

## **The Beauty of the Authority of God**

### **Mark 7:1-23**

#### *Introduction*

I am excited to share a word from the Lord with you this morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Aaron, and I serve as one of the pastors here at Imago Dei. One of my areas of responsibility is overseeing our students. As Pastor Tony mentioned earlier, we just returned from Student Life Camp at Wake Forest University. Tony served as our camp pastor, and he stressed the importance of knowing the true identity of Jesus, which in turns, allows us to rightly understand ourselves.

This morning, our text continues along that same theme. Our passage is about what is clean and unclean, but the truths in this passage extend far beyond this. Our text this morning is one that deals with authority and worship.

Now, when we consider authorities in our lives, some may often consider authorities restrictive. The authorities keep us from doing what we really want to do. I'd rather drive 80 on the highway than 65 because I'll get to my destination faster. Others, however, may see authorities as instructive. The speed limit tells me the maximum safe speed. These are two different views of authority.

Or consider the great theologian Nacho Libre. Nacho was a church cook who wanted to wrestle, but he knew the Bible said "not to wrestle your neighbor." In this sense, the Bible was restrictive for him. But, by the end of the movie, he realized that he could wrestle for the glory of God and feed all the orphans in the whole world. The Bible became instructive for him. Now, certainly we will not look at this movie as a theological authority, but the point is clear. Some view authorities as restrictive and some as instructive. We need to see God's and his word as instructive.

In our text today, one of the most central ideas is the right worship of God. As we study the text together, we will see that having the wrong authority will lead to wrong worship. We need the right authority for true worship.

Another central idea we will see is the right understanding of ourselves. Without the right authority, we will never truly understand who we are. We need the right authority for a true understanding of ourselves.

Today, we can make two observations about our text.

1. Following our own prerogative leads to false worship and false identity.
2. Following Jesus leads to true worship and to our true identity.

**Observation #1. Following our own prerogative leads to false worship**

### *Remember the Pharisees—7:1–2*

Chapter 7 begins with shift in the narrative. Mark recalls another encounter Jesus had with the Pharisees. Think back with me about his interaction with the Pharisees in the past.

- Mark 2:18–22 — Pharisees and Scribes saw Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, and they question who he spends his time with.
- Mark 2:18–22 – The Pharisees and John the Baptist’s disciples are fasting, but Jesus’ disciples are not.
- Mark 2:23–28 — The Pharisees challenge him on the Sabbath
- Mark 3:1–6 — The Pharisees challenge him on the Sabbath again, and they sought to destroy him (vs 6).
- Mark 3:22-30 — The Scribes said he was possessed by Beelzebul

So, when we come to this passage in Chapter 7, we ought to recognize the agenda of the Pharisees. Verse 1 tells us they gathered to him. By this, we can see that they are actually ganged up on him. While Mark has been silent about the Pharisees for the last couple chapters, they have nevertheless been at work. They have been plotting, seeking to destroy Jesus.

Jesus’ enemies come in all shapes and sizes with all sorts of ideas and false teachings. During their time, the Pharisees are the religious of the religious. The top dogs, if you will. And yet, Jesus is going to expose their hearts—they are far from God. Some of you today may consider yourselves to be very religious, somewhat religious, or not religious at all. What we are about to see is that those who seem to have religious desires, who are fluent, fervent, and even abundant in talking about religion, may, in fact, be far from God. One great theologian referred to the Pharisees as “high pretenders to religion” (Edwards, *WJE* 2:204). While claiming to be enlightened, they have no spiritual life, light or being. They walk not by the Spirit because they are without the Holy Spirit of God.

We see this today in a variety of ways. They may be wolves in sheep’s clothing. In this particular story, *we will see that they seek to discredit Jesus’ authority through his disciples.*

### *Clean vs Unclean—7:2–4*

It’s important to recognize what’s going on here. In verses 2-4, Mark provides us with a brief explanation, as he expected his gospel to be circulated among those who may not have understood this issue.

