

# Defilement from the Inside Out – Part 1

**Belcroft Bible Church**

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Good morning, Church. It's good to be with you. It's good to see all of your smiling faces, some new faces. It's always a blessing to come together on the Lord's Day for the corporate public worship of our great God. What a blessing it was to sing about that already. What a blessing it was to hear your voices lifting high the great name of our one true God. What a blessing it is again, week after week in many different ways, to sing about the trinitarian nature of our great God. He is like no other in all that he is and all that he does, especially in the undeniable, unending truth that he is three in one. The Trinity sets him apart from all other false gods across the planet, in all time. There is no God like him. He is the one true God. And it is a blessing. And it is right for us to sing about that. And yet, how sad it is, so often, in churches where you can go a long time, maybe forever, and never sing about the Trinity and how vital that truth is, not only to our faith but in the Scriptures. And how thankful I am that we get to come together and sing about these things.

It's good to see you—I have to acknowledge publicly Owen and Carolyn—it is so good to see you. Praise the Lord! I can't pause here long because I'll start crying, but what a blessing it is to see you. We've missed you. And it's a blessing to have you with us. We're praying for you and thankful for you and trust the Lord in his care of you, even as you're out here with us. And we are grateful to see you. I'm sure your heart has already been filled this morning. Amen? Amen. Good to see you, brother. What a blessing!

The Lord is good and his love endures forever. We are commanded to worship together like this. We are learning more and more through this COVID crisis how vital it is to gather publicly. And what we just experienced and what we just did out of faithfulness to the Lord, to sing together... Our government and all its officials that have tried to make churches unable to sing, they don't get it. Not only do they not get that we're commanded to sing when we come together, but they don't get how vital it is for our life that we sing together. And hearing your voices unite so loudly and clearly just resonated not only with my heart, but I could hear it resonating with yours, the necessary nature for us to sing together

when we come together. The Bible is clear about that. And you see that even here this morning.

Well, we've worshiped in prayer—thank you for that, Marty. We've worshiped in song—thank you for that, music team. Now let's turn in our copy of God's Word and continue in our worship together as we look to the Word of God that we might find strength and help in our time of need. Turn in your copy of God's Word to Mark chapter 7. Mark chapter 7 verses 14-23, as we return to our verse-by-verse exposition of the gospel account, this really glorious gospel account, that we might see Christ rightly and thus submit to him fully. That's what this is all about. You follow along silently now as I read our passage for this morning's exposition. Though I'm pretty confident we're not going to get very far into the passage and we won't get all the way through it. So some of you are looking at the number of verses and are already nervous. Let me put you at ease. But this will be our passage for at least the next few weeks anyway. It's so important.

Hear the word of the Lord:

*And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: 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. And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."*

Praise the Lord! "We have met the enemy and he is us." That quote from a 1960s comic strip entitled *Pogo*, written by Walter Kelly, really correlates clearly to our passage and deep problem of man's sinful heart. Despite all the nonsense we have to hear daily, the real issue in our world is not with the lie of systemic racism or oppressive governmental structures or the so-called—pay attention; do not miss this—the so-called existential threat of climate change, as scary as that may

sound by pontificators on the news. The Bible makes no mention of that except for when it talks about how God's going to bring some serious climate change. That's the climate change the Bible talks about, not these existential threats. I laugh every time I hear a politician say that. There's no existential threat in climate change. Or, you could say, there's no existential threat in the ominous boogeyman called "white privilege." That is nonsense. That will distract you, derail you, and discourage you.

The Bible is clear; that is not our ultimate issue. Nor is it even a clear and present problem. The Bible is clear. Our world's greatest threat is not external; it's not political; it's not environmental; it's not racial; it's not even circumstantial. Our problem is internal. Our problem is spiritual. It's a pervasive plague called *sin*. This pestilence is the personal rebellion against, and rejection of, holy God and his perfect will for our lives. The plague of sin is the greatest pandemic this world will ever know. It is not enshrined in any one people group, any one culture, or any one class of people; but it universally infects the heart of every single human being on the planet. Jesus makes that point clear in our passage before us this morning.

Over the last few weeks, we have been digging deep here in chapter 7 of Mark. We have learned that Mark is here highlighting the seventh serious conflict between Jesus and the false religious leaders of Israel. Ever since Mark chapter 3, verse 6, the Pharisees have been on a mission to kill Jesus and they are looking for any way they can to discredit his character and destroy his life. Jesus has done nothing wrong, but instead he has proven incessantly that he is like no other. Being the very Son of God, he has lived, he has talked, he has preached, served, healed, condemned, and, yes, he has loved like no one else ever has, no one else even can, and no one else ever will. Therefore Jesus has proven to be a serious threat to the man-centered religious system of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism and all the guardians of this false belief of self-righteousness. That's why they want to kill him. All of these controversies we have seen in Mark have ultimately been a battle between truth and error, between a pure theology that is God-centered and a perverse theology that is man-centered. These conflicts have really been a battle between the truth of God and the traditions of man.

