

Mark Chapter 7 v 1 - 23

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[0 : 00] It's on page 1010 in the Church Bible. So Mark and chapter 7 and we'll start reading at verse 1.

Let's hear God's Word. The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.

The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands, a ceremonial washing, holding to the traditions of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash and they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, why do your disciples live according to the traditions of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?

He replied, Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites, as it is written, These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

[1 : 24] They worship me in vain. Their teachings are merely human rules. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.

And he continued, You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions. For Moses said, honour your father and mother, and anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.

But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father and mother is korban, that is devoted to God, then you no longer let them do anything for their father and mother.

Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that. Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.

[2 : 40] Are you so dull? he asked. Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart, but into their stomach, and then out of the body.

In saying this, Jesus declared all food clean. He went on, what comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come.

Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. all these evils, all these evils, come from inside, and defile a person.

May God bless that reading of his precious word. I don't know about you, but would you travel a hundred miles to have an argument with somebody?

Would you travel a hundred miles to have an argument with somebody? Well, in our passage that we read, these Pharisees that came from Jerusalem, travelled 157 kilometres, or 97.5 miles, to have an argument with Jesus.

[4 : 23] They did not come to hear him, but they came to have a disagreement. You see, Jesus and his disciples were challenging all the religious ceremonies of the Pharisees.

All these ceremonies that were so dear to them, and the religious establishment. And they had come to try and get Jesus to rebuke his disciples, and to pull them into line.

Now, this takes place in Mark's gospel. We're told about this. We read it. And Mark is very selective in his gospel about what he believes is important for us to hear.

I mean, previous events have seen Jesus feed up to, some people believe, up to nearly 20,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. And they had wanted him to become their king. A king who could keep them well fed is a king worth having. But in this passage, Jesus emphasises that their worship of God is a heart worship and is not something that is external and connected to religious ceremony or activity.

[6 : 05] Worshiping God, worshiping Jesus just because he had fed them was not the purpose of why he fed them. The purpose of why Jesus fed these people was to point them to what he was going to do and to point them to a God in heaven who can do everything.

You see, Jesus' commission was to come, wasn't it? It was to come and do something that the law that was built up around these religious ceremonies could not do.

He was come to provide this perfect sacrifice for sin. The once and for all time price that was needed to turn aside God's wrath and to reconcile all who will believe in God.

And the law, of course, required continued and regular sacrifices for sin and for keeping the law.

But Christ had come to die once, to pay the price, the full price, the once and for all price.

that God had set upon him. You see, the Pharisees had built up this position where they saw themselves as the religious gatekeepers of the law.

[7 : 50] They were there to protect the law, to uphold the law of God. But Jesus states in verse 7 of this chapter, quoting from Isaiah, and in vain, they worship me.

John McCarthy, in one of his books, he says that this passage is a scripture twisting theology, identifying that they worship the right God in the wrong way.

And he also says that some worship the wrong God in the wrong way. But this is worse. It's worse to worship the right God in the wrong way.

because it's leading them to their own destruction. God wants them to worship him in spirit and in truth.

We read that, don't we, in John 4, 24, from the heart, not based on traditions of the elders, but as he unravels this, Mark records for us three themes to ensure that not just his disciples get their understanding and their thinking right, but so do ordinary people in the congregation.

[9 : 29] We read that, don't we, because he calls aside the people, doesn't he? And when he had called all the multitude to himself, in verse 14, he said to them, so not just the disciples, he wants us all to understand that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our strength and with all our soul.

So what are the three things that Jesus identifies in this passage? Well, the first thing he identifies is that there's a problem with their practice, with their religion, religion, they'd come all this way, these Pharisees.

The criticism they wanted dealing with was this idea of eating bread with unwashed hands. In verse two, we read about that. And then in verses two to eight, we have this whole passage about washing hands, pots and pans and other things, kettles.

and they wanted Jesus to alter that. He wanted them to change, to be different. And this has nothing to do with sanitation, with being clean and having clean hands.

The Pharisees knew that dirty pots and pans, I'm sure they knew, would make people ill. But, this was something different.

[11 : 11] You see, because attached to it was this idea that the people might touch a Gentile in the marketplace, or brush past a Samaritan, or unknowingly touch a person who had touched a dead body.

and there were so many other laws, so many possibilities, that made hand washing into something that had grown and grown and grown, and now is a major part of the traditions.

You couldn't do anything unless you washed your hands first, because you had become ceremonially unclean. And of course, we know when we go back into Leviticus, where the law of Moses was given, and the Ten Commandments were given, and there was all those explanations of opening it out, that there were things that they had to do.

but those traditions, those rules, had now become more than what God had said.

the Pharisees were so concerned, that no one should break the law of God, that they had sort of put a hedge around it, a bit like that idea of putting something in the middle of a maze or something, and then you put a hedge around it, so you can't get to it.

