

Stories of the Master

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~ Clean in the Eyes of 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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New Living Translation (NLT) *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation.

Matthew 15:1-20 NASB	Matthew 15:1-20 NLT
<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 <i>to God</i>,” 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: 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.’” 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.” 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.” 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 the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. ²⁰ These are the things which defile the</p>	<p>Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, ² “Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat.” ³ Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? ⁴ For instance, God says, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.’ ⁵ But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can’t help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’ ⁶ In this way, you say they don’t need to honor their parents. And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, ⁸ “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. “Listen,” he said, “and try to understand. ¹¹ It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth.” ¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?” ¹³ Jesus replied, “Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, ¹⁴ so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.”</p>

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<p>man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”</p>	<p>¹⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Explain to us the parable that says people aren’t defiled by what they eat.”</p> <p>¹⁶ “Don’t you understand yet?” Jesus asked. ¹⁷ “Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. ¹⁸ But the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you. ¹⁹ For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.²⁰ These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you.”</p>
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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- The text says that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem. The largest body of Pharisees did reside in Jerusalem.
- The traditions of the elders rejected by the Sadducees but highly esteemed by the Pharisees were made up of legal comments or case decisions by rabbis. The prescribed washing of hands did not have to do with physical hygiene so much as with ceremonial purity. See Exodus 30:17-21 and Deuteronomy 21:6. It is also mentioned in the Qumran documents, 1 QS 5:13-14
- The attack on Jesus 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.
- Items devoted to God – people could donate property to the Temple. Such property could then never be used by any relatives. Jesus is referring to people who were abusing the system to neglect their duty to care for their parents.
- Earthen vessels that were defiled were to be broken and vessels of wood, horn, glass, and brass immersed so that they could be used.
- If a Jewish person bought vessels from Gentiles they were to be immersed, put into boiling water, purged with fire, or at least polished.
- Some rabbis would come to believe that the oral law was higher than the written law of God.
- One belief among rabbis was that to neglect hand washing was as bad as being a murderer.
- This saying reflects the importance of hand washing, “Better to go four miles to water than to neglect to wash one’s hands.”
- Pulling up plants was a familiar biblical image in the prophets and especially Jeremiah . See Jeremiah 1:10; 11:17; 18:7-8; 24:6; 31:4,28; 42:10; 45:4.
- Lists of vices were often used in the ancient world. Two thirds of these listed here are mentioned in the Ten Commandments.

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

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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 excessive traditions. Why do you think people fall into these kinds of spiritual traps? Which is worse – idolatry or excessive traditions?

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 him. 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

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