

Mark 7:1-23 NCC 11/10/26

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus and 2 saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean”, that is, unwashed. 3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the market-place they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?”

6 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.***

***7 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.’***

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

9 And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! 10 For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ 11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you

might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean'."

17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean".)

20 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'."

Now having had two boys and having been a boy it's fair to say that boys and washing of hands don't easily go together.

And it struck me that as a child I could have used this passage to put up a biblical argument not to wash my hands. Pretty sure my mum would have seen through it.

Anyway, we are continuing today in the region of Galilee, but this is the last section there.

And we come across the problem of.

1 Outward Religion 1-8

We have seen it before but we're back to the Pharisees

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus

Now something to note here. Jesus was making such a noise that the Pharisees and teachers of the Law had come all the way from Jerusalem that's over 100 miles. I guess there were Pharisees up there but clearly there's a wider conversation going on which will result in the Cross

But for now, I imagine senior Pharisees? Make the long journey

They would need somewhere to stay, so it would cost money maybe? This is a lot of effort to criticise Jesus. Then they would have to find him!

Of course, if you leave it at verse 1 that's fine, gathering around Jesus is a good thing to do. Oh that more would

But I think by now we know what their motive is and it's not to learn. They don't want to learn.

They are there listening to the Creator of the world, veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity, an opportunity to hear truth, insights from the Scripture they claim to love.

But unfortunately they are concerned about the wrong thing.

I love it when people are challenged and stimulated by preaching, sometimes I've had that when people have had other thoughts, insights and it's great. That's what preaching should do. Provoke, challenge, warm our hearts even towards the Lord

I knew one guy came to criticise, not me. I wasn't a pastor then. And of course we never turn people away, but I'll be honest people like that are a pain.

Actually thinking about it at my first Church I did have a guy who was really critical, I don't remember why! Eventually left dropping a few hand grenades

They do not want to change, they are negative and part of me thinks why bother!

And these guys came to pick holes

and 2 saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean", that is, unwashed.

So what was the issue? To their mind the disciples were eating with unclean hands. Now, this was not dirt! And, this didn't just come out of nowhere. I've said before in Old Testament worship there were three states, holy, the priesthood, clean and unclean.

There's a great commentary on Leviticus and the writer says he would challenge his students to live in that clean state for one week.

You were always thinking about it. Just one, for example, I think every item of clothing I have on is mixed fibres. That's out. Okay, they didn't have polyester, so it was more likely to be only one fibre

Now many people ask why? Without getting too sidetracked it was a visual lesson about Israel being distinct from the nations, not mixed, different. **Theology in clothing, you may remember how we saw this in what the priests and the highpriest wore. It spoke.**

But what had developed over centuries was a commentary on how to keep the law called the tradition of the elders. It wasn't scripture, it was their interpretation of it and whilst I'm no expert I suspect some parts were okay? It's similar to how many of us have Bibles with study notes. They are great, helpful but they are about Scripture, they aren't Scripture

And it developed from a genuine desire to please God

So Mark gives us the background to this issue

(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the market-place they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

There were cleansing rituals in the Old Testament Law, and again it spoke, there was meaning attached to it **but this here was all extra to what Temple worship required.**

On social media I sometimes come across this very pleasant Orthodox Jewish lady who shares her faith and how she lives her life **and it's just like this**, extra, mindless rules and regulations

All sorts and rules and regulations which when Christ died he fulfilled it all and freed us from the Law.

Oh we still read it and we keep the moral Law, ie the Ten Commandments, and we seek to learn the lessons of the mixed fibres etc but we don't practice this ceremonial or civil aspect of it. We're not bound by it

But as in this case extra man made rules

Hence we read

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the

tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?’

They aren’t asking to learn, they are asking to criticise, to shame because their centuries old tradition of the elders is what counts to them.

Oh it’s still alive today and it’s called legalism. Just because we’ve always done something, doesn’t mean it has to carry on.

My Dad told me that in his day the Moody Sankey hymnbook was frowned upon. It was not quite right, too modern.

But I once knew a Church where they only sang Moody, Sankey, none of this modern stuff

Or Churches make a particular Bible a mark of orthodoxy, a style of worship, how a Christian should dress on the Lord’s Day, and indeed what things are permitted on the Lord’s Day when you’re not a Church!

A godly Christian would never.....well maybe, maybe not. The point isn’t that anything goes, the point is that Scripture should be our guide.

And Jesus sees straight through it

If we can’t make a clear case from Scripture for something then don’t be scared to drop it!

Okay, if it's not harmful then you don't have to drop it, if it serves the Church well, then that's fine!

But Scripture is above the tradition of the elders, we've always done it this way can often be the last thing a dying Church says.

When legalism grabs you, because that's what this is, it becomes all consuming, you always have a bee in your bonnet, you start trying to remove the specks out of your brother's eye, you make mountains out of molehills.

We must guard our hearts against this.

6 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.***

***7 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.'***

Ouch. I'm sure that shocked the Pharisees.

They knew Isaiah, they knew that passage and I suspect many were thinking you can't call the Pharisees hypocrites! They are respectable. They keep these synagogues going, they pray such lovely prayers

I think you've gone a bit too far Jesus

But Jesus sees through it all doesn't he?
You can't fool God

Their mouths moved as they sang the words, their lips prayed deep prayers, perhaps weaving together the Old Testament Scriptures. Praying and singing the Psalms.

Oh you'd want them in your Church today!
Pillars of the Church

But what does Isaiah say, and what does Jesus say

But their hearts are far from me.