[12 : 56] Their idea was, let's keep people as far away from breaking the law as possible, so we're going to make all these rules, and of course all the rules then just seem to grow and grow and the hedge gets higher and higher.

And I don't know if you know anything about the traditions of the elders, but about 200 years after Christ had died, they started to gather all the traditions together, and they wrote a book called the Mishnah.

There were 30 chapters in it on the washing of pots and pans. I don't know about you, but I only needed one lesson, and that was Grace telling me how to do it properly.

But there was one whole volume in the Mishnah on the washing of hands. Later, the Mishnah, this book required a bit more clarity because they developed more rules.

So other volumes were written, and they changed its name to the Gemara. And as that cascaded out to people, they then followed a book called the Talmud with more rules.

[14 : 29] And then that was followed by something called the Mishra, which was another book. Layer upon layer upon layer of rules that seemed to fence around the law of God.

The idea was to keep people away from the law. And of course, what happens is people became to rely upon the rules of the elders, the Jewish rabbis, rather than God's word itself.

These rules became and were held in higher authority than the word of God. One rabbi is quoted as saying, if the washing of hands ceremony is followed, then entry into eternal life is assured.

And of course, Jesus warns us, doesn't he? In the scriptures, in Matthew and in Luke, Matthew 23 and Luke 11, he talks about these clean cups.

You clean the cup on the outside, but it's full of hypocrisy, talking about the Pharisees. You make the outside clean, he says in Luke 11.

[15 : 55] We make things clean, we wash our hands, we make our hands clean, but inside we're full of greed and wickedness. So he has something to say to us, doesn't he?

The Bible has something to say to us about this idea that sometimes our practice, what we do, the way we do it, the way we hold people to do things in our churches, can sometimes be a hindrance to them becoming and knowing what God's word has to say.

Outward ceremony and keeping the traditions of the elders was the way to worship God by keeping his Lord. That's what these Pharisees thought.

What does Jesus say? Hypocrites. Hypocrites. The people honour me with their lips in verse 6, but their hearts are far from me.

A religion of works because your heart is far from me. Then in order to drive this principle home, in order to emphasise and illustrate this, he then picks out an example from their own rules.

[17 : 32] So Jesus secondly says they have a problem regarding their parents and responsibility. You hold the traditions of men and in verses 9 to 13 he shows them clearly that they hold their own rules above scripture and therefore they are not heart worshippers of the one true God.

And of course he takes them back to their own law that was given to Moses that they would have held in very high esteem in Exodus 20.

Honour your father and your mother. Of course that word honour means doesn't it? It means respect them, meet their needs, care for them.

I wish my children were all here to hear this, it would be helpful. But for those of you who are children, we all have been children at one point, it means respect them, meet their needs, care for them.

But however in this passage the Pharisees had overlaid this command with a new rule that abdicated or they could abdicate them from any responsibility whether physical or financial or in any other respect.

[19 : 05] it allowed them to keep all their material possessions to themselves, all their wealth, all their time because they say that they were held in a vow to a higher authority and they had made a vow to God and it's called Korban.

God's and what they were saying was I have given all my goods to God, everything I possess is God's, so I can't provide for my mum and dad.

I promised it to God but there was a little clause in there that said but not now. I'm sort of holding it in trust for God so I cannot provide for my mother and father.

It enables me this Korban to defer the giving bit of it all to God but the vow holds clearly to them.

I get to keep everything I have so I cannot help you mum and dad. And of course probably in most cases it meant that God never actually got any of the pledge any of the promise it's not realised. [20 : 52] You see they had sworn by the gold of the temple or they had sworn by the gifts that were on the altar and this sealed the vow and gave them the back door let out clause.

Scripture becoming obscured and the rules that have been laid upon it taking the lead and are expected to be adhered to.

So God says honour your father and your mother with all its responsibilities consequences. The traditions of these elders said korban as a religious ceremony it frees you from the literal law of God and allows you to live as you please with no consequences.

The word of God having no effect. It's sort of like a modern day equivalent isn't it? Think of our own law, the law of God today under pressure isn't it?

Even within our churches modern attitudes, the prosperity gospel, wealth, health, easy life, same sex marriages, homosexuality, people don't adhere to God's law with regard to these things because what do they say?

[22 : 35] We have new words, unity, equality, inclusion and they are quite important words for us to use but what they mean is that these things go above the law of God, above scripture, our suffering servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, who bore all that persecution because he spoke with a straight voice to people, criticised because he spoke with a straight word, he healed the sick, he looked after the needy, he paid his taxes, he did all those things, but he suffered because the word of God, God's desire for him,

God's commission for him came above all things. So it's not surprising is it, that perhaps as his disciples, those of us who seek to follow after Christ, that we may be tarred with the same brush. And I think the question we often ask ourselves, and we should ask ourselves, is are we tarred with the same brush? Do we know what it is to receive this sort of criticism?

