

The Gospel of Mark.

**Study Week 4 – Mark 7: Unclean on the inside.**

1. A deputation from Pharisee HQ verses 1-5

- A distance of about 80 miles. Jesus fame was spreading and the religious leaders came to observe Jesus, but also to try and discredit him, to catch him out.
- They observed that Jesus disciples ate with hands that were unwashed and therefore ceremonially unclean 'according to the traditions of the elders'
  - Levitical laws that prescribed certain foods clean and others unclean
  - Also laws requiring priests to wash before entering holy place and offering sacrifice
  - Other laws covered bathing rituals after coming into contact with a dead body or animal carcass, certain bodily discharges or suffering from certain skin conditions.
  - Levitical law didn't actually specify hand washing before eating!
  - Oral law (Halakha; Heb.. = the way) did. Hands had to be washed, pots, pans and utensils had to be washed. After coming home after visiting a public place a person should bathe, especially if in contact with 'unclean' gentiles.
  - Not a hygiene issue (we might expect to wash our hands and the pots before eating), but a ceremonial one. If you didn't wash then you were ceremonially unclean, unholy by letting some impurity enter your body.
  - Not of course the disciples that were the culprits, but their Rabbi, their teacher. What are you teaching them? What example are you setting them? How can you claim to speak for God?

2. Jesus' response

- Jesus doesn't answer directly:-

1. He calls them out as hypocrites referring a verse from the prophet Isaiah verses 6-8

- Honour God with their lips, but their hearts are far from me
- Their worship is therefore performed in vain
- Their teachings are but human rules.

Theirs is a fake religion, playing lip service only, they honour God on the outside, but dishonour him from within. Therefore their worship and their teaching is worthless.

2. He gives an example of their hypocrisy:- verses 9-13

- Cites their use of a device/tradition called 'Corban' = giving of personal wealth to the work of God. Developed a system of deferred giving so that they could call Corban on their wealth, but not actually give it away until death
- Used this as a reason to deny help to their parents and family when in need.
- It would be expected in the culture, but more importantly Jesus said in doing this they were breaking the commandment to honour father and mother.
- They were setting the oral tradition over and above the written law of God to their own benefit.

3. He addresses the Crowd (and later explains it to his disciples) verses 14-23

- Nothing from outside can make a man unclean.
- What comes out of a man makes him unclean
- Disciples didn't get it so Jesus explains
  - Food only affects your body, goes in and then comes out
  - But inside a man's heart is uncleanness and it shows when it comes out.

Jesus has set the Pharisees up. He says that they dishonour God from within, therefore they are unclean within. Their worship and their teachings that come out of their lips are therefore unclean. They say with their lips that they want to give their wealth to God, but their motivations are unclean and they break God's command.

Notice Jesus in addressing the crowd does not restrict his teaching to a condemnation of the Pharisees – his message is for all people – “..it is what comes out of a man/person that makes them unclean” v18. Paul tells his readers in Romans that “there is no one righteous, not even one” Rom 3:10, that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Rom 3:23.

There's a verse in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel... Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart 1 Sam. 16:7. When we see a verse like this we are naturally inclined to look into our hearts and conclude that although we make mistakes, our motives deep within are pure. Difficult because we later learn that David has in his heart, adultery and murder! Whatever meaning we put on this verse, we cannot conclude that David has a pure heart. Perhaps we can see that David is willing to acknowledge his sin and uncleanness and declare his trust in God for his salvation. Psalm 51 written by David is a beautiful prayer of repentance and petition for restoration.

#### 4. Three Healing Stories

##### a. The Syro-Phoenician Woman - Mark 7:24-30

- Mark sets story immediately after this incident. Jesus travels north some 20-30 miles.
- Tyre and Sidon (is Lebanon now). Roman controlled, but outside of Israel
- Woman is Phoenician, historically pagan, idolatrous and polytheistic. (Jezebel)
- Gentile. Outside of the Jewish nation. Outside of the Jewish cult. Not connected to Abraham. She isn't Jewish, she doesn't worship right. She is unclean.
- She has a need, her daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit. Jesus' fame has crossed borders and she begs Jesus for help.
- Jesus has gone to the area secretly, perhaps a rest, perhaps because of the storm caused by his recent altercation with the Pharisees. He seems at first to try to dismiss this woman, saying that his mission was firstly to the Jews, not gentiles (dogs)
- Compare her response to that of the Pharisees. She accepts Jesus assessment that she is unclean (a dog) not deserving, but she is persistent and throws herself on his mercy, on his grace. The crumbs that fall off the table, she'll gladly receive them....and her daughter is delivered.

