

What's Wrong with the World?

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 6:53-7:23

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We continue in the Gospel of Mark, and this week we get to a section of the Gospel of Mark where we see the confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders is growing. But it also serves to establish—in the event that it wasn't already obvious—establish the deep truth of what the Scriptures teach regarding who we are as human beings and what's wrong in the world. And we hear this in light of a confrontation between the religious leaders and Jesus's disciples. And Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach in many ways, not only the broad aspect of the gospel, but deep and abiding truths from Genesis to Revelation. So it is not an insignificant passage. So look with me, if you will, at the Gospel of Mark. We'll be looking at Mark 6:53 and then continuing to 7:23. Hear now God's word.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵ and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

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 properly, 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."

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.” 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.”
[ESV]

This is the Word of God. (Thanks be to God.) Again, will you pray with me. Father, this is a hard saying. This goes to the heart of the matter, the matter of brokenness and sin. So help us to see with eyes of faith and with hearts that can receive the Word of God as a gift of grace—that you do not leave us where we are, but rather you proclaim our salvation through your Son, Jesus. Help us to believe and to receive him, and help the teacher. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

So you will see in your bulletin, you'll see two points of the outline. **The Problem** and **Two Alternatives**. **The Problem** and **Two Alternatives**. My emphasis this morning will be beginning in Chapter 7:1, moving forward to 23. But specifically what I want you to see is what Jesus is implying, underneath the context of all that he is saying. Before we look specifically at what Jesus is confronting, we need to hear what Jesus is actually teaching as a backdrop, as a background, as a foundation upon which Jesus confronts these leaders, these Pharisees and scribes.

These Pharisees and scribes were no less [than] the key leaders of God's people. They came from Jerusalem pursuing Jesus, trying to hear what he had to say, which is a practice we have seen throughout the Gospel of Mark. Jesus was growing in influence. They wanted to hear what he had to say. What do they need to counteract? How could they accuse him? How could they catch him? This is another one of these, but before we could actually get to it, what I want you to hear is the backdrop, that is, **The Problem**. The problem upon which Jesus bases all of his teaching on—indeed, in which the entire Bible finds itself, and even the Pharisees and scribes would agree with this problem—it's... I would describe it in two ways. First, there is a base level proposition which Jesus is building upon as he teaches. Secondly, there is a base level recognition.

First, this base level proposition that demonstrates the problem: What is wrong with the world? The problem with the world is us. This is taught most principally from the beginning, even in Genesis, where we learn the thoughts of man are evil even from his birth. This is what people call ‘original sin.’ This is what the Bible means as original sin. And in fact there is this original relationship between Adam and Eve and their Creator, the Lord God. And instead of following him and obeying his ways, they chose to obey—not something that came from without, but rather a desire that was ignited from within. A desire to be like God. And when they chose to not walk in God's ways, what entered in was not only just a fundamental sin and original sin of saying to God, I don't need you, indeed, I want to be like you. I want to be a God unto myself. That original sin had a consequence. That consequence is a broken relationship between God and us.

And so what we see throughout Scripture... We see this continually echoed. One of those places is

early on in the book of Romans, where Paul writes these words: “for all...” meaning all mankind, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...” [Romans 3:23-24, ESV] So what the Bible teaches is that all of us—and this is what Elder Koch was referring to earlier—all of us have fallen in our sinful natures, in our nature, in our inner being, in our very hearts. We have rebelled against God, against his standard. God's standard is his holiness, his righteousness that he's laid out for us to follow. And in breaking that relationship by sin, each of us has fallen short of that standard, which is what Paul is saying. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God's glory is his righteousness and his holiness.

The base level proposition of the entire Bible is that we are fundamentally broken because of sin. And that brokenness isn't just personal; we see it around the world. Do we really need to make that point? But some would believe that what the Bible simply does is that there are the good people in the world and the evil people in the world. It is most sure that the Bible understands good and evil, but it doesn't bifurcate the world and say good people over here, bad people over here. No, it says fundamentally all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There are no good people; there are no just bad people. Each of us carries within us at a deep heart level, at the base of who we are, a brokenness, which the Bible calls sin. This is the base level proposition.

But in the event that we think that it's just the Bible that says this, consider just a couple of quotes that I found in my preparation. One of my favorite authors in college was a famous Russian novelist, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, when he says this word, this phrase. He says, “The line between good and evil does not pass through states nor between classes, nor between political parties, either, but right through every human heart and through all human hearts. This line cuts through who we are.”

