

Not As It Should Be
The Gospel of Mark #26
Mark 7:1-2, 5-15, 20-23

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Therefore, cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

The last time I asked the people of God to take their Bibles and turn to Mark 7:1-23 was January 25, 2009. A lot has changed since I gave that directive from a nearby pulpit 14 years ago. We've experienced 3 different presidents. We've seen a bear market and a bull market. We've witnessed wars at home, within our communities, within our families, and wars abroad. We've masked up. We've masked down. And we've masked out. We've listened to cultural critics' pontificate about why the world is not as it should be with their fingers pointed at every direction but themselves. But the same quote I began my message with 14 years ago applies just as much today as it did then regarding why the world is not as it should be: ***"We believe in Marx, Freud, and Darwin. We believe everything is ok if you don't hurt anyone, to the best of your definition of hurt, and to the best of your knowledge. We believe that everything's getting better despite evidence to the contrary. We believe that all religions are basically the same, at least the one that we read was. They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation. We believe that man is essentially good. It's only his behavior that lets him down. This is the fault of society. Society is the fault of conditions. And conditions are the fault of society. We believe that there is no absolute truth except the truth that there is no absolute truth. We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him. Reality will adapt accordingly. The universe will readjust. History will alter. If chance be the father of all flesh, disaster his rainbow in the sky, then when you hear: "State of Emergency!" "Sniper kills ten!" "Bomb blasts school!" -- It is but the sound of man worshipping his maker (Steve Turner).***

The world isn't as it should be, is it? Our culture tells us that the problem with the world is due to someone else or something else. That's why. But I want to suggest to you today that it isn't someone else or something else that is the problem with the world. The problem with the world is not outside of us. The problem with the world is inside of us. The problem with world is our heart. It's deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That's why the world isn't as it should be. That's true now. It was true 14 years ago. And it will be true until all things are made new at end of time. Because according to Jesus, what's inside the heart is what defiles a man. So, to borrow a phrase from my sermon manuscript dated January 25, 2009, I invite you to take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Mark 7:1-23. As we read together, I want you to see if you can answer two questions as you read: (1) Why is the world not as it should be? And (2) How can what has gone wrong with the world be made right once again?

¹The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ²and saw some of his disciple's eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. . . ⁵So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" ⁶He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' ⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions." ⁹And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' ¹¹But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹²then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." ¹⁴Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." . . . ²⁰He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

What is Wrong with the World?

1. The Heart Creates Ishmaels (5)

- **Creating an Ishmael:** (1) Do you know what it means to create an Ishmael? It's taking a command and direction of God and shortcutting it. (2) Abraham started it when he, well, created an Ishmael, by not believing God's promises and taking matters into his own hands. (3) He wanted a son more than anything in the world, so he made one with Hagar, not his wife, Sarah. (4). And the conflict between the promise of God — revealed through Isaac — and taking what we yearn and desire more than anything — revealed through Ishmael — was born. (5) Creating Ishmaels is the fundamental problem of the human heart because those Ishmaels we create must be fed. And the food isn't the fruits of the Spirit. It is the fruits of the flesh (v21).
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law had a fundamental problem with Jesus' disciples eating food without washing their hands because they had created an Ishmael. They wanted to follow every jot and tittle of the purification laws, so they added to them. It created a yoke on themselves and others and produced hostility towards the disciples and Jesus.
- **Living According to the Tradition of the Elders:** (1) Notice the rebuke from the Pharisees and teachers of the law has nothing at all to do with the disciples breaking a command, or even violating the Law of Moses. (2) It has to do with breaking a tradition. This tradition has to do with a document called the Mishnah. The Mishnah is a commentary on what rabbis have said the law of Moses means to everyday life. Included in it are requirements for washing hands, none of which are in the Law of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy). (3) And these traditions meant more to them than what God said about cleanness and uncleanness. (4) As a result, it caused them not to see the disciples as people who ate without washing their hands because they were hungry. But as individuals who sinned against God because they didn't wash their hands in the right way even though they were starving.
- **What Happens When We Create Ishmaels:** (1) We take something that we want. We might even pray for. (2) And instead of trusting in the Promises of God, we try to bring them about in our own timing, in our own way. (3) That is where evil always starts in the human heart.