We need to acknowledge our uncleanness and throw ourselves on the mercy of Jesus. Although in this slightly strange discourse we read that Jesus initially came to the Jews, the bigger story was that the kingdom was opening up to all people regardless of nationality or race or gender or social status Galatians 3:28

##### b. The Demon possessed man of The Gerasenes – Mark 5:1-20

- Not sure of exact location. Decapolis – eastern shores of Galilee. Autonomous cities protected by Rome. Again a gentile region
- Unclean:-
  - Lives in a gentile area
  - Possessed by unclean spirits
  - Lives among the tombs and the dead
  - Lives near pigs.
- A tortured soul
  - Cry out loud and cut himself
  - Mark hints (Luke confirms) that he wandered about naked
  - He had unnatural strength, no ropes or chains could hold him
  - Nobody could subdue or reason with him
  - This man was like a wild animal.
  - Consequently he was banished (or maybe from choice) from the towns and lived amongst the tombs.
  - Seems his personality intertwined with the demons that possessed him.
  - It seems that this man doesn't even have the capability to ask for deliverance. He runs towards Jesus, throws himself to the floor and starts screaming at Jesus.
- Made whole by Jesus
  - A hopeless case? Jesus heals him. Jesus makes him clean.
  - The townsfolk are amazed when they see him clothed, subdued, rational. He looks clean, his speech is clean, his mind is clean, his heart is clean.
  - His uncleanness not from living among the tombs or near the pigs. Not that he was gentile or lived in a gentile land. Not even the demons that possessed him – no doubt they added to, but he was unclean to start with.
  - Restored man begs Jesus to let him go with him and disciples.
  - Jesus refuses and tells him to remain and be a witness to the glory of God
  - My advice would have probably been, get away, from these tombs, these pigs, these people, start afresh, don't go back. Find a good church, some new friends

...but cleanness, holiness can be infectious if it comes out of us. It can infect our friends, our families, our communities, our workplaces. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls it being salt and light.

This man was an outcast he did not even know how to ask for help, but Jesus showed him mercy. On our streets in our towns there are many such people and we should look to show the grace of God to such. We are no cleaner because we have nice clothes, nice homes, are respectable or even have cleaned hands.

#### 5. The Woman with bleeding – Mark 5:24-34

- A woman with unnatural bleeding that had been going on for 12 years
- Levitical law was that a woman who had such bleeding was unclean until the bleeding stopped (so unclean for 12 years) would be same for a man with any unnatural bleeding.
- This woman couldn't touch anybody or be touched. Anything she sat on was deemed unclean, she was unable to worship.
- Thought that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus clothing – brave because if she was found out she might be in trouble.

- In the event Jesus feels something and calls out “who touched me”. Disciples are non-plussed.
- Imagine this woman – afraid, how would Jesus react, anger, disgust? That is what she might expect from the priest.
- But when her impurity in the law meets the purity of Jesus, she is made whole, she is made clean and Jesus pronounces her so.
- Not the touching of the garment that healed her it was her faith.

We don't meet Jesus in touching some holy relic or some statue of a saint, we meet Jesus in faith and in meeting Jesus we are made clean.

These three stories we meet people who are unclean

- Syro-Phoenician woman – a gentile, outside of the borders of Israel. She acknowledged her need, her uncleanness and Jesus met that need.
- Demon possessed man – an outcast, a misfit, who didn't know even how to ask for help. But he went towards Jesus and Jesus healed him and made him clean.
- Then this woman with bleeding, had tried everything she could to become clean. Everyday maybe people passed her by as she was crying out inside to be made clean. – then she met Jesus

We have these categories of people in our lives today

- People who are outside of our communities, maybe in foreign lands or even in our own lands but so far removed from our daily situation that they might as well be overseas.
- People who are outcasts, who don't fit in, they live in institutions, on the streets, prisons.
- Then there are people who we pass everyday, crying out inside for help.

They need to hear the cleansing gospel, they need to meet Jesus.

We won't convince them by being judgemental by our hypocrisy or by appealing to our own example or worthiness

We show them the love of Christ, point them to Jesus the Holy one...the one who can make us clean.

Three stories: Jesus travelled many miles and met the need of a gentile. Jesus delivered a man from many demons. Jesus healed a woman who had been afflicted for many years. Grace has no limits.

Next week: Jesus and his disciples