

Mark 7:1-30

As we begin this evening I wanted to just remind you of something and you will see why I'm developing this just a little bit when we get to verse 1 of chapter 7.

As Jesus ministered to the masses, as He healed the sick and the lame, as He taught the scriptures with great power and authority there was always one group of people that were quite jealous and envious of all the Lord was doing and that group was the religious people of Israel.

This included several groups of people including the Pharisees, the scribes and a third group called the Sadducees and these three groups were in pretty constant denial of who Jesus was.

There were a few of them that came to believe and probably the most notable was a man by the name of Nicodemus who first shows up in John 3 and he was asking questions of the Lord not to accuse Jesus or look to build a case against Him but out of a genuine place of desiring to know the truth...By the end of the gospels I believe this man had made his choice to be a follower of the Lord.

If you remember the religious had really come to spy on Jesus previously and initially I think they were just curious about who He was and what He was teaching...but then they began to notice that Jesus and His disciples didn't do things the way they as religious followers of God's law did them.

They took issue with the disciples as they went through the grainfields enjoying a snack on the Sabbath, the disciples and Jesus didn't fast

like they did, and Jesus had even healed a person on the Sabbath which certainly broke their rules and regulations.

It even came to the point that they began to tell people that Jesus was doing all the things He was doing by the power of Satan and at one point in Mark 3 they began to look for a way to destroy Jesus.

I say all this to simply point out that the religious crowd had firmly hardened their hearts against Jesus and really they at this point in the narrative have already made their decision that Jesus was not the Messiah, that He was not a prophet, that He was a person that was trying to lead the people astray and I think at the end of the day the religious people were envious of the popularity of Jesus and they could see the people were beginning to pay more attention to Jesus than they were to themselves...Essentially they were mad because their own authority was diminishing and Jesus was on the rise.

So with all that in the back of our minds we now come back to the religious leaders of the people if you look at verse 1 which says this **Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.** So here the spies are once again coming to watch Jesus as He ministered to others and I believe again they are looking for fault with Jesus so they can turn Him in and have Him removed. The most likely accusation they want to bring against Jesus is blaspheme for this carried with it the death penalty.

The Pharisees were a group of individuals that really prided themselves in being set apart and that's actually what their name means. They made it their ambition to keep the religious rules and this meant that they would fast twice a week, they would tithe even on the herbs that they gleaned from their garden, they would stand on

street corners and make lengthy prayers, and they would look down on those who didn't meet the same standards they did.

The Pharisees are what we would call a legalist today...A legalist is someone that is extremely focused on keeping rules and then because they keep the rules they believe themselves to be better than others. They then try to push these rules on others. Now rules are not a bad thing but when your relationship with God becomes based on keeping rules you have lost your way for the way to follow Jesus is to follow by the Spirit and not by rule keeping.

And then we have the scribes who were considered to be the experts in the scriptures as it was their responsibility to copy the scriptures for the next generation...These were highly respected individuals.

So these two groups of religious men came from Jerusalem which is in the south of the country and they made something like a 90 mile trip up to the area Jesus was ministering in on the north side of the Sea of Galilee and remember they are fault finders as they arrive on the scene.

Verses 2-4 say ²Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. ³For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. ⁴When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

In the times of Jesus they had what was known as the oral law which eventually when it was written down around 200 BC became what we call the Mishna. The oral law was really the interpretation or commentary on the law of God...kind of like a how to guide on how to keep the law of God...So if you remember we have said in the past that people of the Old Testament wanted to know what it meant to keep the Sabbath and so the leaders of the people developed these traditions that expounded on the Word of God to help people as they sought to keep what the Word said.

These sayings that eventually became the Mishna were separate and distinct from God's Word and were not be taken as scripture...It was given by man and initially it was probably a good thing to help the people understand what to do and what not to do but as time went on it became almost as important as the scriptures.

One rabbi whose name was Eleazer said, 'He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come'...

