

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 07: 17-23

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you; this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again; we'll continue to read Mark chapter 7, verses 17 to 23.

The scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem questioned Jesus about why His disciples did not wash their hands before eating, considering it a violation of tradition. Jesus responded emphatically, accusing them of placing human traditions above God's commandments. He pointed out their hypocrisy, as they meticulously observed human traditions while neglecting God's divine instructions.

Jesus directly addressed their criticism, stating that what defiles a person is not what enters from the outside but what comes from within. This declaration was bold, challenging the prevailing norms of that time. The people listening might not have fully grasped the significance, and Jesus did not elaborate further at that moment.

Verse 17: "When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable."

Jesus left the crowd and entered a house, leaving only Him and His disciples. Training the disciples was the most important task for Jesus during this period, and He was willing to invest more time in them. The disciples should have been aware of this, so they freely asked questions about things they didn't understand. They were asking about what Jesus said to the crowd, that what goes into a person from the outside cannot defile him, but only what comes out from within. They thought it was a parable and asked for its meaning. I don't know how the saints view this, but to me, it seems more like Jesus making a declaration rather than a parable. Now, let's see how Jesus responded.

Verse 18: "So He said to them, 'Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him,'"

In response to the disciples' question, Jesus asked them, "Are you also lacking understanding? Don't you realize that whatever enters a person from the outside cannot defile him?" In other words, do you lack comprehension? Isn't it clear enough for you? Why don't you understand? For us, who don't have a Jewish background, Jesus' words might be straightforward and easy to understand, like plain language. But for the Jewish people, from Moses to the time of Jesus, a span of 1500 years, they adhered to the regulations on clean and unclean foods. It became a part of their lives. Suddenly, asking them to completely let go was not an easy thing. Therefore, Jesus reiterated, "Don't you understand that whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile him?" Essentially, Jesus was saying that no matter what you eat, it doesn't defile you because what you eat comes from the outside.

Verse 19: "because it does not enter his heart but his stomach and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods."

At this point, what Jesus said becomes quite clear and concrete: whatever you eat does not enter your heart but your stomach, and eventually, it is eliminated in the restroom. In short, these things will leave your body after a while, so why worry about them? Why bother about it? If something could enter your heart, then you should truly be concerned. Jesus here is guiding the disciples to recognize that the heart of a person is the real issue. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." Whether you live a good life or not is determined by your heart. Therefore, be cautious of anything that can affect your heart.

Here, Mark specifically adds a statement: "Thus purifying all foods." This means that in Leviticus 11, a whole chapter detailing what is clean and can be eaten and what is unclean and cannot be eaten. This chapter in the Bible has governed the lives of the Jewish people for almost 1500 years. Jesus, in this declaration, abolishes all

those regulations they had been following for 1500 years concerning clean and unclean foods. Jesus proclaims that all foods are clean, and you can eat them.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope we all understand that everything is clean and can be eaten. Of course, you can choose not to eat something if you don't like it, but don't judge others for eating it. The highest level of not eating is recorded in Romans 14:20-21, "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles." So, if not eating something is not for your own sake but for the sake of fellow believers, then don't eat or drink it.

Actually, Jesus' declaration here can be expanded to the ceremonial laws in the Old Testament Mosaic law. When Jesus came, all these ceremonial laws were abolished. These ceremonial laws were shadows pointing to Christ; now that Christ has come, the shadows are no longer needed. I believe Mark emphasizes multiple times that all foods are clean. This might be Peter's input because at this time, following Jesus, Peter probably didn't understand Jesus' meaning.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, when the Holy Spirit poured out on Pentecost, the disciples began preaching the gospel and establishing the church. When the gospel turned from the Jews to the Gentiles, Peter couldn't keep up. In Acts 10:9-16, the Lord Jesus Christ showed Peter a vision of a great sheet descending from heaven, containing all kinds of animals, insects, and birds. The Lord told Peter to rise, kill, and eat! At that time, Peter completely couldn't comprehend it, and he said in verse 14, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." The Lord then replied, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." Peter forgot what Jesus had said, "Whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile him." This vision happened three times before it was taken up again. After Peter understood, he went to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and started preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. I think Peter must have vividly remembered these incidents, so when he was telling Mark about Jesus' earthly ministry, he specifically added the phrase, "All foods are clean."

Verse 20: "And He said, 'What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.'"

In Jeremiah 17:9-10, it is written, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." What comes out of a person is from the heart, and the heart is more deceitful and desperately wicked than anything else. Others may not fully understand, but God sees it all clearly because the Lord is the one who searches the heart and tests the mind. On one hand, He examines the heart, full of evil thoughts, and warns the person. However, if the person does not heed this warning and continues, producing various evil deeds, then God will repay him according to what he has done. So, Jesus says, what comes out from within is what defiles a person.

Jesus then explicitly tells the disciples that from the human heart, various evil thoughts emerge, which are sinful ideas. From these evil thoughts, various evil deeds develop, and these deeds are not uncommon in our daily lives. Many of them are sins that we often commit. Therefore, we should not judge others for these evil deeds but reflect on whether we, too, have inadvertently committed various degrees of wrongdoing. The focus here is on the source of these evil deeds, all originating from the human heart.

