

Misunderstood Purpose

Mark 7:1-37 (CGS#10)

INTRODUCTION: In our reading and study of Mark, we are coming off of the first bread miracle and will have the second soon in our view. Before we get there, Mark is going to give us a glimpse into Jesus' world that shouldn't surprise us. First, the Pharisees are going to confront Jesus over ritual cleanliness. And, you and I should note just how important ritual cleanliness is to the Pharisees. It was common teaching that even if the shadow of a Gentile crossed a dinner plate, that plate was now unclean and unfit to eat off of unless it was cleansed. Seems a bit much, right? But don't forget the Pharisees truly thought that the way they loved God was to obey the law and force others to do the same. As we've talked before, they were half-right. God wants our obedience. But they actually made their obedience the object of their worship. I.e., It was an idol for them. That means they were tragically wrong, and this is evident in their discourse with Jesus. Jesus (who is the visible image of the invisible God – Col. 1:15) shows us and them God's heart both for obedience and for our neighbors. Jesus also shows us God's character of grace. The Pharisees tragically missed this, and they misunderstood God's heart of grace. So Jesus engages them in a dialogue. It is no surprise that the religious leaders respond the way they do. Remember, they began plotting to destroy Jesus back in 3:6. So what is Jesus' discourse? One commentator helps us to see it clearly, he writes.

"Jesus' rebuke comes in three stages. **First**, he takes the charge that he has defiled hands and reverses it by saying that they actually have defiled hearts (**v 6**, quoting Isaiah 29:13). They are "hypocrites." This word can also mean "actor." The Pharisees are pretending to be someone they are not. Their ritual scrupulousness could look as if they are serious about drawing near to God, but Jesus says that their hearts are far from God. The motivation for their rule-keeping is not love for God but a desire to be seen by others. They're mere con artists. **Second**, Jesus labels "the tradition of the elders" as Isaiah's "commandments of men." The Pharisees are pretending to be the mouthpiece of God, but they are only sharing manmade ideas and treating them as if they are commandments from God. **Third**, Jesus gives an example of the way that insisting on their tradition actually causes others to break the commandments of God. The tradition of "Corban" is an example of a manmade commandment that breaks the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12). They justify failing to care for their parents by saying that their money or possessions are "Corban"—devoted to God. They invoke God's name to avoid doing something which God himself commanded. **Don't miss the irony.** The tradition of the elders added commands to the law of God in an attempt to put a fence around it—to make sure people couldn't get near breaking it. But in the end those traditions caused people to break the law. Jesus says they are leaving the commandment of God (Mark **7:8**), rejecting it (**v 9**), and making it void (**v 13**). Hypocrisy indeed!"¹

Yes, in chapter 7 we will see more healings (Gentiles nonetheless). But those healings only reinforce what we already see in Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees. God desires not just our actions but our motives to be in line with his. And it is far too easy to mix up my purposes and God's purposes. In other words, **If I'm not careful, I can mistake my purposes for God's purposes.**

¹ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 109–110.

GETTING STARTED – As a group, take time to answer this question. What was a moment in your life when you and another person had a miscommunication and weren't on the same page? This could be comical or serious. What did you learn from it?

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage(s). It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions.

1. Have you ever had a time in your life when you realized that you were putting more weight on a good practice than you should have? I.e., Pray has to look like... Or, devotions can only be done in the morning. This is when we mistake form for function.
2. When you hear Jesus' words to the Pharisees, what stands out to you? How is Jesus' character clarified? How do you see yourself in the Pharisees?
3. If you had to give the Pharisees advice in this section, what would it be?
4. How do you see grace and truth given in equal measure or without compromise in Jesus' life?
5. Is there anyone in your circle of relationships that is resistant to the gospel? How can you pray for them this week with grace and love?