

Mark 7: v. 1-23 – Title: The problem with man-made solutions to an evil heart.

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.”

Introduction

I come from a seaside town in England called Sidmouth. (Put up slide picture of Sidmouth)

Every year we have thousands of tourists who come and enjoy their holidays by swimming in the sea.

We have life guards patrolling the beach all of whom are professionally trained but are nevertheless mainly volunteers.

The story goes of somebody who got into difficulty swimming in the sea.

The life guard rowed out to rescue him on his rescue board. However, he went very slowly. People were shouting from the sea shore, go faster, go faster.

He ignored their cries and carried on going very slowly. He could hear the man waving his hands and shouting help help!!.

Finally, when the Life Guard arrived, the man didn't have much energy left in his body.

The Life Guard dived into the sea and easily rescued the man.

When he returned to the sea shore with the exhausted man, people were very critical of the Life Guard. They asked him why he went so slowly to rescue the man in the sea.

He replied **“Only when people have used up all their energy are they able to be rescued easily. When people have lots of energy they are more likely to push you under water, and there is a risk of two people being drowned. The easy rescues are when people come to the end of their energy levels.”**

This is very similar to many people who become Christians. When they come to the end of their own resources, they realise that it is only JESUS, who can rescue them.

Mark Chapter 6: v. 30 – 10 v. 45 reveals Jesus as the rescuer.

In these chapters we see “What Jesus has come to rescue us from.”

Unless we understand this, we will never understand why we need to be rescued by Jesus.

In Chapter 2 we discovered that Jesus had already said that He had come to forgive sinners.

However, He was misunderstood by those who thought sinners were only those people who failed to keep the Old Testament ceremonial law.

Jesus now shows us exactly what sin is. Jesus also describes sin’s nature and its extent.

At the same time Jesus demonstrates the futility of man -made religion.

In this context Jesus exposes Judaism.

However, this exposure could apply to any religion in the world, even in Japan.

In the passage that we read together, there are two main points.

1. The Futility of man – made religion. (v. 1-13)
2. The Hardness of the human heart. (v. 14-23)

1. The Futility of Man – Made Religion – v. 1-13.

First of all, we need to understand what is going on in the passage with the washing of hands and the tradition of the Elders.

In Lev. 11 – 15 and Numbers chapter 19 in the O/T scriptures, God instructed the Jewish nation concerning things that were unclean in God’s sight.

Certain animals were unclean, a woman after child birth was unclean, a leper was unclean, if you touched a dead body, you became unclean.

If you were unclean, anything you touched became unclean.

A Gentile was unclean and even food touched by a Gentile became unclean.

God had His purposes in all these regulations, mainly to keep His chosen people separate. However, there were also other reasons which we don’t have time to explore today.

The Jewish Laws were simple and clear cut.

However, in the 4th and 5th century before Jesus Christ ministered on this earth a group of legal experts called the Scribes came into being.

They were not content with God's moral principles, the 10 commandments, and His dietary laws. They wanted these principles broken down into thousands and thousands of little rules and regulations.

These rules were going to govern every situation in life.

Because of all these rules people were in bondage to them.

There was no liberty to apply principles.

These rules and regulations were not written down until after Jesus was raised from the dead.

They were called the "Oral Law", it was also known as the tradition of the Elders.

So what we have in this passage are man-made laws, made out to be God's Law.

In particular, we have the washing of the hands and a full wash down after going to the shops or out into a public place.

Before every meal and in between each course you had to wash your hands, not for cleanliness but to be clean spiritually speaking. The water for washing had to be kept in special jars.

You were required to wash your hands in a certain way.

Hands up in the air, water equivalent to 1.5 egg shells of water, run down to your wrist. Then each fist rubs each hand.

They repeated this but on the second time the hands had to point down.

In v. 4 the washing after the market place was a full body wash or a bath.

If a Rabbi was seen not obeying these laws he would be removed from his position.

There is a recorded story about a Rabbi who was put in prison by the Romans and when he was given his ration of water, he used it for hand washing rather than for drinking and nearly died of thirst.

The Rabbis, the teachers of God's Law really took it that seriously.

To the Scribe and Pharisee at that time, this was "the Jewish religion."

The moral side of the Jewish Religion was buried under the masses of rules.

Before we laugh off the ridiculous hand washing of these Jews as part of what they felt as very important to their religion, we need to remember that religions in Japan also have similar outward ceremonies.

