

READ Mark 6:53-56

Last we saw Jesus in Mark's Gospel account, He was showing Himself to be the One who was able to bring true satisfaction to mankind. He fed the led the lost, fed the hungry, delivered the endangered, and healed the broken. Every need that came before Him He was able to satisfy to the greatest degree. He showed His power to do so as a way to show the world that He truly was the prophesied Servant Messiah. He was the One who came to restoration to the parched nation of Israel. He was ready to establish a new and greater covenant with mankind. He was coming to show God's faithfulness to His promises.

And yet, it is important for us to recognize why it was that He needed to come to give restoration and a new and better covenant. It was necessary because of the failures of the people and particularly their leadership. Remember that our last study in **Mark 6** revealed that Jesus was struck with great compassion for the people because *"they were like sheep without a shepherd."* Those who were charged with leading God's people in a close relationship with Him through the Covenant of Moses had failed in this awesome duty. They had been selfish and unjust towards the people which was one of the very reasons the nation of Israel had been decimated by God's judgment and in need of restoration.

Unfortunately, things had not changed much by Jesus's day for we have already seen Him have negative interactions with the religious leaders in the from of the Pharisees back in **Mark 3**. **Mark 3:6** even tells us that they had been making plans with the Herodians as to how they could kill Jesus. Since then Jesus has been traveling all over the region proclaiming His special nature through His wise teachings and miraculous powers, and it shouldn't surprise us that the Pharisees and the scribes are now back on the scene and surely looking for a reason to condemn Jesus or at least disparage His name.

Yet, these are the very efforts that Jesus is going to use to show that their sort of religion is nothing like what He was coming to draw to Himself. Through their accusations, inconsistencies, and His own teaching Jesus is going to show that He came to this world desiring to find pure devotion towards God and His ways. That is certainly not what is going to be found within these failed religious leaders. In our text for this morning, Jesus is going to highlight their current failures, and then He will explain exactly why it is that they were failing to live faithfully before God with pure and devoted hearts.

Mark 7:1-23

A. The Pharisees were hypocritical in their devotion to God. (Mark 7:1-6)

1. Earlier in Mark's Gospel, the Pharisees and scribes had attacked Jesus on multiple grounds. They were greatly displeased with Him forgiving the paralyzed man of His sins when He had healed him. **(2:1-12)** Later they questioned why He would dare eat with tax collectors and sinners. **(2:16)** He was then attacked for His disciples plucking and eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. **(2:23-28)** He again is accused of sin for healing on the Sabbath. **(3:1-6)** Finally, He is accused of being in league with Beelzebul as He performed His incredible deeds. **(3:22-30)**
2. The hatred against Jesus by these religious leaders was real, and now they are reintroduced into the narrative here in **chapter 7**, and the attacks just keep on coming. This time they are getting onto Jesus because His disciples were not washing their hands in order to become ceremoniously clean before eating bread. This was not a matter of hygiene, but purely one of a ceremonial nature. One of the evidences for Mark's probable Gentile audience is the following explanation that he gives concerning this Jewish practices. He explains this is a tradition of the elders, and they did these washings when they came from the marketplace. They also had the tradition of even washing what they ate from and on.
3. To add a little more on for our own understanding, we need to know that the Jewish people not only sought to follow the codified Law that had been written down and given to them by God, but they also had many oral traditions that they added on top of the Law. Weirsbe describes these Jewish customs and traditions as the "fence of the Law." The traditions added regulations, details, commentary, implications, and applications onto the God-given

laws so that, in the leaders' eyes, there was no way the actual laws could be broken. In the minds of the Jewish leaders, few things could be worse than being made ceremoniously unclean and that could happen by touching something that was unclean. Even just touching something that had been touched by a Gentile or even worse a Samaritan could cause great harm in their minds, so they instituted these traditions to keep that from happening.

4. However, it seems very clear that Jesus, and therefore God, didn't have any issues with what these religious leaders feared. In fact, when asked what He had to say in response to the actions, or lack thereof, of His disciples, Jesus turns the tables on the men by bringing down Isaiah's ancient condemnation of Israel past upon them! He says that they were the hypocrites that Isaiah rightly prophesied against back in **Isaiah 29:13**. We can only conclude that Jesus was less than impressed by their professed showing of piety through this washing of hands. In quoting Isaiah, He accuses them of being a people who might say the right things and even do things in the name of the Lord, and yet their hearts were far from Him. They were hypocrites because they were only acting or pretending to be pious outwardly while their hearts were not truly invested into honoring or pleasing God.

