

## The Scribes and Pharisee's Return Mark 7:1-13

Matthew 23

Isaiah 29:13-24

Congregation. Romans 9:1-8

Today we are going to be launching into chapter 7 of the book of Mark. For the past few weeks there has not been any mention of the Pharisee's objection to Jesus and his teaching. The last time that we heard any mention of them was I believe back in chapter 3 when he cast out an unclean spirit and they were claiming he was doing so by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons. Starting out here, right in verse 1 we see that the Pharisee's are back, they are once again judging and ridiculing Jesus and his Disciples as being ones who are disregarding the law.

Previously we had seen the Pharisee's attack Jesus and his disciples over a few different things. These guys were no slouches and they understood the implications of what Jesus was teaching, what he was saying but they rejected him and his teachings as false, and as a blasphemer. We first see their awe and amazement at Jesus turn to disgust in chapter 2 with the healing of the Paralytic. They did not have a problem with him healing him, but it was when Jesus told him to go his way, and that his sins had been forgiven. I am going back to a few spots in these earlier chapters to sort of refresh our memories on the Scribes and Pharisee's arguments, so you can turn there with me if you want. Chapter 2, verse 5. This is after the paralytic's friends lifted him down through the roof. "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven you. And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, Why does this man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

See, these guys know that there is only one God, and that God is sovereign, mighty, and powerful. So when they see Jesus who is doing only what God can do that could only mean one of 2 things. Either Jesus is God, or he is an impostor and blasphemer. And as we see here in this verse it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> choice is the one that they take. They were blind to all that the prophets had said about the coming messiah. They were expecting a king, not a carpenter's son. There is no way that this man can be who he is claiming to be. Just as with their own faith being focused on the material, and physical world so to was their understanding of the Messiah. Now I should probably explain myself here what I mean about their faith being focused on the physical world and not the spiritual. I say this because if we look at what they taught, it was a tight observance of the physical laws and ordinances of Moses and the old covenant.

They did not see a spiritual fulfillment, but rather trusted in their own genealogy, being Jews made them God's people, and by the time that Jesus comes and bodily enters the historical timeline of mankind they had taken what they had been given by God through Moses, and expounded, added to, and sought to make themselves holy, and without blame through their own physical acts and observance of the laws. That is what I mean by their faith being focused on the material, and physical things. They did not see God's teaching in the old testament as we do now in the light of the new. They did not understand the spiritual applications and implications of the laws and rituals. Instead of making one holy, the law condemns, it exposes the fact that we humans can not, and never will attain the perfect requirement of God's law, therefore we need a mediator, someone to come and fulfill those righteous requirements for us.

So the Jews rejected Jesus, and his teachings for this reason. He taught against their understanding of the laws and traditions. And just as they had this physical understanding of living by the law and fulfilling its physical requirements is what would make them holy before God. They were also expecting the Messiah to come and rescue them from their oppressors and set up his physical Kingdom on earth in Jerusalem.

In all of Jesus interactions we have seen with the scribes and pharisee's that has been his point. It was never about keeping the law, it was about trusting the messiah to come who would rescue them from their sins. Paul is a shining example of this very thing, he was a Jew of the Jews he said, Lets go to Galatians, chapter 1, verse 13. "For you have heard of my former conduct in Judiasim, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the gentiles."

Then over to chapter 2, verse 15. We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." The law served to point to God's holy and righteous requirements and our need for a savior. Paul understood this after God revealed himself to him. But before that, he was in complete and total reliance being justified by physically keeping the laws requirements. Even to the point of persecuting Christians who he saw as blasphemers.

Now lets go back to Mark chapter 2, verse 16. "And when the scribes and pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and sinners they said to his disciples, how is that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners? When Jesus heard it he said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Once again we see the Pharisees and scribes missing the point of the old testament teaching, and they believed themselves righteous because of their strict adherence of the law, so how could Jesus, who is claiming to be from God, be breaking the laws? Simple, he did not break the laws, but rather kept them perfectly in their intent and purpose. The laws were a picture, and Christ is the fulfillment, the perfect Son of God in flesh, fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law, and covers all in his atoning blood those who have faith and believe.

