother.' ¹³ In this way you do away with God's word in favor of the rules handed down to you, which you pass on to others. And you do a lot of other things just like that."

¹⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand.

¹⁵ Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person."

¹⁷ After leaving the crowd, he entered a house where his disciples asked him about that riddle.

¹⁸ He said to them, "Don't you understand either? Don't you know that nothing from the outside that enters a person has the power to contaminate? ¹⁹ That's because it doesn't enter into the heart but into the stomach, and it goes out into the sewer." By saying this, Jesus declared that no food could contaminate a person in God's sight. ²⁰ "It's what comes out of a person that contaminates someone in God's sight," he said. ²¹ "It's from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come: sexual sins, thefts, murders, ²² adultery, greed, evil actions, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, insults, arrogance, and foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from the inside and contaminate a person in God's sight."

Happy New Year, my family in faith. I am very grateful for the year of 2018. I was journaling things for which I am most grateful and #1 is you, New Life. I am able to live and able to do what I am called to do because of you. I, of course, could preach to birds and fields like Saint Francis, but I am privileged to preach and minister to God's people. Because of you I can proclaim Good News to you and to people in this community. Thank you. I could not ask for a better church.

Today we pick up where we left off in our series on Mark: The Good News of Jesus. We learned about John the Baptist. Very sadly, because somebody thought more of themselves and was afraid to hear and turn to truth, Herod ordered the murder of the person Jesus identified him as the greatest person that ever lived.

We read **"the apostles returned to Jesus reported everything they had done and taught"**.

I often wonder what I will report to Jesus when I will see Him. What will I tell him? What did I do? What did I teach? It is healthy for each of us to ask ourselves these questions. It is not if, but when. When you see Jesus, what will you tell Him? What will really matter?

Your conflicts? Reasons for being upset? Where you went on vacation? What you ate? Who your parents were? How much you spend on your children or grandchildren? Your report card from school? Promotions at work? Became starting quarterback or homecoming queen? What will matter when we see Jesus?

I Corinthians 13 tells us that only three things matter: Faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love. Without love I am nothing. Loving because I am a disciple and I people to know Christ.

Chapter 6 concludes with the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus walking on water and healings in Gennesaret.

As we look forward to this New Year, today's reading from chapter 7 helps us to bear in mind the question: What matters to Jesus today and what will matter when we will meet Him?

Along with this come questions such as, Why I do what I do? Why I am coming to worship? Why I am helping other people? Why am I giving an offering? Is it so I look good and get complements or for the glory of God?

Everyone in this room knows the old idiom: Cleanliness is next to godliness. How many parents have insisted that their children wash their hands – WITH SOAP – before coming to the dinner table? How many of us insist on smelling the child's breath after he said he brushed his teeth?

We understand the importance of sanitation. The Hungarian doctor named Ignaz Semmelweis discovered in 1846 that it was 3 times more dangerous to have a baby in the hospital because the doctors and nurses did not wash their hands. He lost his job and his life because he made everyone working in the hospital wash. It was decades later that Louis Pasteur was able to convince the world that Ignaz was correct.

Surgeons today scrub their hands from 10 to 30 minutes depending on the type of surgery.

There was very good reason that Moses commanded the wandering group to ex-slaves to wash their hands. A plague could sweep through the camp in no time at all destroying them.

Over the centuries it became ritual and tradition. Since it is a command the conclusion is that it displeases God if you do not wash your hands.

"The Pharisees and some legal experts from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. They saw some of his disciples eating food with unclean hands". These experts were watching and were trying to catch Jesus doing something wrong.

I tell you, if you do not like somebody, you will always find that person doing something wrong. Even if that person will have the best performance, I will find something ridiculous to see as a mistake or not good. We focus on criticism instead of loving.



The Pharisees were looking for something wrong and tad-am. Here it is.

Traditionally, Jews are required to wash their hands and say a blessing before eating any meal that includes bread or matzah. The ritual is typically done using a two-handled cup. There are various customs regarding how the water should be poured, but a common practice is to pour twice on the right hand followed by twice on the left. After the ritual washing they would say a blessing:

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands”.

The tradition became unrelated to personal hygiene and a person is still required to perform this ritual even if his or her hands are clean. It was all done to be separate ones from the world. They believed it was how you make yourself holy and set apart to God.

“This is a way of observing the rules handed down by the elders. ⁴ Upon returning from the marketplace, they don’t eat without first immersing themselves. They observe many other rules that have been handed down, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats”.