Now let's bring it to even the low hanging fruit of popular culture. Consider this confessional statement written by a leading editor of women's magazines. This editor served on such magazines as Elle, Elle Girl, Young Miss, Jane, and Sassy. (There we are.) This is what she wrote a few years ago as an editorial piece, as a confessional.

Why do we crave celebrities? Here's my theory. To be human is to feel inconsequential. So we worship celebrities. We seek to look like them. All the great things they have done we identify with in order to escape our own inconsequential lives. But it's so dumb. With this stream of perfectly airbrushed, implanted, liposuctioned stars, you would have to be an absolute powerhouse of self-esteem already not to feel totally inferior before them. So we worship them because we feel inconsequential. But doing it makes us feel even worse. We make them stars, but then their fame makes us feel insignificant. I am part of this whole process as an editor. No wonder I feel soiled at the end of the day.

What she calls ‘feeling inconsequential,’ the Bible would very much agree. We feel broken, and so we're always on the lookout for something that can help us escape what is—we may not have the language for—but is nonetheless a profound and heart-level brokenness.

That's the base level proposition upon which Jesus is teaching. Miss that point, and you don't understand what Jesus is saying in this dialogue with the Pharisees.

But there's also a base level recognition. This is one of the things that separates Christianity

from—one of the things that separates it from every other world religion. That based upon this base level proposition, the base level recognition is....said in the words of another author, Anne Lamott: “It's OK to realize that you are damaged. All the best people are.” Close quote. What Anne Lamott was summarizing is the recognition of what the Bible calls us to do.

Hear it in this phrase from 1 John, which we have read many times in this congregation. Now consider the base level proposition, and then consider what it invites us to do. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he (that is, the Lord) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” [1 John 1:9-10, ESV]

So imagine that. The Bible tells us we are fundamentally broken and sinful. But on the other hand, if we try to hide that fact, if we don't acknowledge it, if we don't confess it—we make God out to be a liar and we miss the gift of grace. So God tells us the truth about ourselves, but then calls us into the light to recognize that that is true of ourselves. Because only as we do so are we then open to asking yes, I know I'm unclean, but what will make me clean? This is the Lord, who is faithful and just, it says. God would be unjust—God in his holiness would go against his holiness if he did not forgive us our sins when we confess it. That is amazing. So God pledges himself in that. By my own holiness, by my own righteousness, by my own *shekinah* glory—if I do not forgive those who come in confession and humility, I am not God. But the Lord says, do you recognize it?

Upon these two things, the proposition and the recognition, the illustration of the problem is the backdrop on which we understand what Jesus is teaching and how and why he's responding to the Pharisees in this way. So let's look at that together. Beginning in Chapter 7:1 we notice that he's being pursued by these Pharisees and these scribes. Very simply, they're watching Jesus, listening to him. And in so doing they bring to him this problem. And [they're] saying why aren't your disciples following the tradition?

Now it's very unusual for Mark to do these things, but if you have your Bibles you might notice that in your Bibles you will see that there are two points at which Mark has an editorial, and that's in parentheses. He expands on the nature of the ways in which they had placed—as we've talked about before. They had the written law of God, but then the Pharisees and the scribes over the years had an oral law, an oral tradition. And what it was trying to do, it was trying to make sure that the written law had its effect, brought purity. And so they simply took the law of God and tried to apply it to every single aspect of life. And their desire was good. They wanted to be holy and righteous and pure. But they mistakenly thought that by following these things, that's what would make them pure.

And so you'll see there, Mark advances out what they're saying. It's not just that they eat without washing their hands—there's these other things. And that they were also to wash the cups and the pots and the copper vessels, as well as where they dined. And they simply say why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands.

So we have these **Two Alternatives**. The first alternative that Jesus confronts is this. The **Outside-In** approach to cleanliness. They believed if I'm clean on the outside, then I am safe. The way of purification is to separate yourself from anything that would defile you: food, people, places. But what Jesus does in confronting them—indeed, he says right off—you're hypocrites. You say you follow the law of God, but then you've created this other oral tradition that negates it.