***7 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.***

That's a searching passage. Because we have to say what about me? Is my worship pleasing to God this morning? Oh, not is it led skillfully by my guitar playing and do we sing in harmony, loudly. That's not it!

-No, true worship comes from hearts that are right with God. Not perfect, but right, we've confessed our sin, we've put things right or seeking to

-True worship is governed by God's Word. God has told us how he wants to be worshipped, we might say we are Bible people. We preach from the Bible, we don't share moral tales

I hope we do, but so often we apply it only to the Sermon, not the rest of our time together. Governed by God's word

-True worship has God, not us, at the centre

Christian worship should make us look to God, we sing about God, we read his word, we pray to Him. We are drawn to His holiness, his love His grace , His kindness. We want to make God look great and glorious in line with what he is.

-True worship involves reverence and wonder, it is Christ centered and it doesn't end when we leave

When I was at Bible College in Birmingham we would often be out and about on a Sunday and often a fellow student would ask the question

What was the worship like? And what was implied was, was it lively, emotional, vibrant, singing all the new songs.

But over the years I thought about that question a lot and I've never been asked it since but if I was I would say, **how can I tell?**

They weren't worshipping me they were worshiping God and He didn't say

If you sing your praise and you are living a lie then don't bother. Or better still, get right with God.

V8 sums it up ***You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.***

That's what legalism is.

And the thing about legalism, the reason why we like it is because we can measure how spiritual we are.

So I prayed extra long this morning. And gave a tract out
 God must be especially pleased with me. Twice what He
 was yesterday.

It's nonsense and misunderstands the grace of God.

I've been reading Amos this week, chapter 5:21

I hate, I despise your religious feasts;

I cannot stand your assemblies.

***22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and
 grain offerings,***

I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,

I will have no regard for them.

Does He say that to us?

23 Away with the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

They had their Temple worship, grand affairs I imagine,
 sacrifices, temple choirs and we are the same today.
 Perhaps it all looks great.

But what does God think?

Let's move on

2. Respectable disobedience vv.9–13

Is there such a thing as respectable disobedience? It seems so.

9 And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”

Now remember this is a challenge to them because they don't see themselves as being disobedient. They didn't see the problem

Isn't that often the case, oh we often see disobedience clearly, and it's obviously wrong

But here they have put together a system that makes their sin look godly

10 For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’

Now the first one is the fifth commandment, of course they believed it. And the second is from Leviticus 20, which certainly sounds harsh to our ears.

The first is the moral law, right for all people throughout history, the second is the civil law which was for Israel at that time and which we learn from rather than practice. We learn the lessons rather than stone people

But how can we argue? The point is clear. Respecting our parents is a good thing.

***But you say that if a man says to his father or mother:
‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from
me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God)***

And then we read

***12 Then you no longer let him do anything for his father
or mother.***

I'm sorry I can't help you. I've got Church. Now clearly,
Church is important for the believer but come on!
Sometimes if we need to help someone and it's a Sunday
morning, do it!

Corban, a gift to God. What a good thing, to give our time,
our money, our homes in service of the Lord

Yet, that isn't what they were doing.

Can you imagine? You've got parents who are really
struggling financially and you tell them, you've given your
money to God. The way it worked was you declare it is
God's but it wouldn't necessarily end up at the Temple. I
think also this is an example Jesus picked up on. I don't
think we are to see every pharisee as heartless like this and
keeping hold of their money so they didn't help their
parents.

It may or may not have been an issue

But they get the point! I suppose you could say everything I have is the Lord's. But you are still making the controlling decisions.

It looks fine and spiritual but it isn't. You think God is pleased but He's not.

Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.

You make the Word of God of no effect, because you're always trying to dodge and get out of obeying it

We can still do that. We put what we prefer above what God requires.

Many will take Scripture and twist it to say the opposite.

Because they start with the traditions of men, what the culture says.

It's not right.

Sometimes in history the Church and as a consequence the Bible will strongly guide and direct the culture. But currently that day has gone.

What we believe is greatly in opposition to what the Bible teaches.

So some Churches in our land have taken the popular route, the tradition of the elders if you like. And the culture finds that acceptable, ***but they nullify the Word of God.*** It produces a powerless gospel, it doesn't save

We can't do that.

3 What really defiles a man 14-23

When I was a teenager I knew a woman and I remember her saying what if the Lord comes back and you're in the, horror of horrors, cinema!

Bless her, she was from another era, a good woman. But that's the problem, what if you're watching the TV? What if you're watching Youtube on the TV and it's a Church service?

Some have strong opinions on alcohol, well clearly we're told not to get drunk, but Scripture doesn't ban it, but I don't drink it more on account of my meds than any strong opinions

Jesus nails it

17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'?

Someone said to me some years ago how we shouldn't eat fish without fins and scales on. And that's just what the OT law said.

But Jesus, soon to fulfil this Law and abolish it, says quite simply ***19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his***

stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean”.)

Food isn't the issue, I think we all know that, it's the heart.
Food is just that, a joyous good thing
Sin is what defiles. Sin is what says in the 'system' and spreads and contaminates.

We live in a health conscious world don't we.
We often pass a relatively new gymnasium and it seems the only time the car park is empty is Christmas Day. Always full. And it's not cheap.

We don't live in a sin conscious world.

Every one of those people will one day stand before the Great White throne to be judged by God. The fact that they spent thousands keeping fit will not help them in the slightest

20 He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean’. 21 For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’.”

That is why we need a Saviour.
To deal with the problem of the uncleanness within