The core issue here in chapter 7 centers around defilement, defilement. That word carries the idea of being corrupted or polluted so that one is alienated from

God and unacceptable before God. This is the issue before us in this chapter, and really the issue before all of our lives. This is no small matter. And this word and this concept of defilement permeates this whole chapter, from beginning to end, even the last few paragraphs that we'll see in the next few weeks, as Jesus leaves Galilee and heads out to the outer reaches of the region. He is going into territory that was considered defiled. That's the point why Mark puts that here in chapter 7. It all connects. This entire chapter is driven by this reality of defilement. It starts in the beginning of chapter 7 with the accusation from the religious leaders, with this reality that Jesus and his followers were defiled, defiled because they ate their food with unwashed hands. That's in verses 1-5. Christ responded to this ludicrous accusation with a severe condemnation and then a very stinging illustration in verses 6-13. This condemnation and illustration demonstrated very clearly how these religious leaders were fakes. They were really the ones who were separated from God because they were hypocrites. We looked at that the last few weeks. They claimed to follow the Word of God, but they actually followed and worshiped the traditions of man.

Now, that short review takes us to our specific passage this morning, verses 14-23. Here Jesus moves from giving a condemnation and an illustration proving the phony nature of their fake faith; that is the religious leaders. And now he moves to give a clear explanation concerning the true nature of defilement. What defiles man, and where does this defilement ultimately come from? Is man defiled before God? Does this defilement come from the outside in, as the Pharisees teach? Or does this defilement come from the inside out? Is the source of defilement an external or internal problem? These are just a few of the questions Jesus will be addressing through this next section we will look at today and next week. Jesus will now address further and explain these foundational truths surrounding the cause of man's corruption before a holy God.

Therefore, this morning, we will see from this passage really the true nature of defilement, as Jesus gives his explanation regarding the source of man's personal pollution. Jesus will give this explanation really in two different ways and in two different times. We're just going to look at one this morning. We'll save the larger one for next week, for multiple reasons. But this passage, this paragraph that I just read, verses 14-23 really is broken down in two movements or in two directions, as Jesus declares this explanation on two different levels. He starts from a more general level, a more general, overarching explanation that he gives

to the general populace, the general public. And then he goes deeper as he interacts with his disciples and gives a further delineation regarding this explanation to his closest followers. Really, that's the two words, if you want to write this down, that really help guide you through this text. One is *declaration*. Jesus makes that very clear in verses 14-15 where he gives a clear declaration regarding the defilement, or the source of defilement, in man. And then, starting in verse 17 through the end of this paragraph, verse 23, he gives the delineation regarding the defilement. We'll see the declaration this morning.

So the first point of explanation in our passage concerning the true nature of defilement is seen in Christ's clarion declaration of defilement. Verses 14 and 15 read, *"And he called the people to him once again, and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand: 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.'"* In these verses, Jesus makes it clear where true defilement comes from and thus further confronts the false belief system and the false behavior of the religious leaders. It is here that Jesus actually addresses the issue of defilement, brought up by the scribes and the Pharisees back in verses 2 and 5. In the previous verses, Jesus dealt with the source of their false accusation, or should I say false authority, being the worthless traditions of men. Now Jesus will speak directly to the false teaching regarding defilement.

There are three aspects of this declaration that I do not want us to miss, that will help us see the severity or, better yet, the solemnity of what Jesus says here. First, I want you to notice the people to which this declaration goes. This declaration is towards, as you see right away in verse 14, the people. Verse 14 says that Jesus called together all the people around him. Verses 1-23—which is what we've been looking at now for weeks and we've got another, at least another week before we finish out this section—really is broken down in three distinct movements that help us follow the flow and understand the point of what's going on. It begins with Jesus and the religious leaders. That's really in verses 1-13. Then it changes, right here in our text. It changes so that Jesus pulls together, calls together, moves away from these religious leaders and speaks to the people at large. That's verses 14 and 15. And then it ends, most specifically and most seriously, with his declarations of explanation and delineation with his disciples in verses 17-23.

We have seen this similar pattern of Jesus moving from the Pharisees to the people, to his disciples. We have seen this, almost like concentric circles that move more and more closer into the specific point of what he's teaching and what he's getting at. We've seen this multiple times throughout the gospel, especially when we were studying the four soils, where, there, it's the same exact thing. After Jesus was castigated by the false leaders of Israel, he turns; he turns to the people. And then, ultimately, he turns to his disciples. What's interesting about this is that, in this text, we see Jesus proactively call the people to himself. Notice the text, and it says very clearly, "And Jesus called to himself these people." Every other time we see Jesus teaching large crowds, it is because they have already gathered around Jesus or are in the process of gathering around him. As a matter of fact, we have seen this often, how Jesus is many times distracted or even held back, from a human perspective, from accomplishing what he sets out to do because the crowds are so large and so, in many ways, menacing. And yet here Jesus is clearly seen pulling the crowds to himself.

There's only one other place in Mark where you're going to see this, it's in Mark chapter 8, verse 34. Most of the time when Jesus does this, he's calling his disciples to himself. That we see repeated many times throughout this account, from Mark 3:13, Mark 6:7, Mark 8:34, Mark 10:42, Mark 12:43, and beyond. He's constantly telling his disciples, "Come with me," "Come here," "Follow me," "Listen to this." But here he says it to the larger crowd. This is interesting and not to be missed because the only other place we see this is in Mark 8:34. And in both of these places, they teach a very serious doctrinal truth that Jesus does not want anyone to miss. In both of these places, he is confronting false teaching that, in many ways, has distracted, or no doubt deceived, the people. And Jesus is going after it passionately. That's what we see here. Jesus is concerned very deeply for the people. As a matter of fact, this reality of the word used for *calling*—or *summoning* is the better translation; he summons the people to himself—is used nine different times in the gospel of Mark; eight of them are by Christ alone. And all of them deal with serious, solemn topics that Jesus is wanting to declare.

