

We're continuing in our Mark series, and this morning we'll be looking at chapter 7. So, if you haven't yet opened your bible, now's the perfect time to turn there.

When I was a kid, we regularly used a word amongst friends to describe kids (or even adults) who acted like they had it all going on—right clothes, right words, right car, right girlfriend or boyfriend, right extracurriculars—they had an outward appearance of being right, but we knew they were faking it. We knew their car *looked* good with its paint and nice rims but, under the hood, it was a piece of junk. We knew that their clothes were the peak of fashion, but they were snobby and self-absorbed. We knew that they acted superior to try to hide their insecurity. We knew. And, if we didn't know, we *assumed* we did.

We called those people 'posers.' And everyone hated being called a 'poser.' If you made the mistake of doing something outside the approved activities or wearing something other than what your peers deemed appropriate, you were at risk of being called that dreadful word. Being called a 'poser' meant your authenticity and character were being questioned. I mean, who wants to be known as fake or imposter?

I don't know of anyone, middle school aged or older, who hasn't felt like a fraud at times. I think we've all felt like posers—pretending to be someone we're not. And some of it is innocent; kids are just trying out what it's like to be part of the chess club or sports team or ag crew or theater troupe. They're just trying on different hats to see which fit best—which group they 'click' with.

But the problem comes when the outward doesn't align with the inward. When we pretend to be something we're not; when we just go through

the motions to be accepted or invited or loved. When the pretending, the posing, becomes a way of life, there's no real joy or peace because there's a constant push to keep up appearances.

What we're going to see today in Mark 7 is Jesus calling out the religious leaders for being posers. They're acting like they've got it all together, and they're expecting everyone else to follow their lead. Their focus is on outward demonstrations of purity, but what's going on inside them doesn't match up. What we'll see is that Jesus is far more interested in what's going on on the inside and how *that* affects what is outwardly demonstrated. So, take a look with me at the first five verses of Mark 7. [READ]

What's wrong with you? (v 1-5)

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, ⁴ and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

In their ongoing attempt to try to catch Jesus off-guard or teaching something that would discredit Him, His ministry and His disciples, the religious leaders follow Him to the region of Galilee. Mark's writing makes it seem that, almost immediately, the Pharisees and scribes notice a problem: Jesus' disciples eat with unclean (ritually unwashed) hands. The word 'defiled' is used. Pay attention to how many times you see this word today. It's all over the place (7x).

Defiled means to be unholy or unclean in God's sight. This would prevent the offender from being in fellowship with God. "The clean person was one who could approach God in worship."¹ It seems to make sense that

¹ Douglas, Bruce, Packer, et al. *New Bible Dictionary, Second Ed.* (IVP, Downers Grove, 1993), 216.

the Scribes and Pharisees would notice such a grave mistake. Who wants to be unable to worship God because they're unclean? But there's more to it than that..

Remember: Mark is writing, primarily, to non-Jewish believers in Rome. That's why verses 3 & 4 stick out. Mark is helping the Gentile believers to better connect the dots with what's happening in this encounter. The Jewish people make sure to wash properly, even their entire bodies after going to the marketplace (like taking a shower after going to Costco). They'll do that before they'll eat—which is a tradition of the elders. And they follow all kinds of other rituals too, as prescribed by the elders. Yes, the Law does say that God wants the Priest to ceremonially wash before entering the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:19; 40:13; Leviticus 22:1-6), but others were commanded to ceremonially wash their hands only when they touched some sort of bodily discharge (Leviticus 15:11).²

So, the religious leaders think they have a legitimate beef: 'Aren't you concerned that your disciples eat with unclean hands? They're going to be impure in God's sight and unable to worship Him. Evidently, you don't know what's important to God.' In their minds, unclean hands make the food unclean. And if the food is unclean, then the disciples will become unclean when they eat it—and that's bad news. 'Jesus, what's wrong with you? Why don't you follow the traditions? You're a rule breaker. You're a pot-stirrer and a rebel.' The ritual washing before eating wasn't what God commanded, but what tradition demanded. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees weren't pushing the Law of God as given to Moses...they were pushing their *additional* laws, making them even more important than the Scriptures. And Jesus has a major problem with that. Check out verses 6-13. [READ]

Look Closer (v 6-13)

⁶And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

² Edwards, James R. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2002), 205.