Verses 21-22: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness."

Here, Jesus clearly tells us that the heart is the source: evil thoughts generated from the heart lead to a series of evil deeds. Jesus elaborates on twelve aspects, and if we carefully observe, they include the sixth commandment (do not murder) to the tenth commandment in the Mosaic law: the sixth commandment against murder, the seventh against adultery, the eighth against theft, and the ninth against false witness, equivalent to deceit here, meaning deception; and the tenth against covetousness. The sixth to tenth commandments in the Old Testament law deal

with interpersonal relationships, focusing on evil deeds committed by people. These are the laws of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, from Matthew 5 to 7, where Jesus speaks about the constitution of the kingdom of heaven, the emphasis is no longer on evil deeds but on evil thoughts in the human heart. Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The law dealt with issues of human behavior, but in the New Testament, Jesus addresses the problems in the human heart. For instance, in Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." So, in the New Testament, Jesus tells us that the problem comes from within, from our hearts, and He wants to address the issues within the human heart.

The soul is the most essential part within us, including minds, emotions, and will. Among the items listed by Jesus, evil thoughts are related to the soul's mind: we have evil thoughts within our souls. Envy is related to the soul's emotions: seeing someone better than us, and a feeling of hatred arises; and pride is related to the soul's will: always valuing oneself and looking down on others. From evil thoughts, envy, and pride, various corrupt behaviors in humans develop. Therefore, Jesus adds the next verse to emphasize this point.

Verse 23: "For all these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Therefore, when we see various wicked actions around us, we must recognize that the true source is from the heart. Wicked actions are merely manifestations of an evil heart. Dealing with wicked actions alone is insufficient; it is necessary to address the evil heart. If a person's heart is completely corrupted, filled with evil thoughts, jealousy, and pride, that person is beyond salvation. This scenario is reminiscent of Genesis 6, where the Lord saw the great wickedness of man's thoughts continually. Due to the pervasive evil in human hearts, God had to judge that generation with a flood. Only Noah and his family, eight people in total, were

saved from the flood. After the flood, God made a covenant with Noah, symbolized by the rainbow, promising not to destroy all living creature with a flood again.

Following the flood, humanity fell into sin once again, prompting God to initiate a calling pattern. God called individuals from the fallen population, forming a called race. Abraham was the first one called, leading to the Israelite nation inheriting God's promises in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, God continued to call the descendants of Abraham in faith, signifying the saints of the new covenant. God's calling will persist until the coming of Christ when it will be completed. During certain periods, God's most significant punishment is the withdrawal of His calling, effectively gave them up.

In Romans 1:8-32, the Apostle Paul outlined the increasing depth of human depravity. He identified three stages of God's letting go. The first stage (Romans 1:24) involves God giving people over to the lusts of their hearts, resulting in impure actions that defile their bodies. The second stage (Romans 1:26) sees God giving them up to vile passions, leading to shameful acts such as same-sex relations. The third stage (Romans 1:28) is marked by God giving them over to a debased mind, as people intentionally reject the knowledge of God. Consequently, their hearts become increasingly corrupt, manifesting in various sinful behaviors listed by Paul (Romans 1:29-31).

Dear brothers and sisters, as we observe the increasing moral decay and indulgence in impure and lascivious activities in our surrounding society, we can't help but feel a sense of concern. This aligns with what Paul referred to as the first level of God's abandonment. As our society becomes more corrupted, deviating from the natural order created by God, with the inversion of right and wrong, the prevalence of issues like homosexuality and transgenderism, our awareness intensifies.

Interestingly, when it comes to God's third level of abandonment, the corruption of human hearts, such instances are abundant in our midst. Yet, we often find ourselves less sensitive to these issues. This underscores our tendency to focus on external matters, forgetting that the external decay originates from a corrupted heart. The source of corruption lies within the hearts of individuals.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ aims to rescue those who are willing to repent from their hearts. While the atoning blood of Jesus covers all the sinful actions of humanity, the wicked thoughts within human hearts cannot be easily addressed. Instead, it requires a process of life transformation, a journey of sanctification for every Christian. This transformation is facilitated by the continuous renewal of our hearts through the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Additionally, Ephesians 5:26 metaphorically states, "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word."

This emphasizes the purifying effect of applying God's Word in our lives during every reading, allowing God's words to flow as living water, washing away the blemishes and wrinkles from our lives, enabling us to become holy. In Mark 7, the questioning of Jesus' disciples by the scribes and Pharisees regarding eating with unwashed hands led to Jesus imparting a lesson to His disciples, emphasizing the importance of paying closer attention to the condition of people's hearts.

Let us pray: Lord, guard our hearts, for out of it flow the issues of life. Remove any evil thoughts from our minds, eliminate jealousy from our emotions, and eradicate pride from our will. May we, as individuals, approach You with humility, experiencing Your mercy and grace. Help us maintain a humble posture, recognizing that when our hearts become proud, corruption is not far behind. We invite You to sit on the throne of our hearts, to rule and reign within us, for when You have our hearts, You have our entire being. Assist us in esteeming You highly in every aspect of our lives, obedient to Your will, and living a life that's pleasing to You. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.