

Gospel of Mark Chapter 7A

After listening to the Scripture reading today some of you (if you are visiting) may say, “I think I picked the wrong week to visit. He is going to talk about washing hands.” Actually the portion that Ben read deals more with worship than washing.

Worship is a very important part of our community life!

- It is a means by which we publically and corporately glorify God.
- It is a sweet expression of our gratitude and adoration to our creator and redeemer.

Heb 12:28 **Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,**

- Jesus words in Mark 7 help us understand “Acceptable Worship.”
- This is the same subject on which Jesus addressed the Samaritan woman.

John 4: 23 **But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.**

24 **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”**

For Generations the Jews and Samaritans participated in an empty forms of worship that involved fleshly ritualistic formalism that did not affect the heart.

- The Prophets gave them clear warnings but they did not repent.

Isaiah 1:13 **Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations, I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.**

Three hundred years later the Prophet Malachi confronted Israel again about their worship.

Malachi 1:6, **“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ 7 By offering polluted food upon my altar.**

- God called his people, from a true heart of worship and thanksgiving to offer the best of the flock, the most excellent of their herds on the altar in worship. BUT instead they offered to God what was convenient and cost effective.

Even though their worship was AIMED at the true and living God it was presented in a completely wrong way.

- They went through the motions, they brought their sacrifices and gave their tithes BUT their hearts were far from God.
- Early on God made it very clear that worship must come from a heart of love.

Deut 6:4 **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.**

Sad to say, when the Lord Jesus arrived on the scene 400 years after the prophet Malachi, nothing had really changed.

- The Jews were deeply entrenched in legalistic formalism. Their worship was corrupt and fleshly.

The Key Verse in the text that we have before us today is verse 7:

Mark 7: 7 **in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'**

- Vain, empty, useless worship

What then is vain, empty, useless worship?

1. More concerned with human activity than the glory of God.
2. Elevating the traditions of man above the Word of God.
3. Focusing on externals and disregarding the heart.

1. More concerned with human activity than the glory of God.

1 **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.)**

- Consider the privilege that these Jewish leaders have; they are sitting with the King of kings, listening to his voice as he declares his word.
- I am reminded of Martha's sister Mary: all the while that Jesus was speaking Mary sat at Jesus' feet, captivated by his presence, taking in every precious word.

But these Pharisees are distracted; they can't seem to take their eyes off of the disciples.

- The more Jesus speaks, the more they watch the disciples and the more they watch the disciples the more agitated they become.

VS 2 - **They observed the disciples ate with unwashed hands.**

- Most of you MOMS make sure that your children wash their hands before they come to the dinner table.
- You are rightly concerned about where those little fingers have been throughout the afternoon and for the sake of hygiene you enforce a ritual washing before dinner.
- Well in Jewish culture ritual washings both before and after every meal were strictly enforced.
- Those washings were not merely for hygiene they were an outward display of ritualistic righteousness, a show or display of their sanctification.

Because Mark writes to a predominantly Gentile audience (in Rome) he explains the Jewish ritual of washing:

Mark 6: 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.)**

Alabert Edersheim: “Washing was so strictly enjoined, that to neglect it was like being guilty of gross carnal defilement. It’s omission would lead to temporal destruction (Sot.4b) or at least to poverty (Shabb.62b) Bread eaten with unwashed hands was as if it had been filth. (Sot.4b) Indeed a Rabbi who had held this command in contempt was actually buried in excommunication.”

It is important that we understand the Law of Moses DID NOT required this meticulous ceremonial washing.

- When the people were called to come before the Lord in a solemn assembly they were commanded to wash themselves and to wash their clothes.
- The priests who ministered before the Lord at the tabernacle went through various ceremonial washings. ALL of this was in recognition of the holiness of God.

It is a good thing to honor the holiness of God, BUT in doing so the Scribes and Pharisees went beyond God’s revealed Word.

God called his people to holiness: Le 11:44 **For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.**

- And he gave them the Law. We know that the purpose of the Law is to reveal the sinfulness of man.
 - In order to appease their consciences the Jewish leaders focused on the works of men and the traditions that were handed down to them.
 - Developing elaborate prayers, ritualistic fasting, ceremonial washings gave them an appearance of righteousness when in fact their hearts were corrupt.

Matthew 23: 23 **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”**

- Just imagine how much work it would take to give exactly 1/10 of your herb gardens to the Lord. Carefully counting out the sprigs of dill and the leaves of mint.
- For the Pharisee this activity provided a sense of righteousness. (feel good about self)

It is no different in ritualistic or humanistic Christianity today than it was in the days of the Pharisees.

