

Judging Jesus instead of Repenting

Mark 7:1-23

Halifax: 3 November 2019

Introduction

Today in our sermon series on the gospel of Mark, we come to a unique part of Mark.

- We have seen that Mark's main focus is not on the teaching of Jesus.
 - He does not spend time giving us the words of Jesus, but rather His actions.
- But in Mark 7:1-23, our text for today, we have an extended discourse of our Lord given to us where He teaches about what makes people defiled (unacceptable) before God.
 - As we shall see, the Jewish church in Jesus' day was in great error about this.
 - And it was not just the Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus who were in error.
 - His very own disciples were also weak in their understanding.
 - This was a major problem that kept people from doing what they needed to do when Jesus was here.
 - Do you remember what they needed to do?
 - Both John the Baptist and Jesus told them that they needed to repent and believe the gospel.
 - They needed to repent of their sin and believe the good news that with Jesus God was bringing His promised salvation to them.
 - That, of course, is the same thing that people need to do today.
 - But if we are confused about what makes us defiled, it makes it hard for us to repent and receive the gospel.
 - And I would submit to you, and hope to show you today, that people today continue to be confused about what it is that makes us unacceptable to God.

This confusion is so deep that instead of welcoming Jesus and embracing Him as the only one who can deliver us from our defilement,

- we judge Him the way the Jewish leaders did when He was here.
 - Truly, this is the height of confusion when a people sit in judgment against God's Son who came to deliver from their unacceptable condition before God.
 - They end up judging Him instead of repenting.

Listen as I read today's text to you: Mark 7:1-23; and I think you will see what I mean.

- This is the Word of God.

Mark 7:1-23: Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. ² Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. ³ For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. ⁴ *When they come* from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And

there are many other things which they have received and hold, *like* the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. ⁵ Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" ⁶ He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with *their*

lips, but their heart is far from Me. ⁷ And in vain they worship Me, teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.’ ⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” ⁹ He said to them, “*All too well* you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me *is* Corban” —(that is, a gift to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³ making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.” ¹⁴ When He had called all the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them,

“Hear Me, everyone, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. ¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!” ¹⁷ When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. 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, ¹⁹ because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?” ²⁰ And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His holy word and give us understanding of matters that we so desperately need to understand.

I. See how the leaders of Israel judged Jesus, saying He was defiled.

- A. They found fault with Him instead of welcoming Him as their long-expected Saviour.
 1. It is obvious that they were looking hard to find fault with Him.
 - Mark 7:1-2 says: **Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.** ² Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.
 - Notice that they came all the way from Jerusalem—about 150 kilometers away—apparently to interrogate Jesus...
 - And all they can come up with is that they saw some of His disciples eating without ceremonially washing their hands.
 - It wasn’t even a formal meal—Jesus and His disciples hardly even had time to eat, and some of them grabbed some food and lo and behold, they did not wash!
 2. Mark explains to his Gentile readers that this was a ceremonial washing.
 - In verses 3-4, he says 3-4: **For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.** ⁴ *When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.*
 - Twice, he uses the word for baptism (translated wash and washing) which refers not to immersion as some insist, but to religious ceremonial washing which was performed in different ways.

- This was not even something that was required in the Law of Moses.
 - Only the priests were required to baptise their hands when they were dealing with holy things... but these Pharisees were so zealous for purity that they would perform these ceremonial washing before each meal.
3. Here is the Saviour of the world, full of grace, full of wisdom, full of righteousness... performing many signs and wonders...
- And all these leaders of the people of Israel—the one nation called to bring forth the Saviour of the world—could see was that His disciples did not wash their hands according to rituals that God had not even commanded.
 - It is like listening to a sermon where Jesus is set forth and all you notice is that the preacher used bad grammar or failed to do some ritual.
 - Or like one singing praise about our God and His grace and all you come away with was how somebody was singing off key.
 - Something beautiful and glorious was here, but they found fault.
 - And sure, fault could be found with His disciples—but here they find fault with something that was not even a fault at all.
 - See how they confront the Son of Righteousness who has arisen upon them:
 - Verse 5 says: **Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?”**

B. Jesus responds by exposing their corruption.

1. First, that they are hypocrites who pretend to be near to God but in fact are far from Him.
 - In verse 6, He quotes from Isaiah who speaks to such hypocrites: **He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.’ ”**
 - They have all the forms—their prayers and their religious service—but they do not know the true God or walk with Him—their heart is far from Him.
- Then Jesus explains how it is possible that they can be so religious and yet so far from God. He really emphasises this...
2. He tells them three times that they have replaced God’s standard with their own standard, His commandments with their commandments.
 - This is serious because those who do this are no longer responding to God—instead they are living up to their own ideals that they have concocted.
 - Look at how He repeats it three times...
 - a. In verse 7, He refers to what they follow as *the commandments of men*.
 - This makes their worship a vain and empty thing: **in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**
 - They are not dealing with God, but with the commandments of men.
 - b. In verse 8, He refers to what they follow as *the tradition of men*.
 - To do that, they have laid aside the commandments of God.
 - **For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.**

