

Remnant Life Church
March 30, 2025
The Same Inside and Out
Mark 7:1-23

Over the next few weeks, leading up to Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Resurrection Sunday, I would like us to examine some of what Jesus was teaching.

- As Jesus got closer to the end of His earthly ministry, not only are the 12 with Him, but there could have been as many as 75-150 others who were shadowing Jesus' movements
- And that would not include many of the Pharisees who were making it a point to be close by whenever Jesus started to speak
 - This was not to learn from His teachings
 - Although Jesus did have an impact on some of them – the most notable being Nicodemus
 - No, it was to try and find a way to trap Him in His words so they could justify the charges they were desperate to bring against Him

The teaching we are going to be looking at this morning takes place just about halfway through the 3-year period

- He has raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (**Mark 5**)
- His cousin John the Baptist has been beheaded (**Mark 6**)
- He has fed the 5000 and has walked on the Sea of Galilee (**Mark 6**)

What is interesting to realize is that Jesus' ministry is beginning to shift in its public perception

- He is starting to move from great popularity to more overt persecution
- He is now fully in the sights of the religious leaders
 - They believe His teachings are blasphemous
 - He is creating an atmosphere where they are sensing a loss of control
 - And He is challenging their long-held methods of manipulating the people, utilizing the Law of Moses that allows them to live in opulence while most of the people are suffering hardships under Roman rule
- But Jesus does not back down, nor is He afraid of them
- And He is now taking every opportunity when they challenge Him to teach the people the truth of God and His love

READ – Mark 7:1-23

At first glance, popularity and persecution seem to be on the opposite ends of an opinion spectrum for any public figure

- Certainly, in the current climate of this country, we witness that every day
- I think to visualize it, you could say that popularity and persecution are at the extreme ends of a straight line
- Yet that line can, at any time, be drawn up to form a circle
 - And when that line forms a circle, those ends are now very close together
 - Jesus finds Himself moving very quickly from popular to persecuted

At the time of this encounter, however, Jesus' popularity had never been higher

- As I said, He has walked on the water, He has fed the multitudes, and He is healing as many people as are able to get close enough to Him
- But the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body of the Jews in Jerusalem, has put out a contract on Jesus
 - A “truth hit squad” had been dispatched to pursue and discredit Him
 - Their mission was to try to catch Jesus violating any of the over 600 laws the Jewish people were expected to follow every day
 - They were desperate to make a case against Him – a case that would result in His execution
 - And do it as quickly as possible before things get further out of hand for them
- One thing to remember I believe to be very true, this is an emotional time for Jesus
 - While Jesus was not ruled by His emotions
 - That did not mean He was unemotional
 - Jesus surely was delighted at seeing so many being made whole spiritually, emotionally, and physically
 - But at the same time, would His heart not sink when the Pharisees would speak out, oblivious to the truth of Jesus’ words, and obviously missing the beautiful moments of people being set free from their bondages?

In the passage we read, we are going to see 4 ways the Pharisees twisted God’s Word into an excuse to sin

- And we, too, can take those same lessons and apply their meanings to our lives
- This entire lesson centers on the emphasis the Pharisees are placing on the purity laws given by Moses, found in the 13th-15th chapters of **Leviticus**
- The first lesson is...

1. A spiritual truth represented by a meaningful symbol must stay true to that symbolism alone

- a. What does that mean? In this case, it is the ancient rite of hand-washing originated with God’s instructions to the first priests of the tabernacle
 - i. In **Ex 30:19-20**, God said that before they entered the place of worship, the priests had to wash their hands and feet
 - ii. This was not only recognizing God’s holiness but it was an important symbolic act
 - iii. The symbolism was that clean hands and feet represented a cleaned, pure heart, without which no one enters God’s presence
- b. Would not that same “law” apply to us today when coming to God?
 - i. Can you approach the throne of God in true prayer with a heart that is defiled by sin, or filled with unforgiveness?
 - ii. Can you come to the communion table, as we will on Good Friday, with unforgiveness or anger at a brother or sister?
 - iii. We should not, but we do!
 - iv. The point then, as it is today, is that we should be more concerned about the cleanliness of our hearts than we are about our hands, feet, or our bodies

2. The meaningful symbol created by God became ritualized and instead became an overbearing spiritual exercise
 - a. Over time, the priestly rite of hand and foot washing was extended to all people of Israel
 - b. What began as a simple ceremony designed to help focus the minds and hearts of these new priests became something it was never intended to be
 - i. Because the importance and significance of the act became a burden to everyone, and nearly impossible for the people to follow
 1. It got to the point where the amount of water, the position of the hands during washing, and even the direction of the flowing water were all strictly regulated
 2. What was intended for the heart became an outward expression now devoid of its intended meaning
 - c. How much of what is done in church today has become actions without meaning?
 - i. When you sing during worship, are you focused on the sound of your voice, the voices of the singers, the way the band is playing, or on the meaning of the words and listening for and to the voice of the Holy Spirit?
 - ii. Has prayer become something that is rote and automatic rather than a vital, intimate part of your walk with God?
 - iii. Has the time at church become more about fellowship with one another than fellowship with God?
 - iv. It is the meaning of the action, not the action itself that is important
3. Now, because of what it had become, the physical act had replaced the original intent
 - a. The original symbol was meant, in part, to represent the grace of God, accepting the priests into His presence in spite of their sinful nature
 - b. And what was worse, the action of the cleansing ritual had become an end to itself
 - i. It was no longer about God's mercy and grace
 - ii. It became about what the person did, separate from God
 - iii. And that is certainly easy for us to do today
 1. We worship and venerate what God has done rather than God Himself
 2. We long for the place of God rather than to be in the place God is
 3. The early cathedrals of Europe and the magnificent temples built as gathering places for God's people often became the draw for people rather than the desire to spend time with God
 4. Many of you are likely familiar with the late Pastor Robert Schuller and the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, CA
 - a. In its heyday, it was a tourist attraction that many people wanted to see and even go in with no interest in the purpose of the church
 - b. The object or location of worship can become more important than who is being worshipped

