

Good morning everyone and welcome to Fellowship Dallas. We're glad you are here. My name is Randy and I'm one of the Associate Pastors here at the church. Happy Independence Day Weekend – I know that July 4<sup>th</sup> was yesterday, but we can still celebrate today can't we? Especially since the US women's soccer team is playing tonight in the World Cup Final. I'm feeling especially patriotic today.

My wife thinks I'm a tad too into the soccer thing right now and she's probably right. She mainly thinks I'm too into it because I don't watch soccer much and I tend to just turn it on whenever the national teams play. I wish I had more time to obsess about FC Dallas but I just don't. So my wife thinks I'm a bad soccer fan, and as I said, she's probably right. As of three weeks ago, I could name only one or two people on the women's team and I'll likely hibernate on them again until the women's team plays in the next World Cup in 2019.

What makes a good soccer fan, anyway? Do you have to only know how the game is played? Do you have to follow the games more than once every four years? Do you have to know more than just one or two people who play for the team? Am I a fan or a follower?

We make up rules for this stuff all the time in our society. I could ask you a question about what makes a good "fill-in-the-blank" and we would all come up with several different answers. What makes a good parent? What makes a good pastor? What makes a good American? What about a good Christian? What makes someone a good Christian? Be careful how you answer that question. What makes a good Christian? Is a good Christian someone who goes to church every week? Or is it someone who reads their Bible every day? Maybe to be a good Christian, you have to be someone who prays a lot. Or give change to every homeless person you see? What makes someone a good Christian?

When we think of that question, a lot of us are tempted to come up with some answers that fit our personal idea of what it means to be a good Christian. We each have this construct of what healthy Christianity looks like and being a good Christian probably looks a whole lot like – well, like us. Right? This is a Bible church in the middle of Dallas Texas, so our ideas of what it looks like to be a good Christian are probably a little different from, say, a Southern Baptist church in the rural South, a Roman Catholic church in the suburbs of Los Angeles or even another Bible church in Fort Worth. After all, those people in Fort Worth are weird. And that's not even mentioning the Christian churches in Asia or Africa, where Christianity is spreading the fastest.

If we took a survey of all these different church communities and asked them what makes a good Christian, and we looked at all the different responses, who would be right? Who is the closest to being right? I mean, after our church – we would obviously be the most right – but who would come in second and how would we know?

The question we're really asking is what lies at the core of following Jesus? If we could sum up what it means to follow Jesus into one simple phrase, what would it be? Jesus addresses this very question in the seventh chapter of Mark. Today we will look at Mark 7:1-30 and in

this chapter, Jesus speaks to the most religious people of His day, the Pharisees and Scribes, and He also deals with someone who would probably be considered one of the least religious people we see in the entire gospel of Mark. So if you have your Bible, turn to Mark, chapter seven.

Over the past two months, we've been looking at the differences between people who are fans of Jesus and people who are followers of Jesus. Today, through Mark 7, we'll discover that while fans of Jesus might talk about Him, they're ultimately pretenders. Followers of Jesus, however, aren't pretenders, they're people who recognize their need for Jesus and submit their world to Him. ***Followers submit their world to Jesus.*** Like we did last week, we'll break the passage up, stopping a couple of times to make sure we're on the same page.

Let's begin by reading Mark 7:1-13: Mark 7:1-13: "Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, 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.) 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?" And he 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;  
in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'  
You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 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)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

In chapter six, Jesus had been ministering to the people, healing the sick and teaching, and He encounters the Pharisees again. We saw them back in chapter two and the beginning of chapter three, but Mark doesn't bring them up again until now. And the Pharisees are doing what they do best – making sure that everyone follows the rules.

In this case, the disciples hadn't purified themselves before eating. Verse two says that the disciples' hands were "defiled" or "unclean". You'll notice that throughout the passage, the theme of clean vs. unclean will be prominent. And it's interesting how Jesus and the

Pharisees differ on what makes someone clean vs. unclean. It's important to note that the disciples' hands weren't literally dirty – the purification ritual wasn't about scrubbing with soap for 30 seconds. Mark notes that it's not about washing your hands, as much as it is washing your hands *in a certain way*. There were also rules about how often to wash hands, cups, dishes, pots and even furniture. Again – this isn't about keeping clean physically, for the Pharisees, this was about keeping clean spiritually.