He's confronting the religious leaders again in how he teaches the people. He's going to show the people that they have been led astray, that they are sheep with false shepherds. And Jesus is concerned for them. Jesus is showing his compassion towards them. Jesus wants to set them free from the tyranny and the lies of this false system. Jesus wants to clarify. No doubt, no doubt many of these

people he calls to himself were maybe in the vicinity of his confrontation with the scribes and the Pharisees and he wants to clarify what has been said. He wants to bring further understanding to free them from this frustrating burden of the traditions of man. And he wants them to understand that their greatest issue is not washing their hands, but not having their heart cleansed. That's what he's after. And understanding how he calls them together sets us up, really, for the priority that comes next in the text.

Look at verse 14. The rest of verse 14 says, "*Hear me, all of you, and understand.*" Now we begin to see the point of Jesus calling the people to himself. It was so that he might tell them something very serious. Notice that there are two very clear commands, given side by side here, from Christ to the people. These aren't options; these are commands. This should grab our attention, as Christ says that it should grab the attention of the people. The severity of this problem of defilement, coupled with the damning doctrine taught by these religious leaders, is serious, and Jesus wants to deal with it head on. And thus the seriousness drives Jesus to make an urgent, an urgent appeal to the people. Jesus is giving, if you will, a personal, passionate plea to the people to wake up. You can hear it if you are in the crowd. It's like Jesus lifts up his voice, and he sees the crowds hustling, bustling around him, and it's like he says, "Wake up, people! Come around me. I have to tell you something." He's grabbing their attention.

The first command comes from the Greek word in the text, translated here in the ESV as "*hear,*" and it carries the idea of paying close attention to what is about to be said. The second command comes in the word translated as "*understand*" and carries the idea of thinking deeply, that one might discern the meaning of what is being said in order to apply it to one's life. Notice the priority and emphasis given by Christ, as he calls everyone to listen to him. Even the "*hear me,*" the pronoun there, is for emphasis. It doesn't need to be there but it's there in the text, emphasizing, "Listen to me; don't listen to them." "Listen to me," Christ is saying. "Pay attention. Understand." We have seen Jesus give this call to people to hear and understand before as we've studied this gospel account, especially in chapter 4. We see it in chapter 4, verse 3; chapter 4, verse 9; chapter 4, verse 23; and chapter 4, verse 24. We have also seen, in that same chapter, how Jesus made it very clear, very clear that religious leaders are the ones who hear but do not understand, meaning it goes in one ear and out the other and never touches or changes their heart.

That is the danger, dear loved ones. Pay attention. That is the danger that Jesus understands the people are under, that they would hear truth but they would do nothing about it, that they would hear truth and it wouldn't impact them personally. They would hear it publicly, in a setting like this, but it wouldn't change them personally, that it would go in the ear and have no effect on the heart. We saw that very clearly in chapter 4, where Jesus quotes out of Isaiah 6:10-12, where that's exactly what he says was Israel's biggest problem, that they constantly heard truth, they constantly even knew the truth, but they never understood it and followed it.

Dear loved ones, that problem is not a Jewish-Israel problem; that problem persists with all people. We are hard-hearted, stubborn, with clogged ears and blind eyes. And we come often to churches and sit and listen often to God's Word and we hear it, meaning it vibrates the eardrum but it never moves the heart. That's the danger regarding false teaching. That's the danger, even more so, regarding our false, wayward, wicked hearts. And that's what Jesus is dealing with here. He knows the people. He knows what's going on. And he knows—you'll see this, we'll see this, even more next week—he knows how deceived the people are, including his own disciples' regards to this reality of defilement.

And how deceived are we? Our children go to public school and they learn what? What do they learn? They learn in secular psychology that they are not the problem, that every problem they face in life is outside of them, that it's the world, that it's the government. As a matter of fact, even now, the Black Lives Matter agenda is being piped with a massive flood into our public schools. As a matter of fact, let me tell you why public schools do not want to open. It has really nothing to do with COVID-19. It has everything to do with the Black Lives Matter agenda. Go to the National Association of Teachers—or is that, what is it? NAE Educators, National Association of Educators—so the largest teachers' union on the planet. Go and read; just go there. I did this week. Go and read, as I was trying to figure out, “Why do these public school teachers not want to assemble?” Are they really worried about the virus, because that's a legitimate fear? No, it's because they're pushing the Black Lives Matter agenda and they want to change the whole entire system so that schools are no longer a dehumanizing environment. I don't even know what that means, but that's what they're piping now.

Listen, our children have been inundated with this in our world, as we have. How often do we hear that the issue is always outside of us? The issues facing everything we're watching on the news right now has everything to do with somebody else's problem, not my own. The Bible is clear, very clear: we have met the enemy and it is us. The Bible is undeniable. And Jesus wants that truth to be understood by these people so they understand that defilement does not come from your environment. Defilement comes from your own heart.

