

“Outside In or Inside Out?”

Series: Jesus and His Gospel: Studies in Mark – Part 22

Mark 7:14-23

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Mark 7, Mark chapter 7.

Imagine the surprise at the Pontiac Corporation when they received this letter from a customer:

“This is the second time I have written you, and I don't blame you for not answering me, because I kind of sounded crazy, but it is a fact that we have a tradition in our family of ice cream for dessert after dinner each night. But the kind of ice cream varies so, every night, after we've eaten, the whole family votes on which kind of ice cream we should have and I drive down to the store to get it.

It's also a fact that I recently purchased a new Pontiac and since then my trips to the store have created a problem. You see, every time I buy vanilla ice cream, when I start back from the store my car won't start. If I get any other kind of ice cream, the car starts just fine.

I want you to know I'm serious about this question, no matter how silly it sounds: 'What is there about a Pontiac that makes it not start when I get vanilla ice cream, and easy to start whenever I get any other kind?'"

It would have been very easy at this point for the people at Pontiac to dismiss the letter, but they decided to check it out. So, they sent a Pontiac engineer to meet the family and take a look at the car. The engineer arrived right after dinner – just in time to ride with the man to the store to buy the ice cream. The selection that night was vanilla, and sure enough, they got back into the car after making the purchase and the car wouldn't start. Instead of telling the man that he obviously needs to buy a different flavor of ice cream, the persistent engineer came back for three more nights. The second night he got chocolate, and voila – the car started with no problem. The third night he got strawberry ice cream and the car started. The last night the man got vanilla, and this time, the car did not start. Rather than believe that somehow the car was allergic to vanilla ice cream the engineer looked over his notes. He had meticulously noted the time of day, the temperature, and the time they were in the store and the time they got out of the store every night. He noticed instantly that the night's they got the vanilla ice cream they were in the store for a very short period of time, but when they got the other flavors they were in the store for longer. This was because the store had a freezer near the front with vanilla ice cream because it was the most popular flavor, but the rest of the flavors were clear in the back of the store. Once the engineer realized that time was the issue instead of the flavor of ice cream he was able to diagnose the problem. The car was suffering from vapor lock on the nights the vanilla ice cream

was purchased because the engine did not have enough time to cool down before re-starting. So, the car was not allergic to vanilla ice cream after all. The problem was not an external force making it unable to start, but the problem was an internal reality that plagued its engine.

This illustrates in a humorous way the chronic error of mankind's view of our own problems. We look at the worsening condition of our society and we tend to think that the problem is external. So we see the news reports of mass shootings and we say – wow, we have a gun problem in America. Or we see the rise of HIV/AIDS and we implement Sex Education into our school systems to inform kids at an early age how to have supposedly safe sex. Or we look at the corruption in our government and we pin our hopes on electing our favored party as the answer. Or we see people living in poverty and having kids out of wedlock who are then unable to properly support them so we promote government assistance programs and promote abortion so that we don't have any more “unwanted pregnancies.” Now, I know that most of you in the room don't agree with those solutions to those problems, so let's bring it closer to home. We see the broken relationship in our life and we blame the other person's hurtful words and actions. We get angry as we check out our account balance and realize that once again we don't have enough money to pay the bills and we dream of having a higher paying job as though that is the problem. We see the homeless man asking for money on the street and we think – he needs to get a job and work hard like the rest of us. We see people living in obvious sin with all of its harsh realities in a life and we keep our distance from them because we don't want to become polluted.