The *Mishna* itself records, 'It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.'"

So the traditions of men had become far more important than intended or ever should have been.

And one of these things the religious people really focused on was how they washed their hands...and it was a big deal, for if you didn't do it properly you could become defiled.

Now initially they got this idea of washing from scripture over in Exodus 30:18-19 which says this when the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ¹⁸ **“You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, ¹⁹ for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it.** The idea was the Levites would wash as they served the Lord...it was a good thing something they should have done and did do.

The religious of the community then wanted to define what proper washing was and as man does they took things way to far applying what was given to the Levites to all of society...and so if you wanted to be religious, if you wanted to keep the rules properly then you needed to properly wash according to the traditions of men.

We are told here that when all Jews ate that they would wash their hands in a special way and especially when they came from the marketplace they would wash...and they took this and actually applied washing to all kinds of items in the house from cups to pitchers and even to the couches they would lean on as they ate.

When it came to washing the hands several commentators give us insight into the ritual that was done when they say the following...For these ceremonial washings, special stone vessels of water were kept because ordinary water might be unclean. To wash your hands in a special way, you started by taking at least enough of this water to fill one and one-half egg shells. Then you poured the water over your hands, starting at the fingers and running down towards your wrist. Then you cleansed each palm by rubbing the fist of the other hand

into it. Then you poured water over your hands again, this time from the wrist towards the fingers.

Now I want to just point something out here as we think about this whole situation...I suppose it's a question...Do you really think these "highly important" religious people travelled all the way from Jerusalem just to point out that Jesus and His disciples were breaking a man made rule? I don't think so...I think as these men came they were looking to find a fault in Jesus so they could bring it back to the leaders to then find Him guilty...When they couldn't find fault in the things Jesus did they then went on to bring up little religious rules the disciples had broken.

Do you know I think this is how the world often works...How many people when they come to church begin to pick on the children of God? They begin to find faults in the individuals that attend church. They begin to look at individuals and how they fall short of the standards of God and then they take that and they say "well, the church is filled with a bunch of hypocrites."

The point I'm trying to make is that so often when people can't find fault with Jesus and surely they never will they then begin to look beyond Jesus to individuals or churches who have faults in their lives and then build a case against Christ based on that.

I want to just remind you that Jesus is perfect, that there is not one thing that is wrong with Him, that Jesus when He was put on trial multiple times as He was on His way to the cross was examined and found faultless.

If you are looking at man and you are looking at the church you are going to find problems, mistakes and failures but if you are looking at Jesus you won't find a thing to fault Him in.

I wish the church could be perfect...sadly we just aren't. I will and do make mistakes as I go through life, I am not a perfect pastor and those of us that come to this church are on a journey and not yet perfect either. **The church sadly will fail in some way or another but there is one that never fails and** His name is Jesus.

To those who are critics of the church or have been hurt by the church I am sorry. I wish it had never happened. The church can't make excuses for our failures and surely the standard is perfection but sadly we all fall short. **But Jesus never falls short. His love is perfect. There is not one thing** wrong with Him. He is the pure and spotless lamb, the One that can take away our sins.

And so the Pharisees and scribes examined Jesus once again and all they could come up with was that the disciples weren't washing their hands properly.

Look with me at verses 5-8 and we'll see the response of Jesus they say ⁵**Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"**

⁶**He answered and 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 And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'**

**8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition
of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such
things you do.”**

So the Pharisees then come to Jesus and specifically ask Him why His disciples don't keep the traditions of the elders...and you might underline the word tradition...What they are faulting the disciples with was not founded on the Word but instead based on tradition.

And I want you to notice that Jesus does not give some big explanation about this, but instead Jesus goes straight to the heart of the matter and we'll see this develop over the next several verses.

Jesus actually calls the Pharisees and scribes out for their actions saying they were hypocrites and pointing them over to what the prophet Isaiah had to say in Isaiah 29:13...What was written some 700 years before Christ is here just as relevant for those that were before the Lord.