Again, washing your hands is a good habit. In Eastern Europe and in Russia, the first thing you do upon coming into an apartment, whether you are guest or coming home, is wash your hands.

The Pharisees and legal experts were challenging the disciples and Jesus as well. Jesus goes directly to the root of the issue. He quotes Isaiah:

*This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far away from me.*

⁷ *Their worship of me is empty.*

Since they teach instructions that are human words.

Jesus added “You ignore God’s commandment while holding on to rules created by humans and handed down to you.”

The Message Bible words it this way:

These people make a big show of saying the right thing,
but their heart isn’t in it.
They act like they are worshipping me,
but they don’t mean it.

**They just use me as a cover
for teaching whatever suits their fancy.
Ditching God's command
and taking up the latest fads."**

The human mind is amazingly capable of rationalizing. We justify our disobedience of the law thinking we are so clever. I have heard it said that if there is a law, there is a way to go around it.

Jesus exposes how twisted their logic is. The 5th commandment is clear. Yet they had managed to find a way around it.

The law of Moses required the Hebrew people to "honor" their parents. That term "honor" did not suggest mere "lip service"; it included the idea of caring for them in their various needs.

Some of the Jews, however, found a way to avoid parental responsibility. They would designate certain of their financial resources as "corban"- "temple treasury.", "this belongs to God," and thus was not to be used for personal interests. So they would say, they cannot support their parents because this money belongs to God.

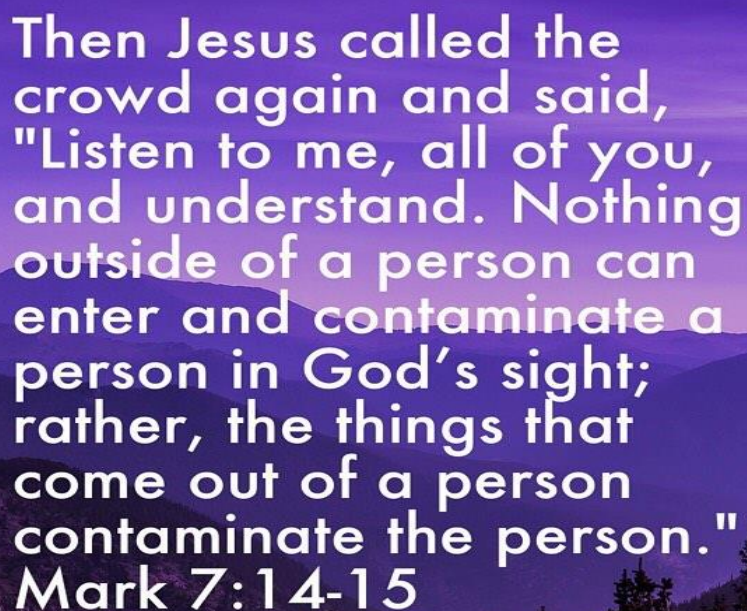
Aren't we all good at confusing what is tradition or just good sayings and what is in the Bible? Tell me where to these in the Bible:

Love the sinner. Hate the sin.

God will not give you more than you can handle.

God helps those who help themselves.

These are good sayings but they are not in the Bible.



Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person."
Mark 7:14-15

"Then Jesus called the crowd again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵ Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God's sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person."

What? Jesus just took scissors and clipped out the entire eleventh chapter of Leviticus! It is clear in Leviticus that some food not should be eaten? The important question is: "Why?" We come to the root question:

What makes a people holy?