This is the heart tendency of mankind – to think that we are good on the inside and the problems with this world are because of the circumstance or the lack of education or other external factors. In other words, we tend to think our cars are allergic to vanilla ice cream. This is nothing new. This is the same erroneous view that Jesus is correcting in our text. The Jewish people of Jesus' day were convinced that their biggest problem was found in external matters. They were sure that the Law's requirements for physical and ceremonial purity were paving the pathway to be right with God. And so they religiously held to these Laws and even crafted a whole slew of further laws to ensure that they would never break God's laws – which is what Jesus confronted in our text last week. In the text before us this morning, Jesus teaches some of his most important truth. All truth is important, but some truth is foundational to other truths, and this teaching in verses 14-23 stands as foundational to salvation and to sanctification. If you get the truth of these verses wrong, you get salvation from sin wrong and you get the process of sanctification in the life of a believer wrong. These are crucial words of Christ. Let's read in Mark 7, starting in verse 14.

There is here in this text one key truth that has several implications. What is the one key truth – simply that Mankind's problem is internal and not external.

I. One Key Truth

- a. Mankind's problem is internal and not external.

- b. This is what is at issue in Mark 7. The Pharisees and the Scribes – the experts in the Law of Moses – have come to investigate Jesus. Jesus isn't going away. His ministry continues to be prolific and popular. People continue to flock to hear him, and he continues to astound the crowds with authoritative teaching and epic miracles that confirm the truth of his words. The Pharisees don't like this. They don't like someone trapesing through their Garden and stepping on their flowers. They wanted to put an end to this Jesus. And so they come and observe Jesus and listen to his teaching and watch his disciples – just waiting for an opportunity to pounce on Jesus and prove that he is a fraud. They are dying for that chance to publicly humiliate him and cause his credibility to fly out the window. And then they find it – his disciples not following the tradition of the elders and not washing their hands according to their prescribed way before they ate. And so they publicly chastise Jesus in the form of a question in verse 5 – “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” This was an accusatory question meant to demean the character of Jesus. In other words, how could he possibly be the Son of God, which he claimed to be, how could he possibly be the Promised Messiah, which he claimed to be, and yet let his own disciples disregard the tradition of the elders and eat with unclean hands?
- c. You see, the Jews had established a fence around the Law known as the Tradition of the elders. They believed it was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, along with the Law, but it was passed down by word of mouth rather than written down in the Holy Word of God. They believed that the Law of God that was written down gave the people of God the what of the Law, but not the how. So it told them to honor their father and mother, but they believed it didn't tell them how to honor their father and mother. And so in enters the oral tradition which was to tell them how to obey the what. This oral tradition was man made rules that the people held to religiously for the purpose of proving their own internal righteousness.
- d. So, the Law of God does give a lot of instruction about what foods the Israelites were not to eat and what would defile them so that they could not enter into the public worship ceremony with others. So, if they had a discharge of bodily fluids, or they touched someone who did, they were considered unclean according to the Law of Moses until certain requirements were met. If they touched a reptile they were considered unclean for a certain period. If they touched a dead body or a dead animal, or came in contact with someone who had, then they were unclean. Certain foods were declared unclean to them and were not to be eaten. The Pharisees took these Laws and put a fence around them with a whole bunch of other laws so as to make sure they didn't break the Law. So for instance, when you got home from the marketplace, according to the tradition of the elders, you were to take a ceremonial bath to cleanse yourself because you might have come

in contact with someone who was ceremonially unclean. That command to wash was not in the Law. And so, Jesus says in verse 1-13, these Pharisees and Scribes have rejected the truth of God and clung to their own traditions. They have trampled on God's Word by making their own ways higher in priority than God's ways.