“This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
7 in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

9 And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! 10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ 11 **But you say**, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— 12 then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

Tradition doesn't equal a heart for God (6-8)

Jesus doesn't pull any punches with these guys. He calls them hypocrites. Their worship was only outward and not from the heart. These guys say what sounds like the right stuff, but it's all lip service. They're pretending, going through the motions and have their priorities upside down. They're more concerned with looking good, on the outside, than genuinely being transformed on the inside. Their outside and inside don't match. He's calling them posers.

He tells them that they've elevated the traditions of men over the commandments of God—so much so that they've lowered the value of God's Word and elevated the rituals and preferences of people and culture.

Looking at ourselves

Think about your spiritual or religious habits. Maybe you set aside time each day to read your bible, pray, journal, maybe sing or be silent. You've done it for years. When you started, you did it because you desperately wanted to know God better and you wanted to grow as His child. Is that why you still do it? Be really careful before you answer. You know the 'right' answer, but is it the honest answer? Are you spending time with Jesus each day because you always have and you're hungry—if so, great. But maybe your time has become more of a rote action with less heart and more 'this is what I should do'? A check-the-box sort of mindset. I've

done that. I do the right thing because it's the right thing. But where's my heart? Does it honor God to say I'm coming to Him in daily devotion if my heart isn't there? My outward and my inward aren't in alignment. Am I a poser in that moment?

I am *not* saying that we should dump our daily ritual of time with God if our heart isn't in it. I *am* saying that it would be a really good idea to start that time with God by being honest with Him and inviting Him to help you to engage fully, to generate hunger in you and to help you to worship fully.

Some people go to church each week and check the box—but their heart isn't in it. Others go to small group study and check the box. Youth group: check! Serve at church: check! Do you see how easy it is to let custom and tradition creep in and steal the heart out of your worship? When it comes to your spiritual life, ask yourself, "Why am I doing the things I'm doing?" Is it out of gratitude and love for Jesus and all He's done and that's motivating your obedience? Or are you doing it because you always have and 'This is my thing...it's what I do'? Let me be clear: I'm not saying, quit! I'm saying go to the Lord and ask Him to work in your heart, to move in you so that your presence, your give, your serve is out of an overflow of gratitude and joy instead of habit or tradition.

You can see how easy it was for those Pharisees and scribes to get sideways because we've all done it. God wants our whole hearts, not just our activity or stale obedience. Jesus called them hypocrites because 1) their actions were outward and not from the heart and 2) because they were misrepresenting God through their teachings which weren't from Him [God] but were the traditions of men. They were wearing their 'religious masks' and those masks make them *look* good. But, on the inside, they weren't good at all. Jesus knew it and He called them on it.

Real Authority is God's Word (9-13)

In verse 9, Jesus specifically cites just *one* example of how they have ignored God's Word. Instead of caring for their parents (as commanded

in the Law that God gave Moses), they tried to create a loophole so they could avoid that and keep their possessions for themselves until they died. That's what Corban was all about. 'Mom, Dad, all my possessions are dedicated to God.' In other words, 'Because of my deep devotion to God, I'm giving Him everything. Which means that I won't be able to care for you.' But it got even worse than that. Not only were possessions declared Corban (basically cursing the parents³), but the religious leaders would *actively* try to prevent the one making the dedication from later changing his mind so he could actually take care of his parents. When Jesus launches into the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, He wasn't messing around. 'God says, *this...but you say* something completely opposite.' The Pharisees and scribes are all twisted up about dirty hands while their sinful hearts encourage people to disobey God's Word. They're worried about unclean hands but can't see how filthy their hearts are!

Careful!

Friends, be careful when you hear someone say, "God didn't really mean that." Society, culture, will always look for a loophole, hoping to ignore what God commands. God's Word says that He created us, knitting us together in our mother's womb and that we're fearfully and wonderfully made. Society says that what goes on in the womb is no one's business but the woman's. God has nothing to do with it. God's Word says that He makes us male and female. But culture says that we get to choose. Sadly, there are some church leaders saying, "God didn't really mean (fill in the blank)..." God didn't really mean honor your father and mother (Yes, He did!). God didn't really mean homosexuality is wrong (Yes, He did!). God didn't really mean that we shouldn't lie (Yes, He did!). God didn't really mean that we're not supposed to worship anyone/anything but Him (Yes, He did!). Did God really mean that sex outside of marriage is wrong (Yes, He did!). This is exactly what the Devil did: "Did God really say...?" When you hear stuff like that, you're being set up. That's why this whole

³ See Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9

exchange made Jesus so angry. [Be careful when someone says, "God didn't really mean that."]

