

38 Mark 7:14-23

A Polluted Spring

Text

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."

Introduction

It used to be that the Pharisees regarded items that could hold water as something that needed washing. If there was a flat or a convex surface then it could hold no defilement. It could not readily hold dirt or filth, or even water which could become stagnant. If you have children and they have a few toys out in the yard, for the most part the flat or convex surfaces remain fairly clean. But the concave surfaces that can hold water and collect dirt will.

Also porous surfaces are more readily contaminated than hard non-porous surfaces. This is why people are getting away from wooden cutting boards and going with some form of plastic. The wood is porous and can soak up some of the germs.

The Pharisees understood these things as well and so we see the list of items from last week's passages that were regularly washed (or baptized) "cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches."

"This is like taking a cup of coffee that is a week old and cleaning the outside of it." But the inside is still dirty. It is filthy (especially if you use cream). Jesus utilizes this understanding of the defilement being an inside thing first to make his point regarding mankind.

His Solemn Call

And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: Jesus gives a loud invitation for all to pay attention. It seems that there was a crowd in attendance (as there almost always was, even when Jesus and his disciples are in need of food). This time it looks like they finally get food just to have the Scribes and Pharisees interrupt with accusations about defiled hands. Jesus addresses them directly, but probably everyone nearby

was listening in on this exchange.

Jesus has great compassion on these people. We saw that when he stepped out of the boat before feeding the 5000 it said that he had compassion on them viewing them as sheep without a shepherd. The people had lots of spiritual leaders though. They had the Scribes and Pharisees, but these were blind guides leading the people astray. So now Jesus, having addressed the Pharisees directly, and knowing that the crowds were observing, wants to shepherd the people, making sure they understand the true source of defilement. They have been led astray too long. Jesus' beckoning recalls to mind the call of God to his people.

Psalm 49.1 Hear this, all peoples!

Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,

Psalm 50.7 Hear, O my people, and I will speak;

O Israel, I will testify against you.

I am God, your God.

Psalm 81.8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!

O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

The great Shepherd has called his people to listen. There is something they must know. There is a poison they must avoid.

The Source of Defilement

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."

Jesus goes to the source of our defilement. It is not unwashed hands. Or defilement is not anything we eat. Our defilement is not anything that is outside of us. Our defilement comes from within. We looked last week at the emptiness of worship and how vain it can be. Not only was their worship of God vain, but their view of sin was surface-level also. If we want to fix our defilement we must know where it stems from. Is it purely external? Are the Pharisees right in pointing to these ritual washings and food laws and other such things?

Christ's answer is no. The Pharisees have it all wrong. This doctrine contains two things: First we see the source of evil. Is the IRS the source of evil? Are certain foods the source of evil? No to both of these. Is money the source of evil? Are nice things, luxurious things, or pleasurable things the source of evil? No. The source of evil is the human heart.

Second, and implicit in this identification of the source is a diagnosis of the human condition. It is not good. God's assessment of the human condition is not good.

Gen 8:21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Js 4:1-2 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

Luke 6:43-45 For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, 44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45 The good person out of the good treasure of his

heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Job 14:4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?

Job 25:4 How then can man be in the right before God?

How can he who is born of woman be pure?

Prov 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

If we aim to eradicate evil, there is no place to turn but in. If we seek to slay all the wrongs in the world, we must mortify the enemy within. A newspaper article a while back asked the question, "What is wrong with the world?" and G.K. Chesterton wrote a reply simply saying, "In response to your question, 'what is wrong with the world' I am." We are the source of defilement. As long as our focus remains on the external only, then we can fool ourselves, we can fool others, we can appear pious, but we will still be defiled. We may fool everyone else, but we will not fool God before whom we will one day stand.

In Shakespeare's MacBeth, just after Macbeth has committed the murder, he is lamenting to his wife. She replies to all his worries, "Get some water and wash this filthy witness from your hands." MacBeth returns saying, "Will all Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red." Lady MacBeth glibly replies, "A little water will clean us of these deeds." It is all ironic because later in the story she is found sleepwalking, rubbing her hands together she says, "Yet here is a spot. Out damned spot! Out I say!...What will these hands ne'er be clean!...Here's the smell of blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

What a masterful job Shakespear did. That is exactly what we have here. Within the chest of the Pharisees beat the heart of a murderer, but to their thinking, a mere washing of the hands will suffice. Wash as they may, their guilt remains. Try as they might the blood will not come out. The defilement is within.

A New Era

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.

Was Jesus setting aside the commands of God? Did Jesus, after having rebuked the Pharisees for setting aside the commands of God, go on to do the same thing himself? After all, there were external ceremonies that God commanded for his people. There were ritual cleanings and the rite of circumcision, and food laws and many other external forms which God himself instituted. Turn now to the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:1-4 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer

have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Colossians 2:16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. **17** These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

All the ceremonies were pointers to Christ. They were the shadow, he is the reality. They were types, Jesus is the anti-type. When the substance has come there is not need of the signs. In fact continuing these signs is a repudiation of Christ. Were we to continue offering sacrifices today, what that would mean is that there still needs to be an atonement for sins. By sacrificing and washing we indicate that there is still a need for cleansing and the removal of our sins. By engaging in these things we effectively say that the sacrifice of Christ did not remove sin or cleans us.

