

## You Gonna Eat That?

It's almost time for the state fair where after dark people wearing the strangest clothing show up with what looks to be their life savings they've withdrawn and they begin to eat the strangest things imaginable. At the fair the philosophy is, put it on a stick, deep fry it and sell it for an exorbitant price and people will line up to try it. Clean or unclean, healthy or unhealthy, batter it, fry it and sell it. The question that should be asked is, **You Gonna Eat That?**

The Pharisees had some questions about what was considered clean and unclean, healthy or unhealthy and Jesus had something to share with us on that very topic. That's our question for this morning. You gonna eat that?

Turn with me to Mark 7 as we pick up where we left off a couple of Sundays ago. Jesus has been working miracles. He fed five thousand men, not counting women and children, with five barley loaves and two fish and then walked across the lake and people came from everywhere to be healed and touched by him.

Along with the crowds that gathered, the Pharisees and teachers of the law showed up. You recall they came all the way from Jerusalem to see him, to ask what was for them the central theological issue. "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders and wash their hands before they eat?" Can you see them arriving and someone tells them, "Jesus took five little loaves of barley bread and two little fish and blessed them and broke them and fed five thousand men plus all the women and children. Thousands of people fed with just this little lunch. Can you believe it? That's a miracle isn't it? Surely he must be sent from God." And the Pharisees reply, "Yes, but did he have them all wash their hands before they ate? If he didn't, he can't be sent from God."

They lost the plot. They forgot what this was all about. I hope you remember what we shared last time about the reason behind the handwashing. The law said that the priests were to be clean when they entered the tabernacle or temple to serve the Lord. They would have ceremonially bathed before their service. In addition, they and their families were allowed to eat some of the sacrifices that were offered, but only if they were ceremonially clean, including their hands. This regulation that was meant for the priests was taken by the Pharisees and the elders, simplified to just washing hands and applied then to everyone.

This washing of the hands then was part of what set them apart from everyone else as

Mark points out to his gentile readers in verse 3-4, along with their dietary laws to which he makes reference in verse 19. Jesus was about to challenge the entire worldview of the Pharisees. It's not about the outward cleanliness of the hands, it's about the inward cleanliness of the heart. It's not about what goes into the belly, it's about what comes out of the heart. It's not about what you put into your mouth, it's about what you put into your mind and what you allow into your spirit, that's what makes you clean or unclean.

Let's read part of this passage and then I want to share some further thoughts with you.

**Mark 7:1-5, 14-23.**

As I stated, Mark is writing for a gentile audience. They may have had questions about what was considered clean and unclean for them as Gentile converts to this new faith. Are we supposed to be eating a kosher diet? Are we to obey the Jewish dietary laws? Mark tells us that by what Jesus taught, he had declared all foods clean.

But why were the Jews not allowed to eat certain foods or touch certain things to begin with? Leviticus 11 records many of the Jewish dietary laws and describes what is clean or unclean, what animals can be touched and what they were not to touch. What was the point?

**Why the Jewish dietary laws?** The simplest explanation would be: **1) It was about health.**

Many of the animals and birds labeled as unclean were scavengers that fed on dead animals.

Disease was easily transmitted through them and so God was protecting the people from illness.

**2) It was about holiness.** It was a visible way of separating themselves from the pagan nations and people around them. For instance, the pig which was unclean to them was a common sacrifice of pagan religions. It kept them from identifying with those who did not know God and was a continual reminder that they were not to be like the other nations of the earth. **3) It was about redemption.** Ultimately, all the laws and regulations pointed to the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man and our need for a Savior and Redeemer. All of these things were shadows and types that pointed to Christ and his saving work.

Over the years, however, the laws and traditions became more important than the meaning behind them. **The traditions became a source of arrogant pride.** The Pharisees came to believe that by keeping ceremonial traditions like washing their hands, and by eating only food they called clean and not touching unclean things or people, that kind of cleanliness would commend them to God. The implication was that by their efforts they could be clean and

holy enough to stand before God. That my friends is the heart of spiritual arrogance. For any of us, Pharisee, sinner or saint, to think that we could clean this old flesh up enough to present ourselves to a holy God is spiritual arrogance. Remember the bible says our righteousness is as filthy rags. Let's face it, God fashioned us out of the dust of the ground. We are just dirt. You can polish your dirt all you want, but apart from God's redeeming mercy and grace, that dirt will still be dirt. (Remember when David tried to move the ark of the covenant on an ox cart and the oxen stumbled and Uzzah put out his hand to keep the ark from falling to the ground and God struck Uzzah dead. Uzzah assumed that his hand was cleaner than the ground. Fatal assumption. Apart from God's grace, none of us are clean enough.)

