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Stories of the Master

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~ **How to Be Clean Before God** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Mark 7:1-13 and Matthew 15:1-20.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Matthew 15:1-20 nasb	Matthew 15:1-20 Easy to Read Version
<p>Then some Pharisees and scribes *came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” ³ And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.’ ⁵ But you say, ‘Whoever says to <i>his</i> father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” ⁶ he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And <i>by this</i> you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:</p> <p>⁸ ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁹ ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’”</p> <p>¹⁰ After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, “Hear and understand. ¹¹ <i>It is</i> not what enters into the mouth <i>that</i> defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.”</p> <p>¹² Then the disciples *came and *said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” ¹³ But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. ¹⁴ 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.”</p> <p>¹⁵ Peter said to Him, “ Explain the parable to us.” ¹⁶ Jesus said, “Are you still lacking in understanding also? ¹⁷ Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? ¹⁸ But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. ¹⁹ For out of</p>	<p>Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus. They came from Jerusalem and asked him, ² “Why do your followers not obey the traditions we have from our great leaders who lived long ago? Your followers don’t wash their hands before they eat!”</p> <p>³ Jesus answered, “And why do you refuse to obey God’s command so that you can follow those traditions you have? ⁴ God said, ‘You must respect your father and mother.’ And God also said, ‘Whoever says anything bad to their father or mother must be killed.’ ⁵ But you teach that a person can say to their father or mother, ‘I have something I could use to help you. But I will not use it for you. I will give it to God.’ ⁶ You are teaching them not to respect their father. So you are teaching that it is not important to do what God said. You think it is more important to follow those traditions you have. ⁷ You are hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he spoke for God about you:</p> <p>⁸ “These people honor me with their words, but I am not really important to them. ⁹ Their worship of me is worthless. The things they teach are only human rules.”</p> <p>¹⁰ Jesus called the people to him. He said, “Listen and understand what I am saying. ¹¹ It is not what people put in their mouth that makes them wrong. It is what comes out of their mouth that makes them wrong.”</p> <p>¹² Then the followers came to Jesus and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees are upset about what you said?”</p> <p>¹³ Jesus answered, “Every plant that my Father in heaven has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Stay away from the Pharisees. They lead the people, but they are like blind men leading other blind men. And if a blind man leads another blind man, both of them will fall into a ditch.”</p> <p>¹⁵ Peter said, “Explain to us what you said earlier to the</p>

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<p>the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. ²⁰ These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”</p>	<p>people.” ¹⁶ Jesus said, “Do you still have trouble understanding? ¹⁷ Surely you know that all the food that enters the mouth goes into the stomach. Then it goes out of the body. ¹⁸ But the bad things people say with their mouth come from the way they think. And that’s what can make people wrong. ¹⁹ All these bad things begin in the mind: evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual sins, stealing, lying, and insulting people. ²⁰ These are the things that make people wrong. Eating without washing their hands will never make people unacceptable to God.”</p>
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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- The traditions of the elders rejected by the Sadducees but highly esteemed by the Pharisees was made up of legal comments or case decisions by rabbis past and present. The prescribed washing of hands did not have to do with physical hygiene so much as with ceremonial purity. Exod 30:17-21; Deut 21:6; 1 QS 5:13-14
- The attack was not one of faith but of ritual. It was not an attack based on the Law but an attack based on the interpretation and application of the Law.
- 18 decrees separated Jews from Gentiles
- Earthen vessels that were defiled were to be broken and vessels of wood, horn, glass, and brass immersed.
- If they bought vessels from Gentiles they were to be immersed, put into boiling water, purged with fire, or at least polished.
- Some would come to believe that the oral law was higher than the law of God.
- “Better to go four miles to water than to neglect to wash one’s hands.”
- One who neglected hand washing was as bad as a murderer.

These insights were taken from R. Alan Cole’s Commentary on Mark, J. Dwight Pentecost’s The Words and Works of Jesus Christ and Robert Gundry’s Matthew.

Answer these reflective questions.

The Jewish people for hundreds of years had a problem with idolatry and then for hundreds of years had a problem with ritualism. Why do you think people fall into these kinds of spiritual traps? Which is worse – idolatry or ritualism?

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Whenever the Pharisees came and complained to Jesus, they always seemed to attack his disciples and not him. Why do you think this was their practice?

Jesus said the religious leaders had lips that honored God but their heart was far from God. Why do you think people hold to outward forms of religion when their heart is not true to God?

Jesus said a person's true problem was their heart and from the heart come many sins. He then listed the following sins. Which of these do you think is a big problem where you live? How can a person overcome them?

- evil thoughts,
- murders,
- adulteries,
- fornications,
- thefts,
- false witness,
- slanders

How can a person have a clean heart before God? How does Jesus do this for a person?
