

Jason Upchurch - Mark 6:45-7:13 - The Good News Exposes Religious Hypocrites

This morning as we look at the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ we see our Lord expose one of the most devastating sins there is: religious hypocrisy. That's what this section is about. The good news of Jesus - the true gospel - will always expose religious hypocrites.

Now hypocrisy can happen in a wide variety of ways; some more obvious and some more subtle. The word hypocrisy itself gives us a little indication about the issue. Our word hypocrite is just a transliteration ὑποκριτῶν. What's a ὑποκριτῶν? It's the used in Greek for an actor. Someone who just plays a role on the stage.

Harrison Ford is hypocrite; Samuel L Jackson is a hypocrite; Russell Crowe is a hypocrite. They are actors, stage performers. I hope you know this but Han Solo is not a real person.

Hypocrite - biblically speaking - is just an actor. It's that the person is not who they claim to be.

We often think of hypocrites as those who say one thing and do another. They say "don't sleep around" and then they commit adultery. They say obey the law, then they find ways to cut corners. They say getting drunk is bad and they get drunk. That is a type of hypocrisy, but it's not the only type.

See, when Jesus talks about hypocrisy, he is often talking about a more subtle version of hypocrisy. Religious hypocrisy. It's when someone says they are following God, says they are following God's word and the commandments of God - but they're actually just following their own religious agenda.

And maybe they're doing it really well, they're actually following all the precepts that they say people should do. But those precepts are not actually from God.

That's the issue here. The Pharisees say that they're following God, say that they represent God but actually what they're doing is representing their own made up religion and slapping the name of God on it. And Jesus calls them out. And I think we're going to see this as an encouragement to be cautious about people who claim the name of Jesus but are really just out for their own gain. And also an encouragement to make sure that we're not just playing the acting game as well.

Now, before we dive in let me just say that there is some transition happening in Mark's gospel that I think is worth noticing. Two transitions, really.

First, what we've seen so far is that Jesus has mostly been ministering in the Jewish Galilee region in northern Israel. But in the upcoming chapters he will devote time and energy to minister in Gentile regions. After this exchange he will go to Tyre and Sidon which are port cities along the Mediterranean Sea. Then he'll minister in the Decapolis - that region to the east of the Jordan River that was mostly Gentile. He'll feed the 4,000 which is also in the gentile region.

These are intentional indicators that Jesus is not only the Messiah of the Jews, he's also the Messiah for the Gentiles. More on that next week.

The second transition we see here is that the Pharisees are back on the scene. We haven't heard from the Pharisees in quite some time. The last time they were mentioned was all the back in **Mark 3:6** where they sought to destroy Jesus - kill him - with the help of the Herodians. The Herodians were supporters of Rome and the various sons of Herod the Great whom Rome had put in power over Israel.

If you remember, the issue back there was that Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The Pharisees didn't like that because it offended their understanding of the Mosaic Law so much that the two groups who are usually at odds with each other - the Herodians and the Pharisees - were working together to kill Jesus.

Well, the Pharisees are back and they are troublesome as ever.

Last week we wrapped up in **chapter 6:52** where the disciples were in confused awe of Jesus walking on the water.

In **Vs.53-56** Mark really sort of gives the epilogue of Jesus and the disciples trying to get a little rest away from the massive crowds. They never do get rest, as it turns out. The crowds continue to press in around them. Which will actually act as an ironic introduction to our section. **Read 53-56**

So the disciples never do get the rest they are hoping for. The demands of ministry are just crushing. And at the same time Jesus miracles are getting more and more amazing.

Remember the woman with the issue of blood back in **Mark 5?** She was psyching herself up just to press in and touch the fringe of Jesus's garment. She was sure that if she did that she would be healed. And it happened! It was amazing and a credit it to her faith and persistence.

Up to that point it seems that Jesus had personal interaction with every person that was healed. He would actually stop, spend time with them, pray with them, lay his hands on them and then they would be healed. It would take a long time; he'd be up all night healing a whole town. Her faith and that miracle of healing was a revolutionary step in the power of Jesus being displayed. The power just went out!

