

Introduction

1. We are entering a new section of Mark (Mk 7:1-8:26) in which Mark shares more of Jesus' teaching and His ministry among the Gentiles. Warren Wiersbe notes that in this section we see “. . . three ministries of Jesus, the Servant-Teacher . . . Teaching the Jews (7:1-23) . . . Helping the Gentiles (7:24-8:9) . . . Warning the Disciples (8:10-26)” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 87-100).
2. When was the last time that you got dirty? I mean really, head-to-toe dirty?
 - a. About a month ago we finally poured our sidewalks and outside patio for our home.
 - b. After the forms were removed, there was a lot of back-filling, grooming, and landscaping to be done.
 - c. I took a Saturday and worked nine and one-half hours moving dirt, raking and shaping the earth, planting grass seed, and putting straw on top to hold moisture.
 - d. When I got done, I was a mess from head-to-toe. I took off my muddy boots outside, put my grimy, sweaty clothes directly into the washing machine, and hit the shower!
 - e. After my shower, I put on clean clothes and set down to rest—exhausted but clean and happy to have that dirty job done.
3. In today's passage, the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples, and indirectly Jesus Himself, of being unclean because they did not ritually wash their hands before eating.
 - a. Their debate wasn't over being physically dirty on the outside but being spiritually dirty on the inside.
 - b. Let's listen to the Pharisee's accusation and Jesus' confrontational teaching on the matter.
4. **Read Mk 7:1-23.**

A. The Pharisees Accuse Jesus' Disciples of Being Unclean (1-5)

1. The Pharisees were watching Jesus.
 - a. They had come from Jerusalem to Galilee to investigate Jesus. (1)
 - b. They observed his disciples “. . . eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed” (2)
 - 1) “defiled” (Gk., *koinas*) – literally “common, public” –The disciples had unwashed/unclean hands that had touched things in common with those who may have been defiled, perhaps even things touched by a Gentile! The Pharisees thought that eating food using their unclean hands would transmit that uncleanness into them and make them spiritually unclean.
2. This matter of being clean was a major topic and concern in Law (cf., Leviticus 11-15).
 - a. It was important for the priests and people to be clean so that they would be acceptable in the presence of a holy/clean God.
 - b. What is unclean must either be cleansed or destroyed. Being clean applied to people, animals, houses, garments, etc.
 - 1) God's people are to eat clean foods (Leviticus 11),
 - 2) have clean bodies (Leviticus 12),
 - 3) wear clean clothes (Leviticus 13),
 - 4) live in clean houses (Leviticus 14),
 - 5) have clean contacts (Leviticus 15), and
 - 6) be a clean people before God (Leviticus 16).
3. Mark shared more details about the Pharisees' views on ensuring cleanliness.
 - a. They washed when they come in from a crowd where they may have unknowingly touched someone or something that was unclean.
 - b. They observed many other “traditions” (Gk. *paradosin*) regarding washing, making things clean.
 - c. Wiersbe notes, “These washings had nothing to do with personal hygiene, nor were they commanded in the law. They were a part of the tradition that the scribes and Pharisees had given to the people to add to their burdens (Matt. 23:4). . . . Whenever the Jews practiced these washings, they declared that they were ‘special’ and that other people were ‘unclean’! . . . This tradition had begun centuries before to remind the Jews that they were God's elect people and therefore had to keep themselves separated. However, a good reminder had gradually degenerated into an empty ritual, and the result was pride and religious isolation” (Wiersbe, 87-88).

4. The Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus a question. (5a)
 - a. They had asked Jesus about the practices of His disciples on the Sabbath (cf., Mk 2:23-27).
 - b. Questioning of Jesus by the Pharisees becomes a pattern that intensifies at the end of Jesus' life.
 - c. The Pharisees did not want to understand or learn from their question. They hoped to catch Jesus in an error or cause Him to say something that would incriminate Him or cause Him to lose the confidence and admiration of the crowd.
 - d. Of course, they had already begun plotting His murder by this time (cf., Mk 3:6).
5. They asked, “. . . Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?” (5b)
 - a. Again, their question was not one of hygiene. It was more a matter of ritual cleanliness than physical cleanliness.
 - b. By the way, physical cleanliness by washing our hands often, especially before eating, is important for our physical health especially in these times.
 - c. The Pharisees' question ultimately expressed their concern for “the tradition of the elders” (Gk., *paradosin ton presbuteron*) that they so highly valued.
 - d. Essentially, they asked Jesus how He and His disciples could truly be good Jews before God if they did not honor and obey the traditions of their ancestors?