- e. And so now, in verse 14 Jesus calls the crowd to himself. The crowd seems to always be around Jesus. They find him wherever he goes. This crowd has Scribes and Pharisees and normal Jewish people in it. As he calls them to himself he tells them to listen and to understand. The double imperative draws attention to the importance of his words. In other words – listen up – this is crucial. And then he speaks a parable to them, which is simply taking something from everyone's common life experience and showing how it points to a greater spiritual truth. And so he says, "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." We have no idea from the text how the crowd reacted to this short sermon through parable, but we know from Matthew's account that the Pharisees were apparently offended by the statement – which means Jesus was successful in communicating this truth. But his disciples are once again without understanding. This just proves that the only difference between them and the crowd at this point is that they are privy to Jesus' private interpretation. They don't understand it all yet, but at least they get to hear it. So, after they enter the house the disciples, namely Peter, pipes up and asks Jesus about the parable and what it means.
- f. In Jesus' explanation of the parable in verses 18-19 he makes note of the physical truth of the parable. Foods do not defile a person, otherwise none of us would eat. Food is meant for a person's good and well-being. But after we eat food, the stuff it produces – that stuff defiles a person. I don't need to get to graphic here do I? There is a reason all societies throughout history have sought to find a place outside of the normal course of life to get rid of bodily excrement that naturally happens as a result of eating. If you have contact with it, it will defile you – you will get sick and you will die. Everyone knows this – it is a simple physical truism. But then he hints at a deeper meaning of this physical truism in verse 19 and then explains it more fully in verses 20-23. This food that we eat, even if we eat it with unwashed hands, it is not able to make us unclean before God because this food does not enter the heart of man and make him unclean, but it enters the stomach and is expelled. So, if outward realities like the food we eat is not the problem of our uncleanness before God, then what is the problem?
 - i. On a side note here – all of us recognize our uncleanness before God. We inherently know that something is wrong between us and God. This is why people look to political systems to solve their problems and make them and others clean. This is why people look to religious systems like

Mormonism and Catholicism and so on, because they desire to work righteous deeds that will save them. This is why people reject the idea of God altogether and cling to an atheistic or agnostic position because if you can get rid of God then you don't have to answer to him. Most people will not admit that they know they have a problem before God, but we all inherently know it in the depth of our soul. We all know that we have a problem and that we are unclean before God. The question is, what is the solution to this problem?

- g. The Pharisees answered that question by turning to the keeping of the Law. The tangible elements of do not touch and do not eat and do not participate in became a way for the Jew to show in an external way that they were internally clean. It was a way to prove their inherent righteousness. To the extent they could live a morally and ceremonially clean life, it was to this extent they could prove the righteousness of their hearts. In other words, they completely misunderstood the intent of the Law. They thought the Law was the means by which they proved themselves righteous and therefore made themselves clean before God, but in reality the Law was to show them their own unrighteousness. So, the Jew went around all the time wondering if they had been defiled by this or by that. Concerned about the next washing and the next cleansing. Jesus is here saying that their concern is misplaced. They are not defiled by external things. They are defiled by internal things, namely their own hearts. So, food eaten with unclean hands does not make one's heart unclean. Jesus proves this point by giving a list of 12 things that originate in the heart of man that renders him unclean before God. His point in giving this list is that none of these things finds their genesis in external realities. Someone does not commit murder because they didn't do the ritual washing before dinner. Men commit murder, and all other sorts of evil because they have a heart problem. These things that come from the heart are the things that defile a person and make them unclean before God.
- h. In this list in verses 22-23 Jesus gives 12 things that are obviously unclean and sinful that spring forth from the heart of man. The first in the list is translated as "evil thoughts." The construction in the original sets this word as the header for the list. So, the rest of these things flow out of or can be categorized under this idea of evil thoughts. Evil thoughts happen within a man, not outside of him. You do not get evil thoughts from bumping into an unclean person in the marketplace. This word for evil thoughts has the idea of careful reasoning or well-thought out ideas. In Romans 1:21 it is said that mankind did not honor God or give thanks to God, even though they knew He was God. But rather they became evil in their thoughts – which is the same word as in Mark 7 – and their heart was darkened. So, evil thoughts is connected in Romans 1 with the idea of reasoning and thinking about God that ends in a rejection of God as God. Romans 1 goes on to say that because mankind gave God up in order to worship created things