Jesus’ disciples are eating with unclean hands—they are defiled. The Pharisees and the Jews followed the “tradition of the elders” when it came to eating and drinking. This “tradition” is thought to have been passed down orally, and it would eventually be added to the Mishnah many years later. The tradition involved a type of ceremonial

washing. The concern here is not about hygiene, though I certainly want to encourage you to wash your hands before you eat! However, this is not the point the Pharisees and Scribes are making. There were different levels of uncleanness, and Pharisees and the Jews would go through various rituals to “become” clean.

### *The Pharisees Question Jesus—7:5*

#### They ask the wrong Question

Now, look down to verse 5. In Mark 7:5, the Pharisees and Scribes, the enemies of Jesus, question him by asking, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” The question they should have asked is, “Why are your disciples free to eat with what has been called unclean hands?” What is the teaching that sets them free? Their question reveals their authority.

#### They have the wrong authority

We can make another observation about this question from the Pharisees. It shows who their authority is—the tradition of the elders. This is different from the Sadducees, as they relied on the Torah alone as their authority. The Pharisees relied upon the development of the oral tradition, which went beyond the laws of the Old Testament. It was originally meant to go help with instruction of God’s law, but it slowly took precedence over God’s law.

Today, this may be like those found in progressive theological circles. Many individuals in church history could be grouped here. They go beyond the gospel, beyond God’s word, and create their own religions. And while Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and prosperity gospel preachers are certainly included in this group, we ought not be too quick to pass over ourselves, as we will see we too can be prone to move beyond the gospel, too.

#### They have the wrong intentions

The Pharisees are attempting to discredit Jesus because of his disciples. The disciples are not walking or living in accordance with this tradition, so the Pharisees and Scribes see their opportunity.

As I mentioned, I have been at Student Life Camp with our students this past week. And one the ideas we talked about is the Christian’s response to sin. We will talk about this more in a minute, but before we do, we ought not to ignore the fact that others may try to discredit Jesus because of us. That’s what is happening here with the disciples. Does this mean we don’t try to represent him at all? Of course not! Rather, it means we admit our sins and our need for his grace. Maybe you find yourself today facing people who are trying to discredit you. I want to encourage you today. You’re in good company!

Jesus is dealing with the same issue here. Let me challenge you to be slow to speak, quick to listen, and eager to share God's forgiveness and grace.

### *Jesus Responds—Part 1—7:6-8*

Jesus' initial answer highlights the absurdity of their prerogative and the falsehood of their authority. *Jesus condemns their tradition.*

Jesus describes their identity—they are hypocrites. He responds with quoting Isa 29:13.

Now, in Isaiah 29, the prophet Isaiah is lamenting the darkness and blindness that comes from tiring, mindless worship from those who claim to be in covenant with God. Here, Jesus applies the text to the Pharisees. They have ideas and doctrines. They speak the right things, but "their heart are far" from him.

Because their hearts are far from him, their worship is done in vain. It is unpleasing to God and it is rejected by God. And the worship is not simply what we may think of worship here on a Sunday gathering. Here, the worship is involved with their teaching. Right teaching worships God; false teaching profanes the name of God. Jesus says their teaching is not only misguided, but also a forsaking of the truth, a departure from the Word of God. Verse 8 reveals the sharp contrast: they "leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

The message of the Bible is the same in the Old Testament and the New Testament. God desires to be worshipped from the heart, from the heart. It is dangerous to worship the wrong God. Many of us today would agree on that. But it is equally as dangerous to worship the right God the wrong way.

### *Jesus Responds—Part 2—7:9-13*

Again, Jesus' answer highlights the absurdity of their prerogative and the falsehood of their authority. *Again, he condemns their tradition.*

Jesus says they have a "fine way" of rejecting God's commandments. To show this, he appeals to the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:12; 21:17).

The commandment is to honor your father and mother and to care for them rather than curse them.

- Exodus 20:12—Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

- Exodus 20:17—Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

A serious command with a serious consequence in the Old Covenant. To honor one's parents was to respect, value, admire, and support/provide for their needs. And, the Pharisees are teaching the people to tell their parents that rather than honoring and caring for them, they are "giving it all to God." So, by this tradition, children are circumventing their responsibility to their family and "escaping" the judgment God has in store for them. In a sense, they have pledged to give to their family, but they have not delivered because of "Corban." This is hypocrisy at its finest.

By doing this, by keeping this tradition, they make void the word of God. And Jesus says this is one way of many in which they reject God's word while actually claiming to be acting on behalf of God.