B. Jesus Confronts the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees (6-13)

1. Jesus began His response by calling the Pharisees “hypocrites” (Gk., *hupokriton*).
 - a. This word in classical Greek meant “to play a part; be an actor.”
 - b. A hypocrite is one who acts like someone or something that they are not. In our modern usage hypocrite refers to someone who is a fake or a fraud; someone who says one thing but does another.
2. Jesus' answer was shocking, especially as He added a quote of Isaiah 29:13. (6-7)
 - a. Jesus equated the Pharisees with the deluded and disobedient Jews living in Jerusalem before its fall to Babylon in 586 BCE.
 - 1) The Jews in Isaiah's day felt that they were secure in their relationship with God as they followed their traditions.
 - 2) Unfortunately, the traditions of the elders were all for show and empty of real meaning.
 - 3) Pride in their traditions led to a great fall because they were not in right relationship with God.
 - b. The traditional practices of the elders were put in place originally to guard the practices of the Jews and guide them to keep the Law and live in right relationship with God. The motivation for putting the traditions in place was good in the beginning, but the practice of the traditions became an end in itself and was devoid of any real meaning for those who practiced them.
 - c. Their external practices looked good on the outside, but their hearts were not right on the inside. It's not who we are or what we do on the outside that matters to God. It's who we are and what we do based on what is inside that counts with Him.
 - d. Relationship with God is not found by following rules but by living in a love relationship with Him. We obey God not to be acceptable to Him but because we love the One who has accepted us by His grace.
3. Jesus' pronouncement to the Pharisees was also shocking: “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions” (8).
 - a. They followed man-made rules and traditions (Gk., *paradosin*) rather than following God's commands (Gk., *entolan*).
 - b. They were more interested in right ritual than right relationship; in being ritually clean than being spiritually clean.
 - c. The problem was that they had missed the heart of God's commands by following empty rituals.

4. Jesus gave an example of hypocritical obedience to tradition that defied the command of God. (9-13)
 - a. Commandment #5 – “Honor your father and mother” (Ex 21:17, Mk 7:10b)
 - b. Moses, the great Lawgiver, was at the apex of the ancestors and the progenitor of many good traditions that over the years had become vain practices.
 - c. The corollary law to enforce this command was “Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death” (Lev 20:9, Mk 7:10b).
 - d. However, the Jews added a manmade tradition that opened a loophole to God’s law that allowed them to ritually obey the command to love their parents without really loving them.
 - 1) The word “Corban” means “devoted to God” (11).
 - 2) A man could declare everything he owned to be “Corban,” devoted to the Lord. It did not mean that he had to sell it or give it away immediately. It simply meant that it no longer officially belonged to him but to God. He must keep it but could use it until his death at which time it would be given to God. Only God and no one else, including his parents, could receive what had been devoted to God.
 - 3) A Jew with needy parents could use Corban to keep and use his wealth on himself without having to use it to care for his needy parents.
 - e. Jesus pointed out the fault of the Pharisees and teachers of the law in the matter because “. . . you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother” (12).
 - f. This tradition of the elders allowed a Jew to be right according to the Law while missing the heart of God’s command in the Law.
 - g. Jesus concluded, “Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (13).
 - h. Corban was just one of many examples of how the traditions of the elders misled a Jew to think He was following God’s commands when in fact he had missed it completely.
5. Wiersbe concludes, “In every period of history, true holiness has always been a matter of the heart, a right relationship with God by faith. . . . Moses made it clear in Deuteronomy that God wanted love and obedience to come from the heart, and not be merely outward obedience to rules (note Deut. 6:4-5; 10:12; 30:6,20)” (Wiersbe, 90).