And he brings us this somewhat obscure problem of you say honor your father and mother, but then you show a way of getting out of that. The way to honor your father mother is you care for them. But what they were doing is, they had an oral law that if a person had an inheritance, that simply what they could do is, instead of caring for and honoring their parents, they could simply say, I gave it to the Lord, and then say to their parents, good luck with that. And that's a drastic reduction, I recognize, but you get the point.

He's saying you've convinced yourselves you know the way to holiness, and you've created these things that actually have created a tension that completely collapses in on itself. You have become hypocrites. You say do this, and then you yourselves find a way out. This is for Jesus the height of pride, this hypocrisy. And Jesus demonstrates that it will never make us clean.

Was Jesus—and this is a key question—was Jesus therefore then rejecting the law of God? Is he saying that the law God here is wrong? No. What Jesus is saying—I will argue, inferring—Jesus isn't saying that the law of God is no longer good. Jesus is saying that what he's doing in who he is and what he is teaching—he's demonstrating that the law of God is now fulfilled. You will no longer need to be worried about this food or that food or touching this thing or that thing, as if it were to defile you. For I have come to be the ultimate clean sacrifice, the ultimate pure offering to the Lord, that will make you clean. Jesus is not rejecting the law. Jesus is saying I've come to fulfill it.

[The audio recording has a skip.] But how many of you have a Purell bottle in your purse or your bag? Everywhere I go there's this stuff. Our soaps are now anti-whatever it is, anti-bacterial. We're concerned about bacteria, because we know that if we touch things it will make us unclean and will make us sick. It isn't suggested that that cannot happen. It's suggesting that all the world religions try to give us spiritual anti-bacterial soap. All of them, except for Christianity, work from the outside in. You want to find a place of peace? Walk these steps. You want to walk in obedience? You need to do exactly these things on exactly these kinds of days, pray in this direction this many times a day, and that is what will make you holy.

But none of them have at its heart atonement. What do we do when we are unclean? What do we do when we recognize that all of this activity, all of this work, doesn't make us clean? Or if you don't ascribe to any religious faith, how do you try to solve your own brokenness, your own failure, your own feeling of inconsequence? You try to make yourself clean by working harder, being better. Hopefully at the end of the day you've done more good than bad. All of us are trying to deal with the dirt we cannot see, but inescapably feel.

Jesus confronts these Pharisees, calls them hypocrites, and says see, you're trying to do it backwards. Because based on that base level proposition, the problem isn't from the outside. The problem is our hearts. And because it's our hearts, this is why Mark could say Jesus declared all foods are clean. Because where does food go? It goes to our stomach, not to our heart. The problem is not first and foremost the mind. The problem first and foremost is not our hands or our eyes. The first and foremost problem isn't Satan and his temptations. The first and foremost problem is we have hearts that have all of their own ability to create all kinds of havoc and sin. For Jesus says it. For out of the heart come “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.” We didn't suddenly discover these things when the Internet came in to fruition in the late 90's. We didn't suddenly discover it when popular culture started producing movies that displayed these things even celebrates them.

Where does all this stuff come from? It comes from the human heart. And that is the only way and only place we can begin. So for Jesus, he talks about the **Inside-Out**. This is the other alternative. Notice what he says. "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."

What question is Jesus wanting to ask? Then how is my heart made clean? This is precisely the mission which Jesus is on. When we use this word 'faith,' it is a word that is deeply embedded in the idea of trust. But Christian faith has something even more profound: that when you trust someone you are united to them. And when we believe in Jesus Christ and say we have faith in him, he gives us the blessing of drawing us to himself. We are therefore united with him—what theologians say we are 'in' him. Therefore what is true of Jesus becomes true of us. Therefore what Jesus does is done for us, and we receive the benefits, both the negative and the positive. Watch this. What happens to Jesus negatively issues out for us in the positive. What Jesus does positively in his obedience issues for us positively. What am I, then, saying. When Jesus obeys perfectly, those who have faith in Jesus are in him. Therefore every time Jesus obeys, that is your obedience. He's done that on your behalf. You can claim that. And likewise, when Jesus gave of himself on the cross, his death, his sacrifice, his offering of his body and his blood, becomes yours. And all the benefits of that offering and of that sacrifice become yours when you believe in Christ by faith.