So we can get this picture and understanding why the scribes and pharisees hated Jesus so. In their minds and hearts Jesus was twisting, and perverting the perfect law that they had received from Moses. This man, claiming to be the Son of God is touching the unclean, forgiving sins, socializing with the sinners and tax collectors, breaking the sabbath there is no way he could be the messiah. But as I said earlier, they were focused on the physical, not the spiritual truths. Instead of grace and mercy, they saw law breaker. Instead of love, they saw a sabbath breaker. What we will see today in chapter 7 is a continuation of this ridicule and their blind understanding being tightly locked into the physical realm.

So let us read our passage this morning in Chapter 7, verse 1- 24. At this time Jesus was ministering around the city of Capernaum, and it says that the Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem which was roughly 90 miles away. It would seem to me that they were likely sent as some sort of like damage control. News of Jesus and his teachings were spreading like wildfire, his disciples had just gotten back from their first missionary journey and as we see everywhere Jesus goes, even when he tries to get away he is met with a multitude.

The last one being numbered around 5000 men, that is probably not even counting the women and children who were there. It says that some scribes and pharisees came together to him, they came to him. There is now way of knowing if this was an official concerted effort from Jerusalem to try to reign in Jesus teaching, or if it was just a group of them who went on their own. But either way, The Scribes and Pharisees are back on the scene doing what they do best. Trying to discredit Jesus, and paint him as a false teacher and blasphemer.

To understand the Pharisees criticism here about unwashed hands we need to understand a little about these pharisees and scribes. This was not a mere hygiene issue, worrying about contaminants and germs but rather it was a ritual that was given to the rabbinic priests before they could enter the temple, which now had been taken and expanded, just as every other law and tradition had been by this time. Other than the Rabbi's entering the temple, the only other requirement for the washing of hands is if anyone had come into any contact with a bodily discharge. What we see here in chapter 7, is neither an entering of the temple, nor a washing the hands after contact of bodily fluids, but their practice of hand washing had become something else entirely.

If washing the hands was a way to cleanse yourself for temple worship, or from that which is unclean then it only stands to reason to wash your hands when you come into any contact, or contact with anything else that had contact with anything unclean, such as Gentiles. It had become a way that they would show their superiority over anyone who was not a Jew. IT was a proverbial turning up of the nose. You, an unclean gentile sinner touched that item. I, a righteous Jew can not be defiled so I must wash your filth from my hands. AS we see Jesus response to them is quite harsh, we know that this whole washing of hands had little, to nothing to do with hygiene.

Verse 6 Jesus answers their accusation. "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, and in vain they worship me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." This goes back to what I was saying earlier about the pharisees religion focusing on the physical. With their lips, they honor God, but with their heart they scream hatred and seek to have him killed. These men are hypocrites, a term that is derived from greek theator. Someone who puts on a mask and plays a part, someone who acts without sincerity, a pretender.

Jesus here is calling them out on their traditions, the fact that they had taken what had been given to them from God and have turned it into something entirely different. He says, in vain they worship me teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Wow, I can just imagine how well this was received. This blasphemer, Jesus, taking their own scriptures, from their own prophet and applying it to them. Jesus does not withhold any punches here, but rather he goes right to the heart of the issue. They are not Gods people, they are pretenders, they have exchanged the doctrines of God for the commandments of men.

And just in case they missed it, Jesus says it again in verse 8, after quoting Isaiah. "For layign aside the commandment of God, you hold to the traditions of men, the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things that you do. I can not read this without thinking of the Catholic church with all of their traditions which have taken place of the gospel. But not only the Catholic Church, we see the same in the Reformed circles who have elevated their confessions to be scripture. Of couse they will not admit that, but that has become their practice, at times teaching from the confessions instead of the bible. So We have our own today who have set elevated the traditions of men above the word of God.