C. Jesus Teaches the Crowd Publicly (14-16)

1. “Again Jesus called the crowd to him” (14).
 - a. Certainly, the crowd must have overheard Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees. Jesus now drew the crowd into this important conversation (14).
 - b. The Pharisees raised an important question and Jesus used it as a teachable moment for communicating kingdom truth not only to the Pharisees but to everyone who would listen.
2. Jesus taught that “Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them” (15).
 - a. Jesus was not giving a physical hygiene lesson. We know that eating with dirty hands is not healthy and can lead to becoming sick.
 - b. Jesus taught a more important truth about spiritual cleanliness.
 - c. Our worship of God is not a matter of outward practices (e.g., going to church, reading the Bible, singing, giving tithes, and praying).
 - 1) Our worship of God comes not from what we do on the outside but from who and what we are on the inside, from what is in our hearts.
 - 2) Now, what is inside can lead us to do certain things outwardly, but real relationship with God is not found in the practices. It is found as these practices flow from a heart filled with the Spirit and joy of the Lord.
 - d. Spiritual defilement comes not from external contact with defiled things but from a heart that is defiled by acting in ways counter to the commands and will of God.

D. Jesus Explains His Teaching to His Disciples Privately (17-23)

1. Jesus gave the disciples further instruction (17-23).
 - a. Jesus concluded the public teaching time with the crowd and went inside a home with the disciples.
 - b. The disciples had questions for Jesus in private about His teaching. Their comments indicated to Jesus that they still didn't understand His teaching just as they had not understood His teaching in parables earlier (cf., Mk 4:10-13).
 - c. So, Jesus patiently explained His teaching to the disciples again.
 - d. We often need repetition in order to understand, remember, and apply what we want to learn.
2. Jesus again separated physical and spiritual defilement. It is not a matter of the stomach but of the heart in regard to cleanliness and relationship with God.
 - a. Mark added an insight regarding Jesus' words concerning the physical nature of defilement: "(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean)" (19).
 - b. Remember that Mark most likely used Peter as the primary source for his gospel.
 - c. Also remember that it was Peter who had a vision about clean and unclean foods on a rooftop in Joppa (Ac 10:9-16). In that vision God spoke not so much about food but about the fact that all people, including "unclean" Gentiles, were acceptable to God.
 - d. This additional note added by Mark may have been Peter's further reflection on the teaching of Jesus in light of his vision in Acts 10.
 - e. Daniel Akin points to a study note in the ESV Study Bible that summarizes this point well, "Mark notes that Jesus' teaching, in essence, declared all foods clean. The Mosaic ceremonial laws distinguished between 'clean' and 'unclean' foods (see Lev. 11:1-47). Their purpose was to instill an awareness of God's holiness and of the reality of sin as a barrier to fellowship with God. But once defilement of the heart is thoroughly removed and full fellowship with God becomes a reality (through the atoning death of Jesus . . .), the ceremonial laws have fulfilled their purpose and are no longer required. . . . The point is quite simple: it was always about the heart" (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 155).
3. Jesus tried to make it as plain and concrete as He could for the disciples. (20-21)
 - a. Children can't deal with abstract ideas they need concrete ideas and examples.
 - b. Jesus gave specific examples of the things that come from a defiled heart: ". . . sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (21).
 - c. Notice how Jesus covered the rest of the Ten Commandments in this list (e.g., murder, adultery, stealing, greed/covetousness, and envy/false-witness). The other words Jesus used in this list elaborate on ways humans violate these basic commands of God.
 - d. The words of Jesus here remind me of those of Paul to the Galatians concerning life in the flesh versus life in the Spirit:

"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Gal 5:18-23).
4. Jesus taught that what defiles a person spiritually is not a matter of external, legal observance but a matter of the heart, the inward spirit and mind of that person, which is ultimately revealed in his/her actions.
5. William L. Lane concludes, "The capacity for fellowship with God is not destroyed by material uncleanness of food or hands; it is destroyed by personal sin. With this fundamentally biblical insight the older ritual concept of purity is transcended. . . . The focus upon the desperate need for the renewal and cleansing of the human heart lends to the entire discussion the character of a messianic sign" (William L. Lane, *Mark*, 258).

E. Reflections

1. What are the positive benefits of longtime traditions? What are their negative effects? (Wiersbe, 99)
2. What traditions do we hold onto that may hinder not only our relationship with God but the possibility of others coming into relationship with Him?
3. What is more important following tradition or following God?
4. “What hypocrisies do you see around you that Jesus would have rebuked?” (Wiersbe, 99).
5. Is your relationship with Jesus based on what you do for God or who you are in Christ Jesus?
6. “What are some of your least favorite or most challenging verses in the Bible? Do you sometimes create ways to excuse yourself from obeying those verses, perhaps by employing some work-around or a fanciful interpretation?” (Akin, 157)
7. What external evidence flows from your inward heart as evidence of your real, loving relationship with God?