

## 37 Mark 7:1-13

### Substantive Worship

#### Text

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, 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?” 6 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; 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.”

#### Introduction

*Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem*

We are reintroduced in verse 1 to the scribes and Pharisees once again. There were 8 references to them in chapters 1-3 but then they disappear. We have heard nothing of them for the last few chapters. One may think that with all the stories of the miracles and the great crowds that everything was going fabulously for Jesus. Perhaps his critics had either been converted or silenced because we have not heard one word from them since chapter 3. After the five confrontation passages in chapters 2-3 Jesus gives five parable about the kingdom of God in chapter 4. Perhaps this is what they needed. Perhaps things having been cleared up they were ok with Jesus.

You know the story too well to believe that! There were 8 references to the scribes and pharisees in chapters 1-3, nothing in chapters 4-6, but from this point on things begin to heat up a bit. There are 25 references to them in the remaining chapters. We also see in verse 1 that the scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem. Jesus has confined himself thus far to the Galilean

region. But in the next chapter he begins making his way to Jerusalem. Just as Jesus went into the wilderness to do battle with Satan, he is soon going to go to the very heart of Judaism. He will soon march upon the gates of the scribes and Pharisees in his final battle. But for now the fight still remains in the Galilean region.

## The Observation

*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, 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.)*

Exodus 30:19 You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, 19 with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet.

Exodus 40:12 Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall wash them with water

The Pharisees took these commands given to the priests and made them normative to all Jews. "If it is good enough for the priests then it is good enough for everyone" seems to have been the mindset. This form of reasoning is tempting to follow. For instance, we take the qualifications for elders given in the NT, can we, or should we say things like, "if it is good for an elder to be above reproach, then all Christians should be above reproach?" or "If it is good for an elder to have a good reputation in the community then ought not all Christians have a good reputation in the community?" I think we can answer in the affirmative on each of these. But these traits are not unique to the office of elder. The ability to rule the church is a function unique to the elders, so this is not a task that anybody can presume to take upon themselves.

This was the problem with what the Pharisees had done. They took functions that were unique to the priest and applied them to everyone. They also missed the purpose of these rites. They pictured the holiness of God and man's need for cleansing before he could enter God's presence. It is not as though their moral defilement was actually washed away when they dipped their hands in the basin. It foreshadowed what the blood of Christ would actually do for us by way of imputation. But missing the significance of the washings and ignoring the uniquely priestly nature of the rites the Pharisees make it apply to all the people.

The pharisees also had a low view of the marketplace. Thus Mark makes it a point to mention that they made sure to wash after leaving the marketplaces. This is where one was very likely to meet a Gentile, or a prostitute or a tax collector, or some other defiled person. Thus they would make sure to wash after being in such a defiled place. So Jesus and his disciples after having been in marketplace after marketplace, for them not to wash was horrible in the eyes of the Pharisees.

## The Accusation

*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?"*

With this background, the Pharisees make their accusation against Christ. They target him since he is the leader. "Why do your disciples...eat with defiled hands?" Notice how they assume rather than prove this accusation. Who said their hands were defiled? It may be tradition in a family to read "The Night Before Christmas" on Christmas eve, but not doing it one year does not make one defiled. On what basis are the disciples defiled? They don't bother to anchor it in anything. This is like asking the question, "When did you stop beating your wife?" If you give a time-frame you admit guilt. If you say "never" you admit that you have not yet stopped. If you are innocent you can't answer a question like that directly for it assumes what it needs to prove. Those who are most bound by their traditions do not see it.

## The Redeemer's Rebuke

*6 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;*

*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."*

## Hypocrisy & Empty Worship

Hypocrites! That is an interesting accusation is it not? The Pharisees accuse his disciples of eating with defiled hands and Jesus replies, "hypocrites." Now if that was all we had, what do you think Jesus may be driving at? A hypocrite is someone who says one thing while doing another right? So we may expect that the Pharisees were themselves guilty of eating with unwashed hands. This would by hypocrisy wouldn't it? But we have no indication that they in fact did this. So why does Jesus lead off with this accusation of hypocrisy?

