

Bible Reading Plan

**DEVOTION FOR
THE WEEK OF MARCH 22, 2020**

WEEKLY READING: MARK 6-10

**PASSAGES REFERENCED:
MARK 7:1-23; MATTHEW 23:25-28**

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were 'unclean,' that is, unwashed. – Mark 7:1-2 (NIV)

Well, this is timely reading. How could this week's devotion be about any other section from Mark 6-10, right? So let's utilize this timely connection and look at what's going on in this portion of scripture.

Right now we're washing our hands constantly to get rid of Coronavirus and Influenza, and all sorts of other germs. But that isn't what these Pharisees are talking about. They're thinking about people and places that could cause them to become ceremonially unclean – Gentiles, unobserving Jews, and the marketplaces where they'd interact with these 'unclean' people.

Jesus replies to them in verse six by pointing out how hypocritical they are. They're so concerned with the literal letter of the law that they totally overlook the spirit of the law – the reason behind God's guidelines. Jesus gives a similar admonition in the book of Matthew:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! 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 23:25-28, (NIV)

What Jesus is saying both in Mark 7 and Matthew 23 is that what makes us unclean or impure isn't a matter of violating external rules, rather it's a matter of our hearts. We can't just put on a good show on the outside to try and convince others that everything is good on the inside. We have to shift our focus to being concerned with what's going on inside our hearts and heads – our spiritual health. Because that internal reality will be reflected on the outside. So let's not be like the Pharisees – whitewashed tombs – looking all put together on the outside while inside, we're just a rotting pile of bones.

Similarly, we have to recognize that we're not even the ones doing this internal work. Sure, we can be intentional and seek to grow and mature in our faith, but the true source of our inner health is God. We also need to remember the truth about our position before God: it isn't something we earn because of our good thoughts and actions. No, it was Christ's sacrifice that brought us right

standing with God. And we need to live in that reality. We have to stop trying to do things on our own and start living in dependence on God.

This passage serves as two reminders for us today. First, we need to remember to not be like the Pharisees – just focusing on outward appearances and trying to do all the right things rather than resting in the reality of who we are in Christ and what His sacrifice means in our lives. The second reminder is that we need to continue not touching our faces, practicing social distancing, and washing our hands all while checking in with our families, friends, and neighbors. – *Sarah Neel*