Verse 15, he goes on. He's explained to the people and he's explained the priority; now you see it in the text. Now I want you to see this declaration not only given to the greater mass of people, not only given with a heightened sense of priority, but I want you to see how this declaration concerning defilement now comes through a parable, a parable. It says very clearly in the text, *"There is nothing outside,"* verse 15, *"outside of a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of the person are what defile him."* Jesus now tells this foundational spiritual truth regarding defilement in a parabolic saying. Now I remind you a parable—and you'll see this next week as we examine the parable even more. And that's literally what the disciples call it, and so I'm bringing that out now, just so that we rightfully understand what's going on here. But I want to remind us that a parable is basically an extended earthly word picture that illuminates a profound spiritual lesson.

This is important to understanding this issue with defilement. The Greek word *parable* comes from really two Greek words that literally means to cast alongside. It means to bring something else alongside, something else so that it becomes clear. It's to take something that is really clear and bring it alongside something that's not that clear so that it becomes clear. That's what a parable is supposed to do, and that's really what drives even what Jesus is doing in this simple parable. Now, oftentimes we think of parables as extended stories or extended metaphors, and oftentimes they are. We saw a big one back in the parable of the four soils. But oftentimes parables are really proverbs, axioms, truths, riddles, these axiomatic truths told in terse sayings, simple phrases, that help illustrate or compare to clarify meanings. That's what Mark chapter 3, verse 23, where it says Jesus taught them in many parables, oftentimes in these simple sayings to jog their memory, to blow out the cobwebs, if you will, so that they could understand. This is what is happening here, right before us in this verse, 15, as Jesus is literally taking a concise comparison between what is known physically,

that is physical defilement, and then explaining it to what they do not know spiritually, spiritual defilement.

Let me be clear: this is the issue, dear loved ones, and this is the issue for us. Pay attention to this. We fall into this trap more often than we want to admit. The issue here is their failure of these religious leaders to discern the connection between ceremonial defilement and spiritual defilement. For these men, the source of defilement was physical. It was this physical defilement that then brought, in some sense, an immediate spiritual defilement. So it was defilement from the outside in, not defilement from the inside out. The source—and that's the issue; that's what Christ is getting at—the source was physical for these men, not spiritual. According to their tradition, the tradition of men, man's problem was not spiritual but physical. Or, to say it another way, man's pollution came not from his internal heart attitudes but from his external interactions with defiled objects, defiled people, and defiled practices. Do not miss it: the Old Testament taught many things regarding ceremonial defilement, that is defilement from defiled things. The Old Testament taught a lot about that. But it was taught ultimately for the purpose of highlighting, the purpose of extenuating or exacerbating, highlighting, exalting, if you will, the real problem of spiritual defilement. That's what Hebrews chapter 8 through chapter 10 is all about, talking about all the rituals, all the offerings, all the sacrifices, given in the Old Testament law, was meant to point to something else. It was meant to point to a spiritual issue. It was a physical practice, and even a physical command, that was meant to highlight the spiritual need of the people, the spiritual issue being their heart, their heart.

The issue has always been, and always will be, the heart. It is the heart that brings separation from God. It is the defiled heart that alienates you from God. That was always the issue. And hence Jesus quotes, in our passage, Isaiah 29:13, earlier back in verse 6. He quotes very clearly that these people are far from God. Their hearts are far from him. Their worship is defiled because it's simply rote rituals done to God, devoid of a heart devotion for God. Therefore they are focusing on external physical realities to the exclusion of the spiritual reality. Jesus now tells this parable that takes the physical reality of defilement, being unclean, to prove the point and highlight the truth, the eternal truth, that the issue is not physical but spiritual.

Dear loved ones, we do this all the time. We do this all the time. We judge our spirituality by the things we do, not by the intentions in doing them. We judge our spirituality by our church attendance, not by the nature of our heart. We judge our spirituality by our offerings, not by the brokenness of our repentance. This is an issue. We read these texts and we think, “That was them. This isn't us.” Oh, it is so paramount for us. And again—I was talking with my children last night, talking with my wife all day yesterday—I am so thankful for the eternal Word of God. Because, if you had the unfortunate opportunity to listen to the democratic nonsense this week on the convention, you would think that your greatest problem is our world. That's all you heard. “Our world is evil.” “Our world is the problem.” “We need to fix our world.” God's word is clear. Our world's got problems; it will always have problems because it's filled with evil people. The issue is us. And while the world will never acknowledge that, God's Word never stops declaring that. And we must be reminded of it often because, as we're going to see even more next week, our hearts are so deceptive, it constantly tries to trick us, to pull us away from that truth.

No doubt some of you even now are listening to me going, “Yeah, I don't like this. I don't want to hear this.” Well, let me tell you where that comes from. It doesn't come from me; it comes from your own heart. Listen, I don't like it. In my flesh, who wants to be told that we're evil? I dare say not me! But I'll also be the first one to stand up and say, “I am evil in my flesh.” As the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:18, there is nothing good that dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. Dear loved ones, our greatest problem has been, and always will be, we have an inflated view of our self and a minimized view of God. Texts like these are so important for us to marinate in, so important for us to grow deeper in, so important for us to see the seriousness of them. And Jesus Christ himself, in this moment, is not just giving a passing statement. He is calling everybody around and says, “Listen to this parable because it deals with your ultimate problem.” The point of the parable is clear, unless your mind has been clouded by generations of man-centered theology, as these people had been.