- As has been demonstrated throughout the Old Testament and in the history of the church of the New Testament,
 - When you follow the traditions of men, you soon replace the commandments of God...
 - To whatever extent you bring in the human innovations, you lay aside what God has appointed.
 - God's command is that prayer should be to Him only, but when human tradition invades, prayers are made to the saints.
 - God has commanded us to remember the Sabbath Day, but when you add holy days of man like Christmas or Lent, the Lord's Day is given second place.
 - c. In verse 9, He calls what they follow *your tradition*.
 - To follow it, you end up rejecting the commandments of God.
 - He says: **“All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.”**
 - Something has to go, and sadly it is God's commandments that are neglected.
 - Think, for example, of the church of England when they tried to force their liturgy on the Scottish Covenanters.
 - They insisted that their prayer book be followed, but they overlooked fornication, blasphemy, covetousness, and theft.
 - They insisted that everyone confess that the king of England was the head of the church, but God calls us to confess that Christ alone is the head of the church.
3. Jesus illustrates the problem with the way these Pharisees had ignored the fifth commandment to follow their tradition about dedicated gifts.
- He explains this in verses 10-13:
 - **“For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban” —(that is, a gift to God),¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,¹³ making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”**
 - When you declared that your property was corban (a gift to God), you were no longer even allowed to use it for other purposes like helping your parents.
 - You could invest it and live off the proceeds, but it was dedicated to God so that when you died, it went to Him.
 - This was somewhat like monastic vows—a man would decide to be a monk, and then he was no longer expected to provide for his parents...
 - and if he was married, he was no longer expected to provide for his wife and children, all because his life was supposedly dedicated to God!
 - Yet, the word of God says that a man is worse than an unbeliever if he refuses to support his own family.

II. People today reject Jesus in the same way, also accusing Him and those who follow Him of being defiled (or unacceptable) before God.

A. It is an ongoing problem in the church.

1. I have already shown you a number of examples...
 - Of the church of England accusing Covenanters for refusing to follow their prayer book and saying they deserved to die for refusing to confess that the king of England was the head of the church...
 - Of the Roman and Orthodox churches instituting prayers to Mary and to the saints and finding fault with those who insist that prayer should be made to God only.
 - Of monastic vows in which the command to provide for your family is made void to follow human traditions.
2. We could also look at traditions that have arisen in the church today that set aside God's commandments...
 - a. Take egalitarianism for example—
 - It has arisen in the United churches, the liberal Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Christian Reformed, and Lutheran Churches.
 - It began by setting aside the call of God to husbands to lead their families, and to wives to submit to their husbands, setting aside God's order in the family.
 - Then, it set aside the commandment of God that prohibit women from serving as elders and ministers, or teaching in the church.
 - Then it began to reject those ministers who refused to participate in the ordination of such persons... it called them evil for opposing the commandments of men and upholding the commandments of God
 - This is to judge Christ whose ways they were following and to say that He is evil.
 - b. As another example, take the man-made view of these same churches that love is accepting others unconditionally and approving of their conduct.
 - First, the command of God to remove the wicked from the church if they will not repent was set aside... it was said to be unloving.
 - Then, church membership was opened to those living in sexual immorality—even fornication or sodomy.
 - And now it has gotten to the point where such persons are accepted as elders and ministers of the word and sacrament... those who not only live immoral lives, but also approve of those who do.
 - And with that, those who would speak against such conduct in accordance with God's word are charged with wickedness and are put out of the church!
 - This is again to sit in judgment against Christ and to say that He, the gracious Son of God, is wicked and defiled and unacceptable.
 - c. These persons show their hatred of Christ.
 - Even though they profess His name, like the Jews professed to look for the Son of David,

- They zealously embrace what is contrary to Him so that their heart is far from Him, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.
- B. This embracing of man-made causes is also a way that many outside the church distance themselves from Christ.
1. They know that they are guilty, so they embrace a cause with ridiculous zeal.
 - Their zeal is over the top because this is how they justify their rejection of Christ.
 - They know that they are guilty, but they pretend to be righteous because they are so dedicated to their cause.
 2. It may be the cause of social justice, environmentalism, Islam, evolution, women's rights, you name it...
 - But these causes are embraced in a way that says, "I am righteous because I support this, and whoever does not unite in this cause is not righteous."
 - They look at Christ and His followers and they judge them for not following their cause.
 - They avoid the reality that He is the Son of God who made the world and who will judge the whole world and they judge Him as defiled...
 - Just like the Pharisees did—because He does not follow their system.