By placing such emphasis upon the traditions (clean hands and clean foods) **Packaging became more important than content.** The outward appearance became more important than the inward reality and character and attitudes. That's what Jesus is talking about to the crowds and to his disciples in verses 14-19. **"Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him."** The Pharisees' emphasis was upon the external – clean hands, don't touch unclean things, don't touch gentiles or unclean people. Jesus called them hypocrites in verse 6. The word originally referred to actors wearing a mask, looking like one thing on the outside but the inside was something or someone different. In another place Jesus called them hypocrites and said, **"You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."** **Matthew 23:27-28**

Can you imagine our pride, our arrogance, when we take the filthiest thing we can find and wrap it all up and put it in a beautiful container with ribbons and bows on it and we present it to God thinking he will be pleased with that and we will then be in right standing with God? "But look how beautiful it looks on the outside!" Yes, but on the inside it is maggot infested and rotting. The content is more important than the packaging.

By placing such emphasis upon the traditions **Holiness became an excuse for isolation.** The Pharisees did not want to touch or be touched because of the risk of becoming ceremonially unclean. They would not pass through Samaria because Samaritans were unclean. If they saw a gentile coming they would cross to the other side of the street. They would do the same if a

woman was coming, fearing she might be unclean at her time of the month. The effort to remain holy became their excuse for despising anyone other than themselves. “Don’t touch those gentiles - they are unclean. They will transfer their uncleanliness to you. They will contaminate you.” “Thank God I’m not like that tax-collector, that sinner in the corner asking for mercy from God. Thank God I am justified because I keep all the traditions and the laws.”

Beware the leaven of the Pharisees Jesus warned. And I would caution us to beware the leaven of the Pentecostals. You see, we can follow the traditions pretty well with the same three challenges I’ve just outlined. Our traditions of holiness can become a source of spiritual pride and arrogance. We have our traditions, just as the Pharisees did. But if we think our traditions and our practices of holiness, apart from salvation and God’s grace, if we think those things will save us or commend us to God, we are wrong, just as the Pharisees were wrong. Be as holy as you can be, but if you haven’t repented of your sins and surrendered your life to Christ, if you haven’t been converted, born again, then you are still just polished dirt, still unclean before God. The songwriter said, “what can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!” Good works and keeping traditions won’t save you but coming to Jesus in repentance and faith will.

And we are pretty good at emphasizing the importance of packaging. We have too often focused more on the external than on the internal. And we’ve allowed holiness to become an excuse for isolating ourselves. In order to remain holy we’ve decided to have nothing to do with the world. We created our own softball teams and restaurants and theme parks and everything else so we wouldn’t be contaminated by the world. I understand that, but in the mean time we consumed every idea and bought into every philosophy that Hollywood and Madison avenue sent our way. We focused on the packaging, making ourselves look like “Christianized” versions of a shallow and sinful culture. Imitating the world is not the answer but isolating ourselves isn’t either.

The bible says we are to be in this world, but not of this world. How can we be salt and light if we aren’t where the darkness is and where the decay is? John Stott wrote, “On the one hand we are to live, serve and witness in the world. On the other hand we are to avoid becoming contaminated by the world.” **“So we are neither to seek to preserve our holiness by escaping from the world nor to sacrifice our holiness by conforming to the world. Escapism and conformism are thus both forbidden to us.”....John Stott**

It is a huge responsibility we have and not an easy one at all, but we mustn't allow our standards of holiness to keep us from interacting with a lost and dying world. We, the church are the only hope for this world. We must not escape from the world but we dare not be conformed to the world. Lord help us to be salt and light in our dark and decaying world, not contaminated by our contact with the world, not conforming to the world's standards, but bringing life and hope by boldly letting the life and light of Christ shine through our lives as we engage the world for Christ.

Jesus is going to make his point so strongly to his disciples when he encounters a gentile woman with a demon possessed daughter. He will show them again, it's not touching people that are unclean that contaminates you, it's what goes into your mind and spirit that makes you unclean. It's not being around sinners, unbelievers, it's compromising and conforming to the world and its sin-distorted views that makes you unclean.

