

Sermon Notes – August 9, 2020

“A Matter of the Heart”

(Matthew 15:1-10)

How many of you have a tendency to see everybody else’s faults, but you don’t see your own – or you know somebody like that? How many of us have ever been called a hypocrite – or maybe you’ve called somebody else a hypocrite? That’s in our lesson today. How many times have you looked at somebody’s outward appearance and judged them by it – rather than getting to know them and hearing their heart and knowing their character? That’s a part of what our lesson is about today. Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites.

My brother, Jimmy and I were brought up going to church. When he grew up, got married, and had his first child, he went to church a little bit - and then he just quit going. One day I was home and visiting and I said, “Jimmy, why don’t you take your kids to church?” He said, “Well, momma always made us and I don’t want to go now.” I didn’t really know what to say to that. A few weeks later, I was home again and I asked, “Oh, by the way, did you go to church last week?” He said, “No, I don’t have the right clothes to wear to church.” I said, “Jimmy, you can go in your t-shirt and jeans now. You don’t have to have any special clothes.” He said, “Oh, leave me alone.” A few months later, I was back home visiting and I said, “Jimmy, have you been to church yet?” He said, “No, the church is full of hypocrites.” I said, “You know, you’re right. We’re all hypocrites. None of us is perfect – only Jesus. Maybe the only difference between those of us who go to church and those who don’t is that we know we’re not so good and we need help.” He said, “Oh, leave me alone.”

Zig Zigglar who was a motivational speaker, book author, and a salesman years ago, died in 2012. He had a friend that he invited to church one Sunday and the friend said, “Well, I’d love to go, but the church is full of hypocrites.” Zig Zigglar looked over at him and said, “That’s okay, there’s always room for one more.” Wow. We are all hypocrites. None of us live up to all that we profess.

In this story today, Jesus was upset with the Pharisees because they were holding on to some man-made traditions and rules. They had expanded God's laws that had been given to them. As one generation went to another generation, the Rabbis passed these rules from one group of people to another group of people. One of those rules was that you had to wash your hands before you ate and during your meal. It was not for health or hygiene; it was for ritual cleansing. Now, the original rule was meant that if you were one of the priests and you were getting ready to do worship duty, you had to wash your hands, feet, and body - but they took it and translated it that all Jews had to wash their hands every time they ate or did anything - everything had to be cleaned. The dishes could be clean, but before you ate, they had to be washed again. Their whole body had to be clean.

Have you ever been so hungry that you just went outside, picked up something, and started eating it - you hadn't even washed your hands - you just wanted a snack real quickly? Jesus' disciples were hungry - so they ate without washing their hands, and the Pharisees got upset. Jesus was a Rabbi - and, during this time, Rabbis took responsibility for their students. The Pharisees approached Jesus and said, "Why don't you get onto your disciples about not following the traditions of the Elders?" I want you to notice that Jesus did not answer that question immediately. He went to something else and he said, "Have you noticed that you guys use God and the Temple as a way for an elder's son to dishonor his parents?" They had something called the "Corban rule" (a vow that an elder (oldest) son makes that he will dedicate everything that he's got - his possessions, his money, etc. - to the Temple when he dies). During his lifetime, he could use it for himself - but if his parents are in need, he can't help them or anyone else in need. Jesus said, "You've used your man-made tradition of giving money to the Temple Treasury for your own profit. You've made it so that the elder's son is dishonoring his parents. God's command, in Exodus 20, says to honor your Father and your Mother." It also said in Leviticus in their Old Testament literature that they are to help those in need. Jesus said, "You've taken away from the law of God - the commands of God - and made something religiously

okay that is not okay.” Jesus was upset with them. He looked at them and said, “You know the prophet Isaiah said, “You guys honor me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me.” ***What Jesus was trying to say was that your heart is most important – the state of your heart.***