B. The hearts of the Pharisees were truly set on their own traditions. (Mark 7:7-13)

1. Their hearts were not invested in honoring or pleasing God because they were much more concerned with their own man-made teachings and traditions. Not only were they elevating them to the level of God's commands, but they even elevated them above God's commands. Wiersbe records a quote from one particular Rabbi named Eleazer, *"He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come."* The Mishnah, a collection of now written oral traditions of the Jewish leadership as found in the Talmud, also states, *"It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself."* Some would even go so far as to try to say that these traditions found their roots in Moses and therefore they were authoritative, but there is no evidence for this actually being true.
2. It is this type of attitude from the religious leadership that caused for Jesus to turn their accusations around on them with such intensity. On past occasions, Jesus has offered up a simple defense, but He now turns around and goes on the offensive with His quote from Isaiah and referring to these men as hypocrites. It is clear from these quotes and the language of Jesus that these men cared much more for their own traditions and making sure that they were adhered to as opposed to simply holding to God's commands as necessary.
3. Jesus even goes so far as to actually bring up an example of what this looked like in real life at that time. He reminds those listening of the Divinely-given command of honoring your father and mother. Part of this command would be to care for them financially when the need arose. It was a showing of appreciation and respect for having raised you when you were younger. However, the Jewish leadership had allowed for people to put aside money "for God" and referred to it as corban. This was money that could be put away and earmarked for spiritual purposes and therefore could not be used for personal means such as taking care of one's parents. This was a way for those doing such to have the excuse that the money they could've given to their parents was already accounted for, and it actually remained in their own possession but only earmarked for "spiritual reasons."
4. In doing such a thing, this tradition that had been established by the Jewish leadership was directly negating a command that had been given by God for children to honor their parents. It wasn't just that they saw their traditions as being on par with God's that they had to be obeyed or one would risk being guilty of actual sin, but they even negated God's commands in order to hold up their own. This is clearly seen in this text as Jesus states that their doing such a thing caused them to abandon (**v.8**), invalidate (**v.9**), and nullify (**v.13**) God's commands and Word.

C. The problem of the Pharisees stemmed from their evil hearts. (Mark 7:14-23)

1. You might be wondering how it is that religious leaders could get to this point that they would be so hard-hearted against someone who was clearly incredible and special in regards to His teaching, wisdom, and power. I believe that Jesus actually answers that question as He then calls the crowd to Himself and uses what has just happened as a teaching moment. He takes everything that has happened in regards to the hand-washing and zeroes in on the real issue. *"Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: Nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile a man, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."* What Jesus is saying flies in the face of the traditions that were being so tightly held onto. The Jewish leaders were all worried about being ceremonially defiled, but Jesus states what truly mattered was whether or not you were possessing a pure heart seeking to serve God. The Pharisees and scribes were all worried about the externals, but Jesus is saying that it is what is on the inside that actually matters.
2. We would hope that this would cause lightbulbs to turn on for everyone, but as we have seen in the past, the disciples simply did not understand what Jesus was trying to get across. They ask Jesus to further explain what He meant, and Jesus does so while still be a bit perturbed. He explains plainly that the worries of the Pharisees are non-consequential since food or the non-washing doesn't actually cause defilement. This would have been crazy for the disciples to hear since they grew up under the dietary restrictions of the Law which were legitimate. They were not to eat certain foods as a means of setting themselves apart as different from the surrounding nations while also serving as practically beneficial for various sanitary needs. The food itself wasn't going to defile someone by it simply being eaten, and then after being digested it would be eliminated. Mark even ties this in with the cleansing of all foods that comes in Christ during the time of the church as he gives another parenthetical statement, *"(thus He declared all foods clean.)"*
3. Therefore, the issue when it comes to defilement is what it is that comes out of us. That which comes out of us is to be understood as our hearts, that which makes up everything that I am. My thoughts, desires, purposes, etc. If those things that are in my heart are good then what will come out of me will be good, and the inverse is the same. If my heart is bad then my behavior will be bad. This was the issue with the Pharisees and scribes. Their hearts were bad, but they pretended to be pious and even set up the extra measures in order to seem more holy. Jesus wasn't falling for any of their shenanigans and neither had God up to this point, and they were being called to the carpet for their hypocrisy as Jesus uses them as an example of these truths.
4. But let's remember...what was the result of their false piety and the elevating of their own traditions? They had abandoned, invalidated, and nullified God's word. If they were not allowing for God's word to influence their hearts then it is no wonder they were like they were. It is no wonder people who also do not allow God's word to influence their hearts find themselves being involved in all sorts of evil things as Jesus lists in this text. Jesus had come as the great Servant of God to find pure devotion, but He wouldn't find it among the Pharisees & scribes.

