

## Mark 7:1-23

- I. **Introduction** – Thom Rainer recently published a list of the top ten most closely guarded traditions in churches. These are held to tightly and have caused church splits. Rainer writes that, “A tradition is neither inherently good nor bad. Its value or its distraction in a given church really depends on how members treat the traditions.” Think about how you feel about these particular areas:
  1. **Worship and music style.** Though I have noted elsewhere that this issue is not as pervasive as it once was, it is still number one.
  2. **Order of worship service.** Thou shalt not change any items in the order of worship.
  3. **Times of worship service(s).** The first three most frequently defended traditions are related to worship services.
  4. **Role of the pastor.** The pastor is to be omnipresent and omniscient. Many church members have clear expectations of what "their" pastor should do.
  5. **Committee structure.** Many congregations continue committee structures long after their usefulness has waned.
  6. **Specific ministries and programs.** The healthy church constantly evaluates the effectiveness of its ministries and programs. That's good stewardship. Other churches continue their ministries and programs because that's the way they've always done it.
  7. **Location of church facility.** A church relocation can be an issue of fierce debate, even contention, in many congregations.
  8. **Use of specific rooms.** Some of the more frequently named rooms are the worship center, the parlor, the gym, and the kitchen/fellowship hall.
  9. **Business meetings.** Traditions include the frequency of business meetings, the scope of authority of business meetings, and the items covered in business meetings.
  10. **Staff ministry descriptions.** Some churches insist on having the same staff positions with the same titles with the same ministry descriptions even though the needs in the congregations may have changed dramatically.

In our text this morning, Jesus interacts with a group of very religious people who are sold out to their traditions. However, their traditions had become paramount to anything else.

## II. Traditions are Important for the Religious (vv. 1-5)

- (1) Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem,
- (2) they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.
- (3) (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders,
- (4) 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.)
- (5) 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?"

- This is not to say that traditions are not important to people of faith. However, they are paramount to those who are simply religious. Their faith has been placed in tradition. It is the traditions that give them their identity. They are closely tied to the songs that are used or the location or name of the church. They find their justification in the clothes they wear or the position they hold within the church. If anything or anyone tries to take that from them, they rebel because it is where they have placed their faith.

## III. Tradition Leads to Vain Worship (vv. 6-8)

- (6) 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;
- (7) in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'
- (8) You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

- Worship is all about the heart. However, traditions and an unhealthy emphasis on them lead to vain worship. We get into a routine and neglect our hearts. Any tradition that stands in between us and authentic worship of Christ should be abolished.

We should often evaluate our hearts to explore whether we are caught in a routine of tradition or experience authentic worship.

#### **IV. Tradition Sets Itself Above God's Word (vv. 9-13)**

- (9) And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!
- (10) For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'
- (11) 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)—
- (12) then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,
- (13) thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

- The measure of the value of a tradition is whether or not it is compatible with the Word of God. This example Jesus gives that had been embraced by the religious leaders can guide us. There are similar examples in the church today. We can see this in how many churches structure their leadership and in the doctrines that they so easily dismiss. We see this in the Catholic Church with the Pope, the baptism of children by Catholics and many Protestant denominations. We can see it in the sentiment expressed with the terms of "we've always done it this way" or "we've never done that before." Our main concern is what God's Word says and instructs us to do.

#### **V. Tradition Makes It Easy to Ignore Heart Conditions (vv. 14-23)**

- (14) And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand:
- (15) 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."
- (17) And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable.
- (18) 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,
- (19) since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

- (20) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him.  
(21) For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,  
(22) coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.  
(23) All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

- It is easy to ignore issues of the heart when going through the routine of traditions. You can make everything look okay. You can make everyone think that you are better than you are. You can make people believe you are more righteous than you are. Many people who saw the religious leaders of Jesus' day believed them to be very righteous. They looked like it on the outside. When we put our faith in tradition, we make it easy to look better than we are. However, tradition will ultimately leave us empty. Tradition has no power to save. When we are comfortable in our traditions, we will quickly and easily ignore our heart conditions, believe that our traditions will save us.

**VI. Challenge** – Where are your priorities when it comes to church life and your relationship with Christ? Do you put your hope in traditions or the teachings of the Word of God? Outward appearances are easy to keep up. It is easy to go through the motions. However, Christ looks on the inside. He does not look at how much you can do with traditions and rituals. They have no value. He examines the heart. We must hold loosely to our tradition and tightly to the Word of God.