

Sunday, June 29, 2025

More Like Jesus

Mark 7:1-30 (ESV)

- Many see Christianity as a religious system that declares if you are to be accepted, you have to live up to a certain standard
 - However, the basis of Christianity is that we could not live up to the standard, so the Standard Himself, became a Man, in the Person of Jesus, and through His death and resurrection, He bridged the gap between our shortcomings and God's Standard.
 - So that even though there is nothing we can do to truly live up to the standard, we can still be accepted before God and have a relationship with Him, because of what Jesus has done for us.
- Whenever we come to faith, there is no questioning that we have a complete

dependence on God. We put ourselves completely in His Hands

- But sometimes, the longer we're in this faith, the more we are tempted to lose that dependence on God and try and take our spirituality into our own hands
- We feel like now that we're mature believers, we now have to perform a certain way, and it's not necessarily to gain or maintain the favor of God...but rather so that we would be held in higher esteem in the eyes of other Christians
- And that is what we refer to as legalism
- Legalism is when we turn our faith into a social competition while covering it in Spiritual language
 - It's when we keep track of church attendance, not out of care for someone else, but rather so that we can feel better about ourselves

- It's when we begin to believe that God is more proud of us than others because of all that we do...or don't do
 - It's when we make worship style more about personal preference, rather than actually worshipping
- And I know many people will define legalism as the attempt to gain God's approval through works...but I really believe that if we ever fall into legalism, the root of it is not the attempt to gain the favor of God, but the attempt to gain the favor of other people
- Or in some cases to control other people
 - This is what Jesus needed to address in Mark chapter 7, beginning in verse 1:
- ***“Now when the Pharisees gathered to Him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of His disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash***

their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” And He said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ““This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

-Mark 7:1-8 (ESV)

- *I had a pretty big wake up call in my first couple years of ministry. It was probably about the 3rd year that had been a youth pastor, the*

group had grown a ton, and I was feeling very good about where we were at

- I felt like I was an awesome youth pastor doing great work.
- And that summer I was out in California at one of the biggest churches in America and I went to sit in one of their youth services to kind of see how they did things and learn a thing or two
- But when the service started, I couldn't get over how rude these students were.
 - The service began and the leaders are talking, and the students just kept on talking amongst themselves.
 - They weren't paying attention, some kids up in the back balcony were just throwing things around, girls were sitting in boys laps...I was flabbergasted
 - And I was thinking to myself, if this was my group, I'd get em in shape real quick

- My group would never behave like this, I wouldn't stand for it!

- And I was literally getting mad

- And in that moment, I felt as if the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart saying, "Kenny, I'm not mad at them, why are you?"
 - I was overcome with conviction in that moment, because I realized that I had been basing the success of my ministry on the behavior of those who I was leading
 - I was making my ministry more about raising up good little boys and girls...than truly caring for their souls
 - But what I needed to learn was I needed to care more about their hearts more than I did their behaviors.
 - I am a teacher of the Word of God and I needed to know what the primary purpose of the Word of God was, and I was missing it.
 - And this is what I was missing:

**- THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT ABOUT
BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION, ITS ABOUT
HEART TRANSFORMATION**

- Jesus was calling out these Pharisees for caring more about the way that people behaved, than they did their actual hearts
- Jesus had already had one show down with the Pharisees whenever He healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath
- So now, the local Pharisees were most likely complaining to the higher ups, and get the Pharisees from Jerusalem, the big show, to make the 90 mile journey up here to the shores of Galilee to monitor Jesus
- Then they get appalled that His disciples aren't washing their hands in the proper ceremonial way before they ate
 - So they try to call Jesus out on it, "Why aren't Your guys following the tradition of the elders??"
 - And Jesus essentially says, "I don't care about the tradition of the elders!"
- You see, what the Pharisees had done, was take a rule from the Old Testament that was specifically for the priests, and expounded it into a regulation for all of the people
- Now, it didn't come from a bad place, it came from a place of wanting to show continual reverence for God
- And really the Pharisees, which is almost a cuss word to us now, this pharisaical movement actually had very good intentions to start
- The origin story of the Pharisees goes back to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah whenever the people of Israel were finally delivered from the Babylonian exile and made it back to rebuild Jerusalem
 - The religious leaders said, "Enough is enough! We're done with this pattern of idolatry in our nation!"