Yet what Jesus is saying here is not anything new. Do not miss this, because in the text you would think Jesus is bringing something new. And we've heard that in poor teaching, right? Like, “the Sermon on the Mount is something new.” It's not anything new. Jesus isn't bringing anything new. Jesus is declaring what God has said from the beginning. And that's why—we'll see next week—why he is so

irritated with his disciples when they're like, "Jesus, what does this mean?" Why he's so irritated with Nicodemus in John 3 when he says, "You're a teacher of Israel and you don't know what regeneration means?" Jesus isn't speaking anything new. He's speaking clearly and with conviction and with the authority of God's Word. The ultimate problem is not physical. Therefore the final solution cannot be physical. I wish we would understand that in the world today. The ultimate problem is not physical. Therefore the ultimate solution cannot be physical. Not that there isn't physical things we should do and can do and must do, of course. But they will never fix the ultimate problem because the ultimate problem is spiritual. Thus the gospel is the ultimate answer and the only answer that will ever bring real change.

God has made it clear to his people that the heart of the matter was always the matter of the heart. God established this clearly and early in the ministry of revelation, going all the way back to the law, all the way back to Deuteronomy 10:12 and 13, which is a reiteration of, really, Exodus 19 and 20 on Mount Sinai. And there he declares—and listen to how clear this is in the Word—speaking to his people Israel as he's establishing them as a nation, he's establishing for them what he ultimately requires, what he ultimately desires, where the focus should be. Deuteronomy 10:12-13, and I quote: *"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?"* Verse 16 summarizes it then, the appeal that Moses gives. Verse 16: *"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn."* Seems pretty clear where the issue lies, doesn't it? Right from the very beginning, "This is your problem, Israel. Not the rituals, but your heart."

Jeremiah the prophet, many years later, speaks about this same reality of breaking up the fallow ground of the heart and calls Israel to recognize their heart problem of perversion in Jeremiah 4:1-4. Of course, as Marty read already this morning in Jeremiah 17:9 and the surrounding verses, it's clear that God searches the hearts of all men. And what does he see? Most are wicked and some are bad? Most are good and some are wicked? No, all are corrupted. All of our hearts are a corrupted, deceptive, cesspool of pollution, flowing from the inside of us. What Jesus says here is not new and should have been known and taught by the religious leaders. That's why they're hypocrites and false teachers and phonies.

Remember the lesson Samuel needed to learn. Showing you how pernicious this reality is within all of our hearts, even the final judge and the first, in many ways, prophet Samuel. And what do we see? He's looking for the new king for Israel. He goes down the line of all of the sons of Zebedee, or all of the brothers of David. None can be found. God keeps saying, "Nope, not him. Not him. Not him." And Samuel is dumbfounded. "Lord, wait, you told me to come here. You told me to come to this house." "There's a little lad out back in the back forty tending to some sheep. Go out there." What does he see? Young, little David. "Really? This guy?" And what is the lesson? "Samuel, you got it all wrong. You're looking on the outside. I look on the inside. You're looking at the physique, and I'm looking at the heart. You're looking at the ability of man, and I'm looking at the character of man." Little David looked unacceptable to Samuel because he was only focused on outward appearance and not inner character.

Listen, dear loved ones. How many ways in which we struggle with this? Think about even the modern church and its pick of pastors or elders. Is it not a plague within the modern church to pick men who have an outward appearance, men who are business owners, men who are CEO's, men who hold positions of high rank, and to look over the faithful, godly men who might just be tradesmen, who are loving their wives, and who have godly character? That's one of the greatest, it's one of the greatest infections in the modern church. They pick people by appearance, not by character. Listen, this is a problem that permeates so many issues in our lives, even as believers in the church. Consider how David demonstrated this throughout his life. Yes, he wasn't perfect at all. And when his heart went astray, we see the disaster it brought. And yet David demonstrates, even in his sin, a broken heart of repentance. David looked unacceptable to Samuel but he showed himself many times to have what God desired.

What about his great repentance after his great and sickening sin with Bathsheba? Psalm 51 is clear: David says that God desires truth in the inward parts, verse 6. David prays that God would cleanse and create in him what? A new heart. And David says, in verse 10, that that's the real problem of his sin. And David won't even go, like these false religious leaders, and bring some empty offering to God because he knows that's not what God wants ultimately. God wants not external rituals or offerings. That's not what pleases him. But he wants the offerings that come from a broken and contrite heart, verses 16 and 17. That's why David so clearly and so helpfully, even for me, in Psalm 26:2 and Psalm

139:23 and 24, what does he say in those psalms? So important. “Search me, O Lord, search my heart. Examine my heart, mine my heart, God, and see if there be any wicked way in me.” What is David saying? Is he arrogantly coming to God and going, “Come on, God. Search me. Come on. I got this, right? I did it right. You won't find anything wrong with me, God. But you go ahead. You search. You search, God.” Is that what he's saying? Not at all. David's saying, “I don't trust my own heart. I know there's wickedness within me.” I know, as Paul said, I don't do anything without a twinge of sin within it. And David says, “Lord, search it out. Look for it. Show it. Bring it out from the depths of my heart and elevate it so I can see it and then kill it.” That's how serious he understood this problem to be. Does this sound like anything new? That's David, long before Christ came.

