

Mark 7:1-23 | Traditions and the Heart

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Mark 7:1-13

GCF

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Announcements: Welcome (Last large group), Shuttle will run this Sunday and next Sunday, We have the final batch of T-shirts so see Tyler if you don't have yours yet, Christmas Party, Jakers.

How many of you have holiday traditions?

I was thinking about traditions today, and my initial thought was that I hate them. I do. My parents and my sister were always into Thanksgiving and Christmas traditions, and my brother and I were wildly apathetic towards them.

But I realized that I don't hate all traditions, I just hate the traditions that inconvenience me. For instance, my sister thinks it is tradition to watch the Macy's thanksgiving day parade, and I hate it. But I realized I hate it because it is on during football. Football is my tradition. It has become the normal desire of my heart every thanksgiving.

I don't like my sister's tradition because it is hard for me, but I like my tradition because it's easy for me.

That's because traditions which sometimes start out good, can often become rigid and lazy ways of life. They can easily devolve from a heartfelt action, to a lifeless action. And sometimes they can grow way beyond what they originally started out as. They lose the original intent of the tradition and become a movement of their own.

In light of the holidays, Jesus is going to be talking about traditions today in the book of Mark. And what we are going to see is that the traditional Christian recognizes that they are not created by the actions of the hands, but they are made new by the renewal of the heart. **Let's Pray .**

So in the book of Mark we are going to be introduced again to some characters we haven't seen since chapter 3. The Pharisees and scribes. Last time we saw them, Jesus just beat them in an argument and this is how they responded: **Mark 3:6.**

The Pharisees want Jesus dead. They don't like who he says he is and they don't like the message he is preaching. With that in mind we pick up our story here: **Mark 7:1-5**

So here we have the Pharisees, who went down to Jerusalem, and got the scribes. The Scribes were the scholars of the day and they went to get the scribes because they wanted to trap Jesus. They wanted to trip him up and discredit what he was doing by calling it sin. And the first place they attempt to do that is at dinner.

The gospel of Luke actually tells us that the Pharisees invited Jesus over for dinner. At dinner Jesus' disciples began to eat without washing their hands. Probably not a huge deal for us, but a really big deal for them. You see for the religious Jews of the day the issue of washing your hands was not simply an issue of

cleanliness, it was an issue of purity. The Old Testament gave some laws about washing, but for the most part it was only for the priests. But here we see, and Mark tells us, that the religious officials have made rules after rules after rules about washing.

They thought that by following these codes, they would not only be clean, but they would be pure. Pure in an immaterial way. Innocent almost. And it is here where they confront Jesus because his disciples are eating with “defiled” hands. Look at how Jesus responds: **Mark 7:6-13**.

So here is what is going on. The Pharisees are appealing to traditions and attempting to trap Jesus. Jesus responds by doing two things. 1.) He calls them hypocrites, and 2.) He shows how they are acting hypocritically.

He shows them the flaw in their actions by discussing what is called “Corban.” Corban was this thing that people could do back in the day where they could take all of their belongings and say it was “Corban” or “given to God.” That would mean that they while they were living would yield all their property over to the religious leaders. But, when that person died, the religious leaders wouldn’t give the land or property back to the family of the deceased unless they paid a hefty sum for it.

This was a tradition which was made up by man, and is not a Biblical pattern, and what it did is it stripped the potential monetary support away from the deceased’s parents. Jesus says, “In doing this you break the command to honor your parents.”

And then he speaks very sternly to them: **Mark 7:8-9, 13**. Jesus is very clear: You are making traditions and commands that are not from God in order to feel like you are living a godly life.

In all reality, these men were writing a false gospel. They had made up a lifestyle of tradition which made them feel like they were living rightly. Don’t we do this at times?

If I go to church, if I do good deeds, if I am a nice and generous person then I will be allowed to get into heaven. If I don’t have premarital sex, if I don’t get drunk, if I don’t do drugs, then I will be a good Christian.

But Jesus rebukes this mindset. Why? Because it isn’t right! The actions of our hands don’t make us holy. The actions of our bodies, and cleanliness of our hands don’t make us acceptable before God.

That’s because tradition often becomes disconnect from heart. The things the Pharisees were doing were just surface things. They lacked substance. Let me illustrate this. If I only loved my wife well on our anniversary and on Valentine’s Day, am I really loving my wife?

It is really easy to love her on those two days on the surface. We can take a trip, I can buy her dinner and flowers. And I can do it year after year after year. But if that is the only time I love my wife, I am not really loving her, despite my actions. Why? Because I am not loving her out of the overflow of my heart, I am just loving her by following the traditional days of affection as dictated by culture.

This is exactly the way Jesus describe the action of the Pharisees in **Mark 7:6-8**. It is often times easy to look like you are a Christian, or to look like you are a good person. But it is also possible to honor him with your lips and hands, but to be far from him in heart.

Why is this issue of heart so important? Jesus continues: **Mark 7:14-23**.

The Pharisees thought that they would be judged pure by their external actions, Jesus came to correct that view and say that you will be judged by your heart. Why? Because your actions don’t make you, your actions prove you.

What is sin? Think about that. What is sin, and where does it come from. While you are doing that, let's read **James 1:13-14**. According to James sin is not something external from us. Sin is in our desires. And James is simply expanding on Jesus' teaching that sin is in your heart.