instead of the Creator, that God then gave them up to the logical consequence of their evil thoughts. This is what we see in the list in Mark 7 as well. Mankind's uncleanness finds its foundation in their rejection of God as God and their evil thoughts about Him. This then comes to fruition in their lives through all sorts of evil – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a person. Hence, the problem is not external, it is internal. Notice that Jesus is not here saying that outward actions or behaviors don't matter and just pointing to heart issues as the greatest concern. So, it is not okay to totally scrap concern about outward behaviors for the sake of saying that it is all just a heart issue. Heart issues come out in actions. Defiled hearts produce defiled actions. Outward actions are indications of inward realities – hence, they are important. What Jesus is saying is that outward and external matters are not the things that defile us. So, you are not defiled by foods and such things, you are defiled because your heart is sinful. Therefore, the Pharisees should have been much more concerned with the uncleanness of their hearts than with making such a great effort to have clean hands and bodies. They were totally missing it!

- i. And we cannot afford to totally miss it! We all know in the depth of our soul that we have a problem – we are unclean before God. What we must not miss from this crucial teaching is that this total uncleanness before God is a matter of the heart. Mankind's problem is internal, not external. This core truth of Jesus' teaching has many implications, but I want to point out two of them to you this morning.

II. This Truth's Implications

a. *We Must Receive a New Heart Through Faith*

- i. So, if it is true that uncleanness comes from the heart instead of from outside realities, then the fix for uncleanness must be internal heart transformation and not external transformation. We do not need a new environment or new rules or new behaviors – we need a new heart. And this is exactly what Jesus is trying to get across to the crowd. If the keeping of the Law and the keeping of the oral tradition could not make one clean before God, then there must be another answer. If the disciples had truly been listening to and understanding Jesus' words here their response should have been – “then what must we do to be saved?”
- ii. The answer to that question from the Old Testament all the way through the New Testament is this – you need a new heart. You must be saved through the implantation of a new heart by the grace of God. The Law of the Old Testament was not meant to make one righteous before God through the keeping of externally oriented commands. Rather, all throughout the Law and the rest of the Old Testament the heart is the issue. So the keeping of the Law was considered a heart issue by Moses in

the Pentateuch. In Deuteronomy 6 he instructs the people to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and soul, and strength. Obedience to all of God's commands is a heart issue, not an external righteousness issue. The book of Proverbs makes this clear too when it says in 4:23 – Guard your heart, for out of it spring the issues of life. Proverbs does not call us to the careful observance of more laws so as to be clean before God, but it calls us to examine and guard our heart because this is where the issue lies. And Jeremiah also makes known in his prophecy that it is the heart of man that is the biggest problem when he says – the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Then Ezekiel also prophesies in chapter 36 of a coming day when the heart of stone that resides in the Israelites will be replaced with a heart of flesh by a gracious act of God. He will place His Spirit in them and they will obey Him.

- iii. You see, Jesus is right in line with the witness of the Old Testament – and this is Theology 101 – this is foundational truth. External issues are not what determine cleanness and uncleanness. Your own heart is what makes you unclean. And all of us have unclean hearts and we are unable, in and of ourselves to do anything about our unclean hearts – so we need God to implant in us a new heart – to remove our heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. We need him to graciously take away our heart of unbelief and rebellion and we need God to give us a heart of faith and love and obedience. This is what Jesus is here saying – mankind needs a new heart.
- iv. So, as the theology of the Bible progresses from the Gospels on into the Epistles – and by progress I mean to say that the Epistles expand the explanation of the theology already inherent in the Gospels and they further expound the implications of this Gospel – and so as they do this, what do they say? Well – they say the same thing of course! They say that the human heart is the problem. The human heart is dead in its trespasses and sins. The human heart will not seek out God in any way. The human heart is condemned before God because of this sin and must face the eternal punishment of eternal death – separation from God in every way. So, what needs to happen? Well, the Holy Spirit of God must graciously work through the preaching of the Gospel to bring about heart transformation. We cannot save ourselves through changing outward realities and we cannot give ourselves a new heart. Therefore we are completely dependent upon God to grant us salvation from our sinful hearts through faith in Jesus Christ. You can't change your heart through external mechanisms, but you can look to Jesus who can save you from your unclean heart. You can't rescue yourself, but you can look to the One Man, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, who alone had a perfect heart and who