Also if we are not careful, Christianity can also develop outward add-on ceremonies that are also damaging.

So when the scribes challenged Jesus about the disciples not obeying the tradition of the Elders, they viewed Jesus and the disciples as disobeying God's Law.

In v. 6-13 Jesus answers the Scribes and Pharisees, firstly by quoting Isaiah 29: v. 13 and then trying to explain where the Scribes and Pharisees had gone wrong.

Isaiah 29 v. 13. In N.K.J.

¹³ Therefore the Lord said:

“Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths
And honor Me with their lips,
But have removed their hearts far from Me,
And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,
Jesus clearly called them “Hypocrites” in v. 6.

The word comes from a Greek word which means “actor”.

An actor plays the part of somebody else and visually he seems real, but he is not, he is only acting the part.

They say that the best actors fully immerse themselves in the part. They become the person for a while.

They had rejected God’s commands and made up their own rules. They were in a sense acting out all the right things but it was not a heart attitude towards God.

We see this kind of acting out in the Muslim world. They must pray to God a certain number of times each day and they must fast during Ramadan from sunrise to sunset.

They act out many things.

There is a true story of a Muslim who was pursuing somebody with a knife to kill him, the call came out to prayer, he fell to his knees, prayed and then later ran after the man to kill him.

There is no greater mistake than to identify Christianity with outward observance.

The mistake is to identify certain religious acts with Holy goodness.

A person can read the Bible, pray, go to Church attend other meetings, even give financially and yet be no nearer to God in forgiveness of their sins and a personal relationship with God, through Jesus.

This passage today is an attack by Jesus on man-made religion, whatever it might be.

For your Christianity to be true and real, it must involve a **heart conversion.**

We must all understand that we are born into this world with an evil heart and **no outward ceremony can change your heart’s condition.**

It is only if you accept your evil heart and desire forgiveness and heart cleansing by Jesus, will your heart ever change.

Jesus now moves from calling them “hypocrites” to giving them an example that proves that they are “hypocrites”.

The example that Jesus gives, concerns the procedure of dedicating your possessions to God.

When this dedication was made it placed a ban on others benefitting the use of that thing.

So when you dedicated that thing, it couldn't be taken back, even if it was needed to support your elderly parents.

Let me give you an example:

A successful Jewish businessman buys a second home and dedicates that to God.

That is called "Corban".

However, his elderly parent's home catches fire, they have no insurance and have nowhere to live.

The person who dedicated that home couldn't use the home or sell it to provide for his parents.

In the 10 Commandments we are told to honour our parents and if required we must support them financially or in other practical ways as they get older.

So the Jewish people who thought that they were super spiritual by dedicating their property or money to God, actually turned out to be disobeying one of the 10 Commandments.

The fundamental point here is Jesus' rejection of the Scribal attempt to define religious purity.

This also prepares us for the incident with the Gentile woman.

The early Gentile believers would have seen in Jesus' words the basis for their right to ignore many of the Judaism laws, and at the same time still claim to be obedient to the will of God.

Two – fold application here.

1. When people are tempted to use distorted exegesis of the N/T in order to prove a pet theory or suspect doctrine, they are guilty of exactly the same sin as the Scribes and Pharisees in the passage.

Most of the time, it is the plain and simple reading of the Bible text in its historical setting that teaches us the truth of God's word.

Even with difficult passages, there are always other passages in the Bible that will explain the same truth.

2. The second application is very clear.

Q. What are we really trusting in today for our full salvation.

Is it outward observance to something religious, or is it a personal relationship to God through the work that Jesus did on the cross.

I have met many people who have trusted in their Baptism as their Salvation.

It is a very easy mistake to make.

You must only get Baptised if you have had a heart conversion first.

Believer's Baptism is an outward sign that God has already done a work in your heart.

Real Life Example

When I left my Bible College in Edinburgh in 1987, I was involved in evangelistic work with a mission called the "The Faith Mission". We had a campaign/ mission in a small mining village called "Bonnyrigg". I met a man and his wife. He was 70 years old and she was 65 years old. I had the joy of praying with them as they both admitted their sin to God and trusted in Jesus to save them from their sins.

David and Betty Scott had been going to Church most of their life. For them it was an outward Religion, but God had not done a work in their hearts. Sadly, the Church they attended did not preach a clear gospel.

David and Betty were trusting in their Baptism as babies and their good works to get to Heaven.