4. Finally, they used what God pronounced as right and Holy to justify their sin
 - a. It is at this point of the confrontation with the Pharisees that Jesus addresses their words directly
 - i. The Pharisees have inferred that Jesus' disciples are sinners because they did not ceremonially cleanse themselves before eating
 - ii. But Jesus counters with a passage of Scripture, written by a prophet who He knows both sides agree with and highly respect
 1. Jesus quotes **Isa 29:13** that says, *These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.*
 2. And suddenly the Pharisees are confronted not only with the truth of the Word but their own glaring hypocrisy
 - iii. And so Jesus goes to the law that they love so much to expose the true condition of their hearts
 1. He uses the illustration of *Corban*
 2. That is a word-symbol anchored in the OT law that says material possessions can be set aside to be used solely for holy use
 - a. It was a man-made ruling, not a law given by God
 - b. The Pharisees were allowing themselves to label some, if not all, of their material things as *Corban* which provided a legalistic way of keeping it all for themselves
 - c. But what's wrong with keeping what belongs to you?
 - d. Jesus pointed out that what they were doing would violate the 5th commandment that says, *Honor your father and mother (Gen 20)*
 - e. IOW, if a parent was in need, or became unable to adequately provide for themselves, the Law said the child or children should care for them
 - f. The person using *Corban* to their own benefit would claim their property was in reserve for holy things and not available, breaking the Mosaic law
 - g. They were now in a position to keep everything for themselves without violating Pharisaical law, even though it violated God's law
 - h. Jesus exposed this by using the words of the prophet Isaiah
 - i. They were guilty of placing the traditions of man over the law of God
 3. I wonder how many times any of us have used a spiritual thought or principle to justify something we were doing that was not right, and we knew it?
 - a. In how we treat others
 - b. In how we handle our money
 - c. Whether we are willing to forgive someone

- d. It becomes easier to do the more often you do it and it is something that satan has used often to keep Christians bound in their unrighteousness

Jesus concludes His teaching with His disciples in private

- After a brief rebuke at their inability to understand such a basic principle, Jesus, for the first time, uses the human body as a parable
- **Mark 7:18-20** - *Are you so dull? he asked. 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. (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) He went on: What comes out of a person is what defiles them.*
- The key to what Jesus is saying is the distinction between the stomach and the heart
 - The stomach acts as a reservoir and a passing point for food and an organ that is not absolutely essential to life
 - By contrast, the heart is indispensable to the life of the person
 - But it only pumps the blood provided to it
 - When a person is diagnosed with leukemia, the heart does not know the difference between the healthy blood cells and the diseased ones
 - So, the heart will continue to pump the blood, both healthy and sick, to all parts of the body, causing the disease to spread
 - Jesus wanted them to understand that it is not food in the stomach that makes them clean or unclean, but the condition of the heart – the core of their spiritual lives
 - What you believe, how you live, how you treat others, who you are when no one will see you or catch you, is from the core of who you are – your heart
 - The defiled heart, given to sinful actions and thoughts, is the center and reality of who a person truly is, and there is no outward ritual that will cleanse that
 - Not coming to church
 - Not making food for us all to share
 - Not putting money in the box
 - Not even reading your Bible every day
 - Nothing but the presence of God, confessing your need for Him, and then acting on what the Bible says is truth will change your heart

Now you might be sitting here this morning thinking, well that's it for me

- I can't be perfect like that sounds I have to be
- I struggle with anger, jealousy, doing things I know I should not...I CAN'T DO IT!
- And you would be right
 - Remember the grace of God I spoke of earlier?
 - His grace is still here and available for you
 - (my paraphrase) *If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9)*

It is not about what you do on the outside that matters the most, it is what you believe and hold to on the inside

- And it is only when your heart is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sent by God the Father, that your heart will be the wellspring of God's love
- And it is the condition of your heart that will dictate your actions and words, how you live, and how others either do or do not see Jesus in you

With this confrontation, Jesus has signed His own death warrant

- The wheels have been fully set in motion by the Jewish leaders to find a way to get rid of Him
- But at the same time, Jesus has also positioned Himself to perform the one and only redemptive act, one only He can fulfill, that will provide the only way our hearts, our lives, our eternity, can be saved.
- And while that date is fast approaching, Jesus still has much to do and He will continue to teach, heal, and love those around Him right up until the very end.