We are not a dart board. You see when you play darts, there is nothing innately attractive about the dark board. If you put a dart next to a dart board, it just stays there. It is only when you throw the dart at the board, and it pierces it and sticks to it that the dark stays on the board. Many people have this view of sin.

Sin is something which comes into our lives from outside, and pierces us externally. But this isn't Jesus' view of sin.

In Jesus' view, we are magnets. We are not neutral. If you put two magnets next to each other what do they do, they pull together. It is true that sin is attractive, and that Satan wants to deceive us, and that is one magnet. But it is also true that our heart desires to sin. And while sin may move towards us, we move towards sin.

Jesus gives a list of things which our heart contains, and in that list are sinful actions (sexual immorality, theft, murder and adultery) and also sinful attitudes (envy, wickedness, lust, pride, foolishness, and hate). It is your heart that defiles you. That's why the actions of the Pharisees are incomplete. They may be pure on the outside, but they are filthy on the inside.

In Luke's account of this story Jesus says this to the Pharisees: **Luke 11:39-41**.

Jesus says you can clean the outside of your body as much as you want. But God created your outside, and your inside, which means he can see that which you so desperately want to hide. Surrender what is inside, not what is outside.

How many of you remember the hubbub that surrounded the full body scanners at the airports? People boycotted them and refused to go through them because it revealed to the monitors the shape of their bodies.

If people are that self-conscious about what is under their clothes, how much more self-conscious are we of what's inside our hearts. We don't want people to see our hearts, because we know what's inside. Often our greatest fear is getting found out.

John Luhmann and I have often talked about the apologies of some famous people. The one that John often talks about regards Ben Roethlisberger, the quarterback for the Steelers. A few years ago Ben was accused of sexually assaulting a woman, and in his press conference he apologize saying, "That's not who I am."

It's as if he is saying, this one event was the exception to the rule. I am not a bad guy. It would be similar to a Pharisee getting caught eating without washing his hands, and saying "On the whole I am a clean person, I just made this small mistake." But the problem is your actions prove your heart.

You are a sinner. You are not a sinner because you sin, you sin because you are a sinner. Our hearts are full of nasty. Happy Holidays!

But here is the hope: Christmas. You see on Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus. And Jesus didn't come to start a holiday. Jesus didn't come to be a good role model, or a wise teacher. Jesus came because our hearts were desperately sinful.

Jesus entered into our disease because our hearts were dead, our bodies defiled, and our lives wholly desecrated. He lived a perfect life. He kept the commandments to a "t." He was perfect and yet he died a sinners death. He died our death.

Earlier in this passage Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah. And in this passage God is speaking of his ultimate redemption of his people but the issue of their sinful hearts always comes back up. But look at the part Jesus left out when he was speaking to the Pharisees: **Is 29:13-14**

God's solution to sinful hearts is to do wonderful things. Jesus is that wonderful thing. Jesus is the therefore in Isaiah's prophecy. On our own we are sinful, evil, filled with sexual immorality and hatred, but for those who believe in Jesus Christ we are made something new.

1 Cor 6:9-11. You see Jesus didn't come and live a perfect life and leave us with the command to live perfectly. Jesus came, lived a perfect life, and gave us perfect hearts so that we can live perfectly. Jesus fixed the heart.

Jesus changed the root of the issue. For those of you in here who are not saved by Jesus, you have a dead heart. And deep in your heart of hearts, you are aware of it. You know your heart, because you have seen it. You have seen the depth of your desires. You have seen those things in your heart that you would rather die than share with anyone else. And ultimately that heart will lead you to hell.

But Jesus changes that heart.

You Christians with a new heart, you are not a sinner. You sin, that's for sure. You wrestle with lust, and pride, and hate. But your heart is not the heart of a sinner. You have the heart of Christ. You are fully able to not sin because you are no longer dead! You know that you are not saved by your church attendance, Bible reading, good deeds or generosity. You are saved because Jesus died for your sins and took away your heart of stone.

The traditional Christian recognizes that they are not created by the actions of the hands, but they are made new by the renewal of the heart.

Here is where I want to close us.

We are about to dismiss for the semester, and we have long break coming up. For many of you, you have developed a good rhythm this semester. You have established good traditions. Not all traditions are bad. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul commends the church for following the good traditions, gospel centered traditions. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul encourages the church to stand firm and hold on to the traditions they were taught.

But as you leave, your system of tradition will be stripped away. You will be back around old friends and family. Around people who might not realize how you have changed or grown this semester. Around people who might not like the gospel you have grown in. And it will be a stress on your faith to get put back into your old system of life.

But praise God we are not saved by traditions. We are saved by Christ who now lives in our hearts. Here are three things I want you to do this break which will help your heart to stay true to the work of Christ and the love of the gospel.

1. Go to church. Some of you may have churches back home, some of you may not. If that's you we want to help you find a church. And while going to church doesn't save you, the church is a special way in which God encourages our heart, and reminds us of the work Christ has done in our lives.

2. Read your Bible. Again this may be easy for some, and hard for others. Talk to me and I can work with you to get you a Bible reading plan so that you can have something. Maybe it would be best to read through Mark since that's what we are going through. Feel free to grab someone in here and ask if you could Skype with them a couple times over the break to go over stuff.

3. Pray that God continues to protect your heart from the traditions of man by continually revealing to you the wonder of Christ. Often times there is no greater prayer than, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief." Pray that God is merciful to your heart and grants you a greater picture of Christ this winter break.