The Pharisees ask Jesus why His disciples aren't cleansing themselves before eating. And Jesus comes right back at them and calls them hypocrites, which at that time meant someone who was a pretender, or a poser. And Jesus quotes the Old Testament – Isaiah – and says to the Pharisees that while they seem clean, the truth is that their hearts are far from God, since they're more interested in loving their traditions than they are loving their heavenly Father. And then He really lays it on them. Verse 9: "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!"

Jesus gives an example of how their tradition trumps God's will. He gives them one of the Ten Commandments—Honor Your Father and Mother—and shows how their human rules subvert the commandment. There was a rule that allowed someone to declare their property as devoted to God – the name for this was "Corban". If someone offered their land or their possessions as an offering for God, it meant that they were "tagging" it for God's use and while they could still do whatever they wanted with it personally, no one else was allowed to touch it. An ungrateful Jewish son would use this tactic, tagging the land or possessions, as a way of getting out of taking care of their parents. In other words, the Pharisees allowed sons to cut their parents off, which to Jesus was a clear violation to the command to honor one's father and mother.

They were holding their manmade rules above God's Law; and not just any law, but one of the Ten Commandments. How ironic that those who felt it so important to keep the laws had been overruling the ultimate Lawgiver. And Jesus was sure to mention that He had other examples in His back pocket.

Jesus then turns to His disciples and to the people gathered around and He begins to teach them. Let's read verses 14-23: "And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: 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." And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. 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, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

So after telling the Pharisees what's up, Jesus gathers His disciples together and the rest of the crowd and breaks down what it really means to be unclean. He says nothing outside a person that goes into him makes him unclean, but the things that come out of a person are what makes him unclean." Jesus and His disciples head inside a house and the disciples ask Jesus, what He meant. Jesus seems upset to have to explain, but goes for it anyway.

By the way – did any of you notice what's missing in this part of chapter seven? Most of your Bibles are probably missing verse 16. Mark didn't forget to write something down. What happened here is that most Biblical scholars believe that verse 16 isn't original to Mark. Most think it was added in a little later by people who were copying the gospel down. Since the scholars don't think Mark wrote it, they left it out. If you're dying to know what verse 16 says, it's not a big deal. Verse sixteen says that the world is ending on July 6, 2015. Just kidding: verse 16 says, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" as a way to conclude Jesus' teaching. So – not too big of a deal. If anything, the rejection of this fake verse should add confidence that the Bible we read has been carefully considered to make sure it's as close to what was originally written down as possible.

So Jesus takes His disciples and a crowd aside and shows them that it's not about keeping a bunch of rules about what to eat and what not to eat that makes a person spiritually unclean. What is more, it's not about any manmade rules involving washing your hands a certain way. How can it be? What makes someone spiritually unclean has nothing to do with what they put in their bodies, but what comes out of the heart. He lists some examples of things that might come out of a person to make them spiritually unclean, and looking over the list, He covers just about everything.

So let's be clear. Jesus is pointing out there *are* rules to be followed. It's not that rules are bad, in general. The important thing, though, is that the rules we follow, the truth that a follower should use in life, should come from God and not from manmade traditions.

Jesus was on the same page as the Pharisees, in at least one regard: it is possible to be spiritually unclean. Where they differed is in *how* an individual became spiritually unclean. For the Pharisees, it was keeping up with rules established by religious leaders – which numbered in the *hundreds*. For Jesus, it was keeping with the God's design for life. In other words, it's possible to keep all of the manmade rules and still be far away from God.

And what we're about to see is that it is possible to violate almost all of the manmade rules and still be very close to God. Let's read verses 24-30: "And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know; yet he could not be hidden. But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And he said to her, "For this statement you

may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.”

So in the first part of the chapter, we enter into the world of the Pharisees who just don't get it. They've been following hundreds of rules, thinking that being good rule-followers makes them good God-followers, but their hearts were misplaced. Their focus wasn't on God, but on a rulebook. In the next part of the chapter, we enter into the world of the disciples, who also didn't quite get it. They wanted to do the right thing, but didn't catch on that what makes a person spiritually unclean had nothing to do with food, but with disobedience to God. In this part of the chapter we enter the world of someone who *gets* it.

