

THE TRUTH ABOUT MAN

Mark 7:14-23

Intro: We have two messages from the Lord in the verses we will consider today. The first is a message to “all the people,” and it is given in verses 14-16. The second is a message given to the twelve disciples, given in verses 17-23. The people did not ask for the first message, but the second message was given at the request of the disciples after they had heard the first message. But, and this is what shows us how important it is to notice the context of any verse or verses in Scripture, I think that you will all be able to see that the Lord’s remark came as a result of His conversation with the Pharisees and “certain of the scribes” in the first part of the chapter.

What was the basic disagreement that the scribes and Pharisees had with the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ? It was that the scribes and Pharisees taught that acceptance with God was earned by the things that we do. In thinking back over the comments of the Pharisees which are recorded for us in Scripture, I don’t remember that they had much to say, if anything, about salvation, as such, nor did they have a lot to say about God. They talked to people about what they should be doing and how they should be living. And they had created such an attitude among the Jewish people that they easily got the idea that the object of their teaching was that the people needed to be concerned about pleasing, or displeasing, the scribes and Pharisees. As we get toward the end of our study of the Gospel of John in our Sunday School lessons, the Apostle John tell us this about a man who seems to have been quite prominent among the Jews, Joseph of Arimathaea. He went to Pilate requesting the body of the Lord Jesus Christ for burial. And we are told that he was a secret disciple of the Lord Jesus “for fear of the Jews.” The scribes and Pharisees were very popular men, and if they put you out of the synagogue, that, in the understanding of most Jews, was the worst thing that could happen to you. It was like being consigned to hell. And this was the kind of power that the Lord Jesus was constantly having to face. The message of the scribes and Pharisees was man-centered, not God-centered, and it was a message of works, and not of grace. The scribes and Pharisees made salvation a reward for doing what they did, but the Gospel teaches us that salvation is a gift by faith from God through the sacrifice of Christ.

But you may want to ask me, Why do you say that it was the scribes and Pharisees who caused the Lord to speak to the Jewish people the way He

did? Well, it all goes back to what the scribes and Pharisees said in criticizing the disciples because they did not wash their hands before they ate. Remember, they were not saying that the disciples had poor hygiene; they were saying that the disciples did not go through *the ceremony* of washing their hands which was required by the scribes and Pharisees. Alfred Edersheim, in his two volume set, *The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah*, said that “purification was one of the main points in Rabbinic sanctity” (Vol. I, p. 357). And he added that if you peruse the Mishnah, which is the first part of the Talmud, the largest part of it is devoted to their teaching on purification. And then Dr. Edersheim added this comment:

Their perusal proves, alike the strict accuracy of the Evangelic narratives, and the justice of Christ’s denunciation of the unreality and gross hypocrisy of this elaborateness of ordinances. This is more so, when we recall that it was actually vaunted as a special qualification for a seat in the Sanhedrin [the highest court and council of the ancient Jewish nation], to be so acute and learned as to know how to prove clean creeping things (which were declared unclean by the Law). And the mass of people would have regarded neglect of the ordinances of purification as betokening either gross ignorance, or daring impiety (*Op. cit.*, pp. 357, 358).

So what the disciples and our Lord did would have been considered by the scribes and Pharisees, as well as by most of the Jewish people, a major violation of the laws governing the people – failing to wash their hands in a prescribed way, plus “the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things” [as Mark said in verse 8}. And all of this was done supposedly to sanctify what was cooked and eaten in pots, or that which the people drank from a cup. However, none of this was taught in the Scriptures. In fact, the Jews enacted many laws which contradicted what was taught in Scripture, as the Lord pointed out regarding the fifth commandment in the Law, “Honor thy father and thy mother . . .” (Read Mark 7:10-13.) And they were doing that which the Jews in Isaiah’s day had done, acting the part of hypocrites. (Read Mark 7:6-8.)

Now let us consider the first of the two messages which we have in our text for this morning.

I. THE LORD’S MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE (Mark 7:14-16).

I think that many Christians who read the Gospels have the idea that the

Jewish people to whom the Lord ministered were believers; they just needed teaching to get their ideas straightened out. They needed to get their ideas straightened out, all right, but the main doctrine that they did not understand was the doctrine of salvation. We have just studied John chapter 3 in our Sunday School classes, and we learn there that one of the main Pharisees, Nicodemus, had no idea what the Lord was talking about when He spoke of being born again, or being born from above.

Possibly you remember also that when many Pharisees and Sadducees came to John the Baptist to be baptized, John said to them,

7 . . . O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt. 3:7b-9).

But with the people the Lord was different. By the way the Lord addressed the people, you can see that He wanted to have their attention. He wanted them to hear what He had to say. He wanted “all” of them to hear what He had to say. But, more than that, He wanted them to understand what He was saying to them.

That was a good lesson for the disciples to receive. They were all going to be preachers. They must want to make everyone hear. And they should want all who hear the message, to understand it. Many people listen, but they do not really hear. They don’t realize how very, very important it is for them to hear the message, and to understand it. Many people don’t believe that it is possible to understand the Bible. And it isn’t if we are thinking about our ability. But the Lord enables us to understand. Like He did for Lydia in Philippi, the Lord opened her heart so that she was attentive to what Paul was preaching. There are probably some here today who have never really heard the message of salvation, not because it hasn’t been preached to them, but because they have never heard it. They have not listened intently with a desire to understand it.