Well, that power is now taken to another level because now that's happening to everyone in every town. Everywhere Jesus goes, whole towns are just bringing people to Jesus and setting them in his path so that they can just barely touch the edge of his garment. And you know what? They're being healed too.

Jesus's divine power to heal and do miracles is absolutely off the charts. He heals everyone in all the towns just by walking by them and brushing up against them.

The power of Jesus over the last 2 chapters has been displayed more and more prominently: he makes dinner for 25,000 people, he heals all the sick and wounded, he walks on water.

Which makes for a rather laughable turn in chapter 7. The Pharisees send a delegation from Jerusalem to confront Jesus. And in light of the power of Jesus being displayed, you know what their big theological problem is? Jesus's disciples aren't washing their hands.

Really? That's their problem with Jesus? If you think about the contrast between it's pretty ludicrous.

But here I think we see their religious hypocrisy on full display and Jesus calls them out on it.

So what I want to do is just spend our time looking at the elements of religious hypocrisy. People who think they love God and think they serve God, but in reality they don't at all.

Now, one warning about this before we dive in. It's easy to take a passage like this and simply apply to other people. Maybe those who knowingly spread a false religion or we suspect are not truly Christian.

But I think that would be to miss an opportunity to examine our own lives. Are we religious hypocrites? See religious hypocrites don't know they're religious hypocrites. "Lord, lord didn't we prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name..." they think they're in.

That's what makes this so difficult. And with both the command of Paul to examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith and Peter's command to make our calling and election sure I think we would do well to not just consider those out there, but ensure that we ourselves are not religious hypocrites.

I see 4 indicators of religious hypocrisy here that we need to be on guard for.

1) Religious hypocrites don't find Jesus amazing.

It doesn't flat say this in the passage, but the contrast between the crowds and the Pharisees is quite amazing. The crowds are coming to Jesus because they are in awe of who he is and what he can do. They're excited

about him and believe he can heal and love to hear his teaching. They're dragging their sick people on their beds across hills and valleys to bring them to Jesus.

Think about that. They're so convinced Jesus is amazing and can heal they're loading people up and carrying them for miles to come just so the people can touch the edge of Jesus's cloak. There is fervor and excitement.

The Pharisees aren't excited about Jesus. They aren't coming to him to see his amazing power. And they're certainly not coming to him to experience his amazing power. They want to argue about minutiae.

And I think this is one of the biggest giveaways of religious hypocrisy: that people aren't all that amazed by Jesus. Whether it's people out there or even us in the church.

So let me ask: do you find Jesus to be amazing? Or is he just okay to you?

When you think of the mercy Jesus has shown you in light of all your sins, are you amazed?

When you think of the gifts that God has given you and entrusted you with, are you amazed?

When you think of the eternity of glory and joy and pleasures that await you all because of Jesus are you amazed?

When you think of the reality that in eternity past before anything was created God had predestined you - you specifically - to pour out his saving grace on, are you amazed?

When you think of the fact that you couldn't talk to the president of the US or the joint chiefs or senators or representatives if you wanted to, but you can talk to the almighty, infinite King of kings and Lord of lords as your father because the blood of Jesus was shed for your sins are you amazed?

Did it amaze you when we read that Jesus walked on water? That he fed 5,000? That healing power is just bursting from him to heal weary people in desperate need?

The Bible talks about the love of some people for Jesus growing cold. The concern isn't the love of religious things, the concern is love for Jesus himself.

You know how you know someone loves something? They can't help but talk about it. They can't help but spend time on it. They can't help but spend money on it. These people from all over Galilee can't help but flock to Jesus.

So let me encourage you that if your love for Jesus is cold, if your amazement of Jesus is lacking - go to him. Go to him in prayer and ask for him to rekindle your affection for him. And go to him in his Word and be reminded again that he really is more amazing that we can ever understand.

That's why parents are commanded in Deuteronomy to teach their kids about the Lord morning, day and night: to continue regale them with the stories of our God! So that our children are in awe of God and that we continue to be in awe of God.

Don't be the religious hypocrite who isn't all that impressed by Jesus.

2) Hypocrites are focused on the followers rather than Jesus. Read 1-5

It seems like what happened here is that the Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem with a heart to accuse Jesus of something. Earlier in Mark's gospel it's clear they have all kinds of problems with Jesus.