What about Solomon, his son? Listen to Solomon's prayer. In 1 Kings 8:39, he says very clearly that God is looking at the hearts of men and he is seeing all of them. And it is the committed and devoted heart that he looks for. In the final appeal of this long prayer of dedication that Solomon gives for the temple—really fills up the whole chapter, like 60 some verses—at the end here in 61, he is done praying to the Lord and then he turns and looks at all the people after praying a marvelous prayer to the Lord. And he says to them, and I quote: “*Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day,*” meaning “from this day forward.” It's not that God is against what he commands or even the rituals that he commanded for Israel, not at all. He gave them for a purpose. But he's not about empty rituals; he's not about heartless worship.

This is what Paul meant in Romans chapter 2:28-29. Again, not anything new because Paul is literally pulling straight out of the Old Testament when he's talking about this same reality when he says very clearly, and I quote: “*For no one is a Jew.*” He's talking about a true worshiper of God. “*No one is a true Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision*”—remember I said all of those physical realities pointed to a spiritual—“*nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew,*” that is a true worshiper of God, “*is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*” God has always been about the heart of man, and that is supposed to drive, that is supposed to fuel, that is supposed to motivate the works of man. Don't hear me that I'm saying works don't matter, meaning our offerings, our worship, our praises, and our faithfulness to the commands and the duties we

have before us, not at all. But those duties, done devoid of devotion, are defiled in God's sight. And we'll see why that is so clearly as we go through this.

Therefore instead of coming to God broken by their sin and seeking cleansing from their sin by the sovereign grace of God alone, the Jews were thinking they could deal with their sin by external acts. This is why Jesus calls the Pharisees a “white-washed tomb,” where the outside looks really nice—it's all decorated; it's all painted; it's got pretty flowers and all kinds of new ornaments hanging on the outside of the tomb—but on the inside is a stinking rotten cell of dead man's bones. But, even more closer to our text, Jesus says in Matthew 23:25 that the Pharisees—watch this, this is a helpful illustration because how easily we fall into this trap—the Pharisees were filthy cups, filthy bowls, filthy vessels, meaning contaminated, polluted. They were filled, the inside of the bowl was filled, with a putrified sickness of sin, while the outside looked really clean. So imagine Amy and I have you guys over for dinner some night, and some of you I have. And we're getting ready. And I'm diligently washing all of our plates and silverware and stuff from the night before. But when I wash the plates, I turn them over and wash the bottom and leave all the scum and food and stuff from the night before. And then I take my favorite coffee cup that I want to share with you because I love you, and you'll just find that coffee tastes so much better out of a right cup, and so I wash the outside. I'm even like polishing it. But you look inside, and there's, like some of your coffee cups that I've seen, where it's like three years of dark burnt coffee on the inside. And then you guys come over for dinner and we're like, “Hey, praise the Lord! I'm glad you're here. Here, we put out the best for you.” That's what Jesus is talking about.

It's foolishness, foolishness to clean the outside, foolishness to buy a house filled with termites and mold and yet to have a beautiful aesthetic on the outside. “Say, doesn't that look good?” You walk inside and it's contaminated and will kill you. That's what he's referencing here. That's their perspective on defilement. It's so messed up. The only things that external acts can do is dress up what is already spiritually dead. That's Jesus' point.

And therefore I ask you this morning, dear loved ones, are you trusting in dead works to save you from the dead? Are you trusting in that which is dead to somehow deal with your sin? Are you trusting in what you can bring to God to deal with something you can never fix, your own sinful heart? If you are—and I'm

afraid that reality is greater than we think—if you are, you are no different than these Pharisees, or no different than these people who are deceived. Isaiah 64:6 and 7 is clear: the only thing that we can bring to God is filthy, polluted works, nasty, ugly rags. And why, why is that? Because of what we're learning here. If I'm polluted on the inside, then whatever I do on the outside will always be polluted. That's the issue. The source is the problem. Isaiah 64 is speaking so clearly to the same reality. If you have a polluted heart, you will always only offer polluted works to the Lord. Therefore you can never be saved by work. That's why works will never save you. Because God will never accept you based upon what you do because you will never do anything to him that not only achieves what he requires and appeases what he demands, i.e. our judgment for sin. That is why we can't work our way to heaven, and the only thing we do when we try that is further seal ourself in hell. No amount of passion or persistence in bringing personal works to God for salvation will make them any better in his sight.

You and I must never forget, dear loved ones, we must never forget that the greatest tempter on the planet resides in us. Let that reality sink in. That is why Proverbs 28:26 says, “The man who trusts in his own mind is a fool.” That's why Solomon deeply warned his sons throughout the whole book of Proverbs to not lean on their own understanding, but ultimately, in all their ways, to trust in the Lord alone. Proverbs 3:5 and 8 to be specific, but you can find that truth in almost every chapter. Proverbs 20, verse 5 speaks to the heart being a deep and hidden clever reality that is tricky. Proverbs 6:12-14 and Proverbs 20, verse 9 describes the natural heart as dishonest, calculating, and not trustworthy. Proverbs 16:12, Proverbs 21:2 shows that the heart is totally biased, blinded, and self-favoring. Jeremiah 49:16, Obadiah 3 says the natural heart is deceitful. Genesis 6:5 and 8:21 says that the thoughts and intentions of the hearts, of our hearts, are always evil from youth, evil continually. Psalm 19:14: the heart is the place where wickedness lurks and therefore must be rooted out, must be rooted out. Proverbs 6:18 says the heart is the place where the wicked plans of life are devised. And, as we've already heard this morning as Marty read, Jeremiah 17:9 must not be forgotten, as the text says that the heart is deceitful, meaning it is sly, crafty, manipulative, devious, fraudulent, and a perpetual liar.