Do we know what it is to stand firm on God's word, not to compromise? Because this incident, you know, in scripture is a pivotal turning point in the Pharisees' attitudes towards Jesus Christ.

A real change takes place in the establishment, the religious establishment, because from this point onwards, the Bible tells us that the Pharisees and the scribes now seek every occasion to kill him.

[24 : 51] because their traditions are being challenged and their traditions are at risk. See, their hearts are filled with what is described throughout the book of Proverbs as hearts that are forward and presumptive and deceitful and haughty, perverse, full of the world and far from God.

we have to be careful that we are not churches, we are not individuals who expect people to fall into our way of doing things.

Dress like me. Say the words I say. Live the sort of life that I live.

We are to keep God's law. We are to work out our faith with honest application. And the Bible tells us that if we do that, persecution will follow.

It does follow. because the world should know the difference between you and them. There should be a clear distinction in the way we live and the way we think and the way we work because we're not called bad.

[26 : 38] And that's just one example, isn't it, from the Ten Commandments. We're not looking for loopholes out of God's law to suit ourselves. We're looking always to serve the Saviour, serve Christ.

That leads us now on to the third aspect that Jesus talks about here. Perhaps the most important leads us on to this problem of purity of heart.

Jesus now summarises the nub of this issue that's going on. He summarises it. He categorically tells them without hesitation, without deviation, that the reality of human wickedness comes from the heart.

In these few verses, Jesus points out to us the need to have our hearts changed and that all the washing in the world cannot achieve cleanliness before almighty God.

All defilement, all that we are, all that we don't want to be, comes from within a man, not from dirty hands.

[28 : 12] I mean, drinking from pots and pans that are not washed and are mucky might make us ill. And if you've had children, you know some of that perhaps, you know, if you forget, or whatever.

But what they don't do, is it doesn't condemn us to an eternity without hope and without God.

Psalms 39 says, what comes out of a man is what defiles him. Inner cleansing.

Inner cleansing is what's required. It's vital to any man. So what is clearly implied is that the traditions of the elders will only continue to enslave and to bind the people. And what that does is important. What that does is obscure for us the need for a clean heart. [29 : 22] That's what it did. It made people so worried about other things that they didn't look at themselves. Ezekiel 18 talks to us about the theme of repenting and living the need for a new heart and for a new spirit.

The psalmist says that doesn't he? In Psalm 51 verse 10. He turns to God and he says, create in me. He didn't say create in me clean hands. He said, create in me a clean heart, oh God. Clean heart. Is that your desire this morning? are you resting in all the rules and the way in which we run our church and the meetings we attend and just coming along and getting on with it and being a good person? Or do you see the need in your heart and your soul for a clean heart, one that has been cleansed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ?

[30 : 52] Because right through the Bible, Old Testament, Deuteronomy 32, set your heart on all the words, be careful to observe all the words of the Lord.

We've got to obey God's law. We've got to set our hearts upon them, but how can we if our hearts are not clean? How can we live in this world for Christ? Be his servants, be his soldiers, declare his goodness if our hearts are not clean, ourselves. Is your heart clean?

Can you stand before God and say, the precious blood of Christ has cleansed me, made me whole, and I'm relying on that to get to heaven.

So as we think on these things, let's remember those verses, that verse from Hebrews 10. then let us draw near with a true heart.

[32 : 05] Let us draw near with a true heart. Don't hold on to traditions. They will not save you.

Do not look for loopholes so that you can live your life with ease. But seek Christ. that's what he wants. That's what he's asking, that's what he's directing us to in this passage. He's saying, look to me, because of yourself, you are sinful.

And these rules will not save you. And all you're doing is obscuring the need of your own heart. changed hearts, changed people, new people, energetic people, enthusiastic people, people who love the Lord Jesus and want to serve him.

[33 : 10] That's what Whitby needs. It's what thirst needs. It doesn't need rule makers. It needs people who are going to challenge our world and our people who are going to stand up and say, no, that's not right.

So I pray this morning that if you go away with nothing else, you go away with this. Create in me a clean heart, oh God.

Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation. And if you haven't done that before, go home. and do it.

Ask him. He will come in. He will forgive. He will save. He will enable you to live for him. Isn't that marvellous?

We don't do this on our own. He helps us every step of the way. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do pray that this morning we would not be those who are representing the people who honour God with their lips, but their hearts are far from him, and in vain worshipping.

[34 : 38] We pray, Lord, that you would make and help us to be those who are true heart worshippers of the Saviour. We pray that we would come to him, we would give our hearts to him, and we would trust him to keep us until we reach those heavenly shores where we shall see him face to face.

So be with us through the rest of this day until we gather again this evening, and we pray that it would be a day that we can say we have known something of the presence of Christ with us, and we ask all these things in thy precious name.

Amen.