

## **SUNDAY 30 AUGUST 2015 (SCRIPTURE READING: MARK 7:1-15)**

### **BACKGROUND**

Mark's Gospel is written as nothing other than a suspense drama. It is evident in the Gospel of Mark that the identity of Jesus is hidden and that no one really knows who He is. Scholars have spoken about this as the Messianic secret which is only revealed at the end.

I am convinced that our reading fits well into this suspense drama.

I mean Scribes travelled all the way to Gennesaret, on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, to see who this Jesus was. I googled this journey from Jerusalem to the Mountains of Galilee - it is about 195 kilometres and with a car it will take 2 hours and 49 minutes. I also calculated it with you walking this distance - according to Google maps it will be 35 hours! So Jesus must have stirred their curiosity to come all this way?

And typical of the culture of shame and honour, challenge and repost, they challenged Jesus with something that was very important to them, namely the oral rabbinic tradition which stated that the washing of hands and goods were not only restricted to the temple and the priests. In fact everyone should follow this practice in obeying God. Now although Jesus proclaimed to be a "Holy man" why is one of his disciples eating with "unclean hands". The Pharisees did not only follow the law of Moses but also an oral law which was the traditions handed down through many generations of rabbis. These traditions, which sought to regulate the lives of the people before God, became more and more detailed over the course of time and were eventually brought together and written down as a single document, the Mishna (dated c. ad 210). Somewhere in its development, the view arose

that the Oral Law itself had been given by God to Moses and thus shared divine authority with the Scriptures.

Jesus answers them with a challenge. He exposes the dangers of the oral traditions. One such tradition was called “the Corban”. This word only appears once in the New Testament, which allowed people to declare their property and goods as “dedicated” to God, which meant that it could not be given to their parents, as the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment instructed “Honour thy Father and Thy mother”. To do this was a serious decision (according to the Mishnah, *Nedarim*) and was rarely reversed (*Nedarim* 5), for violation of a corban vow risked the severe consequences of divine judgment. In Mark 7 Jesus criticizes the scribes because, theoretically, a son could exclude his parents from gaining any benefit from his estate by declaring his property “corban to them.” This, in effect, nullifies the fifth commandment, setting rabbinic traditions against the law of Moses. Worse still, if the son repented of his vow—arguing that it had been given in haste—a rabbinic tribunal would no doubt forbid a reversal of corban.

Jesus then concludes his argument by saying that “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 was telling them in a big way that no human law can protect any human being from corruptness. It is only God that can ultimately change the nature of people. But, of course, this was not yet revealed. It would only be later that the disciples and the people of Jesus’ time realized that He would change their lives forever!

Amen

## SERMON

There are different ways to go about with this text. We can go the way of criticizing the Pharisees but totally miss the point. Or we can identify the Pharisees with all our enemies and again miss the point.

I think we need to understand this text somewhat differently. I think instead of thinking of others as Pharisees, we need to start this morning with ourselves. We have to accept that you and I are the Pharisees. And yes, each and every person living on this earth are the Pharisees. We are the people who do not understand sin and where it comes from. We have so many human rules about sin and the corruptness of human beings.

Just like the Pharisees we totally miss the point that sin is part of our human nature and NO human law can protect us from ourselves or our sinful nature. NOT even the KGB or MI6 or the Queen of England!

No, only God can. And He did through Jesus Christ. He took away all our sins and made it possible for you and me to live in a meaningful relationship with God.

We do not have to allow sin to destroy our lives and our relationships. We can rely on God and ask Him to help us to combat the many temptations that we face on a daily level. But again, these temptations are within ourselves! Sin is not in things like groceries that you buy from shelves. Sin is when you and I do something which results us in NOT speaking to God about it!

The problem with the Pharisees is that they were trying an outside-in approach to solve the sin problem. They thought sin could be rooted out by doing outward actions, things like religious rituals,

watching what you eat, and so forth. Many, many Christians believe this as well.

If the Church of Scotland just does more, if the UK government do more about Christian morality, we just pass the right legislation, or elect the right politicians, or control the media, or get rid of televisions, then that will root out the sin that's destroying our culture. But, at the end of the day, they are just the symptoms of our sinful human nature.

No, we need to change our hearts and our attitudes. You and I need to change and take responsibility for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren, take account of our own actions. We need to admit that we need God every second of every day. We need God's church so that we can hear the good news of Jesus Christ, which is the only power that can transform the human heart. And yes, the world needs to hear the Gospel – not in a fundamentalist or biblicist way, not in an aggressive manner. The world needs to hear it from our actions, because **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS!** We need to remember the importance of the slogan: **“DO NOT ADVERTISE IF YOU CANNOT DELIVER”**.

The world needs to hear it from our actions of love and forgiveness, humility and self-awareness that **NO ONE** is **HOLY**, no one is perfect, and **NO ONE** on this earth is **GOD!**

Amen