Think about it. In man's inner core lives a pathological liar. Actually, it's worse than that, for a pathological liar often has no real motive for lying; it's just what they do in their sick nature. Yet our hearts have clear motives in the lies that it

tells us. Never trust the liar inside of you. How many women have been lured into situations that have brought rape and destruction because they've listened to the lie of their heart? How many men have opened up websites that have enslaved them for centuries, or pulled open magazines because they've listened to the lie of their heart, thinking somehow this scantily clad, or not even wearing clothing, woman on a page of a magazine or on a photograph can somehow bring me pleasure that's pleasing to God? No, I'll tell you what that'll bring you. That'll bring you the judgment of God. That'll bring you the loss of any peace with God. And it will ultimately bring enslavement that, apart from the grace of God, you will not be able to break. The lie of our heart is wicked. How many children have listened to the lie of their heart and rebelled against their parents and ended up in death? How many young teenagers have been involved in premarital sex, thinking the lie of their heart: "But we're going to be married. But we really love one another." And what [that ends in] is the murder of an unwanted child. Listen, our hearts are sick. James chapter 1 is crystal clear: sin doesn't begin outside. It always begins inside. Very sad. We have met the enemy and the enemy is us.

Ephesians 2:8-9, though, is clear: we're not saved by works, but by faith alone in Christ alone. Titus chapter 3:5 is such an encouraging verse in light of these discouraging truths because we see so clearly that salvation is sovereign. What does that mean? That means that salvation is all driven by the initiation of God. By his own self-initiation he saves his own. Because, as we're learning, if our hearts are really like this, why would we ever turn to God? I'm glad you asked. You won't. That's what Paul says in Romans chapter 3. "No one seeks after God. No one looks to God. No one wants God. Everybody," as he says in Romans chapter 1, "is a hater of God." Well then, how in the world am I ever going to come to God? I'm glad you asked. You won't. God comes after you. That's sovereign salvation. That's the only hope for our ultimate problem of the polluted heart, is the blessing of mercy and grace given by God.

And that's why Titus chapter 3, verse 5 says God did not save us because of the so-called works of righteousness that we do. No, he saves us by his mercy, the mercy that he brings out in regeneration, where he takes a dead heart and he breathes life into it. That's exactly what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 4, talking about Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers, but that his ministry in preaching the gospel was to see that God would look at the unbelievers who are listening and God, in his perfect sovereign timing, would say, "Let there be light

on that life.” And, all of a sudden, the eyes that never could see now see. The heart that never beat now beats. The life that never wanted to follow God and love God now, all of a sudden, has this yearning and longing. What is that? That is the mercy of God. That is the sovereign grace of God, where he reaches down and takes the hell-bound hater of him, and reaches down as they're running away from him—no, it's worse than that—as they're running towards him seeking to kill him, and God reaches down and says, “No, you don't want to do that. You're mine.”

Oh, dear loved ones, that's the only hope we have. That's why we don't come to God bringing works, not at all. Because that would do nothing but dress up our own dead heart. That's why the cry of true salvation is never, never “Here is what I bring, Lord. Here is what I bring. Do you accept that, Lord?” Never. Rather the cry of true salvation is “Nothing do I bring, Lord, only my own wicked sin that deserves judgment.” Have you cried that? Have you made that plea to the Lord on your knees in your brokenness in the quietness of your heart? Where you just said, “Lord, I’m tired of bringing things to you that are nothing but dead works. Lord, I bring nothing to you.” That's why I love the old hymn “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for grace, helpless look to the Lord for salvation.” Rock of ages. Christ, he is our only hope.

That's exactly what we see in Luke 18:13, the Pharisee bringing his works and the poor decrepit, defiled in the eyes of the people, tax collector. And what does he do? He won't even lift his eyes to heaven. He beats his breast, says, “I’m a sinner. That's all I’m bringing, Lord. I got nothing, but I need you. I have nothing, but I want you. Lord, I come to you” —here you go— “like Christ said, dying to myself, leaving behind my life, putting it off, done with it, and literally coming to you naked. I have nothing. I’m done. If you don't save me, Lord, I will die.” That's the cry of the tax collector in Luke 18:13. And Jesus said it so clearly: “Which one goes to his home justified?” It's a rhetorical question. The tax collector. Why? Because he came with a broken heart that was evidence of a regenerated heart. What a blessing! This is what Jesus means in Luke 14:33. “Unless you renounce all, you cannot be my disciple.”