- “We’re sick of our people following God’s laws for a little while, then abandoning Him for idols and pagan practices for a long while, until we end up in exile, until we finally repent come back, just to eventually just fall away again!”
- This pattern had been going on for centuries every since they had been rescued from Egypt!
- So this new sect was formed called the Pharisees, which means *a separatist* and this group was going to make sure that the Israelites stayed separate from the rest of the world and remained in their devotion to God
- So they set up these oral traditions, in order to make sure they didn’t get anywhere near breaking the law of God again
- One Rabbi referred to the oral traditions as a fence around the Law of God in order to protect the Law and them from breaking it
 - It’s like the alcoholic who knows his propensity to fall back into alcoholism so he sets these parameters for himself to make sure he never goes anywhere near a bottle or bar again
- So it came from a good place, but the problem was that it was a system that relied on human effort
 - You see, now that they had this fence around the law of God, the Old Testament, God’s actual Word was not the focus anymore. The fence was
 - The traditions of the elders, whether intentional or not, began to outweigh the ways of God
 - Now, they wouldn’t say that, they would say that these traditions were all about protecting and keeping the ways of the Lord, but now they had become so focused on their traditions that the heart of God had been lost to them
- Jesus calls them out in one instance specifically in verse 9: **“And He said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the**

commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God) — then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.” -Mark 7:9-13 (ESV)

- You see, they had added into the Oral Traditions, also known as the Talmud, this loophole that says if you ceremonially declare your bank account and assets “Corban” which means to be dedicated to God, that meant those funds were technically devoted to the Temple
- Now they didn’t have to actually give the money to the Temple right away, they could

just declare that the funds were being reserved for that and they could hang on to their money

- That rule may have been made with good intentions at the start, but because it was a man made tradition it had no power and became a corrupt loophole
 - Some people, even the Pharisees, would use the Corban rule as an excuse to not help and support their own parents whenever they were too old to take care of themselves
 - They would say, “Sorry mom and dad, I knew you took care of me all of those years, but the money that I would use to take care of you has been dedicated to God so....sorry, good luck!”
- But Jesus says if you really knew the heart of God, you would know that the real work of God that He would want that money to go to, would be to honor His law and His 5th commandments when it says to “Honor your father and mother”

- And Jesus says, “You think that your traditions are working for the Law of God, but you’re actually just making it void in the lives of the people.”
 - And He says, “This is just one example... MANY such things you do!”
- He says that you have taken the Word of God, and added to it, and because you have made your addition to the Word of God of equal importance to the word of God...you are diminishing the Word of God in yourself and in the lives of others
- And we can bash the pharisees all we want for doing this, but we can so easily be guilty of doing this ourselves
- How many times can we come up with our own man-made regulations about how we can best honor God...but then completely miss the heart of God in it
- I remember early on whenever I had really began to walk with the Lord
- And after a few years in, I really felt like I was in a good groove
- I was serving in church, I was reading my bible every day, I was spending time in prayer consistently
- And I know that all of these were good things to do
- But one evening whenever I was before the Lord praying, I caught myself beginning to sound like the Pharisee in the Parable Jesus taught
- Where Jesus said there was a Pharisee and Tax Collector praying and the Pharisee said, “Thank you Lord that I’m not like this tax collector but I do all of theses righteous things”
- And the Tax Collector just prayed, “God have mercy on me a sinner”
- I was beginning to be the pious one
- And I realized that I was basing my whole Christian walk around what I was doing. It was all about how much time I spent in prayer, how

I was reading my bible, MY serving in church... and unintentionally I had still begun to make my whole walk with God all about ME...

- And you know what I had begun to do as a result??

- I had begun to police the people around me, to see if they were living up to the standards and protocols that I had set for myself.
- I had a personal conviction about what my role in serving in the church was supposed to be, what my personal time with the Lord was supposed to look like
- But that was for me. And I believe the Lord led me to those convictions
- But where I went wrong when I began to monitor how my friends or the people around me were serving in church or not, or what their time with the Lord looked like

- And if it didn't look like mine, well, I'd be calling them out!

- And I would cover it in spiritual language, I'd say that I was holding them accountable
- But really all I was doing was pharisaically policing the people around me and I was inadvertently promoting a works based relationship with God

- Who am I to tell someone exactly how they are called to serve in the church, or what their personal time with the Lord is supposed to exactly look like?