From the Inside Out (v 14-23)

By now, a crowd must have gathered, and Jesus moves right from His firm rebuke to shed light on what really makes a person unclean; what really defiles a person. Remember: the leaders started this whole conversation in verse 5. Look at verses 14-23. [READ]

And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Not from the Outside In

Jesus makes it clear to the whole crowd: impurity isn't an outside-in thing (and, for that matter, neither is *purity*). He wasn't talking about hygiene, but moral purity. And He flips the premise being made by the religious leaders on its head: what defiles a person isn't what goes in, but what *comes out* of him. And, in classic Mark form, all thrill and no fill, the next thing we know Jesus is in the house (What house? Did they leave town or what?). Fortunately, the disciples are eager for Jesus to explain what He just said to the crowd.

Jesus reiterates that impurity doesn't happen from the outside in. The ceremonial laws were in place to help the people understand that God is holy, and that sin creates a barrier to fellowship with God. Food that God declared 'unclean' defiles a person because of their disobedience.⁴ It's a

⁴ Grassmick, J. D. (1985). [Mark](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 134). Victor Books.

heart issue. It's not about the food...it's about the heart. That's why the washing of hands was ridiculous for maintaining ritual purity. Eating food with dirty hands goes into your stomach and then the toilet. It doesn't go into your heart.

Try thinking about this the opposite way: the Pharisees and scribes are saying that the disciples are ritually, ceremonially, unclean (unacceptable to God) because they didn't wash their hands before they ate. Their defiled hands defiled the food and eating defiled food makes you unclean. What they're really saying is that washing your hands before you eat makes you acceptable to God. Is that true? No! And that's Jesus' point. Purity is a heart thing, not the result of some external action. The outward stuff doesn't defile you anymore that it purifies you. What defiles you, what prevents fellowship with God, is what's going on in your heart. You cannot be made pure from the outside in because the problem is not an external problem but an internal one.

That's Jesus' point in verses 20-23. The evil thoughts that He lists, which all reside in the heart, fall into two categories: *acts* and *attitudes*. The first six (sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, and wickedness) are evil acts we commit which are conceived in our hearts. The same is true of the six evil attitudes (deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness). These are the things that make us impure, that keep us at a distance from God. These are the things that defile us. And they're not *outward* things. They're *inward* things.

That's why it's useless to 'get your act together' before you come to God. People are reluctant to give themselves wholeheartedly to God through faith in Jesus because, 'I'm such a mess.' I need to get 'cleaned up' first, *then* I'll come to God. Friends, you can't clean yourself up enough to be presentable to God. No amount of personal effort will make you acceptable. You can stop drinking or sleeping around. You can go to church and memorize scripture all you want. You can give to the poor and volunteer. But that won't help. The outward stuff cannot cleanse you. What you need is change on the inside, and only God can do that in you.

From the Inside Out

Transformation happens from the inside out. That's what Jesus wants His listeners to understand. Outwardly, you may look fine, like the Pharisees and teachers of the law: they look great. But they're posers. Their insides don't match their outsides. They claim to know God, but their hearts aren't clean. They don't really know Him. They even try to create workarounds to avoid obedience that keep people far from God. They say their traditions are for God's glory but they're not. They just reveal how messed up their hearts are. Their insides and outsides don't match.

When you surrender your life to Jesus, when you admit your sinfulness, repent and trust Him as your Leader & Forgiver, when you follow Him, He cleanses you of all your sin (1 John 1:9). He purifies your heart [Only Jesus can purify your heart.]. He gives you His Spirit to live in you, to help you live the life of holiness that brings Him glory. And as you trust Him, day by day, He continues His transforming work to help you become, more and more, the person He built you to be for His glory. Will you fail at times? Yes! Because your old habits will try to reassert themselves. And when that happens, 'cuz it does (am I right?), confess your sin and thank Jesus once again for His forgiveness, inviting Him to cleanse your heart and to empower you to live in ways that make Him smile. He does the work in you. Your 'job' is to surrender to the leadership of the Holy Spirit every day, to cooperate with Him moment by moment. Some days are better than others. Some minutes are better than others! Jesus started this good work in you, and He will see it through to the end (Philippians 1:6). You just stay close to Him.

