

Vain Worshippers

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Text: Mark 7:1-23

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Series: Mark (Introducing Jesus)

Introduction: We are taking a look today at something we need to be careful to avoid. We need to avoid a vain, empty, meaningless, or self-serving worship of God. The title of this morning's message is "Vain Worshippers" in **Mark 7:1-23**.

The Jews had worked themselves into a system which had absolutely drained the people of any awareness of the presence of God. It had removed from their hearts any heart relationship to God. People were going through the motions of outward ceremonies and rituals and they had no personal contact with the God who created them and the God who was their Redeemer.

It all began with what was known as oral interpretations of the law. They would take the Word of God, then, in order to help the people understand it, they would give oral interpretation. Through the years these oral interpretations would be handed down from generation to generation and finally the time came when the people really didn't know what the Word said way back then.

These people were more involved in keeping and observing these traditions. So, they had lost their contact with God. This is a very easy thing to do. It is very easy to get so wrapped up in programs. It is very easy to get so occupied with what men teach or what men say, that you remove yourself from the authority of God's Word and God can't speak to your heart directly from His Word.

There is a difference between tradition and truth.

- Tradition is outward. Truth is inward.
- Tradition has to do with ritual. Truth has to do with reality.
- Tradition is something you keep. Truth is something which keeps you.

Open your heart this morning and let us see where we may be just "going through the motions".

"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.) 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." 16 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."

Background

There is a great contrast between Mark 6 and 7.

In Mark 6 we see the popularity of Jesus.

In Mark 7 we see the hostility toward Jesus.

Jesus, in this passage of Scripture is dealing with the danger of unengaged hearts. Are you engaged this morning? Are you engaging God or just enduring the service?

Well, God came to meet with the Pharisees and Scribes, but they missed Him completely. They didn't recognize Him!

So, in the first seven verses let's look at:

I. Vain Worshippers **Miss** Christ (vs. 1-7).

A. They missed the **Power** of Christ. Look at what is going on. These Pharisees and scribes come to Jesus to criticize Him. They are missing the big picture! Look at the power of Christ in **Mark 6:53-56**, "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."

- If this would have been our town, we could say—Jesus went over to St. Alexius and emptied it out. Everybody got healed. Doctor’s offices shut down. Doctors and nurses had to start collecting unemployment! Look at the unimaginable power of Jesus! He is God in human flesh!
- After He is done with St. Alexius, he goes to the mental hospitals, and everyone is brought to their right mind.
- Vs. 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.”
- They cleared out their supermarkets and turned them into hospitals. He cleared them all out. He would simply walk by their bed, and they reached out and touched Jesus, and they were made well.

Explanation: The Pharisees didn’t care about this unimaginable power! We are going to see that they miss the power of Christ. They don’t want or need Christ’s power. They say they worship God, but here He is come in human flesh, and they don’t recognize Him.

Application: Vain worshippers are totally self-sufficient. They depend on themselves. They do what they want to do. They are more concerned with their own influence, their own life going their way, their own comfort. For a true worshipper Christ is everything.

B. They missed the **Person** of Christ.

Verses 1-2, ““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.””

We notice in **verse 1** that an official delegation of Pharisees had come from headquarters in Jerusalem. The Pharisees and Scribes, who wanted to kill Jesus (**Mark 3:6**) were traveling all the way from Jerusalem to talk with Jesus.

What a privilege—the Jewish leaders got to live during the time of God coming to earth. They even got to travel up to Galilee and have a meeting with the Almighty in human flesh. And what do you think they talked about?

“Tell us how you created the world!”

“Tell us how you have come to save us!”

Perhaps they could have bowed at His feet and worshipped Him. But NO, they didn’t recognize Him! They wanted to talk about a silly ceremony that Jesus wasn’t partaking in.

Instead of being a group of worshippers, they were a *committee of critics*. Their goal was, not to *worship* Jesus, but to find something *wrong* with Jesus.

The Context

They are getting ready to eat—it is suppertime. The disciples were getting ready to eat. The Pharisees and the Scribes were shocked. They said, “Those disciples are eating with unwashed hands!” The Scripture says in **verses 2-3**, “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)”.

Explanation: This is not talking about hygiene, but a certain ritual—a ceremonial cleansing. We are not dealing here with the dirty dozen. was a *ceremonial cleansing*. It was one of those traditions that had built up around a very important spiritual truth but they had lost the truth in the symbol.

What Did the Ceremony Look Like?

Verses 4-5, “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?”

Before every meal, there was a big to-do. Someone would take a basin and pour water over you from the elbow down to the fingers. You would take the fist of this hand and you would rub vigorously in this hand. Then you would take the fist here and you would rub vigorously in the other hand. Then you would rub all the way up to your elbows. It was a ceremony.

