

**Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23** The Pharisees and some of the experts in the law came from Jerusalem and gathered around Jesus. <sup>2</sup>They saw some of his disciples eating bread with unclean (that is, unwashed) hands. <sup>3</sup>In fact, the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they scrub their hands with a fist, holding to the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup>When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions they adhere to, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, kettles, and dining couches. <sup>5</sup>The Pharisees and the experts in the law asked Jesus, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders? Instead they eat bread with unclean hands.” <sup>6</sup>He answered them, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. As it is written: These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. <sup>7</sup>They worship me in vain, teaching human rules as if they were doctrines. <sup>8</sup>“You abandon God’s commandment but hold to human tradition like the washing of pitchers and cups, and you do many other such things.” <sup>14</sup>He called the crowd to him again and said, “Everyone, listen to me and understand. <sup>15</sup>There is nothing outside of a man that can make him unclean by going into him. But the things that come out of a man are what make a man unclean. <sup>21</sup>In fact, from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup>adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things proceed from within and make a person unclean.”

Does the name Johann Heermann mean anything to you? You sang one of his hymns at the beginning of this service: “If Your Beloved Son, O God.” His hymns are more personal than many written before because of what he went through. The town where he lived was plundered by the Holy Roman Empire four times during the 30 Years War. Once he was shot and nearly captured. Once he had to remain in hiding for 17 weeks. His only crime was being a Lutheran.

Despite that, his confidence remained in God alone. We hear his confession in the first verse, “If your beloved Son, O God, had not to earth descended and in our mortal flesh and blood had not sin’s power ended, then this poor, wretched soul of mine in hell eternally would pine because of my transgression.” He didn’t boast about himself, “Look at all I’ve suffered for you, God!” He knew what sin had done to him.

I wish that the Pharisees in this text could have heard the fourth verse of that hymn. Heerman understood what Jesus was teaching in this text, “All righteousness by works is vain; the law brings condemnation. True righteousness by faith I gain; Christ’s work is my salvation. His death, that perfect sacrifice, has paid the all-sufficient price; in him my hope is anchored.” This text calls on us to look at our own hearts closely and see if we have the same understanding that he did. It’s All from the Heart. Worship God from your heart and watch out for sin from your heart.

The Pharisees loved laws. Loved them. So much so that it wasn’t enough for them to obey God’s Law. They thought that was too easy. So they came up with 613 laws that they added on top of God’s Law. They felt that their extra laws would be like a hedge so that no one could even come close to breaking God’s Law. To the average Israelite in the first century the Pharisees seemed like the best of the best—the kind of people that every believer should aspire to be like.

We have an example of some of their extra laws in this text for today. It all had to do with ceremonial washings. Now, yes, you should wash your hands before you eat or after you go to the bathroom. That’s just good hygiene. This was more than that though. They felt that doing these ceremonial washings was at least as important if not more important than obeying God’s Law. So it was unthinkable for them when they saw Jesus’ disciples eating before going through these elaborate washing rituals.

As much as people say that they don’t want to have anyone telling them what to do, we really like laws. Look at what happens when a small child gets out of his daily routine. Some tears are going to be shed. The worst thing I could do when I’m teaching confirmation class is to assign seats. They want to be able to choose! Once they’ve chosen, though, they will stay in that same seat and get very upset if someone else does.

Sometimes you hear people say, “I was in another church from another denomination and it was just like ours!” What they mean by that is that they basically followed a liturgy. They have a hymnal. The organ leads the singing. Their church is shaped roughly like ours. Those aren’t the important things. God doesn’t command any of them. The important thing is what they are teaching. Does it agree with God’s Word or not?

Jesus told them, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. As it is written: These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. <sup>7</sup>They worship me in vain, teaching human rules as if they were doctrines.” Because he is true God, he could look into their hearts. He could see that they were more concerned about outward appearances than they were about being devoted to God.

The word “hypocrite” is one that most people do not use the way the Bible uses it. When my grandfather was a pastor someone once told him, “I don’t want to go to church because it’s full of hypocrites.” To which my grandfather replied, “There’s always room for one more!” That man felt that believers were hypocrites if they sinned. That’s not what Jesus meant.

Being a hypocrite means that you could win an Academy Award for best portrayal of a Christian. On the outside you would look like the best, most faithful Christian to ever walk planet Earth. But on the inside there is no faith. There’s no heart filled with love for God. It’s all a show. I can’t read people’s hearts so I can’t tell if they are being hypocritical or not. But texts like this one speak to all of us and tell us to check our hearts to make sure we’re not just going through the motions.

As an aside, this text teaches us something about baptism too. You might look at this text and say, “OK, Pastor, you’ve lost it this time. This text doesn’t say a think about baptism.” The Greek word that is translated as “wash” twice in this text is βαπτίζω which is where we get our English word “baptism” from. The Baptists, for example, teach that any baptism must be done by immersion with the person completely under water. They insist the Greek word always means that.

Except it doesn’t and this passage is proof of it. Mark tells us, “**And there are many other traditions they adhere to, such as the washing (βαπτίζω) of cups, pitchers, kettles, and dining couches.**” Cups could certainly be immersed. The Jews ate while lying on their side while leaning on a dining couch. They would be far too big to be immersed. So there is nothing wrong with baptism by immersion but it isn’t necessary.