Application Questions

A. Is my religious practice from a pure heart that longs to please God or do I practice just for show?

1. If we tie in some other texts such as **Matthew 23**, we learn that these religious leaders simply wanted to have the important positions among the Jewish people. They wanted the attention and honor as leaders, and they knew they could get it through this behavior of false piety and religious practice. However, what they failed to desire was approval that truly mattered and that was the approval of God based upon their faithfulness.

2. Will we find ourselves in the same position or will we be committed to giving God pure devotion because we simply love Him and desire to be in fellowship with Him? Living in the south, it can be easy to see faith and religious practice as simply something that is expected so we'll play along in that role. It can be easy for us to see professing Christianity as something that is expected from our families and we simply go with the flow. We know that failing to display a level of faith will only lead to problems, so we make sure to show up on Sundays and go through the motions in order to keep up appearances.
 3. However, it should be abundantly clear to us that simply going through the motions of religiosity and honoring God with our lips while our hearts are far from Him simply is not acceptable. In doing such a thing, we are no better than these Pharisees and scribes who tried to give off pious appearances while having hearts only focused on self. If we are going to give off the impression of faith and religious devotion then we would do well to make sure that we are doing such from a pure heart so that we don't find ourselves also being spoken of by Isaiah.
- B. Do I recognize devotion to God's Word as that which can purify and cleanse my sinful heart?**
1. One more time, let's recognize that the current state of the Pharisees and scribes had not happened by chance. They had not accidentally wandered into hypocrisy, empty religion, or prideful arrogance. They found themselves in these positions because they failed to be fully committed to God's will alone. They had focused entirely on their man-made commands and teachings, and doing so had not allowed for God's word and will to change their hearts. They were the very people to whom Jesus had come to give renewed hearts, but they continued to reject God by rejecting His Son.
 2. Do we find ourselves also possessing similar hearts of stone? If so, could it be that we are not allowing God's word and the Holy Spirit to change us and mold us into the likeness of His Son? Could it be that we are focused on all of the wrong things and not allowing what is only important to be that which is important. We can talk about our own traditions and claim that they are truly only expediciencies, but I sure have seen a lot of Christians show that simply isn't the case during this whole ordeal of COVID-19.
 3. I've seen far too many professed disciples hold white knuckled onto traditions of men that have been expedient for many years under ideal circumstances but that aren't the best at the moment. They not only demand they be done, but condemn others who have decided to go about things a different way. I applaud our shepherds for not being Pharisaical in regards to traditions and allowing us to even meet as we are this morning outside of this building and in a way that is more expedient at the moment than in past times.
 4. We must recognize that our man-made expedient traditions are not the substance of true faithfulness which leads to transformation! That can only come from God's Word! Only it can truly keep us and guard us from the evil things that are mentioned by Jesus in this text. If we want to truly be pleasing to God then our devotion must only be to Him, His Word, & His will, and only from a pure heart.

Main Point/Conclusion: *Faithful living before God can only stem from pure and devoted hearts.*

People so often want to throw around accusations of others being Pharisees, but we would do well to consider what Jesus actually condemns the Pharisees for. In this text, they are condemned for not possessing pure hearts that are devoted to God. Their hearts are full of evil, and they are focused on their own desires and importance. May God bless us and strengthen us to be better and be those who Jesus desired to find when He came to this earth as we pursue Him and His will. May we all be people who possess pure hearts that are fully devoted to God and bring glory and honor to His name alone.