

# Inside Out

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're 26 days in now. How is your New Year's resolution going? How is it going?

I won't get a show of hands. I imagine some of them have already fallen by the wayside. You wanted to get fitter maybe, so you started going for a few runs, then some longer walks, then some shorter walks.

Then it was January the 5th, and you thought maybe next year. Maybe you wanted to break a bad habit. Maybe you wanted to pick up some new habits, so you set the alarm earlier in the morning to get yourself into your routine.

You eat a healthier breakfast. You spend more time reading, less time on your phone. It maybe started well. Maybe it is still going. Maybe I'm doubting some of you. But it is that age-old quip, isn't it, that we've been reminded of even just a few Sundays ago, new year, new you.

But is it really? The turning over of the calendar, as much as we might like to pretend otherwise, doesn't actually kind of transform who we are, does it?

[ 1 : 13 ] But the reason we so often make changes to our lifestyle, I think is because we know, don't we? We know there are often problems that need addressed.

There are things we could do better. There are areas for improvements. Well, what Jesus is going to show us at the beginning of Matthew chapter 14 is that those problems, those areas for improvements, those things we need to change, those problems actually go much, much better or are willing to admit.

And that our attempts to fix them by just kind of setting the alarm clock half an hour earlier, well, that's never going to fix our biggest problem of all.

The diagnosis that Jesus gets to at the end of this little section is pretty damning. And it might be a little uncomfortable. But let me just say, you need to listen to Jesus' words here.

You need to listen to Jesus' words here because a right diagnosis is always, isn't it, in our long-term interest. Far better that the doctor come and explain the seriousness of the problem so that steps can be taken right away than leave you in ignorance of a terminal disease that there is a cure for.

[ 2 : 55 ] That is where we're going to get to by the end of this passage. But the chapter begins, doesn't it, with a group of Pharisees coming from Jerusalem. And these Pharisees, I think that they seem to think that they already know what the problem is.

And so they come questioning Jesus. We're going to just break up this passage down by looking first at the wrong question the Pharisees are asking before looking at the two right responses that Jesus gives to their wrong question.

So let's begin with one wrong question where we see a rejection of the king. In the previous verses, if you were here last week, you'll remember from Joe's really helpful sermon, Jesus has, what has he done?

He's fed 5,000 men, plus women and children, with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He's walked on water in the midst of wind and waves and countless people, if you just glance up there to the end of chapter 14, countless people have been healed of all manner of sicknesses just by reaching out and touching his garments.

That's just chapter 14. We could pile up so much more if we were to go through the previous 13 chapters of Matthew's gospel. Now here's the thing, right?

[ 4 : 19 ] What kind of question would you ask a man like this? You'd think, wouldn't you, something like, who are you?

Where does this amazing power come from? How can I follow you? Tell me more about why you've come here, that there are a lot of good and legitimate questions you could ask.

What do the Pharisees ask? Look down there at verse 2 with me. Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders for they do not wash their hands when they eat?

That was their question, right? Why don't the people following you wash their hands? Now we should say, okay, this wasn't the hygiene police arriving on the scene, like the people in COVID kind of standing at the door making sure you wipe the thing on the trolley.

That's not what the Pharisees are up to here. That there is serious, albeit misplaced, but there is serious spiritual concern in their question and we'll unpack that in a little more detail in our final points.

[ 5 : 40 ] They did have a kind of spiritual-ish question, but it was, I think, nevertheless in the context, a completely almost inappropriate, ridiculous question to be asking the Jesus whom we have just seen perform such wonders in chapter 14.

And that shows us, doesn't it, something of their hearts. They've obviously been watching Jesus very carefully. They know what his disciples are up to.

But these men have hard hearts. In fact, Jesus described them as blind in verse 14. Not physically, but spiritually blind, incapable and unwilling to see Jesus for who he was, for acknowledging what was staring them in the face right in front of them.

Jesus did not fit with their idea of what the king that Israel needed should look like.

I'm sure I saw this somewhere, but I can't remember where and I couldn't find it over the last few days, so I'm just going to paint the scene for you. I want you to imagine, right, it's America in the late 1960s, kind of at the tail end of the civil rights movement.

[ 7 : 05 ] And someone shows up to a job interview and they've got all the right credentials, like the CV is filled out perfectly, that they've got the degree, they've got unbeatable results throughout school and uni, that they've got the experience in the bag, that they've got the personality, they know all about the company and the role.

They nail every single question. They are the perfect candidate for the job. But the interviewers don't like something about them.

The resume is exactly what they're looking for. The colour of their skin is not. And so I can't remember exactly how it went, but in the interview they start asking increasingly absurd and difficult and irrelevant questions.

not because they want to see if the candidate is up for the task, but because they want an excuse not to take them on. That's kind of what we see going on here.

