

## **SM027 – How to Be Clean Before God**

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, How to Be Clean Before God. This story is from Mark 7:1-23 and Matthew 15:1-20. I hope you will follow along in your Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, How to Be Clean Before God.

### **SM027 – How to Be Clean Before God**

News about Jesus' works continued to spread throughout Israel. This news came to the common people and they flocked to Jesus to hear him speak and to be healed of their diseases.

This news also came to the religious leaders and they were concerned. It was the duty of the religious leaders of the land to make sure their people were not led astray by a false prophet or teacher. For centuries the people of God had been led astray. Not long after the time of David and Solomon the nation of Israel split into two nations and false prophets wandered throughout the land leading people away from the true God. These false prophets and priests introduced pagan worship ideas, pagan idols, and pagan practices.

God sent his true prophets to bring Israel back to him, but the people refused and God had to send judgment. In 722 BC the Assyrians came against the northern tribes and carried them away into exile. In 586 the Babylonians came against the southern tribes and took them to Babylon. God's people had been judged for their worship of idols and for their sinful practices that went with the worship of idols.

But God restored his people as he had promised and when the nation of Israel came back into the land they zealously obeyed the Lord. They rebuilt the temple and offered the sacrifices that the Law of Moses had told them to offer. They kept the Sabbath. They kept the feasts. They kept the laws, as best as they could and they rebuilt the city.

Even when other armies invaded the land, the Jews held fast to the laws of God and even suffered greatly for the laws of God.

But a new danger arose within the nation – it was not a danger of a new false god, it was not a danger of following sinful, pagan practices – it was a danger of using the very laws of God to keep people from God. How did this happen?

Times were changing, and the religious leaders wanted to make sure the people were applying the laws of Moses to the new times in which the people were living. And so they took the laws of God, in their simple form, and began to make new rules for everyone to follow. God told the people to rest on the Sabbath and not do any work. Simple enough. But what did it mean to work? What did it mean to rest? How far could a person carry an object on the Sabbath? And so the religious leaders set out to define, to the smallest detail, what a person could or could not do and the rules became so many that one had to spend all day studying the rules just to know what to do or not to do.

There were rules about washing and being clean before God. These became extremely important because there were so many Gentiles in the land – Romans, Greeks, Edomites, Egyptians – how could a son of Abraham keep himself pure from the pollution that came from the pagans! Yes, God wanted to keep his people pure from the defiling practices of the pagans, but what did this mean in everyday life for his people? And so the religious leaders made up all sorts of rules as to what this meant.

If you went to the market, and bought a cooking pot from a pagan, when you brought that pot home, you had to wash it, or boil it in water, or purge it with fire. It is not because the Jews were concerned about germs. It is because they were concerned about not being pure before God.

And when you ate your meals, you had better wash before and after your meal. You had to be clean before God, not clean from germs, but clean morally and the washing of the hands was the way to prepare oneself to eat a meal so that one was clean before God. Some would come to believe that it was better to walk four miles to find water to wash the hands than to eat a meal with unwashed hands. Some would come to believe that a person who did not wash his hands before a meal was as bad as a murderer.

One day, these religious leaders, who knew about all these laws and rules about cleanliness came to Jesus. They had heard about the miracles, but they had also heard the disturbing news that Jesus was not very careful about keeping the new rules.

It was time to eat and Jesus told his disciples to get a meal ready. They still had some of the fish and bread that he had miraculously provided for them by taking the loaves and the fish of the little boy. Jesus had blessed that food and then multiplied it to feed 5000 men. When they had all finished they had twelve baskets of fish and bread left over, more than what they started with!

The disciples went to their baskets and began to prepare the food for their meal, but the religious leaders were appalled at what they saw – the disciples did not wash their hands! They watched as Peter, James, John, and the others began to set the food before all who were eating that day and they had not taken the time to cleanse themselves! They looked at Jesus as if they were waiting for Jesus to correct his disciples and command them to wash. But Jesus did nothing. He just sat there, smiling, talking with people, and seeming to enjoy himself.

And again, we must remember, they were not upset because the religious leaders were concerned about germs or dirty hands, they believed that to eat food before God with unwashed hands made a person unclean before God and deserving of his judgment!