Jesus says they are hypocrites and actually the Lord used this word to describe the Pharisees on numerous occasions and the word hypocrite actually means to wear a mask...It was used of actors who were in a play as they would look one way on the outside but on the inside they were totally different.

Jesus used this to try and help the Pharisees to see that though they looked great on the outside and though they kept lots of rules that their hearts were far from where they should have been. You might write down Matthew 23 for homework as this is a whole chapter that is

dedicated to Jesus lovingly confronting and rebuking this group of people.

I want to say this about traditions...they can be a good thing, they can help us stay on track, they can help us to honor that which has happened in the past...but if the traditions we participate in pull us away from the plain teaching of scripture then we have a very large problem. Traditions after a while can often become a man made mark of spirituality...if you do them you are doing well...if you don't then something is wrong and that's exactly what had happened in this case.

There are several traditions that churches practice that could apply to what takes place here...For example what about infant baptism? Some hold this man made tradition in high regard even saying if someone is baptized as an infant that they are saved...Simply said this is unbiblical.

What about praying to saints? That's a tradition some hold and it's an empty one...one that isn't found in the Bible at all, instead the Bible teaches that we are to pray to God alone.

What about the tradition of going to church on Resurrection Sunday or on Christmas or even just the tradition of going to church at all because that is what we have always done...Your church attendance while a good thing means nothing if you don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The problem for the Pharisees is that they were holding the traditions in far higher regard than they were the Word of God and then they as religious leaders were pressing these legalistic teachings on to others.

Not only was handwashing an issue but now Jesus will give the Pharisees and scribes another example as to how they held traditions as being of greater worth than the Word if you look at verses 9-13 which say ⁹ He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”—’ (that is, a gift to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³ making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

I want to just point out that in the history of debating the issues of life there is One that remains undefeated and His name is Jesus...time and time again in the scriptures people would challenge Him and He would quickly put their thoughts and arguments to rest.

Jesus as He brings up another similar issue begins to speak of how Moses had made it clear that parents were to be honored and that if you cursed your parents you were to be put to death. In Biblical times there was no social security, there were no retirement accounts, there was no Medicaid, there were no senior living situations.

Parents took care of their children and raised them and helped them to become established in life and as parents became less capable of providing for themselves the expectation was that they were to be honored and taken care of by their kids.

Both of these quotes that Jesus brings up are found in the book of Exodus and you might just write down Exodus 20:12 and 21:17 for cross references.

What was happening culturally though and what happens in life is that people are always looking for a loophole, just like you and I do for taxes and any number of things. If there is a way around something people will find it.

In the oral traditions of the law there was a tradition that was called Corban and as you went through life you could begin to say that the earnings you had, or the items you had in your home were being set aside unto the Lord and then when it came to their parents and taking care of them they were saying they couldn't do it as what they had was dedicated to God.

As they did this they were making the Word of God of no effect through the traditions they were following. So they were placing the traditions above what God's Word said or to replace the plain and simple commands of God.

It was a sad situation and people were justifying the neglect of their parents by saying what they had was set apart unto God. Their hearts were far from the truth for sure, they had missed the desires of God entirely...as they did this they were wearing the mask of hypocrisy...People would come by and say man these people are so holy and so amazing because they have dedicated everything to God and yet they were neglecting the more needful things.

So Jesus has spoken to the Pharisees and the scribes and I can imagine they were hanging their heads as Jesus really puts them in

their place and then the Lord turns to the multitude that was there at the time and we see this in verses 14-16 which say ¹⁴When He had called all the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: ¹⁵There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. ¹⁶If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Jesus now puts to rest the issue of hand washing that was being contested. Jesus simply says that what really matters in life is not what comes into the body through the hands but instead what makes a person defiled is what comes out of their life and these things are what truly defiles a person.