From these two examples, we can see that hypocrisy is the fruit of a heart far from God. So what does this mean for us? First, I suggest that we examine ourselves. Do your actions match up and align with your confession? If you claim to know and follow Christ, are you increasingly walking like him? Second, I would encourage you to pray. We should pray, not "Lord don't let me be a hypocrite." Instead, we should pray, "Lord help my heart be close to yours." A heart close to God is one walking in step with the Spirit of God for the glory of God.

True religion is a humble love for and delight in God. In this, we confess that we love him, and we keep his commandments. James tells us that our actions must match our confession.

If you find your life as one filled with hypocrisy, I want to encourage you for a moment. I want you to see that you're not too far gone. You're not beyond the Lord's reach. I am reminded of story of John Wesley. John Wesley's early life may be considered one marked by hypocrisy. He grew up in a very religious home. His father Samuel raised him in the high church tradition of the Church of England. As he learned about God, we desired to share his knowledge of him with others, what many of us today might call "evangelism." He even went from England to Georgia for an extended period of time to spread the truth of Christ. He was unconverted. While in Georgia, he began to struggle with his salvation. Of course, while there, he developed his "mission trip crush," so much to the point that he proposed, and she rejected him. Then, he refused to give her communion, so he was forced to leave Georgia.

After returning from Georgia to England, he wrote in his journal in 1738 the following:

In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter

before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

Wesley would look back on his life and see that this was the time of his conversion, the time in which God brought him into his family. Wesley knew the Bible, participated in the life of the church, and even went on mission trips. But his heart was far from God.

One of my greatest fears is that I or anyone I know would deceive themselves. The only way we can know who we truly are, the only way we can avoid deceiving ourselves, is to have the right authority for our lives. Our authority must be God and his Word. Without Him, without his word, we are destined for destruction. We must not forsake the word for tradition. We must uphold the word and understand and teach it correctly. We must worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth.

We need the right authority to rightly worship God.

## **Observation #2. Following Jesus leads to true worship and our true identity.**

*Jesus transforms our understanding of holiness—7:14–23*

While the previous section dealt particularly with their traditions and false worship, this section deals with their character and false identity.

In verse 14, there appears to be a pause from the previous section. It seems likely the same occasion, but we don't have the full conversation. But here, Jesus calls the crowd to him. And he explains further to them in vs 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." Jesus teaching initially responded to *how things were eaten* in verses 1–13, but here he expands his teaching to include *what is eaten*.

After providing this teaching, Jesus leaves the crowd and goes into a house with his disciples (7:17). Remember, Jesus' often excuses himself from crowds with his disciples to provide further teaching. In the house, he asks them in verses 18-20, "Are you getting the point?"

Jesus explains, through his question, that food goes into the physical body and does not impact their moral/ethical/spiritual side, the heart. From this, Jesus "declared all foods clean." At this point, you can imagine, the disciples are thinking, "Man, this is good news! We can eat what we want!" Peter says to his brother Andrew, "I've always wanted to try bacon. Haven't you?" Praise the Lord we can eat Barbeque, bacon, and pork chops!

Jesus then returns to defilement in verse 20. “What comes out of a man is what defiles him.” What is the “what” he is referring to? Look at verse 21. The source of the defilement is *within*. It is in very inward parts of our being. Our hearts are defiled. It is not simply what we do, it is who we are. From this, we have hard hearts that produce false worship, reject God’s authority, and misunderstand our identity.

That our hearts are defiled is not a new teaching that comes only from Jesus. Consider Jeremiah 17:9-10

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “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.”

Jesus shows his disciples, and us, that our identities are marred by defilement. We are unclean. This is significant. The people of God, and even the Pharisees and others, would undoubtedly affirm the God is holy. This is a central teaching of the Old Testament. Through this instruction, Jesus shows us that we are far from God. Ordinary people are practicing extraordinary evils in the world today. And whether or not it is the senseless killing of people in Florida to lying about emails to gossiping about your neighbor, we are all far from God.

Jesus goes on in verse 21 to explain the gravity of this defilement. Our hearts bring forth “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.”