One thing you may have noticed is that this text is pretty much all Law and very little Gospel. I don’t want this sermon to be nothing but, “Do this. Do this. Do this.” That would be missing the point of this text. Really we have all the Gospel we need in the name of Jesus. Remember that that precious name means “he saves.” It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means “the LORD saves” or “the LORD is salvation.”

Because none of us can obey God’s Law perfectly—not even close—Jesus did. As a matter of fact any time that you read any passage in the four Gospels, you are seeing Jesus living perfectly for us. He never once was a hypocrite. What you see is what you get. When people tried to force their laws down his throat, he stood his ground and pointed to the truth of the Scriptures instead.

The whole reason that Jesus came here in the first place was to free us from the stranglehold that the Law had on us. Because we have failed, we deserve death. Jesus took the death he didn’t deserve on himself. When he died on the cross, all of us died with him. So now God the Father cannot possibly punish us because that wouldn’t be fair. He already poured out the punishment for sin on his sinless Son.

It’s All from the Heart. Worship God from your heart and watch our for sin from your heart.

Jesus’ message in this text was so important that he didn’t just want to have the Pharisees and experts in the Law hear about it. He called everyone who was around to himself and said, “**Everyone, listen to me and understand.** <sup>15</sup>**There is nothing outside of a man that can make him unclean by going into him. But the things that come out of a man are what make a man unclean.**”

We like to think that people are born basically good and want to do good things. It’s only once they go out into the world and the world gets its talons in them that they start to do bad things. That’s not what the Bible teaches. Jesus shows that the real problem is not the world. The problem is the human heart. The Prophet Jeremiah talked about that too, “**The heart is more deceitful than anything. It is beyond cure. Who can understand it?**”

We see how the human heart was completely corrupted by the fall into sin. Adam and Eve tried to hide from the God who knows all and sees all. Neither of them fessed up. Adam blamed Eve and by extension blamed God because he put her there in the first place. Eve gave the very first example of saying, “The Devil made me do it.” Neither of them admitted anything. Neither of them threw themselves on God’s mercy. They crossed their arms and defiantly tried to stare God down.

I cannot blame someone else for my problems. We might blame a temper tantrum on someone who made us really mad. Maybe that person was being a jerk, but it does not excuse how we reacted to it. We get upset when the police officer pulls us over because we were speeding. Doesn’t he know I’m going to be late now? Aren’t there real criminals that he should be catching? Well, in that moment, we are the real criminal and he caught us. We decided to ignore the first, fourth, and fifth commandments and got upset when someone called us on it.

Jesus continues, “<sup>21</sup>**In fact, from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder,** <sup>22</sup>**adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and**

**foolishness.** <sup>23</sup>**All these evil things proceed from within and make a person unclean.**” So it didn’t matter if you did those ceremonial washings or not. The food that goes into your mouth isn’t the problem. What comes out of our sinful human hearts is.

Once again, we just have to go back to the Garden of Eden. Human beings were created in God’s image which meant that they knew God’s will perfectly and they could obey it perfectly. That image of God wasn’t darkened. It wasn’t damaged. After the fall into sin, the image of God was lost. We hear that when Adam and Eve had their son, Seth, **“Adam...became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his own image.”** Not in God’s image, in Adam’s image.

The Bible drives that point home over and over again. King David confessed about himself and every other human being, **“Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me.”** He didn’t just confess what he had done, he confessed who he is by nature. He inherited a sinful nature from his parents and that sinful nature reared its ugly head in his life.

Those words are from Psalm 51, one of the penitential Psalms. Those are the ones where the author confesses his or his people’s sin. But King David also knew the perfect solution to sin, **“Be gracious to me, God, according to your mercy. Erase my acts of rebellion according to the greatness of your compassion. <sup>2</sup>Scrub me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.”** Later he wrote, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God. Renew an unwavering spirit within me.”**

Remember that he was repenting of his twin sins of adultery and then murder to try to cover up the adultery. If he was ever going to live a God pleasing life again, that was not something he could do on his own. He needed more than God’s help. He needed God to do everything for him. That’s exactly what God did for him and for the whole world. He showed the love that no one deserved because he is God and he wanted to.

God has provided the means for our hearts to be cleansed. The Apostle Paul remembered Ananias saying to him, **“Get up, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”** Baptism would wash him clean. The Apostle Peter wrote, **“[B]aptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** All the blessings that Jesus won for us through his life, death, and resurrection become ours through Baptism.

Jesus gave his church the keys—the ability to forgive or not forgive sin. So when you confessed your sin at the beginning of the service and I announced your forgiveness, those words were just as good, just as certain, as if you heard them from Jesus’ own lips. This is not because of who I am, but because of the promise of our Savior himself, **“Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven.”**

In just a few moments we will be receiving the forgiveness of sins in the most close, personal way possible—by receiving Jesus’ true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine in Holy Communion. This sacrament gives us exactly what Jesus promised: the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of our faith, and eternal life. God has done everything so our sinful hearts can be cleansed. Laws won’t do it. God’s love for us in Christ has.

It’s All from the Heart. Worship God from your heart and watch out for sin from your heart. By God’s grace we have never had to brave anything like what Johann Heermann had to endure in his life. The greatest threats do not come from out there, but from inside, from our own hearts. Always remember what your sinful nature is capable of. Always remember that Jesus set us free from sin, death, and Hell forever.