Sometimes we as humans can get caught up on the outward appearances and we can sometimes make the outward more important than the inward work of God in the heart of a person.

Let me just give you a personal example of this from my time as a missionary in the Dominican Republic. In the neighborhood we lived in they had outward physical appearance standards you needed to meet if you were really going to be considered a Christian...If you were a strong believer then you would cut your hair a certain way especially if you were a man and if you were a woman who was spiritual then you must wear a dress that went all the way to the ground and if you went to the ocean which was about 10 minutes away and you wanted to get in the water you had to wear that dress...Men were to wear suits for church and make-up was frowned upon for women.

None of this has any standing on whether a person has a real relationship with Jesus or not but the people had elevated these things making them necessary in order to call yourself a Christian.

The Lord is far more concerned with your heart than He is with your outward appearance. I would say that in all we do in life we should look to honor the Lord but the most important thing is the inward work of the Holy Spirit. If you are connected to the Holy Spirit then the fruits of the Spirit will come from your life and you will live a life that honors the Lord.

So often when a person begins to rely on tradition or regulations to mark where they are spiritually they miss what the Lord wants entirely and that's what had happened with the so called spiritual leaders of Jesus' day.

Now as Jesus was saying this the disciples were found to be with question and that's what we see in verses 17-23 which say ¹⁷**When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. ¹⁸ So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" ²⁰ And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within and defile a man."**

The Lord here simply points out that food is not what makes a man wrong or right with God, the outward traditions don't make a person right with God and He simply says that food when it enters the body is simply eliminated.

He then points out the real issue and that is that a man or woman is known by the fruit that comes from their life. What we should really concentrate on in life is allowing the Spirit of God to cleanse us and to rid us of the evil that resides within our hearts.

Jesus pointed out several evil things that come from the hearts of men and I wonder today if any of us here have a walk with God that is very much based on outward appearances but in our hearts we have evil sinful thoughts that shouldn't be there whether they be of lust or envy.

I wonder if any of us are committing adultery or fornication or we have murder in our hearts and when it came to that certainly the Pharisees and religious leaders had a hatred in their hearts for Jesus to the point that they wanted Him dead...I wonder if we have theft in our lives or we are covetous of what others have, or we just have wickedness in our hearts and minds or we lie continually or we are lewd or crude in our speech or we look at things with an evil eye or we praise God one minute and curse Him the next or we have pride or foolishness.

You see the religious leaders were far too focused on outward appearances and actions and all the while the inside of their hearts and lives were full of sin. Jesus spoke of this to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25-28 when He said this to them ²⁵ **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-**

indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The outside looked great and such are many today who show up at the church and they say the right things and they know the truth of God...and yet in their hearts and in their private lives there is much sin that never gets addressed.

Don’t be the hypocrite in your life. Don’t become prideful in your walk with Jesus. Focus on the inward work of God and the outward work will shine forth.

You and I should focus on growing in our relationship with Jesus, connecting with Him in prayer, studying His Word and being accountable to others and as we do so the Lord will change our hearts and cleanse us and help the inward motives of our hearts to match the outward actions of our lives...So many know the truths of God’s Word, they know what they should do but they fail to really allow the Lord to change the depths of their hearts...and when you live like that I would say you are missing out on the goodness of just knowing Jesus.

Let’s move forward here we’ll quickly look at this next section if you look at verse 24 which says ²⁴ From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden. Now Jesus is out of the

land of Israel and he is over in modern day Lebanon and I think and this is just me but notice it says that he wanted no one to know where He was...So I think perhaps Jesus just wanted some rest and a moment to unplug.

We are told though that He could not be hidden. Everywhere Jesus went He was recognized, the news would spread quickly and the people would come.