- Men offer prayers that are nothing more than vain repetition in order to appease their guilty conscience. (10 hail Marys and 4 Our Fathers)
- They fast in order to force God to do their bidding, they **“sow their seed”** give their money, NOT as an act of worship but because they want to be personally enriched.
- Whenever human activity becomes the means for obtaining a right standing with God, man becomes the sole object of that worship.
 - He may be very busy with religious activity but his heart is far from God.

2 Elevate the traditions of man above the Word of God.

Mark 7:5 **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?”**

- Take note that the Pharisees and the Scribes did not accuse the disciples of breaking the Law of God but of breaking the traditions of the Elders. WHAT does that mean???

(Important!) The Rabbis of Jesus' day embraced the idea that Moses received TWO laws on Mt Sinai, the Written Law or the Torah and the Oral Tradition called the Mishnah.

- The Mishnah (*to repeat*) was tradition that was believed to have been verbally passed down from Moses to the Synagogue of Jesus' day.

The Mishnah was considered to be "A fence around the Torah."

- The Torah contained the revelation of the Holiness of God, but the Mishnah (tradition) was necessary to keep people from encroaching upon God's holiness.
- This Mishnah contained 30 chapters which painfully described in great detail the proper ceremonial washing of pots, cups, bowls and hands.

Some of the Scribes thought that the Mishnah needed further clarity so they developed the Gamara (meaning - "complete") Eventually the Mishnah and the Gamara were put together in what came to be known as the Jerusalem Talmud.

Listen to a small portion of the Talmud:

"Words of the Scribes are more lovely than the words of the Law."

"It is a greater crime to transgress the words of the school of Hillel than the words of Scripture."

"My son attend to the words of the scribes more than the words of the Law."

- So you see from their own writings that they considered the traditions of men to be more authoritative than the Word of God.

Jesus responds to the error of the Pharisees quoting the book of Isaiah:

Mark 7: 6 "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!

- Jesus often called the Pharisees and Scribes "Hypocrites." They were corrupt and sinful men who hid behind their religious and pious masks.
- Their outward appearance covered up a deep and deadly internal sickness.

Whenever you asked My Father-in-law how he was feeling: "I'm Fine."

In reality if you were to do an x-ray, an MRI or a catscan of his body you would find that he was gravely ill. COPD, hardening of the arteries,

- Jesus is the great Physician and His Word acts like an MRI exposing what lies beneath

In Vs 9 He places the Pharisees in the MRI of his Word:

Mark 7: 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.”

The Mishnah permitted an individual to declare all of his assets, all of his property to be dedicated to the Lord. That is what the term “Corban” means.

- Certainly this dedication would have been viewed as an expression of righteousness an act of religious devotion.

TODAY in a person’s WILL they might leave all of their property, all of their worldly possessions to their church so that when they die everything they own becomes the property of the church.

- BUT while they remain alive all of their resources remain under their control

It was the same in Israel when wealth was declared to be “Corban.” The person was looked upon as uniquely devoted but in reality that person retained complete control over his assets.

- Jesus’ problem was that the Pharisees pulled out the “Corban Card” when their parents were in need, *“I can’t help you mom and dad because everything I have belongs to the Lord.”*
- In this way they broke the 5th commandment (**honor your father and mother**) yielding to the traditions of man.

The natural, unregenerate man seeks only to benefit himself at the expense of everyone else, even those closest to him.

- BUT the truly redeemed individual having a new heart, possesses a new compassion for the poor, a heart of mercy for the suffering. This is why James could say:

James 1:27 **Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.**

3 Empty Worship focus on externals and disregard the heart.

Mark 7: 14 **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.”**

- It is not the external filth, the kind of dirt that can be washed away with water that defiles or corrupts a man. **FORBIDDING** him from participating in worship.

If we are honest with ourselves, it is the defilements that arise from within us that are in need of cleansing as we come before the Lord in humble worship.

- Surely this is what Jesus communicated with his Disciples:

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.”**

- The heart of man has not changed since the time of the Pharisees:
- Lust, anger, greed envy and pride flow from the heart of man like a spring of corrupted water flows from a septic system.

- You can freeze the ground as much as you want the continual run off from the septic system will win out every time.
- YOU need to DIG UP the drain field, cap the pipes and replace the dirt only then will the field finally be clean.
- That is what God has done to our corrupt hearts through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Look at what God promised Israel through the mouth of Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 36:25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

- By Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone, GOD does a heart transplant in those he has called his own.

Titus 3: 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,