Then they went so far as to insist that all the utensils used had to be baptized—had to be washed. They would take the pots and the pans and dump them in water. They would even take the table to a body of water and dunk that table in the water. They had become so ceremonial, so ritualistic in their religious observances.

- C. They missed the **Purpose** of Christ. Jesus Christ refused to be bound by those man-made rules and rituals. Jesus came to reach the heart! The Pharisees and scribes ask Jesus, “Why don’t you keep the ritual?” His answer is cutting. He quotes Isaiah.

Look at **verses 6-7**, “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”” (from *Isaiah 29:13*).

Jesus came to reach the heart!! The purpose of Christ coming into the world was not to make you religious. It was to deal with your rotten sin. It was to crucify your stinky pride and all your self confidence. It was to level you before a holy

God—to humble you—that you might surrender all to Him.

You want to bring this into the 21st century. It is people who go to church and just go through the motions. I fear that there may be many people in our churches who never make contact with God when they come to the worship services. They never have a heart experience with Jesus. They never go away from the service saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place."

Vs. 6, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites...” The Greek word, *hypocrite*, was a word is the word “actor”. It means one who pretends. What Jesus is saying is--you folks have turned worship into play acting. The hypocrite is the religious make-believer. He is the person who pretends to be one thing in his outward behavior. He has NO heart change. Jesus came to radically change us from the inside out. Christianity with no heart change is a deadly imitation.

- II. Vain worshippers **manipulate** worship (vs. 8-13). Jesus gives an example here of manipulating worship.

Verses 8-13, “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.”

We have to be careful not to get wrapped up in our own program. What happens is this—it’s not that you disregard the Word of God at the beginning. You put some standard or application of God’s Word that started out as a good thing along side of God’s Word.

We can get wrapped up in a system that I know a lot of Baptist, their theme song ought to be, My hope is built on nothing less than Scofield’s notes and Baptist Press.

As Christians we are tempted to get so into books and conferences and online sermons, that we forget to study the Word of God itself.

There are two extremes in worship. There is the rigid form of worship. You know exactly what you are going to do at all times. Then there is the other extreme. It’s chaos. Anything goes. Jesus said, “God is a Spirit and those who worship Him must worship him in Spirit and in truth.” Now the church cannot worship for you. The church just provides the opportunity for you to worship. Worship is a deeply personal, deeply intimate affair. It is something that goes on in the heart between the heart and God. We must not build up human traditions and say this is right and this is wrong. When I come to our services I worship. I’m engaged. I don't sit in this service

like a knot on a log. You've got to on purpose get your heart engaged and worship God.

But when you start putting human tradition ahead of the Word of God worship is affected. Compassion is affected. Love for God is affected.

Jesus illustrated this. They had come up with a little system they called **Corban**, which means a gift. If a son didn't want to take care of his parents, he could take his money over to the temple and say, "I declare this corban, a gift. I dedicate this to God." In so doing that freed him of the responsibility of caring for his parents. He might do anything he wanted to do with that money otherwise. But, he would just say, "I'm sorry, dad, this money is corban, I can't help you with it." You see what tradition had done, It had absolutely quenched human compassion and love.

We do the same thing. We don't give people time to grow. We don't allow for Christian liberty. And we begin to judge someone because they don't have their I's dotted and T's crossed like I do.

Don't get so wrapped up 'in tradition and in programs and in outward activities that you lose the heart of your relationship with Jesus Christ.

III. Vain worshippers **maintain** an unchanged heart.

Verses 14-15, "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."

This is Jesus giving a sermon. Can everybody just give thanks to God that this was recorded for us?

A. The **defilement** of the human heart is much deeper than anyone might assume. Let me show you some scary verses in **Jeremiah 17:9-10**. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that our heart is much more sinful than we can ever imagine, and God is much more holy than we can ever comprehend: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 10 "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

Our core problem is not that we don't have our programs or our standards right. It's not the outward that defiles a person. It is our heart that defiles us!

In our heart, in our the core of our being, we don't want to surrender all to Christ.

B. What we need is a **radical change** of heart!

Now look at **verse 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.”

The heart is the control center of the person. All these things that defile us are us breaking God’s law and doing our own thing. Who can tame the human heart? Only God!

Ezekiel 36:25-27, “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.”

Conclusion: If you are lost, you need to come to Christ with a broken heart! David said in **Psalm 51:17**, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” **Hebrews 4:7**, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Christian, let your heart melt before Christ! If you are without Christ, turn from this world in broken repentance and receive Christ as Master of your life!