- I don't have their calling, I don't have their personality, I don't have their temperament
- I am wired specifically the way that God wired me, and He has a personal time that He wants to spend with me

- And that might look different for you...and that's ok

- Now I can encourage you, with how my time with the Lord may look like or the experiencing that I have had serving....but

it's not my job to police you and set those regulations for you

- You see, whenever we as Christians begin to police each other we begin to replace the Relationship with Regulations
- And one of the greatest misconceptions about Christianity is that we fail to understand this principle:

- GOD RULES ARE ALWAYS ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIP

- You may have heard the old saying that rules without relationship leads to rebellion
- Which is exactly why those who do not have a relationship with God will never understand the rules and commands that He sets out for us in Scripture.
- And what they don't get, and really even us Christians sometimes don't get, is that every rule He sets is because He values the relationship

- God has always valued the relationship more than the rules

- That's why He says, ***"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."*** -Hosea 6:6 (NIV)

- God says, "Yes, there are Rules and Regulations for sacrifices and burnt offerings, but if you miss the relationship, it means nothing."

- This is also why Jesus said, "If you Love me, you will keep My commandments"

- And John says that His commandments are not burdensome, they are for our benefit

- Because this is always primarily about the relationship

- Here's an incredible passage that I never took the time to appreciate until this week. In Exodus chapter 19, as God is giving the law

and commandments to the people of Israel through Moses, in verse 3 it says this:

- ***“Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you will obey Me and keep My covenant, you will be My own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to Me.”***
-Exodus 19:3-5 (NLT)
- Now, notice that the salvation, the bringing them to Himself, preceded the obedience
- He doesn’t say, if you obey My rules and My laws, THEN I will save you, THEN I will deliver you, THEN I will bring you to Myself

- No, He says look at the way that I HAVE saved you, and delivered you, and brought you to myself
 - Now, because I have saved you, because of this relationship that we have, follow My commands and and instructions so you can be My treasure...so that we can remain in a treasured relationship
- And we see God set certain standards for His people, some that we could get offended by reading on the surface
 - Like whenever there were times that He would forbid His people from intermarrying with certain people groups
 - Now that seems offensive, that seems racist and prejudicial
- However, what we fail to recognize is that God giving that rule had absolutely nothing to do with ethnicities
- It was all about their spirituality

- God clarified that they were not to intermarry with certain people groups, “Lest they turn your heart from Me, with their false idols and pagan practices, and they lead you to serve other gods”
- God was trying to protect the spiritual relationship that He had with His people
- But time after time the people did not listen to God, and His warnings came true
- And they married people who served false gods and practiced HEINOUS pagan religious rituals,...sometimes even to the point of child sacrifice... and the people ended up turning their heart from the Lord
- THEY broke the relationship, God did not
- THEY turned their heart from Him, but He did not turn His heart from them
- Which is apparent because eventually they would repent and turn their hearts back to God, and God would save them and deliver them, and He would warn them not to do the same things again that led them to turning from Him before
- But inevitably they would end up doing the same things, which would end the same way, and give the same results
- And the cycle went round and round and round
- Which led to this group of Pharisees being formed, to make sure that they didn't make those mistakes, that they wouldn't break the rules, but they still weren't accomplishing what they were supposed to accomplish because they began to focus on the rules more than the relationship
 - And in turn, they began breaking the rules themselves
- Because the reality is, the more that you focus on the relationship the better you will keep the rules.
 - Jesus even said, that out of all of God's laws, if you could just keep Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and

strength...and love your neighbor as yourself, you would have no problem keeping all of the other ones!

- Why? Because whenever you love someone, the more you are with them you begin to love the things that they love
- You begin to develop different habits because you value the relationship
- I know this a menial example, but I used to bite my finger nails, I don't even thing I owned nail clippers
 - But when I started dating Rachel, she didn't call me out on it or anything, I don't even think she noticed that I did bite my nails, but I happened to hear her mention that one of her pet peeves was nail biting
 - So you know what I did, I stopped biting my nails, I went out and got some finger nail clippers and developed a new habit
 - And it wasn't hard, it wasn't some big dramatic change in my life...it was just

something I did without giving it a 2nd thought, without even being asked to or called out about it, all because I loved the relationship that I was in.