To the disciples he makes it clear. It's not what you eat that contaminates you. It just goes into the stomach and out into the sewer system. It's what is in your heart and spirit.

They were focusing on the wrong thing – on the wrong stuff – so Jesus made it plain to them. Here is the really gross stuff. Here is the stuff that contaminates and makes you unclean. You think dirty hands are something nasty, wait til you see the filth inside of your heart! Here are the really disgusting things: **“For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean.” Mark 7:21-23**

Notice the list. Some are physical acts like theft, murder, adultery and some are attitudes of the heart like greed, envy, arrogance. Whether it is an action or an attitude, Jesus still refers to all of these things as evils, as sin that makes us unclean.

The list and terms on the screen are from the NIV. Let's look at these quickly.  
Evil thoughts - evil intentions of the heart, the intent to sin against God and his word.  
Sexual immorality - fornication - usually thought of as sex involving unmarried people, it would include incest and even pornography would likely fall into this category since the Greek word used here is porneia, from which we get the word pornography.  
Theft - taking something that belongs to someone else without their permission

Murder - Taking of an innocent life

Adultery - A married person having sex with someone other than their spouse

Greed - The constant desire to get more for yourself, often regardless of the personal price.

Malice - Plotting to do evil, to harm someone, in spite of good that you have received

Deceit - To trick someone, to mislead them by lying, to set a trap for someone.

Lewdness - Immoral behavior that is not restrained or concealed, just giving into whatever sexual desire or sinful desire you might have.

Envy - Desiring something that belongs to another. Jealousy.

Slander - Attacking another person's character and reputation

Arrogance - Pride. Making claims of superior importance.

Folly - Foolishness in KJV - Refusing or unable to discern between right and wrong. Making sin a joke, making light of the seriousness of sin and of God's word concerning sin and judgment.

Jesus said all of these things come from inside the heart and they make a man unclean.

These things contaminate us.

Stop for a minute and think about how many times you pick up something at the grocery store and you look at the ingredients or at the fat content or the cholesterol content. You look to see if it has the wrong stuff because you are cautious about what you put into your body – and rightfully so. Jesus isn't saying we should have nachos and twinkies three meals a day so eat up and have a good time. But he is saying those things won't make you morally unclean. Nor will abstaining from those things make you morally clean. It's not about what goes into and out of your stomach, but it is about what goes into and comes out of your heart!

You've examined the label on your food. Have you examined the label on your movies? On your television shows? On your magazines and books. You've checked out the fat content on your salad dressing because you don't want to damage your waistline, but have you considered the damage being done to your spirit and your attitude by the way you spend your time, the music you listen to, the conversations you open yourself to. Remember, I'm not talking about isolating yourself from people, but I am cautioning you not to allow yourself to become conformed to the world. Don't let your spirit be contaminated.

Jesus said this stuff would defile you. It will make you unclean. It will damage you. It's time to take a look at your life and spiritual health. You've been ingesting some stuff that has

been damaging you. Or perhaps you've been focusing on the wrong things, external cleanliness more than internal cleanliness. Let's go for both. Wash your hands, but guard your heart as well. Watch what you eat, but watch what you feed on in your spirit as well.

Ask yourself in a spiritual and moral sense, **“Are you gonna eat that?”** Really? You're going to put that in your mind? In your heart? In your spirit? Do you want that going into you and coming out of your spirit? Are you sure?

Maybe you've become like the Pharisees in some of the other ways we've discussed. Maybe you've allowed your traditions to become a source of arrogant pride. Maybe you realize you've been focusing more on Christian packaging than on spiritual content. You've tried to look and talk like a Christian, but inside you aren't living like Christ, you haven't surrendered your life to Christ, you're living one way in front of church folks, but you're wearing a mask, living another life in secret. It's time to get clean and live clean. It's time to be honest with yourself. Or,

Maybe holiness has become an excuse for being unwilling to get your hands dirty and messy in reaching out to the “unclean” in your world. It's time to hear what Jesus says, to do what Jesus did, to reach beyond our comfort zone to the hurting and broken and desperate and unclean in our world. We won't isolate ourselves from the world, but we won't be contaminated or conformed to the world either.

Let's take an honest look at our lives today. Clean or unclean. How are we living?