One of the religious leaders stepped forth and with great concern, even anger in voice said, “Jesus, why do your disciples not obey the traditions of the elders? Why do they not follow the rules that the leaders have set forth for our people? They have not washed! They are setting food before you with unclean hands. They ... and you ... are about to eat food with unclean hands. All of you will be unclean before God and what kind of example are you setting before the people?”

The reports that the religious leaders had heard about Jesus were true. He may do miracles, but he was not keeping the laws of their people. And that made him a false teacher, didn't it?

But Jesus looked at these leaders and he said,

“Isaiah the prophet talked about you. He talked about your hypocrisy as it is written:

‘ THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. <sup>7</sup> ‘IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’<sup>8</sup> Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

The religious leaders were stunned by what Jesus said. The disciples were delighted and kept on eating the good tasting fish and bread that Jesus had provided. And the crowd rejoiced that at last someone was telling these religious leaders the truth.

They had made so many new laws and rules that it was impossible to keep them all straight. It was impossible to remember what to do and what not to do. A person had to spend all day reading them, listing them, memorizing them, if he wanted to keep this endless list of laws that were supposed to keep a person pure before God. But did God really want it that way? Is that what God had in mind when he gave his laws?

But Jesus also showed there was a deeper problem. It is not just that the number of laws was too great for the common person to remember. The deeper problem was that the religious leaders became so involved with making new laws about following God, that they forgot about God Himself!

They still said the right things with their **lips**, Jesus said, but their **heart** was far from God. They still had the outward form of worship but it was empty. They still taught the people about following God, but the true words of God had been overshadowed by the words of men. No heart for God, no worship of God, no word of God. These religious leaders were empty shells for they were not really following the commandments of God but only the tradition of men.

Jesus wanted to make sure they understood him. Jesus loved them too and wanted to heal them of their religious sickness as much as he wanted to heal the common people of their physical sickness. So Jesus pointed out something that the religious leaders did which was clearly disobedience to the commands of God. Jesus said,

“You men have become experts at setting aside the commandments of God in order to keep your man-made traditions. Let me show you how. Moses said that a child is to honor his father and his mother. He also said that if a child speaks evil of his mother and father he is to be put to death. What does it mean for a child, especially when he is grown up to honor his mother and father? Is it just a matter of words or is it a matter of caring for his parents? It is caring for his parents! He should provide for them and watch over them when they are old and make sure they have enough.

But you allow young men and women to make vows that keep them from caring for their parents. If a young man vows to give all that he has to God, and then something happens to his parents so that they are in great need, you don't allow that young man to rescind his commitment in the face of the new circumstances. You bind that young man to his previous commitment and you don't allow him to take that money and use it for his father and mother!

Do you really think God wants the Temple to keep the money and to let his parents go hungry? Do you really think God needs that young man's money? Do you really think God delights in the money and has no care for that young man's aging parents who are in need?

This is why Moses said, “Honor your father and mother and don't speak evil of them.” But you do not allow the young man to honor his parents anymore. You have set aside the clear and simple commandment of God in favor of your man-made tradition. And you do many other things like this.

Then Jesus stood up from the meal and in a loud, clear voice he said something to the crowds and when we come back we'll find out what he said and why his words were so important then and why they are so important now.

### **Interlude**

Hello everyone, this is Jonathan Williams the creator of and storyteller for Stories of the Master. The conflict between so-called religious people and the truth of God's word is a conflict that has lasted for thousands of years. We humans just can't seem to understand the simplicity of loving God.

On the one hand, some of us make the mistake of worshipping the wrong god, like the children of Israel who worshipped false gods. This is a sin that is grievous to the true God for the false gods will always lead us astray and down a path to destruction. On the other hand, when we do follow the true God, we often make up extra rules and laws about following him and we start to focus on the rules and the laws rather than focus on loving him! This also is a grief to the heart of God.

He wants to cure us of both of these problems so that we have a truthful, loving relationship with him through Jesus Christ. I remember what Jesus said to the woman of Sychar – “An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

I hope you have learned how to worship God, in spirit, rather than through a bunch of rules, and in truth, worshipping the true God. And write to us and let us know how this is happening in your life. You can write us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA TX 78209.

