

The heart of the matter

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[0 : 00] A reading this morning comes from Mark chapter 7, which you will find in page 842 of the Pew Bible. Mark chapter 7. And we'll read from verse 1 through to verse 23 together.

Let us hear then the Word of God. Now, when the Pharisees gathered to him, that is Jesus. Now, 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 us comments so that we understand. 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.

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Jesus, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?

[1 : 16] 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 us doctrines, the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.

And he 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 korban, that is a gift given or 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 traditions 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, 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.

[2 : 36] 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 he declared all foods clean.

And Jesus said, 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.

Amen. And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. I invite you to take your Bibles, and to turn with me again to Mark chapter 7, which you will find in page 842 of the Pew Bible.

And as you do so, let me say a word of prayer. Amen. Make the book, live to me, O Lord, show me thyself, within thy word, show me myself, and show me my saviour, and make the book, live to me, for Jesus' sake.

[4 : 22] Amen. My notes begin, as I was preparing, this passage this week. But the truth is, I prepared and preached this passage, three years ago.

But it's been a heavy week, and that was even before my team got knocked out, the Scottish Cup, and England thrashed us at rugby. But as Bob always says, we can never remember, what he said

a month ago.

So there's no chance of us remembering, what I said three years ago. So with that said, as I was preparing this passage, I recalled a story, that my good friend Hugh McKenna, once told me a number of years ago.

Hugh told me that he'd just moved into a new house, in the Jordan Hill 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 neighbour.

And the next door neighbour informed Hugh, that the tree that Hugh had in his back garden, had snapped, and smashed the neighbour's wall to bits. Hugh said, I didn't even know I had a tree in the back garden.

[5 : 34] And he went out into the back, followed by his neighbour, and there sure enough, was this 80 foot tree. How Hugh McKenna could miss it, I don't know. But this 80 foot tree, the neighbour was right enough, it was snapped.

The big stump was there, and the rest of the tree, was lying over the neighbour's wall. And the neighbour's wall, was smashed to bits. And Hugh said, Terry, when I looked at the tree, the bit of the stump that remained, he said, it looked strong, and it looked healthy.

The bit that had broken off, and smashed the wall to bits, he said, that had great big branches, and they looked strong as well. And they had lots of green leaves on them. But when I got close up 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 rotten on the inside.

And as we come to these verses in Mark chapter 7, we have a similar contrast.

If you gaze your eyes over Mark 7, you will notice that the word defile, defiles, defiled, has been mentioned seven times. So the issue that we are faced with here in Mark 7, is moral purity.

[6 : 53] How is it that we are defiled? And how can we be made clean before God? Well, if we do what Jesus instructs 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. I would like to take these verses under two headings. Firstly, in verses 1 to 13, the outward ritual, the outward ritual.

And then secondly, verses 14 to 23, the inward reality, the inward reality. Well, firstly, then, verses 1 to 13, the outward ritual.

Just to bring us up to speed as to where we are in Mark's gospel, we will know that Mark's gospel begins in chapter 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's good news. Christianity is good news. Good news about a person, Jesus, who is the Christ, God's anointed King, the Son of God.

[8 : 08] And in the chapters that proceed, Mark, as it were, begins to set out his evidence to prove the identity of Jesus. In verse 15 of chapter 1, Jesus bursts onto the scene, and Jesus declares, the time is fulfilled, and 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 only has to forgive sins and to calm creation.

And if that isn't enough, he shows amazing authority to call a young girl who was once 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.

[9 : 22] the ones whom you would expect to examine the evidence before them and to be in no doubt as to the identity of Jesus. Well, they are in fact the very ones who oppose him.

And it is with this religious establishment that Mark sets the scene of chapter 7, verse 1. Now when the Pharisees gather to him and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, well, we've already been introduced to these groups of, both groups in Mark's gospel.

The Pharisees in chapter 2 and chapter 3 when they've 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 that they've interpreted the law wrongly. And he interprets the law correctly for them. But this doesn't seem to do any good. They still see him as a lawbreaker, a blasphemer, that

he breaks God's law.

And how ironic it is that these ones who accuse Jesus of being a lawbreaker in chapter 3, verse 6, they themselves break the sixth commandment as they begin to plot how they shall murder him.

[10:42] And we've seen the scribes as well. They've come down from Jerusalem, party headquarters. They're the high hedges. And they've come down from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus. And this is the second time they've come down to see Jesus.

They came down in chapter 3 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 his autograph or to have their photographs taken with him.

No, they've 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, like 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.

[11:52] 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 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 Sinai, but as time had gone by in order to apply the law to everyday life, the rabbis came up with their own interpretation, misinterpretation of God's 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 going into exile.