Right? Israel need a king and they are on the lookout for their Messiah. and Jesus shows up with all the right credentials. Right? Matthew's shown that through his gospel, hasn't he?

[ 8 : 27 ] How he fulfills prophecy after prophecy after prophecy. But the Jewish leaders show up and they don't want him because he's not one of them.

And if he's not one of them, they're going to have to make changes to follow him and so they start asking the kind of questions that people looking for and out start asking.

In verse 2, they are not saying to Jesus, oh that was amazing, but we've just got a couple of kind of clarifying questions for me to go through. No, they see fine and well the credentials Jesus has and they are thinking we need to trip them up, we need to find a way out here.

Now I slightly probably can't belabor that point because I think it is really important we understand what the Pharisees are doing, where the Pharisees are coming from in order to rightly understand Jesus' response to them in this passage and to better understand his warnings about them that are coming up in the next chapter and his interactions with them later on too.

These guys are not curious. They are deliberately rejecting Jesus and trying to find a way to justify their decision.

[ 9 : 49 ] Maybe you've had that in your own experience sharing the gospel, that there are people, aren't there? And there always will be people who hear and see what Jesus has done, but instead of following them as they should, will start asking questions after question after question, not out of curiosity, but out of an attempt to find a reason not to follow him.

Jesus sees these questions for what they are, but here he sees also an opportunity, an opportunity to warn us, I think, against false piety and to teach us about our greatest needs.

So let's turn now to Jesus' two right answers to the Pharisees' wrong question. First, Jesus takes on the Pharisees' principle of living by their traditions, to which Jesus says, live by the word of God, not the traditions of men.

You can't really miss the direction and force of Jesus' response, just look there with me. First, verse three, why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?

Verse six, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. Similarly, in verse nine, in vain do they worship me, teaching us doctrines the commandments of men.

[ 11 : 27 ] The Pharisees had elevated their tradition to a place above the word of God. So that when push came to shove, they would honor their tradition instead of honoring God's law.

Jesus highlights for us an example of them doing just that in verse four and five. What Jesus is describing in these verses is a practice that the Pharisees developed called korban, korban, which basically meant whatever money you had left when you died, you could vow that to be dedicated to God.

Now, it's a bit complicated, at least I found it a bit complicated, that doesn't mean it's complicated, I found it a bit complicated, but basically, right, the idea was this, and this is how the Pharisees started using it in practice.

Korban meant making a vow that you would dedicate everything you had left when you died to God, but you could still use the money for yourself. Everything that's left is going to go to God, but I can still look after myself with my money and resources now.

So what would happen? Your parents would ring up, obviously this would happen much more in their society, the parents ring up, they wouldn't ring up in their society, but you know what I mean, the parents ring up saying that they aren't doing too well, or they find themselves in financial difficulty, they need support, you've made a vow to give everything you have that's not on yourself to God, so you look at your healthy savings account that you can use for yourself and say, sorry, I've made a promise, I've made a promise that everything that I don't use on myself is going to God, I can't help you out, I can go on an Alaskan cruise next summer, but I can't help you out.

[ 13 : 30 ] Jesus unsurprisingly comes down heavy, and the force of his words I think are primarily at the start of verse 5 and the start of verse 6.

God says, look after your father and mother, you say, unless you've made a different vow then you don't have to.

God says one thing, you say another. And what they're saying might look good at surface level, mightn't it?

You know what, wow, look at all the money they're giving to their church and their will, people. But it is not what God has commanded. And so Jesus condemns them.

It is strong language. You hypocrites. This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

[ 14 : 32 ] in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. These guys, they are supposed to be the leaders of God's people.

They are supposed to be their teachers, and yet they are leading them astray, the blind leading the blind, and teaching them false doctrine. That is why Jesus speaks so bluntly and directly to them. That is the primary audience that Jesus is addressing. But Matthew records these words for us, for disciples of Jesus.

And I think he does so as a warning to watch out for false teaching. We're going to get a little more of that in a few weeks. But also to guard against our own hearts, elevating our own traditions.

Jesus isn't demonizing traditions in and of themselves. Everyone has lots of traditions. We have lots of traditions here as a church family at Bon Accord.

[ 15 : 44 ] We meet at 11 o'clock in the morning and 6 o'clock in the evening on a Sunday. That's a tradition, right? We sing Psalms, we have prayer meetings, our services last for about an hour.

They are traditions. And that is good, right? Every culture at every point in history will develop their own traditions. That's okay. What Jesus is saying is watch out.

Beware of the place that your traditions take in your life. And guard yourself against ever allowing them to supplant or usurp God's word in any way at any time.