A Filthy River

While Christ's teaching here indicates that a new age has dawned, not only do his disciples miss the new age teaching implicit here, but they also miss the quite obvious point about real defilement. So as Christ continues to explain to his disciples, he begins to list some of the things that flow out of this filthy river within us.

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."

It is possible that Mark intends to present a scheme in which "evil thoughts" introduces the list. Then we have 6 items in the plural and 6 items in the singular. The phrase "evil thoughts" is *hoi dialogizmoi hoi kakoi*; literally "those bad dialogings." I am a person who talks to himself a lot. I like to say that it is a sign of intellectual. But there is a bad dialoging.

Probably everyone knows what I am talking about. In your mind you have imaginary conversations with people. You think of an enemy and what you'd like to say to them. You think of situations in which you may meet this person and you have imaginary conversations where you really tell them what for.

Perhaps it is not an imaginary encounter, perhaps you replay in your mind a real encounter that you had and how you wish you could go back, for now you have the words to say. You have rehearsed the conversation many times and you have the exact zinger to deliver at just the right moment. You have rehearsed the tone and the facial expressions. Should this ever happen again you'll be ready.

Perhaps you do not have an enemy in mind so much as people you want to impress. There is a crowd or an audience of some kind before whom you can display your wit or your intellect or your piety. There may be no one in particular that you want to be in front of, but it is a conversation or monologue that it would be nice to share with someone, it really doesn't matter so long as they give the appropriate accolades. Bad dialogings.

While these mental conversations are a good example of what is in view, I think that these *dialogizmoi* are broader still. In a general sense they are bad thoughts. These bad thoughts then produce all kinds of sin. The list that Jesus gives here has 6 plural items followed by six singular items. They could be understood as sinful deeds and sinful drives respectively.

We spoke earlier about the heart of man as the source of evil. Let me now ask some more difficult questions. Are beautiful women the source of evil? Are disrobed beautiful women the source of evil? It gets a bit tricky here. Is pornography the source of sin? If you see what could be described as pornography, is that the source of your defilement? No. Jesus here says that *pronia* comes from within the heart of man. The magazine or TV advertisement is a thing external to you and is therefore not the source of your defilement according to Jesus. That defilement of *pronia* comes from within.

I want to be exceedingly careful here. To make sure that this is clear let me ask it this way. Were Jesus to be walking through the streets of Capernum and a prostitute flashed some skin, would Jesus be defiled? No. This in no way means that it is OK for a person to look at porn because it is external and therefore not defiling. Wrong! For as you look at it you are giving expression to that evil desire which lies within you. We are not gnostics who give no care for what the body does. Our list is 6 singular items that are drives, and 6 plural items that are deeds. These defiling things which come from within do find their way out and they are still defiling. The women who decided to disrobe gave external expression to their depravity. The producers who published those images gave external expression to their depravity, and if we entertain these things then we will be giving external expression to the depravity that lies within. So this in no way means that we can engage in these things.

It is only the thing that go into the heart that are going to effect a man. That which touches the heart is what is important. Here is a question for you. Can eating a certain kind of food make you unclean? Here is another trick question. If a person really believes that something is sin (even though it is not), and if he proceeds to do that thing, did he sin? Let's make it concrete. Suppose that you put a plate of cookies on the coffee table. Suppose that your intent is to bless your children with these cookies. If a child then ate that cookie that would not be sin would it? But suppose that Johnny believes that the cookies are for dinner guests and not for him. If he proceeds to eat a cookie now, are his actions proceeding from a pure heart or a defiled heart? There is nothing inherently sinful about the cookie. Do you see that the cookie itself does not touch the heart and is therefore OK. But the sinful desire of the cookie did touch the heart. At that point it was wrong.

The point I want to make here is not an academic splitting of hairs. What I am laboring to do here is to remove any excuses we may have. I don't want us to say that the devil made me do it. I don't want us to say that lack of sleep made me do it. I don't want us to say that Hugh Hefner made me do it. I don't want us to say that my stressful job made me do it. I don't want us to say that my environment made me do it. I want us to face up to the problem, recognize that the source of the defilement is within. As long as we refuse to go to the source of the problem, the problem will remain.

It has been said that nature abhors a vacuum. Anytime a vacuum is formed all the surrounding area want to occupy that space. The same is true with our hearts. Our hearts will not sustain a vacuum. They will be filled. They will either be filled with good thoughts or evil thoughts. This is why our minds must be saturated by Christ. That is why our desire here at Grace Community is to see the hearts and minds of all people consumed by the matchless glory of Christ.

Scripture itself gives us this pattern. In Colossians 3 Paul urges the believers to put off the old self and to put on the new self. It simply will not do to do away with our filthy rags. We are no more able to stand in the royal courts of our king naked than we were to stand there with filthy rags. We must take off the old and put on the new.

