

1. The Outward Ritual

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Preacher: Terry McCutcheon

[0 : 00] I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me to Mark chapter 6 in the Bible that's on your chair, which you will find in page 842, Mark chapter 7.

And we shall read verses 1 to 23 together. Mark chapter 7. Let us hear then the Word of God. Now, when the Pharisees gathered to him, that is Jesus, when the Pharisees gathered to Jesus with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is unwashed.

And Mark here gives his comment in verse 3 because he knows he's writing for a non-Jewish audience. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders.

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.

[1 : 11] 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? And Jesus 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.

In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. And Jesus said to them, You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother, And whoever reviles father or mother must surely die. But you say, If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban.

And again Mark gives his comments so that we understand. Corban, that is a gift given or a gift devoted to God. Then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother.

Thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do. And Jesus called the people to him again and said to them, Hear me, all of you, and understand.

[2 : 31] 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. And when he had entered the house and left the people, His disciples asked him about the parable.

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? Since it enters not his heart, but his stomach, and is expelled.

Thus Jesus declared all foods clean. And Jesus said to them, What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, Come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within. And they defile a person. This is the word of the Lord from Mark chapter 7.

May he bless it to us as we study it together. Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, We give you thanks that we are able to come together this lunchtime to gather, to praise your name, And to listen to your word.

[4 : 09] Father, we come from many different backgrounds and situations. But we come together today as one. A people who have come to know you, and love you, and trust you.

And as we gather today, we are conscious of how needy we are. We have all different problems and struggles and issues going on in our lives.

And for these things we ask for your help. But as we gather, we are all so conscious and so grateful That our greatest need, the issue of our sin, has been dealt with.

Through your wonderful love and grace, And the willing sacrifice of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we thank you for loving us so much. For we know, That even the sin of just this day, Would be enough to cast us from your presence from all eternity.

So we give you great thanks. And Father, we also pray, That as we meet here Wednesday by Wednesday, You would build our confidence and our hope in the Gospel.

[5 : 14] And as we each go back to our own lives, You would use us to share the good news of Jesus, Which our world so desperately needs.

We are so aware that our world is still under the curse of sin. We only have to open our newspapers, Or turn on our televisions. Countries torn apart with war.

Young girls being taken away in vans. We only have to open our front doors and look out, Father. We just have to look around at people in our places of work.

People who continue to reject you, And replace you with their own values and ideas. Please strengthen us, Father. As it would be so easy for us to withdraw from those who oppose you and your Son.

Give us courage to engage with all people, In order that we may evangelize, Through the words of our lips, And the works of our lives.

[6 : 17] That through this proclamation of the Gospel, Many would come under the banner of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Father, in our time together, We would indeed ask that you would speak to us through your Word, And send us on our way rejoicing, Revitalized, recharged, And ready for serving you in the remainder of this day.

We pray all these things, In Jesus' precious name. Amen. As I was preparing this passage, I recalled a story that my good friend Hugh McKenna told me a number of years ago.

Hugh told me that he had just moved into a new house in the Jordan Hull area of Glasgow. And he'd only been there a couple of days when there was a knock on his door.

And it was his next door neighbor. And his next door neighbor informed him, That the tree that Hugh had in his back garden, Had snapped, And had smashed the neighbor's wall to bits.

Hugh said, I didn't even know I had a tree in the back garden. And Hugh, followed by his neighbor, Went into the back garden, And sure enough, A big 80 foot tree, How Hugh McKenna could miss it, I don't know.

[7 : 32] But this 80 foot tree, True enough, Was snapped. The big stump was there, But the rest of the tree was snapped, And lying over the neighbor's wall.

And the neighbor's wall was smashed to bits. And Hugh said to me, Terry, When I looked at the tree, The bit of the stump that was still on the ground that remained, It looked really strong, And it looked really healthy.

And the bit of the tree that had broken off, And had smashed my neighbor's wall to bits, It looked strong as well. There was a lot of branches on it, And it looked healthy, And there was a lot of green leaves on those branches.

But when I got up close to the tree, I saw that what was on the inside, Was a different story. The tree was absolutely rotten, To the core.

It looked good on the outside, But it was absolutely rotten, On the inside. And as we come to these verses, In Mark chapter 7, We have a similar contrast.

[8 : 34] If you gaze over your eyes, Over the verses that we've read, You will notice that the word, Defile, Defiles, Defiled, Has been mentioned seven times. So the issue that we're faced here, Within these verses in Mark 7, Is moral purity.