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, Speak where we teach the truth of God's word to a world that desperately needs to hear truth. We show people how to develop a biblical worldview, how to obey God's word, and how to connect their personal story to the Story of God's love for them. If you would like to help us in this ministry, write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in San Antonio TX 78209. That's Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in San Antonio TX 78209.

What started as a simple lunch soon became a controversy as the religious leaders, the inventors of the traditions of men, found fault with Jesus' disciples because they did not wash their hands before they prepared or ate their meal. But Jesus rebuked these leaders telling them they were a bunch of hypocrites. They had words for God but their heart was far from him. They had lost the word of God. It was lost in a maze of confusing commands and traditions of men.

Let's get back to our story and see what Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples.

## Part 2

What a rebuke Jesus gave to the religious leaders. He called them hypocrites. He said that Isaiah the prophet had talked about their hypocrisy many hundreds of years before. He said they neglected the commandment of God in order to hold to the traditions of men and he proved it to them by telling them how insensitive they were to the needs of families.

"Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. <sup>16</sup> [If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

Then Jesus dismissed the crowds who had been watching and he went back into the house. Soon, the disciples followed him into the house and said,

"Do You know that the Pharisees were offended by what you said?" <sup>13</sup>

But that wasn't a surprise to Jesus. Of course they were offended. He had called them hypocrites. He had said that all of their hard work to explain the Law of God had only kept people from the Law of God. He had said that their heart was far from God. And when he told the crowds that it wasn't unwashed hands that made a man unclean before God, but the things that came from a man's heart, that completely undermined their entire religious system that they had so carefully built up through the years. Of course they were offended!

But Jesus answered and said to the disciples, " Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

Even stronger words! Jesus said that these religious leaders did not belong to God. In the writings of the prophets, God often compared his people to a plant. In Jeremiah 2:21-22, the prophet said, "I planted

you a choice vine, a completely faithful seed. How then have you turned yourself before me into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine. Although you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your iniquity is before me, declares the Lord God.” And what God said of the people in Jeremiah’s time Jesus was saying of the people of his time. They no longer belonged to him. In fact, he never planted them. They belonged to someone else and they would be uprooted. They were blind guides of blind people and both would fall into a pit.

But for some reason, the disciples were not getting it, the disciples were not understanding what Jesus was really talking about when he said it was not external things that made a man unclean before God, but internal things and so Peter said to Him, “Lord, explain the parable to us.”

And Jesus said, “Are you still lacking in understanding also? <sup>17</sup> Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? <sup>18</sup> But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. <sup>20</sup> These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

And my friends, let me ask you this question today, “do you understand what Jesus was talking about?” He wants you to understand, so let’s take some time and make sure we all understand what he was saying. After all, we don’t want to be blind guides of the blind and we don’t want to be plants that have to be uprooted. We want our eyes open to Jesus and we want to be a plant that grows up and bears fruit for him.

The first thing we need to understand from this story is that what can look good on the outside may mean nothing to God if the inside is not right. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day looked good on the outside. They had their special robes. They had their Scriptures that they wore on their arms or foreheads in little boxes and held with light leather rope. They had the tassels on the garments that hung down from the robes that marked them out as religious people.

They spent their days in the study of the Laws of Moses and they worked many hours making up rules and laws to apply those laws for the people. But somewhere they lost their heart for God. They had the right words on their lips but their heart was empty. They had the scrolls of the word of God, but their heart was filled with the teaching of men.

And the same can be true for any of us no matter what religion we are. We can have the outward observances but not have a heart for God. God is not looking for the outward observances, the way we stand or kneel when we pray, the amount of money we give, the number of times we attend religious services. He is looking for the heart. It is important to pray, it is important to give, it is important to attend services, but only if our heart is open to the things of God and only if we want to obey the clear, simple words of God rather than the complicated words of men.

Second, being clean before God does not come from washing our hands or our bodies or avoiding touching a list of things that supposedly make us unclean before God and unfit to come into his

presence. There is nothing on the outside of us that can make us unclean before God. But what makes us unclean is what is on the inside of us and that brings us to the third point.