How many of us look at someone’s outward appearance and judge them? A few years ago, I read a story about a hiker that was in the mountains of North Carolina – hiking for the weekend. He was by himself and on that Sunday morning, he had not taken a shower. He had on some shorts, a dirty t-shirt, dirty tennis shoes, his hair was kind of scraggly looking, scraggly beard, had a few tattoos, and he looked a little dingy and dirty – but, he wanted to go to church. He saw a little church up there in the country, in the mountains, and he wanted to go in for worship. He decided that he was going to walk in and sit at the back of the church. But, guess what? The whole back of the church was filled – you know how people like to sit at the back of the church. He had to go to the front – but he didn’t sit on the front row. He sat on the floor in front of the first pew. It wasn’t long before a few of the older women started talking and saying things like, “Can you believe he’s sitting there like that?” ... “I can’t believe he didn’t dress up for church.” ... “I wonder if he’s just wanting money or food?” ... and they just went on and on. Finally about one-third of the way through the service, an elderly gentleman in a 3-piece suit, got up and walked over to the hiker. (These women just knew he was going to escort this young man out of the church.) But, the elderly gentleman went and sat down right beside him on the floor in his 3-piece suit – and he stayed there the whole time. When the service was over, the elderly gentleman got up and thanked the man for coming to church – and said, “Hope you’ll come back again.” The young man said, “I am a Christian and am just visiting. I was out there hiking and I didn’t have clean clothes, but I wanted to come to church. I saw your little church and just thought maybe I could sit at the back and get out of here easily. But thank you for letting me visit.” The older ladies were over at the side thinking, “I guess we were judging him, weren’t we?” ***Don’t we often judge people by their outward appearance without getting to know them and knowing their heart?***

Jesus was concerned about our hearts. He called them hypocrites - they were pretending to be holy and righteous on the outside. They adhered to all the commands - the rituals and traditions that had been passed down through the years. *They thought their holiness was based upon their adherence to the law, doing the right things, and looking right.* Jesus said, "No, their hearts are dirty." **Holiness is related to what goes on in our heart and when we believe in Jesus, God's spirit comes to live within us and renew us and transform our hearts. It makes us new - so that what comes out of our hearts, comes out of our mouths and into our words and actions.** Jesus said to the Pharisees, "It's not the food that you eat that makes you unclean, it's what's in your heart that comes out." If you read in that scripture, you'll find out that Jesus talks about a lot of different things that come out of our hearts - evil thoughts, sexual sins, lying, theft, pride, arrogance. All of these things, Jesus said, come from within.

There is a story in the Old Testament where Samuel went to anoint a new king to take over Israel - after King Saul. He went to the home of Jesse, who had many sons and he went through one son after another - this one's smart, this one's good-looking, "God, is this the one?" God kept saying no to each son. Finally God said to Samuel, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart." Samuel asked Jesse if he had any more sons. He said, "I have one out tending the sheep in the field." Samuel told him to go get the son. As soon as David walked in the door, God's spirit told Samuel, "That's the one. It's his heart - a heart like mine - a heart that's pure and clean - a heart that wants to follow me." **God is always looking at our hearts.**

Jesus called them hypocrites. Do we ever play the part? - Yes. Jesus called them blind guides - *they were blind to God at work in Jesus* - all of these people have been healed, Jesus had raised some from the dead, Jesus had done all these things. He thought the religious people would have seen God at work. **Sometimes we can be blind to God at work around us, too. Jesus said they were blind because they ignored the needs of others and their responsibilities to others.** Jesus was trying to say that we have a responsibility to honor our parents and to help those

in need. Sometimes we forget that. You see, they made it okay to give money to the Treasury, but not to honor your parents if they were in need. They were disobeying the command - the law - of God that said to honor your mother and father so that your days will be long on the earth. I would like to give you a modern day example. Let's say that you made a pledge to this church to give money during the year - for the whole year. Something went wrong with your parents and they needed money - or your child is needing money desperately. Don't you think God wants you to honor your parents and help that child in need? Helping someone else is honoring God - "Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul" - "Love your neighbor as yourself". When we are helping someone in need, whether our parents or a stranger, we are bringing honor to God. God said, "Don't forget my commands." They were blind to their responsibility to others - and looking to the needs of others. They were blind because of their legalism. They thought what made them good was the way they looked on the outside.

We can spend a lot of time looking good on the outside... but, God wants us to remember that He looks at our heart and our soul. Do we judge others by outward appearance rather than getting to know them? God says what's most important is your heart. Are we blind to the needs of others? Do we see our responsibility to all of God's children? Are we blind to God at work around us in the world?

Jesus wants us to know that what makes us unclean is what's in our heart. God wants to cleanse and transform and renew our hearts so that what comes out of our mouth (our words, attitudes, and actions) is the likeness of Jesus Christ. It's not what goes into your mouth that makes you unclean. It's not having unclean hands that God's worried about... God is worried about your heart.

So, today, I leave you with a question, how's your heart? God wants us to have pure, clean hearts - obedient hearts - ones that are ready to follow Him. He wants to cleanse us, purify us.

Would you pray with me?

Holy and Gracious God,

Thank you for who you are. Thank you for your patience with us because, Lord, we are often times hypocrites and we are often blind guides leading the blind. Cleanse, and renew, and reform our hearts and minds that we might be more in the like-ness of Jesus Christ and show the world Jesus our Savior. In your name we pray. Amen.