- Evil thoughts – thoughts and plans contrary to God’s nature and will. The remaining sins proceed from here.
- Sexual immorality—any sexual deviance from God’s intention, including lust, pornography, adultery, homosexuality, and more.
- Theft—stealing, taking what is not yours
- Murder—taking innocent life
- Adultery—violating the marriage covenant, mentally or physically
- Coveting—greed, seeking what is not yours at someone else’s cost
- Wickedness—bad behavior that is contrary to the attributes of God
- Deceit—dishonest, deceiving others or yourselves
- Sensuality—shameless living, lacking moral judgment
- Envy—jealously, stinginess
- Slander—blasphemy, speaking bad of God or man
- Pride—arrogance
- Foolishness—lack of sense, lack of spiritual sensitivity

As we review these sins, I imagine even some of you today just thought, “Well, when I do this, it’s not really this sin.” We desire to justify ourselves. This is exactly what is the

problem with the tradition of the elders. It goes beyond the word of God. It replaces God's authority with our own.

This week at camp, I asked the students to be honest with themselves. Honest about who they really are, what they really believe, who they really trust. I am asking you to be honest with yourself.

You may be here this morning and doubt the Bible. Let me speak to you a moment today. The Bible is completely reliable and trustworthy, and it is fully able to lead us unto salvation. J.I. Packer, the great Anglican theologian who will celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday this summer, said this about tradition and history:

The history of the Church's labour to understand the Bible forms a commentary on the Bible which we cannot despise or ignore without dishonouring the Holy Ghost. To treat the principle of biblical authority as a prohibition against reading and learning from the book of Church history is not an evangelical, but an anabaptist mistake, which comes from overlooking what the Bible says of the Spirit's work in the Church. Tradition may not be so lightly dismissed. But neither may it be made a separate authority apart from Scripture. Like every commentary on the Bible, it must itself be tested, and where necessary, corrected by the Bible which it seeks to expound.

You may even question where the Bible comes from. It comes from God. It has been said the church no more gave us the Scripture than Isaac Newton gave us gravity. God created gravity, and Newton only recognized it. You can trust the Bible.

Jesus, in verse 23, affirms these come from *within*. And we know from 1 Samuel 16:7 that God sees and knows the hearts of man. He knows these thoughts and actions in your heart, even before you committed them. We are defiled. We are not holy before a holy, righteous God who says "be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44).

Now, in this passage, Mark does not provide us with the solution to this problem. Yet, we can see...

### *Jesus provides the cleansing we need*

Mark's gospel begins with seeking to show us who Jesus is. Jesus breaks down barriers. He calls people to repent because the kingdom of God is arriving. He is calling you to do the same.

Our only hope for cleansing from defilement must come from outside ourselves because our inward self is wasting away. We are already defiled. The good news of Jesus is that he intercedes on our behalf. He gives his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). Jesus lived without sin. He didn't commit evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness when you did. When we call on him for salvation, he gives us his own

righteous robe. He provides forgiveness, new life, and his Spirit to live in us. Through Jesus, we are able to worship God. He provides us access to the Father and he gives us his Spirit.

Hypocrites need to urgently repent. Turn away from false religion, false authorities, false hopes, false worship. Place your hope in Jesus and worship in Spirit and in truth.

Jesus comes to tell us who is the true authority—God himself—and to teach us true worship—to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love you neighbor as yourself.

The title of the message is the Beauty of the Authority of God. You may be wondering why. The beauty of the authority of God is that he reveals to us who he is, who we are apart from him, and who we become in him. The Scripture reveals who we really are so we can see the Savior we really need.

If you haven't trusted in Christ, the question facing you today is this: Who will you trust? In our culture today, authority can be found in many places:

- One's feelings
- Tradition
- Reason
- Family and friends
- Education
- Jobs
- Possessions

All of these things offer no hope.

Or, will you trust Jesus? Christianity in two words is "Trust Jesus." Trust him today.

For believers, will you again commitment to following Jesus? Will you look to him as the authority for your life? Will you worship him as he has called us to?

Fathers, I want to make a special plea to you this Father's Day. Will you lead you family in the commandments of God? Will you teach them the instruction of the Lord and show them how to practice it? How we need men of God! Fathers committed to the Word! God help us!