Which is ironic, because this person is someone the readers of Mark's gospel 2,000 years ago would expect to get it. This person is a woman, which often meant that she was a second-class citizen. The verses say she is “Syrophoenician,” which shows us which region she's from. We know that since she's syrophoenician, we know she was a gentile – she didn't grow up understanding the Jewish Law or following God. She is the opposite of religious. And talk about unclean – her daughter had an unclean spirit. And if her young daughter was unclean, and she had been taking care of her, according to the manmade rules, she would be considered unclean, too. So she had three strikes against her – all making her the least expected person to pick up on truth, yet here she is at the feet of Jesus.

And she begs Him to heal her daughter. Jesus' response was a test of her faith, to see what she truly believed. Did she think of Jesus as some magician or as the bread of life? He looks at her, and says that it isn't right for the bread to be thrown to the household dogs. He's referencing the fact that His primary ministry was to the children of God, the Jews. But she answers Him knowing full well that the household pets are always picking up the crumbs of the children. She knows what we know – that in every household for hundreds of years, there's always someone taking care of the doggie under the table. In other words, somehow, even though it's not intended, the bread always seems to find its way down to man's best friend. She knew who Jesus was and what He was able to do. And her faith in Him healed her daughter.

So we have these three accounts in Mark 7, but what does this chapter show us about following Jesus today? I think there are a couple of truths to take away from this chapter.

The first truth I think we must learn from this chapter is that Jesus is bigger than your world. ***Jesus is bigger than your world.*** Whatever world you've created for yourself; whatever routine you've set up, whatever schedule you've created, whatever norms you follow or traditions you keep, whatever world you live in, Jesus is bigger. We all set up a way of life. We all set up things that make us comfortable, as we navigate our day to day. And, over time, we set up rules and use those rules to gauge other people.

Whether it's a stereotype or a personal expectation, you automatically have thoughts in your mind when you encounter people. You probably interact differently with a guy who has a beard, long hair and tattoos than a guy who is clean-shaven with no ink. You probably

interact differently with someone who is a pastor than you do with someone who is a dentist. You probably interact differently with someone who is homeless than you do with someone who is very wealthy. And I'm not necessarily saying that these things we do are wrong, until we start viewing other people as "less-than." Putting things and people into groups happens, but when we start relegating some of these groups and make them second-class, we get into trouble and start declaring them unclean for what they look like and how we see them versus how God sees them. And that's wrong. The Pharisees looked at Jesus and His disciples as unclean because they didn't follow the same rules. How tempting it is to look at other people, other *Christians*, and condemn them for not acting like us.

And Christians can sometimes be the worst at this. It is from within the church all manner of societal ills have been justified to make sure anyone from the outside doesn't get in unless they look like and act like the people on the inside. People in the church are tempted to take certain sins and place categories where God doesn't place categories and before you know it, a tradition develops that dishonors God. And it's as if we can hear Jesus say, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!" Whenever we establish a rule that God did not establish, we become legalists. And if there's one thing that Jesus couldn't stand, it's legalism.

I'll give you an example. What are the two greatest commandments that Jesus gave His followers? Love God and love others. Yet, any time we take certain sins to be worse than other sins, and then cast the so-called "worst sinners" aside, cutting them out of the church, we cease to love them. And this has happened here in the US over the past few decades. A clear example is Christians who have been the least loving to many in our community who have struggled with same-sex attraction, casting them aside. During the AIDS crisis of the 80s, Christians tended to look the other way as gay people in their midst suffered and died. We knew what the Bible said about homosexuality, but somehow, that sin became more dangerous, more wrong and more scandalous than anything else. And so we went about doing whatever we could to prevent people from sinning that specific sin. So, over the past 30-40 years, the church has taken Jesus' command about loving other people and subjugated it to the manmade rules of casting gays out of the church.

Now please let me be clear, I believe that Fellowship Dallas strives to be a place that welcomes all people. If you've only been going to church here a couple of years, then you may not know that this church has a legacy of grace, seeking to accept all people into our doors each Sunday who are genuinely here to seek Christ. Regardless of what you did last night, what you drank or with whom you shared your bed, if you're interested in drawing closer to Christ, you are welcome here. So, I'd like to think that the people of Fellowship Dallas haven't fallen in line with others who are unloving to people who are different.