How is it that we are defiled? And how can we be made clean before God? Well if we do what Jesus tells us to do in verse 14, Hear him, Every one of us, And understand, Jesus will take us to the heart of the matter.

And he will show us, That it is a matter, Of the heart. So over two weeks, Today and in a fortnight's time, I would like to take these verses under two herrings.

Today we will take verses 1 to 13, Under the title, The Outward Ritual, The Outward Ritual. And then in a fortnight's time, We will concentrate in verses 14 to 23, The Inward Reality.

Well firstly then, Our verses for today, Verses 1 to 13, The Outward Ritual. Well just to bring us up to speed, As to where we are in Mark's gospel.

[9 : 43] We will know that Mark's gospel begins in Mark 1, Verse 1, The beginning of the good news, About Jesus Christ, The Son of God. Mark sets his stall out in verse 1, He tells us that it is good news, Christianity is good news, But it is good news about a person, Jesus, Who is the Christ, God's anointed King, The Son of God.

And in the chapters that follow, Mark as it were, Begins to set out his evidence, To prove the identity of Jesus. And in verse 15 of chapter 1, Jesus busts onto the scene and declares, The time is fulfilled, The kingdom of God is at hand, Repent, And believe the gospel.

Then Jesus begins to go about displaying this kingdom authority, He shows authority to call people to follow Him, Authority over sickness, The casting out of demons, He shows amazing teaching authority, He shows authority, That God alone, Can have, To forgive sins, To calm creation, And if that wasn't enough, He shows the mind-blowing authority, To call a young girl who was dead, Back to life.

It is no wonder then, That everywhere Jesus went, The crowds flocked to Him. But Mark also shows us, That Jesus wasn't just surrounded with popularity, He was also opposed.

And this opposition emerges, Rather surprisingly, From the religious establishment, The ones whom you would expect, To examine the evidence that they have before them, And to be no doubt, As to the identity of Jesus.

[11 : 27] Well they are in actual fact, The very ones who oppose Him. And it is with this, Religious establishment, That Mark begins to set the scene of chapter 7, Chapter 7 verse 1, Now when the Pharisees gather to Him, And some of the scribes, Who had come from Jerusalem, Well we have already been introduced, To these two groups in Mark's gospel.

The Pharisees back in chapter 2, And chapter 3, When they have been at loggerheads, With Jesus over the issue of, Jesus eating with sinners, People that were defiled, And then over religious matters, Of fasting, And Sabbath keeping, But Jesus shows them, That they have interpreted, The law wrongly, And He interprets the law, Correctly for them, But they don't seem to take too kindly to this, They still see Him as a lawbreaker, That He breaks the law, And how ironic, It is, That those who accuse Jesus, Of being a lawbreaker, In chapter 3 verse 6, Begin to plot, How they themselves, Might destroy Him, How they might kill Him, And we have seen the scribes as well, They have come down from Jerusalem, From party headquarters, The high he genes, And they have come down from Jerusalem, To investigate Jesus, And this is the second time, That they have come down from Jerusalem, We have seen it in chapter 3,

Just a couple of weeks ago, When Rupert so helpfully, Opened up that chapter to us, They have come down, And boy they didn't mince their words, They accused Jesus, Of being possessed by the devil, So as we come to verse 1, We would be right to assume, That the Pharisees haven't gathered to Him, And the scribes haven't come down from Jerusalem, In order to get Jesus autograph, Or to have their photos taken with Him, No, They have come to build their case against Him, To gather evidence, That He is a blasphemer, That He is a lawbreaker, And they don't have to wait, Long verse 2, They saw that some of His disciples, Ate with hands that were defiled, That is, Unwashed, Now why was this a problem?

Was it to do with hygiene? You know, Maybe washing your hands, Before a meal, Or after you go to the toilet, Well no, It wasn't an issue of hygiene, It was an issue of ceremonial purity, Look to verse 5, Why do your disciples, Not walk according to the tradition, Of the elders, But eat with defiled hands, So whatever this, Washing of hands is about, It's got something to do with the tradition, Of the elders, So what was the tradition, Of the elders?