He eats heals paralytics on the Sabbath, he eats with tax collectors, he doesn't fast when they think he should fast, he eats from the grain on the Sabbath. They're probably sure they can find something against Jesus.

Here it seems as though they come with an accusatory heart but don't have anything specific. They come and hang out around Jesus and that's when they notice the worst. **Read 1-2**

What does it mean eating with defiled hands? Well, in the OT there was a distinction between clean and unclean. And when you think of those terms, the issue isn't always sanitation or even actually cleanliness, although in the OT unsanitary things are often unclean.

More the idea is authorized by God or not authorized by God. Clean things were authorized by God to be touched or eaten or sacrificed or inside the camp of Israel. And unclean things were not to be touched or eaten or sacrificed; they were not allowed in the camp of Israel. Those are broad ideas but hopefully you get the point.

Those that were unclean that violated the law were an abomination to God. He hated them and depending on what it was the penalty could even be death.

Side: We're not always told why some things are clean and some things are not. Sometimes we are, or can make an educated guess. But other things we don't know why. People can speculate, but sometimes it seems like God made distinctions that only he knows the reasons for.

Well, interestingly, there was no law in the OT that anyone had to wash hands before eating. None. There were laws that the priests needed to wash their hands before doing their priestly duties in the Temple - **Exo. 30:20-21**. Moses says twice they have to wash before entering the Tent of Meeting so that they do not die.

But even there the idea is ritual purity. It's not soap and water for sanitation, per se. It's a cleansing ritual to indicate they are clean before God when they offer service at the Temple.

But as with many things the religious leaders had added to God's law. They had added that people needed to ritually clean themselves before eating. God didn't say that, they did. And the disciples were not following their man-made law. And so the Pharisees and scribes accuse the disciples to Jesus.

They're going to take religious potshots anywhere they can. Hypocrites love accusing the brethren. And in the Jesus's day an accusation against the disciples was a direct accusation against Jesus himself.

It's guilt by association. The teacher is responsible for his followers. So if Jesus's disciples are tainted, Jesus must be tainted as well. That's why they attack the people who follow Jesus: the lepers and prostitutes and gentiles and tax collectors and these unwashed disciples.

It's the ancient equivalent of saying "Your boy did this bad thing," "your buddy so and so did this bad thing. Aren't you friends with that guy?"

The implication is that you're guilty by association. That's what the Pharisees and scribes are doing. They've decided to attack the followers of Jesus.

This is the legacy of religious hypocrites: they are focused on attacking the followers of Jesus. Exposing their flaws and failures becomes their hobby.

And it comes in all kinds of ways. It can be big named people: Calvin, Sproul, MacArthur, your favorite author or preacher.

But it can also be pointing out all your flaws and the flaws of all the people you worship with. They'll point out the flaws of other churches and Bible translations and on and on.

It's nonstop criticism of the followers of Jesus.

And don't get me wrong, there is a call for discernment; to know truth from error. To call sin, sin. But that's different than constant criticism.

Interestingly, the people who spend all their time attacking other Christians rarely ever publicly praise Jesus themselves. Rarely do you hear praise for God or thankfulness or contrition for sin on their lips. You don't get the feeling that they're in awe of Jesus like these townsfolk are in awe of Jesus.

The most critical people are rarely the ones who just spontaneously praise God for his good blessings and unmerited favor.

They'd rather accuse the brethren like Satan their father.

So religious hypocrites don't find Jesus amazing and they usually focus on the followers of Jesus rather than Jesus.

3) Religious hypocrites are focused on religious acts rather than Jesus. Read 3-4

So we just saw they're focused on accusing the followers of Jesus. Here we see that they love their religious acts. One thing you'll notice about religious hypocrites is that they do a lot of things that look very religious on the surface. They have their own religious morality code that they keep very carefully.

Now, to be fair, the lives of followers of Jesus should be transformed. Loving Jesus is obedience to Jesus. People should see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.

Paul says in **Titus 1:16** that there are some who profess to know God but deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. So we are to be obedient and godly.

But religious hypocrites aren't committed to obedience to Jesus. They're committed to obedience to their own man-made religious works.