Have you renounced all, all of your perceived works, all of your desires that you're clinging to, thinking that that's going to make you acceptable before God? Listen, dear church, you know I love you. You know my passion to see you walk with the

Lord and to see us all persevere to the end. But it always amazes me in my interactions in just evangelizing and interacting with our world, whether it's our local community or beyond, how many times I interact with people who call themselves Christians and you find out, really clearly, they're trusting in their own works. I would be a pitiful pastor if I ever let anybody under the sound of my voice for one minute think that is true, not at all. We must understand these truths rightly. The Lord is making clear here where the problem lies. And the problem isn't with external acts. It's with the internal nature of the heart.

One of the greatest illustrations of sovereign salvation, and there are many in the Bible, though, is Exodus, or Ezekiel 37, like 1-14. You remember that passage? You know what that is? It's great. Again, what is Jesus teaching here? Anything new? Because if what he's telling us—and we'll see it even more detailed next week because we'll go through the delineation and even get further detailed than this—if what he's telling us is true, then we have no hope because I can't fix my inside. If it's physical, I can fix it, right? I can deal with that. But if it's in my heart, this is what I was born with. This is who I am. I can't fix that. That's the point. It's to drive us to the end of ourselves so that Christ, and Christ alone, will be our salvation. Ezekiel 37 is so awesome. It's the beautiful, glorious illustration of sovereign salvation in the valley of dry bones. Remember that story, where you have this entire valley filled with dead, dry bones? There's nothing left. There's no tendons; there's no muscles; there's no hope. They're just bones. And what is Ezekiel commanded to do by God? I love it—preach to the bones!

Imagine the contemporary church here in that command from God. “Well, you know, Lord, alright. We'll preach through it, but can we have the lights, the smoke, the mirrors? Can we have a bunch of dancing people come up? We'll do the drama team. We'll preach to the bones.” Thankfully, Ezekiel didn't have that mindset. He preached to the bones the Word of God. And what happens? As he's preaching, no doubt going, “Alright, I'm not really sure how this is.” You know, prophets had to do some crazy things. And there he is preaching to the bones and all of a sudden Ezekiel was like, “Wait.” And then, “I heard a rattling going on.” That probably was a little scary. Is something living under the bones? What's going on? And then the rattling got louder. And then the bones started standing up. And then the bones started connecting. And then flesh started going on the bones. And then the bones started moving; the bones started walking; the bones started worshiping. It's like, “Whoa, what's going on?” Sovereign salvation

through the sovereign means of salvation, which is the preaching and the evangelizing of the Word of God. That's what's going on. That's what we need for our dead hearts. We don't need to try to dress it up with good works. We need to dress it down with brokenness and humility before the Lord in true repentance and seek God's one and only sovereign grace!

What a marvelous truth that is. Because here's why, dear loved ones, this is so important. One of the Puritans understood this better—they got some things extenuated, exalted some things they shouldn't have exalted. They weren't perfect—but the Puritans are a blessing to my soul. And I love to read them because I find few writers today that understand doctrine rightly, especially this one. Jeremiah Burroughs is one who's blessed my soul on many levels. His book, *The Evil of Evils*, is just so helpful. And in his book, he quotes from another Puritan that he was reading that provoked him. You think I'm long-winded; Jeremiah Burroughs, the book, *Evil of Evils*, is nothing more than a compilation of sermons that he started preaching one day in his church on this issue of the sinfulness of sin. And he started preaching and he didn't end the series for a year and a half, the same exact thing week after week after week. He understood where the problem lied. And he read another set of sermons from another pastor who got it; his name is John Yates. And he said this, and it is so true: "Never until sin is seen and sorrowed for as the greatest evil will Christ be seen and rejoiced in as the greatest good."

That's why this passage, and ones like it, are so vital to our health. Because when we see the real problem, then we go after the real solution which is Christ. When we see ourselves for who we are, then we abandon ourselves for who Christ is and what he brings. And then we find hope; we find help; we find joy. In Christ, we go from darkness to light (Colossians 1:13-14). In Christ, we go from being a child of Satan to a child of God (1 John 2:10). In Christ, we go from death to life (John 5:24). In Christ, we go from the old ways of wickedness to the new ways of holiness (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ, we go from being a slave of sin driven by my own wicked desires, unable to stop it, to being a slave of righteousness (Romans chapter 6). Not wanting to stop it, that is the pursuit of Christ (Philippians 3). In Christ, we go from being condemned by God to being forgiven by God (Romans 8:1). In Christ, we go from hopelessness to never-ending hope (1st Peter 1). The list just keeps going, dear loved ones.

But here's the reality: you never get to that without going through the door of coming to grips with your own personal defilement. These are hard lessons, but these are lessons that serve as the key to opening the door to true salvation. For, without a right understanding of sin, there will never be true salvation. And without a right understanding of our ongoing sin, as we'll see next week in even greater levels, as believers there will never be a right living of sanctification. These truths are so helpful for us. We need to marinate and meditate on these, not only this day, but every day for the glory of our great God.

Let me pray. Father God, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for the way in which it guides us. We thank you that it is sharper, as Hebrews 4 says, sharper than any double-edged sword, that it cuts both to convict and confront, at the same time, to heal and to help. It divides down to the soul and marrow. And as that text says, it leaves everything exposed before you, the glorious Judge. Father, we have been exposed today. Help us to judge ourselves rightly that we might not come under your judgment. Give us Holy Spirit eyes to see and a heart to feel that we might not simply be hearers of the word, but doers also, for the glory of your name we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.