Well very simply, The tradition of the elders, Was an oral interpretation, Of God's law, Remember, God had given His law, To Moses and Mount Sinai, But as time had gone by, In order to apply the law, To everyday life, The rabbis came up, With their own interpretation, Of the law, The misinterpretation, Of the law, And these additions, This supplement to God's law, Were now regarded as, Equal to God's law, Equal in its importance, And equal in its authority, It was placed on a par, With scripture, And the Pharisees, Well, They concerned themselves, To take the law very seriously, Because they knew, That in generations gone by, It had been the nation's failure, To live by God's law, That had resulted in them, Being taken into exile, But the problem here, Was that these additions, These misinterpretations,

[15 : 10] Took on the status, Of the law itself, Now regards washing, God had given some regulations, To Aaron and the priests, They were to wash themselves, Before entering the temple, It was symbolic washing, It was symbolic of washing off, The contamination of the world, But the

rabbis, The rabbis, Looked at these instructions, And they thought to themselves, Well if it's good enough, For the priests, It's good enough for us, And if it's good enough for us, It's good enough for everybody, So now instructions, That God had given, Have now been misinterpreted, And were now ceremonial rituals, For people that they were, Never intended for, And if anyone, Didn't comply with these rituals, Then the Pharisees, Regarded it, As an indifference, To moral holiness, And they obviously, Looked good on the holiness front, Because in verses 3 and 4, Mark tells us, That they washed everything, They washed pots and pans, And copper vessels, And dining couches, So to people looking in,

They must have looked, Really holy, So the Pharisees question, In verse 5, Is really directed at Jesus, Why do, Your disciples, Not walk according to, The tradition of the elders, They are your disciples, You're responsible for them, If they're disregarding, The traditions, Then you're disregarding, The traditions, Is what the Pharisees, Were saying, But what Jesus does here, Is he addresses, Not the issue of purity, But the issue of authority, He says, Guys, Hold on a minute, Let's back up, And see where you're taking this from, And he calls them hypocrites, In verse 6, That's a Greek word, For actors, Actors would wear, Not makeup, But masks, So what Jesus was saying to them, Was this, Yes, You're on the stage, And you're playing the part, And you look the part, But the truth is something else, And in verses 6 and 7, Jesus uses the word, From the prophet Isaiah, To describe them, And boy is it hard hitting, And what Jesus is saying, Is that the issues, That were around in Isaiah's day, Are well, Well and alive in you today, Well what did Isaiah have to say, This people, Honours me with their lips, But their heart, Is far from me, They worship with, External things, Lips, But not internal things, The heart, And what he's saying, Yes, You've got it all going on, Out here, But you've not got it going on, In here, Now how would you like it, If you were married to someone, Who loved you with, His or her lips, But not with their heart, It would be horrible, Wouldn't it, The marriage would be, An absolute sham, Plenty of sham marriages about, People getting married, So that they, Maybe get a passport, So that they might be able, To remain in this country, Or as I was reading, In the newspaper last week, In order that they, Might fleece their new spouse, For all their life savings, A sham marriage, And that's what Isaiah, Goes on to say in verse 7, It's a sham, In vain do they worship me, Teaching us doctrines, The commandments of men, Now it's right friends, We should worship God, He is our creator, And he's our redeemer, But if our starting point, For worship is flawed, Then our worship, Will be in vain, We sang earlier, You are the truth, Your word alone, True wisdom can impart, You only, Can inform the mind, And purify the heart, You see friends, Worship is always, A response to revelation, To God's revelation, So if we're not worshipping, In response to God's revelation, Then we're not worshipping, Their starting point, Was the commandments of men, And it didn't matter, How many prayers, Or washing,

Or ritual ceremonies, They went through, Their worship, Was in vain, So, Their religious cloak, And their ritual cleansing, Wasn't like, Ronseal, Do you remember Ronseal, Ronseal is a wood product, It's varnish for exterior wood, You know, For varnishing doors, And wood frames, And decking, That sort of a thing, And what it said, In the tin was this, Protects in 30 minutes, And I'm sure you'll all remember, The slogan, Ronseal, It does exactly, What it says in the tin, Well their religion, And rituals, Weren't like Ronseal, It didn't do, What it said in the tin, In fact, It done the absolute opposite, Instead of bringing them to God, It left their hearts, Far from God, And their worship was in vain, And in verses 8, 9 and 13, Jesus highlights, Why their worship is in vain,

[20 : 15] And why they are far from God, And why what they are doing, Is very dangerous, Verse 8, You leave the commandments of God, And hold to the tradition of man, Verse 9, You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, In order to establish your tradition, Verse 13, Thus making void, The word of God, By your tradition, That you have handed down, You see friends, It lies in authority, They have placed the traditions, Above the authority of scripture, And Jesus gives an illustration of this, Through the practice of Korban, At the end of verse 11, And Mark here gives us comment for us to understand, Korban is a gift, Given, Or devoted to God, So we can see what's happening here, A fellow was maybe given a gift to the temple, And he's declared that Korban, It's set apart for God, But then the postman drops a letter,

