

Sermon Outline

THE HEART OF THE HUMAN PROBLEM

Text : Mark 7: 14 -23

Message: Because our sins are from within us and our heart matters in serving God, we can only honour God with transplanted and constantly renewed heart.

I Introduction

1. Prevalent today is our preoccupation about pollution – pollution of the earth and our bodies.
2. But do we spend as much resources to take care of the pollution that is our hearts.
3. Even believers overlook the issue of heart condition in deference to external performance to give us acceptance with Him.

II Our hearts are unclean by nature

A. Context

1. In the verses before our text, Jesus was confronted by Pharisees on 2 issues. One was the issue of ritual purity and the other on authority of their oral traditions.
2. The Pharisees are despised because of their legalism..
3. The Pharisees' focus was on interpreting and applying the torah for everyday life. Hence they are instrumental in keeping Judaism alive.
4. Although they accepted the priesthood of the Jerusalem temple of that day, they believed that it was not pure and sought to reform it.
5. Hence they came all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to confront Jesus with these 2 issues that is central to their beliefs.

B. Preoccupation with Oral Tradition and External Ceremonial Purity.

1. Mark goes some way from vv 3-4 to explain to his Gentile hearers what defilement and ceremonial washing were about.
2. Jesus' response to their question on defilement was they have gone beyond scriptures in their uncontrolled zeal. Their tradition takes precedence over scriptures and makes the commandments of God void.
3. To the Pharisees defilement is related to acceptance with God. But their preoccupation with their ceremonies and external observances made them substitute ceremonial washing for purity of heart, man-made traditions for God's commandments, worship of the lips for the heart, and even ceremonial sayings for filial duty.

C. Deceitful handling of scriptures

1. Their desire cannot be faulted but their corrupt hearts twist the means for acceptance to accommodate their own leanings. The ceremonies have a semblance of religious piety but in actuality reject God..
2. Christians today also find false comfort and assurance in public practices, traditions and the opinions/commendations of men. They protect themselves with narrow interpretation of the Scriptures without taking into account the totality of Scriptures – once saved always saved regardless of what they do or once forgiven never have to confess and repent again..
3. But in heart they are really hypocrites. They are modern Pharisees. But in essence it is still about corrupt hearts refusing to submit to God's commandments and re-interpreting God's love for them to hide behind and make them feel good and accepted.

D. The place and role of Tradition

1. All of us are in danger of substituting the tradition for the spiritual content Human life depends heavily upon tradition, from family upbringing to national and international custom. It is often responsible for coherence, order and continuity when these would be under threat.

2. The point is not whether or not we have tradition. The question is whether traditions are kept in proper perspective.
3. The test is not whether all conform to the same pattern but whether each, in its own setting, is true to the Scripture it claims to interpret.

E. Dull of hearing

1. After rebuking the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus called the crowd back to him in v 14. Like a shepherd who did not want his sheep to be confused by the discussion, he called them to his side to make the issue of ceremonial defilement clear to them.

2. Listen and understand was the call of Jesus to his hearers.

Points to note here:

- To understand is to be engaged in the mind.
- To understand implies action and change as a result
- Corrupt hearts do not hear. Corrupt hearts do not change.

3. In V18 Jesus expects understanding from his disciples. We should ask that we might understand because by nature we are also dull of hearing.

III Our hearts are the source of defilement.

A. The teaching line

1. Nothing outside a person goes into a person and makes a person unclean. It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. Defilement is from the inside not from the outside.

2. . The Pharisees saw their basic problem as ‘outside-in’ - contact with external ‘defiled’ items would defile them. Jesus, says, “Actually, your problem is inside-out”.

B. The teaching is revolutionary

1. The teaching turns upside down the teaching of the Pharisee.
2. It sets aside the authority of oral tradition of the Pharisees and its practice of increasing their numbers to further ceremonial purity.

c. The illustration from everyday science

1. Jesus anchors his thesis with an illustration from anatomy. The reason why the food cannot defile you is because the food you eat enters directly the stomach and not the heart and is then passed out at the other end.
2. But then where does the defilement come from? Where does our sinful behavior and actions come from? It is from the heart itself. All these evil things, Jesus says comes from within (v23). The heart is the source of our sins.
3. Hence Jesus declares all hearts dirty or unclean and all food clean. There is no sin in things – be it cigarettes, alcohol or money. Defilement is not physical but moral and spiritual.

d. The problem of the human heart

1. As much as a filthy polluted fountain sends forth filthy polluted streams of water, so does a corrupt heart send forth corrupt reasonings, corrupt appetites and passions.
2. V 21 lists 13 things, far more than the parallel passage in Matt 15. Of the 13 in the list, the first six are plural nouns, describing acts which are committed. The rest are singular, dealing with different kinds of evil.
3. Interestingly the list kicks off with evil thoughts or plans.
4. The list finishes off with the outcome of foolishness.
5. To concentrate on issues of ritual cleanliness for eating, while neglecting the source of evil in human life, is truly to be imprisoned so much so that they are not free to understand its deeper meaning and embrace it.
6. The text shows it is also true that sins have a multiplying effect. Sins committed “further defile the man.” V23

E. The relevance of the truth today

1. But this is not a teaching that belongs to the 1st century. It is as relevant today as it was in the 1st century. Some of us lapse into such an error either because of our background or because of our baggage.
2. We might agree with the list in v 21-22 as undesirable and unacceptable but man will not say it is wrong or sinful. Like the Pharisees, we put the cause of our problems we have in this world to external factors. We evade the issue of accountability and taichi it or deflect it to external factors such education, circumstances and examples or even genetic makeup.
3. Beloved you see, the Lord Jesus was teaching us the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. Unless we live by that (not just believe in the superficial sense), we will not have peace in our hearts amidst the surrounding chaos.

IV Our heart matters in serving God.

A. God requires cleansing of the hearts rather than our hands

1. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes for prescribing traditions that appeared to make men clean and acceptable to God by external rituals.
2. God requires our hearts to be right with Him and not just our outward appearances and actions. Christianity is a heart religion.
3. The fact of the matter is that no amount of cleaning can cleanse the dirty polluted heart. The heart in us is so defiled, it is dead and incurable in sins (Eph 2:1, Jer17:9). Man needs a transplanted and new heart.

B. God alone cleanses the heart

1. Hence we need to go to God and not man to do the job for us.
2. The heart can only be cleansed by blood, not any blood but the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son the perfect man who died on the cross to pay for the price of our sins that we cannot pay ourselves. John 6:37, Isa 55:1-3.

3. Regardless of how far a person's heart is from God; God can change it. But you and I need to ask Him.

c. God requires obedience from the heart

1. And it is only with this new and cleansed heart can you now honour God in the right and proper way.

2. Otherwise Isaiah, the prophet tells us it is service that God hates. from the heart. Loss of delight in God and the means of grace is a sign of declension.

3. Hence love of God is the core principle of the Christian faith. It is not enough to have new heart but it also important that we continually depend on the Lord to cleanse it.

4. JI Packer has this to say: We must learn to measure ourselves, not by our knowledge about God, not by our gifts and responsibilities in the church, but by how we pray and what goes on in our hearts. Many of us, I suspect, have no idea how impoverished we are, esp when our hearts are deceitful.