These pharisees thought themselves pious righteous followers of God's laws and commandments but Jesus points out here in the following verses that in actuality they break God's law in favor of their own traditions. Verse, 9. "He said to them, all too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said honor your father and mother and he who curses father and mother let him be put to death But you say, if a man says to his father or mother, whateer profit you might have received from me is Corban, that is a gift of God, then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother. Making the word of God of no effect through your traditions which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

It was common practice to dedicate things to God, and give that portion to the Rabbi's and to the temple. But at this point it had become something entirely different then intended, which was to suport the needs of those who taught and provided temple services. By this time it became a way of with holding things, once something was Corbin, or given to God it could not be returned. So these Pharisees would give their riches, their property, all that they had to the temple. Which sounds pious and righteous, but they were not sacrificing it, they were giving it in the even of their death leaving nothing for their parents, or anyone else for that matter. They were using their religion and traditions to keep from giving to the needy, and the poor for how could they give if they didn't have anything sincee they dedicated it all to the temple?

So in their pious self righteous act of appearing holy and just they were cursing their parents, which according to the law they were claiming to follow that should have been a death sentence. As we can see this are all things that God does not take lightly. It is at its core a heinous type of sin, to take what God has given and established and twist and turn for their own gain, to take the glory away from God and put it upon themselves. Its not hard to see why Jesus didn't make any friends with the Pharisees eh?

So this accusation of them being hypocrites, 2 faced, false, and putting on a show is exactly what they were. While the sect of Pharisee's may not exist today in any official way, we have our own pharisee's today do we not? This is something that is not talked about really, it is not brought up in our seeker sensitive churches and society, but I think we should. Jesus takes great offense at the falsehood of these men, these leaders, and teachers. Who claim to be children of the one true God, but act only in their own self interest. Sad to say I believe that our churches are full of pharisees and hypocrites today. If we look at statistics it shows that church membership is down, teens are leaving the church. Congregations have become revolving doors of people coming and going with no real dedication or commitment. Don't like the music, that's ok I will find somewhere that suits my musical taste. Not enough programs and fun things for your kids to do? That's ok I will find somewhere that has all those things.

Offended by what the pastor says? Well I a definitely not going back to that church again! While on the surface it may look fairly bleak for the American church I have a different point of view. If we look at the bible, what it says about the congregation of believers, what it should be like when brothers and sisters gather together to fellowship, read scripture and worship God whom they love it would seem that many churches today are leaving off of such things in favor of musical concerts, special political, or motivational speakers, couples nights, teens nights, you name it there is a special something for every type of special person seeking to draw them in, seeking to make you comfortable, have you entertained. And we wonder why people are leaving the churches..because this fallign away from a gospel focused ministry to these new traditions of men is not producing disciples, but rather pious looking pharisees!

This needs to change, this needs to stop. Sure, if you are focused on solid biblical teaching your congregation will probably not grow rapidly, or in some cases might offend these religious pharisees as we see Jesus often does with his teaching, and they will seek to cause division, and discredit the one teaching. This should be no surprise for it is what happened when Jesus spoke the truth. Yet that did not deter Jesus from speaking the truth and neither should it us. In fact, it is what the church needs, we don't need another special program, the church needs the gospel, the church needs Christ! We have left Christ and went chasing after other things, it is time that we repent and return. So yes, people are leaving the churches, people are finding religion, and Christianity empty, and outsiders looking in see the hypocrisy. Pastors caught in scandals, hatred and bigotry being shouted from people claiming to love God.

So I don't see these reports of the statistics of people leaving the churches as a major problem. All that it has done is to show that our churches are full of religious pharisees. You want to stop this trend? Start preaching the Bible, make Scripture your focus, not your confessions, your traditions, your programs but Scripture! As a church, as a pastor and elders seek to create God loving disciples instead of entertainment seeking pharisees. When you do that, when your building has people who are dedicated to the God they love, the revolving door effect will slow down. The dedicated children of God will continue, will carry on. Think what would happen if mass persecution came upon the churches here in America...how many would leave. We have people leaving over petty things, how much more so when real trials come.