But then what did the Lord say to them? (Read verse 15.) He was saying in so many words that you can wash your hands a thousand times a day, but that is not going to keep you from being defiled. Under the Law there were certain animals and birds which Jews were not supposed to eat. But the Jews had evidently taken that prohibition a step farther and were

claiming that if you ate with hands that were not washed, that was just as bad as eating the wrong thing. So the idea really was that you are not defiled, you are not polluted, you are not unclean, until you do something to make yourself unclean. It is as though everyone is born with a clean slate, and you remain clean until you do something to defile yourself.

Moses never taught that. He never said that we are not sinners until we sin. The Law was given to the children of Israel to restrain them from committing that first sin which would make them a sinner. The Law addressed them as sinners, and was a temporary schoolmaster, or disciplinarian until Christ came. Washing could not keep them from sin, nor could water cleanse them from their sin. So the Lord was seeking to get the people to understand that their doctrine of sin was wrong, and so was their teaching as to how to prevent sin. They had the wrong idea about their own nature with which they had come into the world. So if they washed themselves every day for as long as they lived, their washing would not prevent a single sin, nor would it cleanse even one sin away!

So the Lord said in words that could be clearly understood that defilement does not have to do with what we put into our bodies, but our defilement comes from what is already there. But people do not understand this until they hear what the Lord has to say.

But there is a fact of life that is generally admitted by all of us. We know that something is terribly wrong about people. People make new year's resolutions to try to do better in the new year than they did in the old year. Other people give their lives to enact legislation that will do away with social problems. And I would be the first to admit that we have social problems, lots of them. But what is the solution?

The Jews in our Lord's day felt, that is, many of them, that if we carefully wash our hands, and eat the right things, we won't be defiled. "Defiled" means *corrupted, polluted, unclean*. *We don't like to call our problems, sins. They are personal weakness, or mistakes that we make, but most people long for a better life and how to get it. And if one thing does not work, then we will try something else. But it is always something that we try to do to ourselves, or for ourselves, or what we can get some other person to do for us. But instead of seeing problems go away, they get greater and more hopeless.*

The Bible has been telling us for a long time, not only what our problem

is, but also the solution. But people are not listening. They may read the Bible, but they don't believe it.

As a final word to the people the Lord said, as we read in verse 16, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." He meant, "If any man has ears to hear what I am telling him, let him hear." And, oh, what a difference it makes in our lives when we listen, really listen, to the Word of God. Do you ever pray when you go to church that the Lord will give you ears to hear His Word? That is His work, and He delights to do it.

But isn't it amazing that Mark does not indicate that there was even one person who came to the Lord and said, "Please tell me more." But what is very interesting is that when the Lord and His disciples got into the house, "His disciples asked Him concerning the parable." And so we come to:

II. THE MESSAGE TO HIS DISCIPLES (Mark 7:17-23).

What did they mean by the word "parable"? Isn't a parable something in story form which is meant to teach some truth that God wants us to know. There are many parables in the Bible, many that our Lord taught, that are stories. But we don't have a story here. And yet they were referring to what the Lord said in verse 15.

The Lord was not talking about physical health. He was talking about that which corrupts us morally and spiritually. That it is not what we put into our bodies, but it is what we get out of our bodies, especially out of our hearts. It is true of all of us. That which corrupts us, that which keeps us from being acceptable to God, is what comes out of us, out of our hearts. This means that we were born with it. We were born sinners. We did not become sinners the first time we sinned; we were born sinners. And that applies to all of us. Nobody is exempt. This is the judgment of God. And washing your hands is not going to help at all. Even washing your whole body in baptismal waters is not going to bring about the forgiveness of a single sin. If it is that which comes out of our hearts that defiles us, then we need to look for some way to have our hearts cleansed.

Illus: Recently Mr. Tony Sorrell took our pictures in preparation for putting together a pictorial roster of those of us who attend Trinity Bible Church. We all tried to look our best. With some of us that was

not too good, but with most it was fine. Those pictures reveal how we look outwardly. Did you ever ask yourself what you would look like if your heart were photographed? I am not talking about that in your body and mine which pumps blood throughout our bodies. I am talking about the real you, the real me. God told Samuel when He was seeking a king for Israel among the sons of Jesse, that “man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart.” Do you know what you and I looked like as we were born? Your picture and mine are right here in verses 20 through 23. This is not a complete list, but it is a typical list, a representative list. It shows that my need is far bigger than I could ever control, or change. The picture of every one of us, shows one thing: we all need a Savior.

We all have the potential of being able to commit any sin that has ever been committed. That is a scary thought, isn't it? But it is true. And so the remedy is not in our hands. We are under the judgment of a holy God. “The wages of sin, is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” ((Rom. 6:23). We need to be born from above, from God. We need to be made new creatures in Christ. We need to have redemption through Christ's blood which He shed for us, the forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of His grace.

So I can never be made acceptable to God by any thing that I can do, or everything that I can do. Our only hope of deliverance from sin's penalty and sin's power is through Jesus Christ, the world's only Savior. Is He your Savior? If not, ask Him to give you ears to hear what the Lord Jesus was telling His disciples. Nothing surpasses the Gospel in that which needs our undivided attention..