TRANS> It is very wicked and dreadfully sad to see persons rejecting Christ for the sake of the doctrines and commandments of men.

- But the truth is, their rejection of Christ is the reason they embrace these.
 - It allows them to appear righteous and good, and yet be far from God.
 - They know better. That is why they get so angry when they are challenged—the word of God cuts deeply, at least until they get so scarred that they can longer feel the pain.
- Such were the Pharisees of Jesus' day, such are the Pharisees in the church today, and such are the Pharisees in the world.

III. Jesus graciously shows His elect where defilement is really to be found.

A. Even His disciples were fuzzy about this.

1. Jesus, knowing how much the doctrine of the Pharisees by which He was being judged had affected the people, reaches out to the crowd.
 - In verses 14-16, He earnestly pleads with them to consider the simple truth that a person is not morally defiled by what they touch or eat.
 - Certainly, in God's ceremonial law, they were ceremonially defiled, but the great error that had infected the Jews saw people as *morally* defiled by touching or eating what was *ceremonially* unclean.
 - Verses 14-16 say: **When He had called all the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. ¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"**
 - This is so obvious... so basic... that it should have been easily understood by everyone... I mean, we should all know what real sin is!
2. But you see how even Jesus' disciples did not understand.
 - Verse 17 explains that as soon as they are in the house with Him, they ask Him to explain the parable. The parable!

- To them, this straightforward teaching—that it is not what goes into you but what comes out that defiles you—is a *parable* that needs to be interpreted!
3. Jesus expresses His disapproval with their confusion.
 - In verse 18-19, He says: **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, ¹⁹ because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus purifying all foods?*”**
 - How basic can you get? Food does not corrupt your heart, it goes into the stomach.
 - The *heart*, in the Bible, does not refer merely to the affections, but to the whole inner person where thoughts and decisions are made.
 - It is the core of you—your attitudes, your plans, your desires, your purposes, your aims, your responses—the mind, will, and affections all.
 - And that part of you, Jesus says, is not affected by food.
 - Jesus expresses surprise that His disciples did not immediately understand this—but your see, they had been caught up in the mindset of their nation.
 - Even though they had been with Jesus, they still needed to renew their minds by the word of God.
 - So do we!
- B. We who have come to Jesus are also often fuzzy about the source of defilement.
- I am not talking about those who are unbelievers in the church—I am talking about those of us who have truly come to Jesus in a saving way...
 - We, like the apostles of Jesus, too readily embrace the world’s notions about defilement.
 - For them, it was that defilement came primarily from contact with people who were ceremonially unclean.
 - We often suppose that defilement comes from outside of us too.
1. How common it is for us to suppose that we are defiled because of what others have done to us in the past.
 - We feel that we have been ruined because we were molested, or because we were abused or yelled at or neglected or unloved.
 - Maybe you are defiled for life because of a bad church experience where you were abused and mistreated.
 - Certainly, these things were wrong and certainly they were difficult, just as they were for Jesus who received far worse than we ever will.
 - But these things did not make you into a sinner.
 2. Or maybe we believe that we are defiled because of our physical problems.
 - We blame our worry on a chemical imbalance in our brain...
 - After all, those who are riddled with worry have certain parts of their brains that are very active.
 - We blame our lust on a genetic issue...
 - We blame our drunkenness on some sort of predisposition in us...
 3. Or perhaps our defilement and sin was caused by our environment...
 - Parents are often sure that their little darlings were full of goodness until the bad kids moved in down the street.

- Perhaps you think that is the case with you.
 - Or maybe you are the way you are because you have had such a hard life—harder than others—and it has made you bitter and cold-hearted.
 - You have battled with sickness and financial hardships... perhaps failure or some sort of disability.
4. Others, who are more spiritually minded, suppose that defilement comes from Satan.
- While it is true that Satan is the tempter and true that he and his agents go about seeking whom they may devour,
 - we must also remember that Satan cannot make us sin.
 - I have had people tell me otherwise—that Satan just puts thoughts of murder and adultery in them. He can tempt you, but the desire for these things is not from him, but from you.
 - Defilement does not come from him.

TRANS> You can live your whole life under the delusion that sin comes from outside of you, but if you do you are in opposition to Christ and are one who blames Him.