Through his front door, And it's for his mum and dad, And they've experienced heavy rain and floods, Just like some parts of the country did the other week, And their whole house has been badly damaged, And as they have no savings left, Well, They're looking to their son to help them, So the son goes down to the rabbi, And he tells them the situation, And he says, I would like to get

some of that money, That I gave to the temple last year as Korban, I want some of it back, I want to help my mum and my dad, But he's told, No, Verse 12, Then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father and mother, And you see the contrast that Jesus draws, Verse 10, Moses said, Honor your father and mother, Really, God said, As in Matthew's gospel, God said, Honor your father and mother, And whoever reviles father and mother must surely die, But here's the contrast, Verse 11, But you say, Then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father and mother, You see friends,

What's going on here, Their traditions have become the grid of how they come to scripture, They interpret the scriptures through their traditions, And the scriptures have become void, Take the Bible, A big cross edit, Void, And friends, This is absolutely dangerous, We don't have to look far to see practices of this, And the Roman Catholic Church, They have a great respect for the word of God, But they also alongside the word of God, Have the oral traditions of the church, And these traditions are, Are given an even footing in terms of authority with scripture, Now friends, I'm not being sectarian here, I was raised Roman Catholic myself, I'm a mad Celtic supporter, You only need to see the colour of my tie, All my family are Roman Catholic, But the truth is, The teaching of Rome elevates tradition above the Bible, Just as these Pharisees were doing, And you'll see it in Christian science as well, In Christian science they have the Bible,

But alongside the Bible, They have a book written by Mary Eddie Baker, That interprets the Bible, And you see what's going to happen, The Bible is often hard to understand, So if you've got a book alongside the Bible, That interprets the Bible for you, Then you won't read the Bible, You just read the book that interprets the Bible, And you make the word of God void, And we have our traditions as well friends, Don't we?

Things that we put alongside, Or even above the word of God, Here are a few examples, You must be a dyed in the wool, Five point Calvinist, To be a proper Christian, You must be baptised, Totally immersed, As an adult, To be a Christian, You must raise your hands in the air when singing, Or you must keep your hands in your pockets, We must sing accompanied by musical instruments, Or no, We should never employ musical instruments, When worshipping God, You must speak in tongues, To be a proper Christian, Or no way, Anybody who speaks in tongues, Is half their head, And could never be a real Christian, These are just some things friends, I'm sure you could add plenty to the list, But I must say friends, Some rituals and traditions are okay, We all have traditions and rituals, But traditions and rituals, Are only okay, If they reflect the truth of God's word, And not become a substitute for it,

[24 : 45] And that is what the problem was here, With these Pharisees and scribes, Their traditions had become a substitute for God's word, Friends, We need to be people with a big S for scripture, And a small T for tradition, Jesus shows that outward ritual is dangerous, And is leading them astray, And will lead us astray as well, Because the authority in which it is set, Is from men, And not from God, You see friends, Before we can even get to the issue of purity, In this passage, Jesus in verses 1 to 13, Has to deal with the issue, Of authority, Friends, Friends, If we hope to be made clean, To be made pure before God, Then we have to be absolutely sure, Of where we place our hope, Where we place our trust, We have seen from these verses, That the Pharisees and scribes, Were putting their hope and trust, And outward rituals, And we have also seen, That Jesus has revealed,

That outward rituals will just not do, They are the equivalent of using a sticking plaster, When intensive surgery is required, Here is a question for us all today friends, Where are you placing your hope, To be made clean before God, In your baptism, Church attendance, Reading the Bible, Praying, Doing good deeds, Friends, Outward rituals will just not do, And as we will see in a fortnight's time, Jesus is going to reveal, The inward reality, Of all of our lives, It's not dirty hands, That are the problem, It's dirty hearts, It's not soap we need to clean us up, No, no, no, The problem goes far too deep, For soap to be of any use, What we need to clean us up, Is a saviour, To perform surgery on our hearts, And thank God,

That he has provided such a one, And his son, The Lord Jesus Christ, Let us pray, Father, Father, We thank you that you love us, You love us so much, In order that you would, Reveal the truth of all of our lives, Father, Father, We're all really religious at heart, We love to put our trust, And hope in rituals, But Father, Thank you, That while we're all still alive, You've exposed to us, You've revealed to us, That rituals will just not do, I pray that you would help each of us, Father, To not put our trust in rituals, For they just won't do, But to put our trust and our hope, To be made clean before you, In

a real relationship, With your son, Please help us, We ask, In Jesus name, Amen,