- And you know where I would go wrong with that?
 - If I went up to another guy if I saw him bite his nails and say, "Oh you're a terrible husband, you're a terrible boy friend, because you bite your nails!"
 - That would be dumb. Because that was a personal conviction that I had for my personal relationship, that doesn't mean that is for everyone else!
- Paul had to address this to the Romans in chapter 14 when he wrote: ***"Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who***

thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” -Romans 14:13-19 (ESV)

- Here's what going on here, we have a variety of believers in the Roman Church. You have a lot of people from a lot of different backgrounds that have come to faith.
- Now there are some, that have come to faith, they are saved, they are a part of the family of God. However, they still feel strongly about observing certain aspects of the Jewish tradition.

- Namely, the dietary restrictions. There are some that still felt strongly about abstaining from certain types of meat, others went full vegan and believed that you should abstain from meat all together
- Then you had those who used to think that way, who have come to faith, and feel the freedom they have in Christ, no longer feel bound by the law or Jewish customs..so now they're enjoyin' their new pork chop and prime rib filled life and loving every minute of it!
- But now you have the people of God at odds with each other, because whenever they would get together for a church meal, you would have some piling their plates high with red meat, waving it around in the other's face like, "Doesn't it smell good! This is what the freedom of Christ smells like!"
- Then you have the other side showing up to the pot luck with "Meat is Murder" t-shirts on... just stirrin' the pot.

- And all this is doing is causing unnecessary division and quenching the Spirit and Joy among the people of God.
- So Paul is trying to explain that people can be Christians who follow the same Jesus, and have different personal convictions, Earlier in the chapter he says: ***“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.” -Romans 14:5-6 (ESV)***
- He says, look some of you may have different personal convictions, but that should not be a cause to break fellowship with each other
- He says, Look, everyone is just trying to serve and honor God the best way that they can
- So if you are around someone and you know that their conviction is not to eat the red meat, then just don’t eat red meat around them
- And if you are around someone that does eat red meat, don’t get all offended and up in arms at them
- Just pursue unity and building each other up
- Translation: Value the relationship first!
- Before getting all up in arms and policing other believers, why don’t you take the time to care about that individual and consider that they may be honoring God with their lives, it just might look a little bit different than the way that you do.
- To which some would push back and say, “No, Christians need to be calling each other out, we need to be holding each other

accountable, Jesus said that “you will know them by their fruit”

- Well that word Fruit from that passage, in Matthew chapter 7, it’s the same word that is used in the Fruit of the Spirit
 - And that word is the Greek Word **“Fruit” (Karpos): that which originates or comes from something [else]; work, act, deed (of Christian charity)**
- that which originates or comes from something [else]: so it can’t originate from you or me, it can only originate from God
- work, act, deed (of Christian charity): Of loving and caring for others. The most spiritual thing about you is not the religious acts you perform or what you abstain from.....it’s how you effect the people around you
 - Are you someone who builds others up?
 - Are you someone who lifts people’s spirits?
- The last and final Commandment that Jesus gave was to Love one Another just as He loved

us...and He said that would be the gauge by which the world would recognize us as followers of Jesus

- If we had Agape love toward one another
- And the closest word we have in our english language that we have for translating the word Agape...is the word Charity
- So what should be the most recognizable thing about our Christian walk should not be our church attendance record or our bible study plan...it should be how we love and lift one another up
 - And I’m not knocking church and bible study...don’t hear what I’m not saying...I just know that if we prioritize performance over relationship we’ll just become a bunch of Pharisees policing each other and lose all of the joy that the church is supposed to be.
- Now also what I don’t want to happen, is for some of us hear a message like this and begin to use it as a way to justify sinful behavior.

- We can't say things like, well it's my personal conviction that I can sleep with whoever I want and God's fine with it
- Shut up, no he's not. The bible is very clear on those issues. There's no gray area there
- That would be voiding the Word of God also
- And that is not what Jesus is addressing in this passage. He's not calling out the Pharisees for calling people out on sinful behavior
- He's calling them out for condemning people on issues that have nothing to do with sin and salvation
- Jesus goes on to further explain that sin is the real issue that needs to be dealt with here!
- ***And He called the people to Him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: 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." And when He had entered the house and left the***

people, His disciples asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." -Mark 7:14-23 (ESV)