It's exactly the catechism question we were thinking about this morning. The word of God is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

Traditions can help us observe what God has commanded, but there is only one rule. only one voice of authority.

[ 17 : 02 ] And it is God's. If we start measuring ourselves or others by their adherence to traditions that are not commanded, then we are, I think, we're one step down the slippery slope to where the

Pharisees are.

We're not where they are, I trust, in elevating and teaching their tradition against the word of God. But we need to make sure we're not stepping in that direction because we do, don't we?

We love to make up our own rules. Primarily because when we make up our own rules, we make the really important rules the ones that we find easiest to keep.

You're a morning person with lots of time and energy. Shouldn't everyone be reading their Bible for half an hour every morning? You never work shifts in the hospital. Everyone should always be at both services on a Sunday.

You have a nine-to-five job. Shouldn't everyone be at the prayer meeting? I choose those examples because every one of them is a really, really good thing to do.

[18:20] rule. But if you make any one of them a rule that you live by and judge others by, it's a step down a slippery slope.

They are traditions and they are good traditions, but there is only one rule, and that is God's word. when we let our traditions become the defining factor, the most important standard, we are beginning to set ourselves up as king, determining what is right and wrong, and so unavoidably starting to turn away from the true king.

So Jesus' first response teaches us to live by the word of God, not by the traditions of men.

Traditions will always have their place, but let us make sure that place is never above God's words.

Jesus' second answer in verses 10 to 20 kind of follows on from part two of the Pharisees' initial objection back in verse two. They say, they do not wash their hands when they eat.

The disciples of Jesus did not wash their hands before they ate. Now, as I mentioned here, the Pharisees' concern here was not ultimately about physical cleanliness, it's no bad thing, but with spiritual cleanliness.

[19:56] But they did think that spiritual cleanliness came through physical actions. things. And so they had an extremely rigorous and burdensome series of washings to go through prior to every meal.

They were originally only meant for the priests in the temple, but the Pharisees kind of looked at them and thought, why not everyone? And they held to them rigorously so they would not defile themselves in any way.

But they wanted to stay pure. And so clean hands, eating clean food from a clean table was to them a key part of that.

It's interesting, I think, it wasn't maybe just the Pharisees, but everyone had this idea, because Jesus addressed the Pharisees' specific problem in verses 3 to 9, but now in verse 10 you'll see he gathers the crowds, doesn't he?

This is a message for everyone to equally take heart to. What does he say in verse 11? It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth.

[21:17] This defiles a person. Their understanding of spiritual cleanliness was basically you are what you eat.

Whatever goes in, that's what defines who you are, that's what makes you you. Now they had whole rituals that would baffle us today, but at its heart, I don't think the attitude is that different to what many people and maybe many of us intuitively think today.

Remember where we began this sermon. How do we so often try and change who we are? We so often think, don't we, just like the crowds Jesus was speaking to do?

We think outside in. We think if I do all these different things this year, then I'll be a different person. We think if I want to change who I am, we start with habits and routines, with schedules and alarm clocks, with books to read, with motivational music to listen to, with languages to learn, with marathons to run, and maybe we think, how can I change, if we think, how can I change who I am spiritually, we start importing all that thinking.

[22:50] We begin with thinking, what can we change outside in the hope that it will make me clean inside? I'll show up to everything on the church calendar, I'll start a new Bible reading program, I'll pray every day, then maybe, then maybe I'll be clean enough to come to God.

But Jesus shows us that if that is what we are doing, we are just papering over the cracks. Verse 17 and 18, do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth, proceeds from the heart and this defiles a person?

It's kind of slightly graphic, isn't it? But it's very straightforward. You put something in, it's coming out again. Jesus says, stop thinking about outside in, start thinking about inside out. What is coming up from inside? What is coming up from your heart and out through your mouth? [ 24 : 17 ] What is coming up from your heart and out through your mouth? I ask the question, but you don't need to give an answer because Jesus gives us the answer. And it is not flattering.

Jesus says, your heart and my heart is full of wickedness, for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. that, Jesus says, is our heart. Now, we might be quick, mightn't we to try and justify ourselves from that list?

I've not robbed a bank, I've not slept with anyone, I've not murdered anyone. Remember what Jesus said ten chapters ago in the Sermon of the Mount.

Amen. Have you told a lie this week? Have you had a lustful thought?

[ 25 : 33 ] Have you thought ill of someone? Have you considered doing something you shouldn't have done? Jesus says that.

Evil thoughts defiles you. Have you spoken about someone in a way you shouldn't have? Have you gossiped about someone over a cup of coffee at work?

Are you clean? I'm not clean. Jesus' diagnosis is severe, isn't it?

God's God's God's God's God's God's God's teaching and tradition. And tells Peter basically to stay away.

