

## Mark 7:1-23 (NLT)

### The Gospel of Mark Jesus and the New Heart

**Introduction:** Mark is written for disciples. It's a road map for discipleship to Jesus. So in a time where there is a lot of confusion about what's going on, who we are and what we are to be doing - Mark's gospel is a road map for the people of God in how to follow the way of Jesus.

Mark is also a book of mystery - Mark's Gospel is so filled with mysterious references to Jesus and his identity. Mark, though rarely quoting the OT, is a master of the Biblical text and has told the story of How God is cryptically and mysteriously present and bringing his kingdom on earth through the suffering, crucified and resurrected messiah, Jesus.

*"For Mark, the character of God's presence in Jesus is a mystery that can be approached only by indirection, through riddle like allusions to the Old Testament." - Richard Hays*

Mark through his portrayal of Jesus is provoking the most important question that has ever been put to humanity, who is Jesus?

As we've noted Mark's Jesus speaks cryptically and mysteriously on purpose because he wants us to press into his story of Jesus so we don't miss what God is doing, so we don't miss how God is bringing his kingdom into this world and how we get to be a part of that kingdom.

#### 1. Jesus and the Religious Leaders

- a. Once again the Pharisees and Scribes take issue with Jesus' disciples and their lack of observance and practice of the

traditions of the Elders.. I had a thought as I was studying this passage - If Disciples are those who are being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what he did - Foraging on the Sabbath, not fasting and eating with unwashed hands - most likely this was learned behavior from Jesus. Jesus basically tells the religious leaders that he doesn't hold to their tradition or their interpretation.

- b. First, Jesus says that the religious leaders' zeal for the Traditions of the Fathers (A Rabbinic commentary on Mosaic Law) actually nullifies or makes void God's law (Scripture). It would be good to note that this Rabbinic tradition added hundreds of laws to the Mosaic law - and in many cases required all of Israel to observe a rigid system of washings and ceremonies that were meant only for the levitical priests).
- c. Jesus' words bring a serious accusation against those who claim to have a high view of law and scripture.
- d. God had said, in Isaiah 55, a powerful passage about God's unstoppable word, **“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” - Isaiah 55:10-11**
- e. Here Jesus accuses the religious leaders of Making God's word void - empty - taking away it's intention and power.  
WOW!
  - i. It's wild to think but in these people's zeal for holiness and purity they actually missed the whole goal!
- f. Remember, the goal or purpose of Pharisaic zeal is the messianic kingdom - if the Nation keeps up levitical priest type holiness THEN Messiah will come

- g. But here is the irony once again - The Messiah is right in front of them and they are constantly resisting him, not listening to him, and eventually they will kill him...
- h. The hope they claim to be all about, the one they claim to be zealous for is right in front of them, but they miss it. Not only that, they have blocked him at every step, and sought to make his word and ministry void... WOW

## 2. Jesus and the Crowds

- a. At this moment, Jesus turns to the crowd and calls their attention to what he's about to say - **"It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart."** Jesus with one sentence undoes all of the regulations of the tradition of the Elders.
- b. We looked at the idea of clean and unclean a few weeks ago in the story of the woman and Jairus' daughter. We saw how in the early laws of Israel strict holiness guidelines were required in approaching God, especially in worship at the temple, - sin was defilement, but also, sickness, uncleanness, and even improper hygiene were pictures of and types of death and decay and could be brought into God's holy space. God is life, death and decay have no place in his presence. But in the prophets, specifically Isaiah and Ezekiel, is envisioned a moment when all of this is reversed - the coal is taken from the altar in the temple and when it touches Isaiah's lips it makes him pure. Isaiah is not destroyed by God's holiness but instead he is transformed by it. The temple is now transferring it's holiness and purity to others rather than the reverse.. it's absorbing the uncleanness and transforming the person. We see the same picture towards the end of Ezekiel where healing waters flow from the foundation of the temple and bring healing to every place it flows...again it cleanses and absorbed all the disease and death in its path.

- c. This cleansing was a foreshadow of what God would himself do - the temple housed the holy presence of God and now In Jesus God's holy presence has come among humans and is in that same way absorbing all the sin, disease, uncleanness and death around him.
- d. *"The scriptures spoke of purity, and set up codes as sign posts to it; Jesus is offering the reality. When you arrive at the destination you don't need the signposts any more, not because they were worthless but precisely because they were correct."* - NT Wright, *Mark for Everyone*

### **3. Jesus and Disciples**

- a. The last bit of the section, and this is interesting to note - Jesus unpacks only for Disciples -
  - i. They came to him privately and asked and Jesus responded, "Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? 19 Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer." (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.)
  - ii. 20 And then he added, "It is what comes from inside that defiles you. 21 For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. 23 All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you."
- b. Now we can't mistake what Jesus is saying here - He is not saying that what we do on the outside, what we do with our physical bodies doesn't matter as long as we have good hearts. That's dualism not Christianity. Jesus is saying that if we only worry and are concerned with outer purity, doing the right thing, there is no real healing and we've missed the point. The key is to get at the root, the heart of the issue, and from there character and action flow...