[13:05] But the problem here was that these additions and misinterpretations, they 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, well, it's good enough for everybody. So now instructions that God had given had been misinterpreted and now had become ceremonial rituals for people that they were never really intended for.

And if anybody didn't comply with these rituals, then the Pharisees regarded it as an indifference to moral holiness. And they obviously looked good in the holiness front because in verse 3 and 4, Mark tells us that they washed everything.

They washed cups and pots and copper vessels and dined in couches. So to people looking in, they must have looked really holy. So the Pharisees question in verse 5 is really directed at Jesus.

[14:26] 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.

It's what the Pharisees were really 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 just 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 verse 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 were around in Isaiah's day are well and alive in you today.

[15 : 32] This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me with external things, lips, and not with internal things, the heart.

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 and not with their heart?

It would be horrible, wouldn't it? It would be an absolute sham. Plenty of sham marriages about. People getting married so that they can obtain a British passport and remain in this country. Plenty of sham marriages. 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, our redeemer. But if our starting point for worship is flawed, then our worship will be in vain.

[16 : 36] 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, worship is always a response to revelation, to God's revelation.

So if we're not worshiping, living, in response to God's revelation, then we are not worshiping. 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 Ron Seal.

Do you remember the adverts for Ron Seal? Ron Seal is a wood product. It's varnished for exterior wood. You know, for varnishing doors and wood frames and decking.

And this is what it said in the tin. Protects in 30 minutes. And I'm sure you'll remember the slogan. Ron Seal. It does exactly what it says in the tin.

[17 : 47] Well, their religion and their rituals, they weren't like Ron Seal. It didn't do what it said in the tin. In fact, it did 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 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 men. Verse 9, you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

And 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 us an illustration of this through the practice of Corban at the end of verse 11. And Mark again gives this comment for us to understand.

[18 : 58] Corban is a gift given or devoted to God. So we can see what's happening here. A fellow maybe has given a gift to the temple and he's declared that Corban is set apart for the work of God.

But then the postman drops a letter through his door from his mum and dad. And they've experienced heavy rain and floods just like some parts of the country have been experiencing what seems for months.

And their whole house has been badly damaged. And as they have no savings left, they're looking for their son to help them. So the son goes down to the rabbi and he tells him the situation and he says, I would like to get some of that money that I gave to the temple last year as Corban.

I want to help my mum and dad. But he's told, no. Verse 12. Then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father and his mother.

And you see the contrast that Jesus draws. Verse 10. Moses said, honour your father and mother. Really, God said, as in Matthew's gospel, God said, honour your father and mother and whoever reviles father and mother must surely die.

[20 : 13] And 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.

And friends, this is absolutely dangerous. And we don't have to go far to see practices of this. And the Roman Catholic Church, they have a great respect for the word of God.

But alongside the word of God, they have the oral traditions of the church. And these traditions are given an even footing in terms of authority with scripture. And I'm not being sectarian here, friends.

I was raised Roman Catholic, all my family are Roman Catholic. My full name is Terence Andrew Patrick Murphy McCaffrey McCutcheon. But what I'm telling you is the truth.

[21 : 17] The truth is the teaching of Rome elevates traditions above the Bible, just as these Pharisees were doing. 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. people. And you see what's going to happen, don't you? The Bible's often hard to understand. So if you've got a book alongside the Bible that's going to interpret the Bible for you, then you won't read the Bible. You just read the book that interprets the Bible for you.

And in so doing, you make void the Word of God. And we have our traditions as well, don't we, friends? 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 baptized, totally immersed as an adult.

[22 : 18] You must raise your hands in the air when singing hymns. And that's if you sing hymns. There are Christians who say you should never sing hymns. You should only ever sing psalms. You must raise your hands in the air when singing hymns.

Or no, you must keep your hands in your pockets. We must be accompanied by musical instruments. Or no, we should never employ musical instruments when praising God.

You must speak in tongues to be a proper Christian. Or no way, anybody who speaks in tongues is off their head and could never be a proper Christian. These are just some things, friends.

I'm sure you could add plenty to the list. But I must say, 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. And that is what the problem was with the Pharisees and the scribes.

[23 : 21] Their traditions have 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 the outward ritual is dangerous and leading them astray because the authority in which it is set is from men and not from God's.

You see, friends, before we ever get to the issue of purity in this passage, Jesus in verses 1 to 13 has to deal with the issue of authority. 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.

If you gaze your eyes over verses 1 to 13 with me, you will see that the Pharisees and the scribes of verse 1 were putting their trust, their hope, in the traditions of men.

Verse 3, holding to the tradition of the elders. Verse 4, many other traditions they observe. Verse 8, hold to the tradition of men. Verse 9, in order to establish your tradition.