They are the blind leading the blind. Stay away from them and leave them to it. And I think when we read these verses we see part of why we need that warning. Because the Pharisee's diagnosis and the Pharisee's treatment is actually much easier to bear.

[ 26 : 48 ] And much simpler to submit to than Jesus' diagnosis. Pharisees say, don't they, you've got dirty hands.

Go and wash them. And you put them under a tap, you put them in a bowl of water, you dry them with a towel and problem solved. Jesus says, your heart inside you is defiled.

The Pharisees are handing a pack of paracetamol to people who need a heart transplant. Our true condition outside of Christ is so much worse than we like to imagine.

The condition could not be worse. And you can't clean it, can you? You can't go home tonight and run the bathtubs and think I'm going to clean my heart.

That is Jesus' word to all of us. Your heart is what defiles you. Your words prove it. And you cannot fix it by washing your hands before dinner or by just showing up to everything in the church calendar.

[ 28 : 13 ] But praise God that there is a cure. Because as we heard at the very beginning of this service, Jesus says, doesn't he?

Come to me. Diagnosis requires us to come to Jesus and say, everything I have, and everything I have, all of it, outside of you, it's unclean.

And I need you to deal with it all. And he will deal with it all. Let me just close with a story you might have heard before.

It's from The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, the third book in C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia series. And it follows Edmund and Lucy, the two youngest kids, are back in Narnia, but this time they're there with their cousin Eustace.

Eustace is about as unpleasant a character as he could be. selfish, he's greedy, he's critical, he's cynical, he's cowardly, he's petty.

[ 29 : 36 ] Think of a negative attitude and you could use it of Eustace. The Dawn Treader was a ship and it needed repairing, but Eustace being Eustace had no desire to get involved and do any hard work, so he headed off on his own and stumbled on a cave full of gold.

Selfish Eustace was overjoyed and he settles down on his newfound wealth and begins to dream of how he can use his treasure for himself back home and drifts off into sleep.

But when he wakes up, Eustace is no longer a young boy. Eustace is a dragon. The gold was in fact a dragon's hoard and as we told later on, sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.

It is, of course, the stuff of fancy, but what Lewis is describing is the physical manifestation of Eustace's inner heart. he had an unclean heart.

But later in the book, Aslan, the great lion, he takes Eustace, the dragon, with him and commands him to undress. He says, Eustace, to take off your dragon scales.

[ 31 : 10 ] And so Eustace tries to remove the scales himself. He does things, right? He does everything he can to change who he is. But every time he peels off a layer, what happens?

There's just another layer of dragon skin beneath. He tries with all of his might to rip off his skin. But there's just more dragon skin.

He cannot do it. Why? Because we are not changed from the outside in. We are changed from the inside out.

Eustace's problem wasn't his dragon skin. It was his dragon-like heart. And so only when Aslan intervenes does Eustace truly change.

Eustace later describes it as an intensely painful experience. As Aslan cut deeper into him than he could ever go himself.

[ 32 : 20 ] Even to the very heart. But once it was done, he finally felt clean.

Only from that moment does Eustace truly become a different person. Not when he resolved to change himself by his own strength, but when he allowed Aslan to cut through his whole being and change his heart.

Brothers and sisters, look at our words, look at our thoughts. Our hearts would be so unclean, wouldn't they? God would be so good.

And no amount of hand washing, no amount of outer cleanliness, no amount of work we do could ever fix a problem so deep. But if your faith and trust are in Jesus this evening, Jesus has, given you a new, clean heart.

we were condemned and unclean. But in Christ, our sin-stained hearts are washed clean as snow.

[ 33 : 53 ] He has given you a new heart. It is clean, not because of what you have done or not done this week, but because of what he has done for us on the cross at Calvary.

That is the gospel we need to come back to, isn't it, time and time and time again. We can never and never have made our hearts clean by our external actions, but only ever by coming to the feet of King Jesus and confessing our need of his cleansing, sometimes painful, but always healing touch.

What makes you you is what Jesus has done for you. If that is not you, let me just say very briefly, don't try and clean yourself thinking you can then come to Jesus.

There is no amount of scraping off dragon scales that you can do that will get to your heart. But come to Jesus as you are, unclean as you might be with all your impurities and he will make you clean from the inside out.

Come to Jesus and he will give you a new heart, a clean heart. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you and praise you.

[ 35 : 37 ] That we who were unclean and defiled have been made new again, not because of anything that we have done or could do, but because of what you have done for us.

And so we praise you, Lord Jesus. We love you, Lord Jesus. For you have done for us what we could never do ourselves.

You have cleansed our hearts and made us new. may we worship you in all that we do, living for you with the new life you have given us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.