Remember how we defined legalism. Legalism is setting up any rule that God did not set up Himself. There are rules and guidelines that we *are* to follow, as believers. It's not legalism to do what *God* asks us to do. It's legalism to *add* to what God asks us to do. That's why you won't see a wedding ceremony at this church for a same-sex couple. God paints a pretty clear picture of what He intended marriage to be. I won't go into all those specifics here,

since Gary is going to do so in a few weeks when we look at Mark 10, but I'll give you a sneak preview. Spoiler Alert: marriage is designed by God to exist between a man and a woman. The Bible is pretty clear about that. And we're not being legalistic when we lay out what God says about marriage. We're being honest.

But the truth remains: Jesus is bigger than our world and we are to love everyone, no matter what sin they're dealing with, whether they fit our pre-conceived notion of what "good" looks like. The second we start categorizing sin is the second we begin to add our tradition to God's commandment and we begin to take our world and make it more important than God's. And these verses show us that Jesus is bigger than our world.

So if Jesus is bigger than our world, what are we to do? If Jesus is bigger than our traditions, our way of life, what are we to do? We must submit our world to Jesus. ***Submit your world to Jesus.*** A follower of Christ submits their world to Him. They take everything they are and they place it at His feet.

Look again at the list that Jesus gives us of what makes a person unclean in verse 21-22. It's what comes out of the heart: "evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." Any one of these things is enough to make a person spiritually unclean. And if we're honest, we're all guilty. Every single one of us. There's not one person in this room or in the city of Dallas that can make it through that list unscathed. And if you think you can, you're mistaken. And if you think that you can clean yourself up, you're mistaken. You can go to church all you want, say a prayer before every meal and help old ladies cross the street, but until you submit your world to Jesus, until you confide in Him, confess your world to Him, until you trust Him and agree to follow His commandments, until you submit your world to Him, you remain unclean.

We see what He is capable of in the verses with the gentile woman. Her daughter, sick at home, is made well by Jesus. He can redeem anyone. *Anyone.* That's why we're so welcoming of anyone who would seek after Him. Anyone willing to consider taking their world and placing it at His feet is welcome here.

We are having another baptism service here next month. Do you know what the requirements are to be baptized at Fellowship Dallas? It's simple. We only baptize people who have submitted their world to Jesus. Notice what I didn't say. I didn't say we only baptize people who are perfect. I didn't say we only baptize people who have all of their sin under control. I didn't say we only baptize people who look like us, talk like us, dress like us, act like us, smell like us, and play like us. What's the requirement? Submit your world to Jesus. If someone has done that, they've been made clean. We don't pay attention to age, gender, job status, marital status, bank accounts, or any other thing that this world uses to categorize people. Because we know that Jesus can redeem anyone. *Anyone.* If you're interested in baptism, you can fill out a Connect Card and bring it down to the Hub to let us know.

And, by the way, the requirement we have for baptism is the same requirement that we have for people to take communion. Today is communion Sunday and if you want to participate with us today, there's only one requirement: You must have submitted your world to Jesus. Have you done that? Have you taken your entire life and fallen before Him, recognizing Jesus as the only one capable of taking you and making you whole?

Fellowship Dallas, the weeks, months and years ahead will tempt us. We will be tempted to add to Jesus' gospel, but let me encourage you to only hold up what Christ Himself has held up to be true. Don't be ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. But as you preach this gospel to yourself, to your family, to your neighbors, to your co-workers, as you tell others about Jesus, we must be sure to maintain our loving stance before God and man. Let us be known as a church whose god is not a set of rules or political stances, but whose God is Jesus. Let us be known as a church that understands that Jesus is bigger than our world. Let us be known as a church that submits our world to Jesus.

Today, we are taking communion at several stations around the worship center. In a few minutes, when you're ready, you can come to one of these stations, tear a piece of bread, dip it into the cup and eat. And as we enter this time, let me read from 1 Corinthians 11: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." If you have submitted your world to Jesus and are ready to proclaim His death until He comes again, we invite you to join us now.

**[communion]**