2. The Heart Feeds Ishmaels (20-23)

- **Starting a Fire in the Neighborhood:** (1) When I was a teenager, the neighborhood kids and I wanted to play capture the flag on a Saturday afternoon more than anything in the world. (2) And we did. Half on one side and half on the other. (3) But here's the problem: we didn't just play capture the flag. We played capture the flag with a particular brand of firework called a Roman Candle. (4) It wasn't a good idea, especially when we saw the first fire. (5) The fire used all the dry grass as fuel, and it was a bad situation. (6) The fire we set from the desire we had in our hearts had to be fed. (6) The same thing is true from the evils that originate in the heart.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Defilement that comes out from the soul reveals that we've allowed an imposter, an Ishmael, to reside where only God wants to dwell.
- **What Jesus Said About What Defiles a Man:** (1) The Pharisees and teachers of the law thought that the disciples were defiled because their hands were not clean. That's the wrong way of looking at how God defines cleanness and defilement. (2) Instead, we need to look at defilement as what the heart produces because of the idols, desires (i.e., Ishmaels) we've allowed to reside there. (3) That's Jesus' way of telling the crowds – in front of the Pharisees and teachers of the law – that the individuals who displayed defilement were the ones pointing the finger at the disciples. (4) That's why he includes slander, arrogance, and folly among the list in v21-22. We tend to think these don't rank as bad as the others. But, according to Jesus, these came forth because of the Ishmael they created (adding to the law of Moses).
- **When We See a Fruit of the Flesh Spring Forth from the Soul:** (1) When we see a Fruit of the Flesh flow out of us, we should ask ourselves: what is the Ishmael? (2) The fruits of the flesh Jesus mentions here are: *sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.* ²³*All these evils come from inside and defile a person.* (3) But the Ishmael lives behind the action. For all these sins are fed by an Ishmael, regardless of severe they do or do not seem.
- **What Is Wrong with the World?** (1) Every single person breathing creates an Ishmael and then feeds that Ishmael. (2) And that's where the conflict, the immorality, and the problems in the world come from. (2) It all originates in the human heart, our hearts.

How Can What Has Gone Wrong Be Made Right?

1. The Right Word (9)

- **The Body and the Heart:** (1) Biologists tell us by the time we reach adult, we have 60,000 miles of blood vessels inside our bodies. All of which supply your tissues with oxygen and nutrients. (2) They also tell us we have over 37 trillion cells in our bodies, all of which are specialized to perform a unique function. (3) They also tell us that inside each of the 37 trillion cells is something God put there called mitochondrial DNA. It's responsible for making you unique and specialized function that God put you on this earth to do. (4) And the heart is responsible for it all. When it works right the blood flows as it should. (5) In the Bible, your heart is the center and core of your being. And the type of blood that makes it work the way it was intended is the blood that is the Word of God. When it's hidden in your heart, righteousness flows like a river to the other parts of your life.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The Word of God, when understood correctly, which is something the Pharisees and scribes hadn't mastered, imparts life. It doesn't subtract from it.
- **What the Pharisees and Scribes Didn't Understand:** They took the commands and created an extra yoke. In so doing, they gave no thought to the fact that the disciples were hungry. They only saw that their extra-biblical tradition of the disciples not washing their hands was violated.
- **Jesus' Response:** Jesus' response to their criticism was shocking. He charged them with forsaking the commands to follow their traditions. This is a big charge because Jesus has the 10 Commandments in mind. He is right, though. At their core, they detail what loving God (No other gods; No idols; No misuse of the Name; Remember the Sabbath) and loving neighbor (honor father and mother; no kill; no adultery; no stealing; no false witness; no coveting) is all about. The Pharisees and scribes neglected the latter while trying to keep the former, which misses the point of them all.

2. The Right Wellspring (15, 20-23)

- **Ponce De Leon:** (1) In 1513, a Spanish ship set sail in the Atlantic Ocean that commandeered by a famous voyager: Ponce De Leon. (2) He arrived 125 nautical miles south of St. Augustine near Cape Canaveral. (3) Why did he set sail for Florida? He was looking for a particular type of wellspring: a continuous supply of water always flowing that he hoped would be the fountain of youth. (4) We still haven't found the wellspring of youth in Florida. But we know of another wellspring in Florida. It exists 46 nautical miles south of where he landed right here in Vero Beach. That wellspring is in your heart and my heart. You see, when we begin to treasure the Word in our hearts it begins to flow into the vessels of our lives. And in that process, our lives start to produce the fruit of the change we want to see in the world.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** If what comes out of a person is what defiles that individual, then the opposite is also true: if what comes out of a person is righteous, noble, and full of spiritual fruit, it reveals a cleanness of the soul, free from Ishmaels, and imparts life and promise to the world.
- **Reading in a Mirror:** (1) A reflection in the mirror casts an opposite image; (2) The same is true here. The passage ends with the image of the fruits of the flesh. But Jesus speaks it to cast and implore his audience that God looks for the exact opposite. (3) That's the wellspring for the problems in our world. May that wellspring flow mightily right here in Vero Beach, FL.