- c. You cannot make up for a “bad” heart by doing sacrifice. Or you can’t cover your injustice, unrighteousness and mercilessness by doing sacrifice. That can’t change you. Can’t you see you have a heart problem?? You need a new heart!
- d. The problem is the heart. This is what God is constantly saying in the prophets - You’ve missed the point! I don’t care about sacrifice and ritual, about the blood of bulls and goats - you think this is what I’m about?? It was all intended to make you just and merciful!
- e. **“ I can’t stand your religious meetings. I’m fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I’ve had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me? Do you know what I want?I want justice—oceans of it.I want fairness—rivers of it. That’s what I want. That’s *all* I want.”**  
**- Amos 5:21-24 (The Message)**
  - i. Later God would speak through Jeremiah and Ezekiel about the day when he would give his people new hearts  
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  - ii. **“I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” - Jeremiah 24:7**
  - iii. Here we get the understanding of the need for the new heart, all religious ritual and sacrifice is ultimately endless and insufficient without the new heart that comes from the Spirit of God. We must be cleansed from within!
    - 1. But Ezekiel makes it even clearer as to what God is after.

iv. **“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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” - Ezekiel 36:25-27**

- f. Notice - God will cleanse the outside with washing, then he will give the new heart or new person within, which leads to walking in his statutes and obeying his rules.... This is a whole person cleansing - What the Sermon on the Mount points to - A Wholistic Righteousness
- g. Both inward and outward character are important to God. A heart that is devoted to God will show that devotion in everyday practices of life.. I mean read James, this is what he is constantly getting after. Either a spirituality that is only inward and has no outward manifestation or a spirituality that is only outward and has no inward devotion to God. Both are bankrupt/bogus without the other.
  - i. **Example:** Today we go do justice, but ignore being just. We condemn sex trafficking, raise money to help people out of it, while indulging in porn. We lament child trafficking and abortion and yet are silent on adoption and foster care. Or - I condemn pornography but care nothing for the sex slave girl or boy. or there is the virtue signaler type - We “like” some social cause on facebook, repost something on instagram, we post a personal rant at injustice and think that that is sufficient for doing righteousness and justice...
- h. God wants to make us into WHOLE people. God wants to make us into people of character. God wants to make us into

people who actually do mercy (kindness, service, feeding, helping, caring, healing), because that's the kind of people we are, the people we have become, because of God's own Spirit and character at work in us. And this is the work that Jesus is here to do. Who is Jesus? He is the giver of the New Heart. The one who can bring us into the wholistic righteousness of the kingdom of God that the prophets foretold.

4. **Closing** - What does this mean for us - as Disciples, as followers of Jesus?
  - a. Here - standing before these religious scholars, experts, biblical professionals is the very one the scriptures pointed to all along, and they can't see him, they can't hear him, he can't get through the hardness of their hearts, their insistence upon the old ways, the way of tradition blocks them from seeing... they are resisting the one who is here to do the very thing they claim to want purity, goodness, new hearts!
  - b. What is it about human nature that we will give ourselves completely to a manmade construct, a creed, a constitution, a political party, a career, a dream, a lifestyle, a health regiment - with all the fervor of the most religious zealot; yet the commands of God - to do justly to love mercy, to walk with him in humility we leave untried and wanting?
  - c. None of these things I mentioned are wrong - they can be incredible tools, helpful guidelines. But they can't cleanse you, that can't redeem you, they don't love you, they won't die for you.
  - d. Why do we give our loyalty, allegiance and passion to almost everything except the Gospel of Jesus and the Kingdom? It is a tragedy and a mockery to our king, to our redeemer that at this moment Evangelical Christians are better known for our

conspiracy theories and political opinions than for the Gospel, the way of Jesus and our kingdom work.

*i. "The real conspiracy is satanic and it's goal is to get you to focus on "global meta whatever's" that you can do almost nothing about and neglect the place of prayer, the word, and sacrificial love of neighbor" - Jon Tyson*

- e. We have so much more to offer than conspiracy theories and talking points for political parties, we have the gospel!
- f. JESUS ALONE can give us what our hearts truly long for Wholeness, goodness, righteousness, justice - the Kingdom of God! HE gave his very life blood to give it to us, and yet we give our loudest cries, our passionate protests to man made traditions - pointing people to observe these! Our call as disciples is to point to Jesus and not to put any obstacles in the way of him! The World Needs Jesus! People are afraid, they have no hope, they fear it's the end of the world, their lives have been upturned - WHAT AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GOSPEL - WE NEED SOME GOOD NEWS IN THIS WORLD! Let us faithfully follow and represent Jesus to a world that needs him so desperately.

**Closing Prayer:** Holy Spirit we ask again that you would do for us what we cannot do for ourselves - open our eyes and ears to the ways that we have shut ourselves off to the hope and redemption that can only be found in Jesus. Make us channels of grace, peace and good news to those around us. Lord we don't ignore the state of the world, but we want to remember our call to be a people who point away from man made solutions to our only hope in this world - Jesus, the giver of the new heart and the new creation. Lead us by your grace. Amen