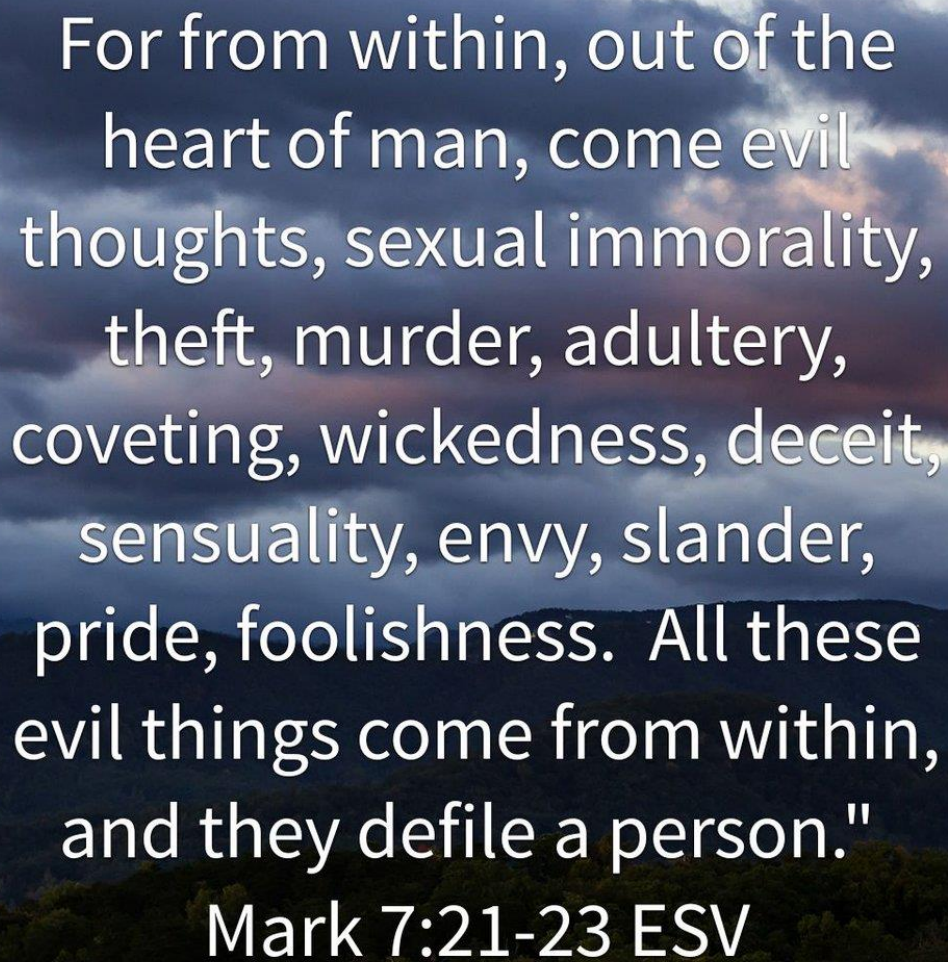
Muslims do a ritual washing of hands and feet before saying their prayers 5 times each day.

God makes us holy through the faith of Jesus Christ and it is God working in us as we make ourselves available to Him. God starts a work in us and we can see in a person's life that there is a change by what God is doing. Being clean or pure or holy has to do with your life, your attitude, your thoughts, your actions.

It is important what you eat, but it will not make you clean or unclean spiritually. For sure, the things that come out of a person contaminate and defile the person.

The disciples had trouble believing and understanding what they just heard so He explained it another way. Your stomach and your heart are two different things. It is what you feed your heart that matters the most. It is your thoughts and what comes from your heart that matter.

*"Blessed are those who are pure in their heart for they shall see God".
"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind".*



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."

Mark 7:21-23 ESV

"Everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light." (Mark 4) It matters what you do or think when nobody sees or hears. It matters what thoughts you choose to dwell.

God says, "people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me" What is in your heart? What are the desires and the thoughts of your heart? It is a danger to think it is my private life. If I do not hurt others I can do whatever pleases me. Jesus says, "from the heart of man comes evil thoughts".

Jesus continues by giving a list what flows from evil thoughts that we harbor. Let us slowly consider each of them by asking, "Is this true in my life?"

- Sexual sins. Many think it is their own business and it is private. Why, then, is this the first thing on the list? Maybe God very much cares what is happens in your private life.
- Thefts. This includes cheating on a test or taking things home from your place of employment.
- Murders. Jesus said that just calling someone a bad name is the same as murder.
- Adultery. Jesus said looking at person with lust is the same as adultery.
- Greed. How many material possessions is enough? What do I desire more than spiritual things?
- Evil actions and wickedness and deceit. Does my action or thought glorify God? What am I hiding?
- Lustful desires. What I desire? Is t lustful?
- Envy. What you think if somebody has better or is better?
- Insults. Have you hurt or insulted somebody? Go and apologize.
- Arrogance and bragging. How much you talk about yourself and think it is all about you?
- Foolishness, recklessness, lacking good judgement.

Paul ends his letter to the Philippians with these words:

"Finally, brothers and sisters whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, make your minds dwell on these things...practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

As we start this new year, let us turn to prayer with confessing and praying for the Spirit to give us a new heart and renew our love for God and others.