[24 : 27] Verse 13, by your tradition that you have handed down. Jesus exposes that their religion is man-made. The authority in which their outward rituals are set is the commandments of men.

Friends, Jesus exposes that outward rituals will just not do as the authority in which they are set is the commandments of men. they are the equivalent of using a sticking plaster where intensive surgery is required.

And now in verses 14 to 23, Jesus teaches the reason that outward rituals will just not do, as it's not dirty hands that are our problem, but dirty hearts.

Having dealt with the issue of authority in verses 1 to 13, we move to verses 14 to 23 to deal with the issue of purity. So what we have in verses 14 to 23 is the inward reality.

The inward reality. Verse 14, Jesus calls the people to him and again said to them, hear me all of you and understand. In chapter 6, Jesus had seen the people as a sheep without a shepherd and he had compassion on them.

[25 : 46] Here in verse 14, it's the same, but Jesus here doesn't give them compassion. He feeds them with information. He doesn't want them to be caught up in the religious outward rituals and practices of the Pharisees.

So he cries out, hear me, listen to me, not to them. Listen to me, all of you, and understand. So friends, this is of great importance.

So we need to open our ears and our minds to hear and understand what Jesus is saying. verse 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.

And you see what Jesus is saying. It's not outward things, but internal things. And you can see why he wanted the people to hear this. Because the Pharisees believed it was the other way about. They believed it was the world outside that defiled them. That's what all the ritual washing was about. To wash off the contamination of the world. But Jesus is saying, no, no, no, these guys have got it all wrong.

[26 : 56] The flow of defilement isn't outside in, it's inside out. Jesus says, nothing that goes into a man. And you can see that at the end of verse 19, Mark gives us a comment.

Thus he declared all foods clean. Jesus declaring all foods clean is absolutely remarkable. And it must have been controversial at the time. In Exodus 19, God set aside the nation of Israel apart for a special purpose that he would choose to work through them.

Then in Leviticus 11 and 20, God gave them certain food laws to make them distinctive as his people. Some foods were to be ceremonially unclean for Israel, but there was nothing intrinsically evil about the food.

This was how they were to express their obedience and distinction as a nation. Therefore, Mark 7 15 must have shocked them. But the casual reader, the casual observer would maybe say, well, wasn't Jesus just doing what he accused the Pharisees of doing in verse 8, 9, and 13?

Leaving, rejecting, making void the word of God? Well, no, he wasn't. Because Jesus has authority to handle the written word of God, the authority to interpret it, to fulfill it, and to speak it to them.

[28 : 17] You see, friends, the uncomfortable truth for the Pharisees is that their setting aside of the word of God didn't stop with the Old Testament. They continued to set aside God's word as they rejected his son, the living word.

Well, verse 17, we move, as we often do in Mark's gospel, from public to private. Jesus is now in the house with the disciples, and they ask him about the parable. In Matthew's account of this story, he tells us that it was Peter who asked, it was Peter who asked Jesus to explain the parable, because he just doesn't get it.

I wonder if you were ever faced with a situation like that when you were at school or university. I had it many times when I was under the tutorage of Edward Lobb and Bob File at Cornhill.

Sometimes they would be lecturing and it would just go right over my head. Ian Constable once said to me, being your height, Terry, most things go over your head. But I was always so thankful sometimes when someone in the class would put their hand up and say, would you please explain that again, because I just don't get it.

And I'd be sitting there going, I'm glad you said that, because I don't get it either. Well, verse 18, and he said to them, then are you also without understanding? Are you so dull?

[29 : 38] 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? You see what Jesus is saying?

It's not a question of defiled hands or defiled food. What you eat can't make you defiled, and what you abstain from can't make you holy. It's not about defiled hands and defiled food, but a defiled heart.

That's the inward reality. Jesus goes on to say, verse 20, 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.

Well, I suppose you could sum up what Jesus is saying with a saying I'm sure you're very familiar with. The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart.

And what Jesus is saying here is this, every one of us, every single one of us is exactly like Hugh McKenna's tree, rotten in the inside.

[31 : 02] Does that shock you friends? Does that come as a surprise to you? I'm not going to go through the list, but we can see that some of these are thought, words, and others are deed.

Everything that a human being does is permeated with this condition. everything that we do is defiled and polluted because we are walked at the very center of our beings.

In chapter 12 of Mark's gospel, Jesus is asked, what is the most important commandment? And Jesus replied, hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But friends, who here has been able to live up to that?

Not a single one of us, because sin has polluted our hearts. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But the truth is this, God has had all of nothing.

[32 : 19] And because we don't love God the way we should, we don't love our neighbor as we are. And friends, this isn't only a first century problem only, this has been man's problem since our hearts turned from God and sin entered the world.