never had any uncleanness before God until that day when he bore our uncleanness on the Cross of Calvary so that we might be cleansed. Salvation from our sinful hearts and all of its consequences is an internal matter, not an external one. The pathway to being right with God is not through proper washings and proper ceremonies and proper actions and proper religious works. The pathway to being right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. We must receive a new heart by faith. So, the obvious question for your own personal examination is – how are you going to be saved from your uncleanness before God? What hope do you have? Are you looking to your religious system, the traditions handed down to you from your ancestors? Are you looking to God to save you as you earn his salvation through your good external works? Or, can you say this morning that you are looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith? Do you understand that your heart is desperately wicked and will not seek after God? Do you understand that apart from God's work in your life you are dead in your trespasses and sins? Have you looked unto God through faith to give you a new heart – to raise you from the grave of sin and death and hell and bring you to new life in Christ? If you haven't, may today be the day of salvation for you!

- b. *We Must Pursue Constant Heart Change the Right Way*
 - i. But there is another implication of this truth. So, if it is true that man's uncleanness is not a matter of external realities, but it is a matter of the heart, then this not only determines how we are saved from sin, but it also determines how we are sanctified from sin. So, at the moment of our conversion when we place our faith in Christ and we are given a heart of flesh that longs to do God's will and please Him, we are not in that moment made completely perfect. So, the old man, the flesh, continues to reside within us. We have been rescued from the power of sin, but not from its presence. Sin no longer has control over us. It can no longer demand that we obey it, but it is still present in us and we are set on a lifelong process of being conformed to Christ as our hearts are changed from one degree of glory to another. And so we must put off the old man, and put on the new man in Christ as we are told in Ephesians 4. We are to deny our sinful flesh and imitate God. In other words, if we have a new heart that is clean we are to show that cleanness more and more throughout the entirety of our lives. We are no longer to be dominated by the deeds of an unclean heart – evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness – but rather our lives should evidence the fruits of the Spirit of God and His work in our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, kindness, self-control.

- ii. But how do you bring those things into your life? How do you deal with your sinful ways and replace them with righteous ways? Do you tweak circumstances or create more fences or seek to obey more rules and laws? Will that bring inner transformation? No, the problem is not external, it is internal! Therefore we need an internal solution, not an external one. This is difficult for us to practice. It is so much easier to deal with externals because we can control them so much easier. So for instance, if we are struggling with covetous desires, it is easier to avoid the shopping mall or avoid going to our friend's house who has what we want – rather than to do the heart work it takes to deal with the root of uncleanness in our heart and to seek for God to grow us in righteousness.
- iii. The Early Church struggled here as well. This is why in our text in verse 19, after Jesus has said that food does not enter into a heart and make it unclean, but it only enters into his stomach – Mark says in a parenthetical comment that through this Jesus declared all foods to be clean. Mark hardly makes any editorial comments in the Gospel. He shows the glory and majesty of Jesus through his works and his words. But here, at the behest of the Spirit of God, he makes an editorial comment for the benefit of the Early Church – and us! He is intending to show them an area where their sanctification is not a matter of “do not eat” and “do not touch.” Remember he is writing in Rome under the guidance of Peter for the Early Church in Rome. It was a mostly Gentile Church, but it also had a Jewish contingent. Paul's letter to the Roman church probably preceded Mark's Gospel, and in chapter 14 of that book Paul addresses a matter of “do not eat” and “do not touch.” Apparently some within the Roman church were still struggling with the food laws of the Old Testament, and they were increasing those Laws to apply specifically to their situation. So some within the church were saying that you were not supposed to buy meat from the market because you couldn't know if it had been offered to an idol before it was brought to the Market. Doesn't that sound eerily similar to the Jewish oral tradition of the elders? But Paul in Romans, and again in 1 Corinthians, and Mark here in this verse, make clear that the food laws have been dealt with in Christ. Jesus has here declared that all foods are clean. There is to be no more concern among the people of God about “do not touch” and “do not taste” because it is not a food entering into a stomach that makes one unrighteous before God.
- iv. Now, we must be clear here – this does not mean that Jesus is just abolishing the Law of the Old Testament and moving on from it. Rather, Jesus is here fulfilling the Law and bringing it to a conclusion. You see, those food laws of the Old Testament were to be pictures and symbols that pointed to greater realities. They were like the cardboard picture