- Jesus is pointing out that these Jewish people are so concerned with keeping up appearances and whether or not they are being defiled by what's on the outside
 - So they put all of their focus on what they eat, what they see, what and who they're

around so they won't be ceremonially defiled according to their traditions

- But what Jesus is driving home is that you gotta stop focusing on what may or may not defile you from the outside because you are already defiled from inside!
- Because: **JESUS IS LESS CONCERNED WITH EXTERNAL PERFORMANCE, AND MORE CONCERNED WITH INTERNAL REDEMPTION**
- Jesus wants to shift the perspective of the people and His disciples so they can begin to understand that washing your hands means nothing if your heart has not been cleansed
- All of these evils that exist in our world is because of the sinful hearts of mankind
- And the only hope and answer that we have is not religion, philosophy, ideology, doing more good things and less bad things, or any man-made, self-help system or program!

- The only answer and hope that we have is a Person and His Name is Jesus Christ.
- And it might seem obvious but we have to understand that Jesus was flipping the system that these people grew up with on its head
 - Because no one else was questioning the Pharisees and the tradition of the elders... that's all they ever knew
 - And many Christians have been stuck with legalistic minds and practices, because that's all they've ever known
- They had been policed in certain ways with certain traditions so they only know to do the same!
- And what we ALL need to do is get back to the basics and reevaluate Who has our attention and Who has our heart.
- And I believe that Jesus drives home this point in the very next passage of this chapter:
- In verse 24 we see the only recorded time of Jesus' public ministry where He leaves the

boarders of Ancient Israel to go into a known pagan gentile land:

- ***“And from there He arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet He could not be hidden. But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of Him and came and fell down at His feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” But she answered Him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” And He said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.”***
-Mark 7:24-30 (ESV)

- Now, on the surface, Jesus seems to be very rude and unloving to this woman
 - But we know from the context of scripture that Jesus is not rude and unloving in the least
 - But we see Jesus do this a lot. We see the Father do this in the Old Testament as well
 - Where God gives a certain statement in a certain way, in order to draw a response out of a person that we can all learn from
- Jesus' statement had three main components
 - The Bread: The Gospel
 - The Children: The People of Israel
 - The Dogs: The Gentiles
 - Now the term that Jesus used for dog was not the term that was used for the wild street dogs, like some assume
 - This term was a term used for puppy, or a family pet

- So what Jesus is saying is that His ministry is to the feed the Jews with the Gospel first, and then the Greeks and Gentiles will have their turn
- Which is why Paul says in Romans 1:16, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*
- But then the Syro-phonician woman had a statement of her own, and in her three components to her statement revealed what was happening in her heart
 - First she falls at His feet and calls Him “Lord”
 - Which means: He to who a person or thing belongs, He Who has power of deciding; Master
 - So we see Submission to Jesus as Lord
 - Then she says, “Even us dogs under the table”
 - This shows Humility
- Like the tax collector praying, “Lord have mercy on me a sinner”
- She doesn’t get offended at Him in the least because she see’s Him as Lord and as Master and compared to Him of course she is just a house pet under the table
- Then finally she says, “eat the children’s crumbs”
 - Here we see that she has Trust in His will and His Plan
 - She says, “I get it, if your plan is to feed the Jews first, that is Your Will and Your plan... but I trust that if even a crumb were to fall to me, it would be more than enough.”
- And Jesus says, “For this statement...!” In Matthew’s account he says, “Oh what great Faith!!
- Can you see the stark contrast between this pagan woman, and the most religious scholars in all of Jerusalem?!

- Those Pharisees come to Jesus, skeptical, in an accusatory manner...standing in their pride questioning Him on why He does things the way that He does things
- But then this woman, who would be seen as a defiled wretch by them, who they would have fully bathed even passing her on the street because of their traditions...she shows greater faith than they ever could!
- The Pharisees say, “How dare you not honor our traditions”
- The Syro-Phonecian woman says, “Its an honor to even be considered a house pet in your Kingdom that could get a crumb”
- So I think that we just need to get back to the feet of Jesus.
 - Understand that there is nothing that we could ever do to clean or purify ourselves
 - Humble ourselves before Him and and Trust that even if He chooses to give us a crumb,

His crumb can do more for us than we could ever do for ourselves.

- Let’s just get back to the heart of the matter, and value the relationship that He offers us... then we’ll see just how well we begin to follow the right rules in the right way.