- You are at odds with Him because He tells us that it comes from within.
- See how He develops that more fully.

C. Jesus shows us that the source of defilement is our own heart.

1. In verse 20-23, He says: **“What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”**
 - Make no mistake about it.
 - You are the problem, right to the core of your own person... from your heart.
2. What vile things are found lodging in our own hearts!
 - Look at the list for moment...
 - Mark has included twelve things... Jesus may have mentioned even more.
 - The first six are all plural and speak of sinful behaviour...
 - The second six are all singular and speak of sinful attitudes that are equally offensive to God even if they are not seen by others (though they certainly have many ways of showing themselves!)
 - Look at the list...
 - **evil thoughts**—they do not just pop in without control, they are generated from your sinful heart.
 - **adulteries, fornications** (refers to all kinds of sexual sin),
 - As a believer, you do not like it when these sins arise within you... you may become stirred up by a seducer, but the seducer is not the source of the sin—it is your heart that is enticed.
 - **murders**
 - You may be provoked to anger, you may be bitter toward those who have done you much harm—that is murder within you—but though you are provoked, the sinful response is all your own.

- **thefts, covetousness,**
 - you may have thoughts that you have been deprived of things that ought to be yours—but the desire to steal or have what God has given to others is your sin alone.
- **wickedness—**
 - This involves those malicious thoughts and devisings against others—deliberate malice—things for which we ought to be deeply ashamed before God.
- Then there are the last six...
 - **deceit**—when you believe lies—such as that sin is from outside of you instead of from within you...
 - or the way you always think you are right when a quarrel breaks out with others—
 - or when you distort what God has said in the name of righteousness—believing lies is a product of your wicked heart.
 - **lewdness**—those vile, shameful fantasies you have—
 - perhaps a desire to expose yourself or some such.
 - **an evil eye** is stinginess...
 - where you see others as unworthy of your assistance...
 - and where you are jealous and offended at their prosperity.
 - **blasphemy** speaks of cursing—of God—of parents—of peers—of those who have wronged you...
 - as if you were in the place of God to call down curses on others... that is a product not of their wrong, but of your wicked heart—even if they have done wrong.
 - **pride**—wanting people to think well of you—seeing yourself as the centre of all...
 - so that you live for you instead of for God and others...
 - You want to be admired, acknowledged, highly esteemed...
 - And finally, **foolishness**—what William Lane calls “the dominant disposition of the man who is morally and spiritually insensitive: he does not know God and does not wish to know God.”
 - It is the opposite of the fear of God—it is that in your sinful heart that pushes God away and ignores Him... that is from you.

TRANS> What vile creatures we are!

- No wonder we want to find another source of our defilement.
 - Yet, Jesus has relentlessly pressed this truth upon His disciples because He loves them and wants them to face the truth...
 - And the Holy Spirit has used Mark to record this for us so that we might face the truth about ourselves.
- It is because the LORD loves us that He presses this upon us.
 - Evasion, avoidance, and denial will do us no good.

IV. What freedom comes when you finally face the defilement that is in you!

- When you finally stop denying and shifting and avoiding and blaming and just accept the truth that all your sin has its source from your own heart.
- A. Then you can repent.
 1. You can repent, as John and Jesus and Paul and all the twelve preached.
 2. You can turn with disgust from the sin that is in you—you can really face how vile and rotten it all is.
- B. Then you can embrace our precious Saviour.
 1. You can put yourself into His hands for cleansing...of both you and your children.
 - You can come to Him who shed His blood for forgiveness and as the One who gives you life in His Spirit who transforms you.
 2. You can stop accusing Him and you can start admiring Him and delighting in His beauty and perfection, His love and wisdom, His holiness and justice, His matchless grace.
- C. Then you will indeed be pardoned and cleansed from your defilement.
 1. Don't be afraid to dig up all the mud because He will pardon it all and He will give you His Spirit to cause you to grow.
 2. It is painful and humbling to see what you are, but it is also very heartening when you know that He will cleanse you.
- D. What tremendous peace there is when you finally let go.
 - When you stop holding on to your foolish pride and your excuses and your half-way confessions that you have been clinging to for so long.
 - Now you can walk with the Lord who ever lives to make intercession for you.
 - You can be honest before Him... You can know him like never before.
 - He is yours and you are His forever—
 - You are the source of your defilement, but He is the source of your salvation.

Conclusion: It was confusion about the source of defilement that kept people from repenting and embracing Jesus when He was here.

- It is confession about this that keeps people from Him today.
- Yet still, He calls you to come to Him with your sinful heart that He might cleanse you.