books that you read to babies to prepare them for greater things. These laws were not means of internal cleanness, but rather they were meant as pictures. External uncleanness that was to point to internal uncleanness. And in Jesus, the need for those pictures has ended. The shadows have passed away and the real has come. The Law has been fulfilled in Christ. And so the writer of Hebrews tells us to move on past elementary things and move to maturity in Jesus Christ by leaving behind washings and cleansings because those external things find their fulfillment in Jesus. That is exactly what Mark is saying here in this small editorial comment. All foods are clean in Christ Jesus because in Christ the shadow has passed away and the real has come.

- v. Believers still have the tendency to think that we are made unclean by external realities. So, the church in Rome needed to hear again that a food, even food offered to idols, was not a problem for Christians to eat because all food is clean in Christ. This does not mean that you cannot sin at all while you eat food. You can still be gluttonous and eat more than you should. You can be covetous and want what someone else has to eat. You can be proud and arrogant and lack a thankful heart for the food you have. You can be selfish and take food from others – but none of these things are the food’s fault. They are your heart’s fault. It is an internal issue, not an external one. Therefore, your sanctification is an internal issue, not an external one.
- vi. So, when you see sin in your life as a follower of Jesus, this sin must be dealt with at the heart level, not at the circumstance level. Our tendency is to tweak circumstances and adjust patterns of behavior. So the parent struggling with anger towards their children is prone to think that it is the kid’s fault. The spouse who is resentful toward their husband or wife tends to think that it is their spouse’s fault. If only they were more loving and more concerned for me. The man or woman struggling with pornography tends to think that it is the internet’s fault and more safeguards just need to be put in place. The teen struggling with disobedience and a rebellious attitude tends to think that her parents and their outrageous rules are the problem. The single man or woman struggles to find joy in the Sovereign Hand of God and tends to think that if God would just bring along a spouse then joy would return. Our first tendency is to look to the external solution, because it is easier and more manageable. But it is hopeless and unable to bring spiritual maturity. Your growth is not dependent on external things to make you cleaner. Your cleanliness is dependent upon you walking in the new life you have in Jesus Christ.

- vii. Turn with me to Colossians 2. Colossians 2 – starting in verse 20. If the answer is not more external safeguards or more rules or more don't do this and don't do that, then what is the answer? Colossians 2 tells us. And by the way – the Scriptures are not here saying to us that safeguards do not matter. We are not here being told to just cast aside all restraints and live “free” in Christ. No, we are being told that these things are not the answer. So, it is still necessary to be careful about where you go and what you expose your heart to as you fight against sin. You must be discerning about what you can handle and what you can't. But these things are not the answer. These external tweaks to our circumstance cannot be looked to as the end all, but simply as guards along the highway keeping us in pursuit of the answer. And Colossians 2 points us to the answer. *Read Verse 20 through 3:4 pointing out 3:5a and 3:12a.*

Conclusion: Our cleanliness before God is an internal matter, not an external one. Are you looking for external solutions to an internal problem? I say to you this morning, look to Christ! He is The Eternal answer to our Internal Problem. Let's pray!