So how is the human heart changed? That is, when the human heart, at the base of what we say we love, we are willing to finally capitulate and give up and say, Father, forgive me, for I am a sinner. In Christ, forgive me of my sins. Forgive me. Have mercy. And the Bible tells us that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and we receive salvation. We receive the Holy Spirit. We receive the gift of union with Christ. And the human heart, as the Scriptures teach in the Old Testament—he takes from us our hearts of stone that say we have no sin, and gives us a heart of flesh that says Father, forgive me, for I have sinned. He gives us new hearts. And new life starts from the inside and works its way out.

See, the answer is not washing of hands and keeping away from certain food. No, it's about a fundamental relationship. Because it is only in relationship with Christ that our hearts can be changed. One writer, a famous preacher, says these words. "Not all the vials of judgment that have or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the groans of damned creatures give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin as the wrath of God let loose upon his Son. Never did divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely, than at the time when our Savior's countenance was most marred in the midst of his dying groans."

And through that offering the Scriptures teach that Jesus became a fragrant offering. Because why? Sin and its consequences had been paid in full. And God hates our sin. But that wrath has been poured out on Christ. And the invitation to you and me at the heart level is to recognize our sin and its deserving of wrath. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but Christ has been offered on our behalf and God's wrath has been satisfied.

But more than that, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Do you hear the alternative from inside out? God made him who had no sin to be a sin offering for us, so that in him, trusting in Christ, we sinners might become the righteousness of God. God clothed Jesus in our sin, this writer says. He took our

penalty, our punishment, so that we might be able to say: Let us rejoice and be glad! Fine linen, bright and clean, is given to us to wear. Revelation 19:7-8. Hebrews 13 says Jesus was crucified outside the gate where bodies are burned, the garbage heap, and the place of absolute uncleanness, so that we might be made clean. Through Jesus Christ, at infinite cost to himself, God has clothed us in costly, clean garments. It cost him his blood. And it is the only thing that can deal with the problem of our hearts.

We receive the clothes of righteousness. We receive forgiven hearts. We receive a reconciled relationship with the Father. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and nothing we can do by our hands will ever change that fact. Only Christ, whose outstretched arms, whose body and blood, by the wrath of God became a sacrifice, that is for us a fragrant offering.

So I can say to you, if you are a believer, Christian, you are clean. You are clean by the blood of the Lamb. If you are not a believer, and you feel that dirt, the dirt you cannot see but are trying to escape—come, come to him, and you will find a lover of your soul that will never judge you, will love you and care for you. For he is good and his love endures forever. What are the alternatives? By what righteousness standard do we want to live? The standard of the culture? The standard of beauty and success? It is like sand that is constantly on the move. And it is a legalism and a judgmental-ness that cannot be described. We will never add up. But Jesus offers a faithfulness and love that knows us to the core, and knows you and loves you, and invites you to know a purity and a cleanness and a newness that cannot be fully described.

There's another group I want to address as I finish. There's probably a large group of Christians here this morning that perhaps feel guilt or shame for sin that you are afraid to keep confessing or that you've battled against. And you begin to allow that into your life and you begin to doubt the love of God the Father in Christ. And your heart has slowly become cold to the Gospel. And your relationship with him is distant and doubt begins to creep in, or resentment. I say to you, Christian, that is the lie of Satan. The lie of Satan says: He won't forgive you again. You need to do these things first. You need be obedient for another twenty four hours, then you'll be OK to come before the Lord. You'll be able to be faithful one more week. Oh no, you know that when you ask for forgiveness, you're going to have to start that Bible study up this week. You going to have to start praying more. And we begin to have this battle internally. But none of it drives us to the Lord; it drives us steadily away.

I say to you, Christian, that is a lie from the pit of hell. And your self-accusations? Those, too, are from the pit. For his grace is greater than all your sin, and he invites you this morning to be renewed at your heart that Jesus has paid it all. Confess your sins, and he is just and will forgive you, for it is paid in full. Let's pray.

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. These treasures of grace from your word are greater than we have the capacity to fully take in. Yet we pray that your Holy Spirit would renew us from the inside out, to rest and trust and stand upon the work of Christ alone, who can make us clean from the inside out. Those sin is still present, we are no longer a slave to it if we are united to Christ. And you are just to forgive us and to restore us. Lord, help us to taste of that grace this morning. And Father, may you extend your grace to those who do not know you, and draw them to yourself, that they may know a cleanliness through the work and beauty of Christ our Savior, who has paid it in full. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.