Listen again to what Jesus said: the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. <sup>20</sup> These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

Our problem before God is a problem of the heart. We are already unclean before God because all of us have unclean hearts before God. Let’s look at the list that Jesus presented, and this is only a sample list. This is not an exhaustive list of every sin.

Jesus identified seven sins that start in the heart.

1. Evil thoughts – whenever evil is acted out in the world, such as violence to another person, it all begins with evil thoughts. The evil does not come from eating a meal with unwashed hands. The evil comes from a heart that has already been polluted by sin.
2. Murders – every murder that has taken place, beginning with the first murder of Abel by his brother Cain, had a beginning point in the thoughts of people. God told Cain, “Cain, sin is crouching like a hungry animal ready to pounce upon you and consume you, but you must not let that happen. You must fight the battle and overcome it in your heart and mind.” And friends, Jesus also said that we commit murders in our hearts. We may not act upon them, but in our hearts we kill people.
3. Adulteries, and
4. Fornications – adulteries are sexual sins after we are married. Fornications are sexual sins before we are married. Where do they begin? Do they begin when we fail to follow the rules of religion? No, they begin when we fantasize about things. When we allow lust in our heart to grow and then consumed by lust, we carry out the lust with others.
5. Theft – when we steal the property of others, or steal their good name, or anything belonging to them we are acting out something that has already been in our hearts. We are acting out of greed and out of desiring something that does not belong to us. We are acting out of covetousness.
6. False Witness – we lie about others to get our way in court or to bring another person down.
7. Slander – we lie about others, not in court, but to our neighbors so that our neighbors will think less of others and more of us.

Jesus could have mentioned many other sins – but he stopped with these seven, sins of the mind, sins of the heart, sins of the flesh, but all coming from the inside of a person.

And friends, this helps us to understand why we need to listen to Jesus and follow him. Our problem is a problem of our heart. Our problem is a problem of sin. No amount of washing ourselves on the outside will help. No amount of avoiding contact with the wrong kind of people or the wrong kind of objects will cure us. Again, the prophet Jeremiah speaks to us, “Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved. How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you?” (4:14)

And so Jesus showed us how to be clean before God. The only thing that can cure us is the work of God. The only thing that can heal our hearts is the Spirit of God who comes to live in us and the only way the Spirit of God can come within us is through the gift of Jesus. Will you receive the gift of Jesus today and let him clean you from the inside out?

## **Ending**

My friends, in our story today, we have a powerful story of the greatest need of mankind – a new heart. Jesus came to give us a new heart and a new start. As we listen to these stories of the Master and of the events that happened in the life of Jesus, we must remember that everything that happened was leading to the day when he would die on the cross for our sinful hearts.

Our sinful hearts with all of their evil and murders and sexual sins and thefts and slander and false witness would need to be forgiven and Jesus paid the price when he died for our sinful hearts on the cross. Jesus bore the punishment for our sin, but now having borne that punishment, if we will confess to him that we need him, confess that our hearts are evil, he will forgive us, justify us, and send his Spirit to live within us.

Pray this prayer with me today, “Father in heaven, my heart is full of evil. I ask you to take it away and give me a pure heart. Forgive me of my sin. Thank you for Jesus who died on the cross for my sin. May his Spirit come to live within me and make me a new person. I want to live a clean life before you on the inside and on the outside. And I pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Did you call upon God? Why not write to us and tell us. We will rejoice with you and we will send you some material to help you grow in your new heart-relationship with Jesus.

Write to us and tell us of your prayer and tell us what Jesus is doing in your life. Write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA TX 78209 in the U.S. That’s Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA TX 78209.

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Please check out our website – [storiesofthemaster.com](http://storiesofthemaster.com) and you can listen to today’s story again, download it or receive a CD to share with a friend. You will also find books and studies that will help you grow in your discovery of Jesus and your relationship with him. And when you go to the website, don’t forget to Recommend us on the FB icon.

My name is Jonathan Williams and I hope you have been blessed today and I look forward to you joining us next week for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master himself richly bless you.