I thank God that today they are both in Heaven with Jesus, because they both trusted in Jesus and realized that their outward Religion could NOT save them.

Entry into the Kingdom of God is NEVER through an outward ritual.

Jesus said to a Religious man in John Chapter 3 v.3 " ...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"

2. v. 14-23 – Jesus talks about the hardness of the human heart

The Scribes accused the disciples of defilement but it was the hearts of the Scribes that were defiled.

We now come to the heart of the matter, which is the problem of the heart.

In v. 14-16 Jesus calls the whole crowd together to make a statement.

At the time this was a huge statement.

The Scribes taught that basically we are O.K. when we are born, it is the things that come into our life that make us unclean and bad. This is the basic mind set of most of the people who live in this world. It's not new.

The Scribes taught that for defilement to occur there must be some **outside defilement.**

Jesus cut across their thinking by telling them that the source of defilement was not external, but within, and that it already existed in the human heart.

There is a world of difference between these two theologies, or mind-sets.

The scribes on the one hand thought that sin was a result of things coming into our lives from the outside and Jesus said that the issue was the things that came out of our hearts from the inside.

These were moral issues in thought and in deed.

In v. 17 it tells us that Jesus took the disciples away from the crowd into a house and explained to the disciples who had not understood his parable.

In v. 18-19 Jesus clearly taught that we cannot be defiled spiritually through certain foods.

In the original Greek, it says that the food only ends up as excrement, down the toilet.

Mark actually says here that all foods are now ceremonially clean.

What Jesus does say in this passage is that the things that make us dirty in the sight of God are our **thoughts and the things that we do as a result of an evil heart**, those things defile us.

It happens a bit like this.

As a result of a thought which may come through a book, T.V. programme, suggestion of a person, or just a thought in our minds.

If we entertain that thought, it becomes an evil thought. We may not commit adultery, steal or murder, but given half the chance, if we could get away with it, we would do it.

When that happens to a Christian, he needs to say sorry to God.

(1 John Chapter 1: v. 9)

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We do not have to entertain bad thoughts. We can as Paul advises us in 2 Corinthians Chapter 10: v. 5 to take that thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

However, a Non - Christian may entertain the thought, but not actually commit the act.

Jesus says here that entertaining the thoughts is sin.

To the non- Christian who actually hasn't committed the act, to him it is never sinful.

In fact most non-Christians work out, what is wrong, and what is right for them.

This can often be based upon their culture and family background. It is also based upon what is socially acceptable in the current situation of any country.

What is right and wrong for the world changes according to culture, traditions and pressure from government or from people.

There are two important applications here for us today.

1. The application for people who are not yet Christians is this.

You need to realise that in God's eyes you are sinful and need the forgiveness of Jesus.

God is 100% Holy and you are not. God can't stand sin and to be in His presence requires that our sin must be forgiven.

God sent His Son Jesus Christ, from Heaven, to come to this world.

He lived a perfect life and proved through miracles that He was in fact God's Son.

He willingly subjected Himself to a cruel death on a cross.

He acted as a "Substitute" sacrifice, taking the penalty of mankind's sin.

There is no other way for us to enter God's presence, except by repenting of our sin and asking Jesus to forgive us, based upon His substitute death for our sins.

2. The application for Christians here today is also challenging but in a different way.

Our thought patterns need to be disciplined.

You need to be aware that Satan's first temptation is always a thought in your mind.

The challenge is not to entertain thoughts that are clearly from Satan.

Paul teaches us the following in 2 Corinthians Chapter 10: v. 3-5.

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Taking our thought patterns captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ is the biggest issue in spiritual warfare.

If Satan can control our minds, then it will not be long before he controls our behaviour.

The constant cleansing of our minds from Satan's activity is something that we often need to do daily, especially if we are under attack from Satan.

Victory can be obtained from the influence of Satan in our minds, because Jesus defeated Satan by His death on the cross.

The blood of Jesus cleanses our thought patterns. Satan must retreat when we claim the blood of Jesus over the thought patterns of our lives.

To-day we celebrate the death of Jesus Christ, for many reasons.

One of those reasons is that there is POWER in the precious blood of Jesus.

Perhaps you remember that old hymn – power in the blood.

Would you be free from your burden of sin?

There is power in the blood, power in the blood.

Would you over evil a victory win?

There is wonderful power in the blood.

Chorus goes.....

There is power, power, wonder working power, in the precious blood of the lamb.