So my challenge goes out to anyone who would listen to me today, examine yourself, be honest with yourself. Why are you at the church you are at? Why do you attend church services at all? Challenge yourself, ask yourself what matters to you, is it the word? Is it the teaching? Or is the good feeling and high you get from the worship service. And pastors, we have been given a great responsibility over God's sheep, to watch and care for them. I for one do not want to stand before God some day having my ministry being one of creating pharisees because I was more interested in tailoring the message to be less offensive because my goal is congregation numbers. This is a heavy responsibility, one that I fear most people behind the pulpit seem to not think about. They think their goal is to bring people in the door, but they are wrong. They should be teaching and preaching and preparing the sheep for the ministry, caring little about how many people are filling the seats. That should not change the gospel message.

I know some of what I have said today might be considered offensive, or devicive, but I believe it is entirely true. Jesus through out his entire ministry showed little patience for the pharisee's, scribes, and other religious leaders and in fact was quite harsh and to the point in his dealings with them. It is quite obvious that false faith, self imposed religion and pious moralism is something that God hates. For it takes the glory and focus from God, and instead puts it upon man.

Building up their pride, arrogance, and self worth, instead of totally and completely relying upon God for salvation and righteousness. And it is something I see a lot of in the American church, an appearance of faith and holiness. Jesus called out the pharisees on this very thing calling them white washed tombs. Beautiful and clean on the outside, but inside full of rotting dead men's bones. And I fear that much of what passes for Christianity today in this country is a bunch of moralistic, conservative, white washed tombs, who have become twice the sons of hell because they have been duped and convinced that they are children of God just like the pharisee's believed themselves to be.

So if we do indeed have this problem, how do we fix it? At the church level, it is simple. Preach the word, simply, clearly, and truthfully. Do not censor out the offensive, the difficult, the controversial for fear that you are going to offend those who come to the service. I am of the opinion that if you are not offended, convicted, or at the very least a bit uncomfortable from the teaching of God's word then you probably should find a different church. God's word offends, it is sharper than any 2 edged sword able to cut to the spirit. If you are listening to this today, and you have been offended..good, my goal today is not to make you feel good about yourself but rather to be uncomfortable and provoke thought and questioning in your own hearts and minds. And that brings me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> part, how do we fix modern phariseism in our own lives? We need to be Testing ourselves that our faith be true, and pure. That our hope is in Christ, and Christ alone, not in the church organization, not in our own moral ideals, or even our own will and decision but on Christ, and Christ alone.

The word of God is a great mystery, for many can hear the same message and some come away rejoicing, and others will be offended, but that should not surprise anyone, for as Paul wrote in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians verse 14. "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to another the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as from God we speak in the sight of God and Christ."

So my hope today is that if you have found what I said this morning offensive, that you will meditate upon it, that you will challenge yourself asking yourself the difficult questions about what you believe. Search it out for yourself in scripture, pray about it, for it is my desire that all here will find themselves disciples of Christ, Sons of the almighty God whose hope, and rest is in him. And not be pharisee's and white washed tombs trusting in our own devices, our own works and merit going through the motions of faith, but not truly believing.

I will close today with what I think is the scariest passage of scripture in the entire bible. Mathew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, Lord Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?" Or to apply it today, Lord, have I not ministered to 1000's in your name? Have I not been generous and loving toward the poor? Have I not lived a clean moral life? Have I not faithfully attended church services? "And then I will declare to them. I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. This is a scary, and sobering passage that I am afraid many people will experience first hand.

So let us be ever vigilant to always have Christ at the center of all that we are, and all that we do. For he truly is our only hope, and our only salvation. Relying solely on his grace, on his mercy. But I don't want to leave on such a scary and somber note this morning, but rather for those of us in Christ, rejoicing in him. So in closing, I want to read a passage from John, chapter 17:10 "And all mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am not longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy father keep through your name those whom you have given me, that they be one as we are one. Verse 24. "Father, I desire that they also whom you gave me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me. For you loved me before the foundation of the world. Oh righteous father, the world has not known you, but I have known you and these have known that you sent me. And I have declared to them your name and I will declare it that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them."