And you don't have to go far to find evidence of this. You would only have to go home today and pick up your newspaper and turn on your television, and you will find evidence of everything from this list, every single one, every single thing from this list, you will find today.

That's why we've got allegations against high-profile celebrities of being sex offenders. that's why we have a son attempting to murder both his parents and succeeding at only murdering his mother. That's why we have underworld gangs flooding our streets with fake tobacco and drugs, trafficking human beings as if they were scrap metal. And what would the world say is the cause of all this? Well, they would try to put it down to things like environment, places where we've been brought up, education that we've had, or the examples that we've had.

[33 : 41] I suppose the Johnny Cash song would sum up their assessment of human behaviour perfectly. Well, my daddy left home when I was free. He didn't leave much for my man, me.

Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of booze. Now, I don't blame him because he run and hid, but you know the meanest thing that he ever did? Was before he left, he went and named me Sue. Well, he must have thought that it was quite a joke, and it got a lot of laughs from a lot of folk. It seems I had to fight my whole life through. Some girls would giggle and I'd get red.

Some guy would laugh and I'd bust his head. I tell you, life ain't easy for a boy named Sue. Education, environment, an example.

Now, it's true these things are factors in each of our lives, but the Bible always says that our defilement, our behavior begins from within. James writes in his letter, by our own evil desires, we are led away and enticed.

[34 : 46] Temptation is outward. The desire to do it is inward. I remember speaking to a lady from her church a while back, and she was telling me that she'd been with some friends and they'd been talking about some of the shocking goings on in the West End.

You know, the West End is supposed to be the nice part of town. And they were shocked because there had been slashings, stabbings, and murders. And the lady from our church said that what shocked her friends the most was that these crimes were committed by people in suits, professional people.

But friends, as we read this list, it shouldn't shock us as Christians because we're realists. We know that everybody has the potential to do the most heinous of things, whether they wear a shell suit, a blue suit, or a biler suit.

And what Jesus says here in verse 21, for from within, out of the heart of man, Jesus doesn't have a particular man in mind. He's not talking about a certain type of man.

He's talking about man, all men, and all women. We all have a tendency, don't we, as human beings, to see others as the problem. Well, I know I do.

[35 : 58] I sometimes think to myself, the world would be a better place if we didn't have dodgy policemen, dodgy politicians, or greedy bankers. Maybe your list is something different.

But friends, it's not someone else who's the problem. The problem is us. It's you. And it's me. All that is wrong in the world is all that is wrong in us.

My best friend wrote a song called Let Glasgow Flourish. And in that song, there is a line that goes like this. I once helped ruin Glasgow. Yes, I'm in part to blame.

You see, friends, my friend gets it. He knows that all that is wrong in Glasgow is all that is wrong in him. And Jesus says, verse 18, do you see?

Do you see and understand that this is the inward reality of your heart? And what he is saying is not just because you read it here, but because you recognize it here.

[37 : 00] Friends, Jesus doesn't just want to be the revealer of the problem. He also wants to be the redeemer from the problem. Only he can deal with our hearts.

education can't, legislation can't, and rehabilitation can't. Only the transformation that Jesus Christ brings can deal with our sin and our defilement.

Well, how does he do this? Well, back in chapter 2, the Pharisees came and they questioned Jesus because he was sitting eating with tax collectors and sinners.

And they said, why do you sit and eat with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus said, those who are well have no need of a doctor, but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Friends, do you see what Jesus is saying here? He is saying that he is the doctor. He is the spiritual surgeon, skilled enough to deal with even the sickness of our defiled hearts.

[38 : 06] But the Pharisees rejected his claims and they continued with their own alternative therapies, which we have already seen didn't work. Their religious cloak left them far from God and their ritual ceremonies left them far from clean.

Their religion of ceremonies and rituals didn't work. But friends, Jesus Christ offers not a religion of rituals and ceremonies of outward ritual.

Jesus offers a religion of inward relationship. A relationship with Jesus Christ can make you clean from the defilement of sin, can bring you into a relationship with the one true and living God and give you a new heart.

Friends, which one will you choose? Will you continue with outward ritual, observing mere externals, all the while becoming more defiled and further away from God?

Or will you accept what Jesus has revealed about the inward reality of your heart? And in accepting all that Jesus has revealed about your heart, will you trust all that he has done in the cross to redeem you?

[39 : 23] Let us pray. when I realized my own sinful condition and that Jesus had paid the penalty for my sin, I wanted somehow or another to respond.

Maybe from your heart this morning you want to cry out to God. Well, if that's you, maybe you can join me in this prayer. Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever before believed.

But through you I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you for paying my debt, for bearing my punishment, and offering me forgiveness.

I turn now from my sin and receive you as my Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen. to k Him Nobody Kind Wasn't I responsabil of For God will S God Him as an would and him a dose just to have