We are all familiar with the story of Job right? Job had a number of bad things happen to him and then a group of "friends" comes along to "comfort" him. What happens? They accuse him of all kinds of sin. In their mind suffering of any form is the result of moral defilement. They obviously go too far in pressing for a one to one correlation, but in a general sense suffering is the result of sin. We see a similar connection being made by the disciples themselves when they ask, "who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" Again perhaps they pressed it too far for a one to one correlation, but the general thrust is correct. Jesus himself linked suffering and death with sin when discussing the fall of the tower of Salome. Observing calamity and suffering is a thing that ought to cause us to repent for generally speaking it is the result of sin.

So what is the significance of the healings that Christ performs? We have mentioned a number of times that these miracles signify the turning back of the curse. But if struggle and toil and death

are the result of the sin of mankind, what does the healing and raising of the dead indicate if not the purifying of man's moral uncleanliness?

As Rikk Watts notes, Jesus was already declared to be "the holy One of God in Mark's first mighty deed (1:24) and having cleansed lepers (1:40-42) forgiven sins (2:1-12) restored the impure woman (5:29-34), raised the unclean corpse (5:41-42) and cast out unclean spirits (1:23-27; 3:11; 5:2-13; 6:7)." Thus Jesus in the marketplace, "not only sees no threat but also recognizes an opportunity to extend purity to others." This is where the hypocrisy of the Pharisees shines so brightly!

They make a big show of purity. They wash their hands for ritual purity. They recognize others who do not follow the practice and try to bring them in line. They make quite a show of their zeal for purity all the while rejecting and opposing Jesus who is bringing real purity.

Jesus leads off with this accusation of hypocrisy into a quotation from Isaiah. It is an appropriate flow because their hypocrisy regarding purity before God is symptomatic of a deeper problem - the emptiness of their worship. There is no substance in their desire for purity before God, there is no substance in their worship of God, there is no substance in their regard for the word of God. We have the same problem today. This vacuous worship need not be confined to legalistic hypocritically pious persons. Our worship is empty when we thoughtlessly sing catchy ditties in church. Our worship is empty when we sing substantive songs without an accompanying heart. Our reverence to God is vacuous when we hypocritically speak well of scripture without actually using it to order our lives and correct our hearts and inform our worldview. Our dedication to God is empty when we go the other way in making extra-biblical rules that functionally carry the same weight as scripture. Is your life a substantive, non-hypocritical, God-centered reflection of the glory of Christ?

## A Case Study

*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."* Jesus gets more specific, wanting to demonstrate a particular emptiness in their worship.

We may get upset with the pharisees over the notion of corban, but how much room do we really have? Yes, they made a loophole in God's decree to honor your father and mother. Dedicate it to God and it doesn't have to go toward helping your parents. Nowadays we don't even bother with the dedicate it to God part. I don't have to help my parents if doing so will cramp my style! How vacuous is that?! How much substance is in our worship of God at that moment? How hollow is our love of God when we so quickly dismiss His command to honor our father and mother.

Jesus singles out the commandment to honor your father and mother, but the larger point he is making is that they have set aside the commandments of God. He continues, "*And many such things you do.*" Indicating that this is just one instance of this kind of behavior. Five times Jesus mentions "commandments" or "doctrines" or "word of God." Also all the way through Jesus'

reply he uses words like hypocrites, lipservice, void, vain. In a way you cannot separate the weightiness of one's worship of God with the commandments and doctrines of God.

Because we are fallen creatures, worship of God does not come naturally to us. If we are going to worship God in a substantive way, we must know and adhere to the doctrines which He has revealed to us. Notice the specific application that Jesus made. He referenced the commandment to honor your father and mother. Let us not think that worship is restricted to singing. According to Jesus, honoring your father and mother is an act of worship. Further notice that honoring them is not just being civil toward them, it involves action and sacrifice when necessary.

Thus, anytime we eschew doctrine, anytime we neglect the commandments of God, that is empty worship. Our tendency today is to ask, "how little do I have to do?" "What is the absolutely bare bones of evangelism?" "What is the least I have to do in order to check this off my list?" We don't want to go overboard, we just want to do enough to qualify. When you bring your basket of minimum qualifications to God, will He look at that and say that it is weighty or empty? If, therefore we want to worship God in fullness, then we should be asking what more we can do. And we should not just focus on the command to honor father and mother, but we should also think through all the commands of God, asking, "how can my worship in these areas be more substantive?"

1. You shall have no other gods before me
2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house