The Pharisees show us how it's done. Washing hands before meals was just the tip of the iceberg. In fact, they had perfected this game so much that all the Jews did it too. **Read 3**

It wasn't just the Pharisees and scribes, it was most Israelites. But it's nowhere in the Law. Neither is washing after being in the marketplace or washing cups or kettles or pitchers.

Interestingly in **Vs. 4** the word used for washing is actually baptismos, where we get our word for baptism. In ancient Israel there were baptismal pools where people would ritually cleanse themselves by immersing themselves into the water.

Again, there was no command from God to do this in the Law of Moses. This was something the Jewish religious leaders came up with on their own. Maybe you bumped into someone in the marketplace who was defiled, how would you know? So just to be safe you would cleanse yourself in a baptismal pool to purify yourself before eating.

And you'd also immerse your cookware, your cups and dishes as well. What if, by chance, they got defiled since the last time you used them? Gotta make sure they're ceremonially clean as well.

Some of your translations add "dining couches." There was a purification ritual for your furniture as well. And remember, this isn't for actually cleaning anything. This isn't sanitation. This is ritualistic religious nonsense that they made up.

They basically had made everyone in Israel ceremonially OCD where every time they went anywhere or did anything they had to completely wash themselves and their whole household just on the off chance someone had defiled them unknowingly.

The irony is that because God did not command these washing rites, even if they were defiled it wouldn't have cleansed them anyway.

But they want to add religious looking rituals to everyone's lives for good measure and then accuse them of wrongdoing if they don't follow suit. That's hypocritical religion.

And listen, people do this all the time even now. And it's not just when someone makes rules for themselves. That's fine, if you want to make a rule for you to follow that's not in the Bible. Okay.

But when people judge others by arbitrary rules that are not in the Bible that becomes a problem.

People who say even drinking wine or beer or alcohol at all is sinful, rather than just not getting drunk. It's adding to God's Law.

People who make it mandatory to dress up in a certain way to church or use a certain Bible, or sing certain songs.

There's all kinds of religious rules that people want to make up and add to what the Word of God has to say that have nothing to do with either the spirit or the letter of the Law.

That's religious hypocrisy.

If you can't show me chapter and verse for a command or a prohibition I'm not going to do it. Or, as the Westminster Confession of Faith says: commands need also be deduced by good and necessary inference. That is, maybe a command isn't spelled out exactly, but we get where it's going.

4) Religious hypocrites disobey commands that are clear. Read 6-13

This is really sort of the opposite of the last command, though they are tied together. Religious hypocrites love making laws that God never made. But they also love disobeying commands that are clearly presented in the Bible.

Here the command is to honor your father and mother. And specifically it's to provide for them financially in their old age. That's a biblical principle.

Usually when we think of honoring our parents we think of kids still in the home obeying their parents and respecting their authority. That's true.

But the command also includes providing for them financially in their old age. That's a command.

Paul makes it clear that Christians are to take care of our older parents when he speaks of widows:

1 Tim. 5:8: But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

If you don't financially take care of your parents in their old age you're worse than an unbeliever. Are there some limits and difficult situations? Sure. But the general rule is we provide for them and Paul makes it clear with the language that he's talking about financially.

Well, in Jesus's day the religious leaders had come up with a system that instead of providing for your parents you could give that money to the Temple instead! Isn't that great. What could be more religious and God-honoring than giving money to the Temple?

"Sorry mom and dad, I'm taking the money I would have given you to live and I'm giving it to God." Sounds very spiritual. Except it's not. Why not?

Because God was clear: you honor your parents with that money. **Read 11-13**

They made void the Word of God.

Any time you see people voiding the clear teaching of the Word of God to do some other religious looking thing, it's hypocrisy.

Whether that's loving each other, gathering together, writing off commands because they seem archaic or out of touch with our culture.

Any time you bring up a command or a prohibition and their response is "well what about..." - they're making void the Word of God.

We are called to guard ourselves from hypocrisy. From disobedience and a heart of accusation.

And instead love God with our heart and with our actions. Jesus wants us to follow him in obedience. Amazed at who he is and loving and obeying his Word.

Pray