Fruit Trees

Some of you may have heard me say this before, but it fits so well with what Jesus is describing in this passage. If you've ever walked through an orchard, like up at Apple Hill, you can hear several things if you listen. First, you may hear bees and birds. You may hear voices and the occasional car in the distance. But you know what you'll *never* hear? Grunting. You won't hear those apple trees 'grunting' to produce apples.

'C'mon apples! C'mon apples!' The same is true with peaches, pears, plums, almonds or anything else. You don't hear them grunting or straining to make it happen. Apple trees produce apples because they're apple trees—it's what they do. They don't produce oranges or apricots. They produce apples because that's the way God built them. And you, your fruitfulness, your effectiveness for the Kingdom of God, your purity, will not result from your straining and grunting. It will come because that's who you are now—a child of God. Saved by grace. Forgiven and free. 2 Corinthians says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (5:17). Since Jesus lives in you, you get to live as the person He created you to be. But only Jesus can transform (me) you. Rest in Him. Lean on Him. Trust Him. Walk with Him. Listen to Him. Spend time with Him. And, as you do, He will transform you from the inside out. Jesus did the work to save you—to cleanse you and purify your heart. And Jesus does the work to grow you. Your 'work' is to stay close to Him.

Close

God wants every bit of you. Not just your outward demonstrations of obedience but your whole heart. That's what Jesus was pressing down on. It doesn't matter if you've got it all going on *outwardly* if your heart is far from Him. You can set up all kinds of rules to follow that demonstrate your 'faithfulness,' but if your heart isn't His, who cares? That was the Pharisees and scribes. Your church attendance, service, giving, singing, small group stuff doesn't bless Him if your heart's not there—if you're just going through the motions. The good news is God can change all that. He can transform your heart and fruit will grow because of the changes He's making in you, and it will be undeniable—like apples on an apple tree.

So, how's your heart? I think that's the distilled version of what Jesus was after. How's your heart? If you have a relationship with God, an authentic, growing, dynamic relationship through faith in Jesus Christ, how are you? Maybe you're on fire right now and your appetite for His Word, your time in prayer, your worship is better than you've ever known. If so, praise

Jesus! Maybe you're in a place where you realize that you've gotten into kind of a rut with your spiritual life—it's not bad, but it's not where you want to be, either. You're hungry for deeper intimacy with your Savior. Ok. I get it. Maybe you're listening today, and you feel like a poser. You're just going through the motions. You're doing the right things outwardly but, for a variety of reasons, you know your heart isn't right. I understand. None of it is surprising to God. He knows and He loves you.

Some of you are trying to clean yourselves up so you can come to God. Please know, He wants you to come to Him as you are. Let Him do the cleanup—from the inside out. Just come to Him.

Wrap

I want to wrap up our time by giving you some space to talk with Jesus. Ask Him to search your heart. Ask Him to reveal anything that's getting in the way of your relationship with Him; anything that's preventing you from walking in deep intimacy. Maybe you have never given your life to Jesus, and you know you need to. Tell Him that you want to follow Him for the rest of your life. Ask Him to purify your heart and to grow you.

Just be still for a few moments. Ask Him. Listen. If you need to confess and repent, do it. And, whatever you do, please: don't just go through the motions. Take these moments to connect intimately with the One who loves you best and most.

After a minute or so, I'll close our time in prayer.

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Pray

Lord, hear the prayers, the hearts of Your people.
May our hearts would be fully, unreservedly His.

May we not be satisfied with going through the motions, but hungry.
Help new believers to flourish and grow for His glory and their blessing.
Help us to be a people committed to loving Jesus with all we are and
loving others and that our lives would point people to Christ.

Bless & Go

If God did something cool in your heart today, tell your spouse, your kids,
your closest friend. Share His goodness. Don't be shy about it. We're all in
it together!