And we can see here that one woman in particular had a great need in her life if you look at verses 25-26 which say ²⁵**For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet.** ²⁶**The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.** So a woman came who had a young daughter with a demon living inside of her...and how this came about we aren't sure but you can imagine that this demon was causing all kinds of problems in the home and this poor little girl had just no say in the matter at this point. Certainly once a demon enters a person they have a certain power over them, a certain shackling of the individual takes place and I just can't imagine this but in some ways it is as if the demon takes over and causes people to do things they would never do.

I think today in our own society we have people that suddenly snap and they do things they would never have dreamed of doing and I do think some of this is spiritual in nature as people are persuaded by demonic influences to carry out disgusting crimes.

If you are a parent you can probably sense the desperation of this mother...she had probably done what she could to help but this was

way beyond her abilities and perhaps she had heard of Jesus as people travelled through...and then to suddenly hear that Jesus was there in your town would have brought a great deal of hope as she ran to the Lord.

And we get the idea here that she asked and she kept on asking Jesus to deliver her daughter...It reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-11 which says ⁷**“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”**

You and I should be persistent in our prayers, we should never lose hope, we should always trust that Jesus is working both in the people we are praying for and that He is working in us along the way as well and I think the Lord was working faith into this woman as the story progresses here.

We also learn here that this woman had no Jewish connections at all, she was of the Greek culture meaning she had adopted the world system that was in place at the time.

Look at verses 27-28 which say this ²⁷**But Jesus said to her, “Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”**

²⁸ And she answered and said to Him, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.”

Now at first look of this without the cultural understanding and context **you might look at this and sense that the Lord** has no concern for this person because she is a woman or because she is of the Greek world **but that’s not what is happening here at all.**

Over in Matthew’s gospel we get just a little more information...and I want to read that to you so we can understand. It’s from Matthew 15:21-24 which says this **²¹ Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”**

²³ But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.”

²⁴ But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Notice Jesus makes it clear here in these verses from Matthew that he was sent to the people of Israel. **That was the primary ministry Jesus had** and so He is pointing this out to the woman.

Now culturally speaking often times the Jewish people would refer to the Gentile or Greek world as dogs, animals that have no purpose, scavengers **and the Greek word to describe them is the word kyon...** Jesus when He responds to this woman says to the woman that the children should be filled first and this is speaking of the Jewish

people and the Lord is essentially saying to her that I can't take what is given to the children **and give it to "little dogs" and just so we can understand the word used here is the word kynarion which means little puppies.**

Jesus used the word for puppy here and listen Jesus was not looking down on the woman but instead was working to develop faith within her...Again over in Matthew 15:25 as this interaction took place we see this as this woman is repeatedly pleading with Jesus to work in her situation...it says this ²⁵**Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"** So this woman's faith is on display here in the situation.

And so the Lord says the food shouldn't be taken from children and given to puppies but the woman in great faith simply says that surely the puppies get some crumbs...and so I imagine this woman having this great faith that says "Surely God cares for me, surely God is interested in me even though I clearly am not of Jewish descent."

And of course you and I know the Lord has a great concern for all the world. I can almost picture a little puppy being in the room and the family loving and caring for that puppy as this all unfolded.

And then look at verses 29-30 which say ²⁹**Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."**

³⁰**And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.**

So the woman's persistence has paid off, Jesus has shown to her and to us as we read that He cares not only for the Jewish people but also

for the whole world and we once again see the power of Jesus as He healed this little girl.

Tonight as we close I want to just encourage you that Jesus absolutely knows and cares for you. He hears the cries of your heart, your prayers do not fall on deaf ears. I think you and I must trust by faith what the Word says over in Isaiah 55:8-9 which says this **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.**

⁹ “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

We must trust that Jesus is concerned about us and that behind the scenes the Lord is working in ways that we could never understand or fathom. His thoughts towards us are good and not of evil, He desires to develop us and minister to us.

And listen if you are here tonight and you can see in your own life that you are religious on the outside but on the inside you are a mess and just full of sin understand that the Lord doesn't want you to stay there and that He can set you free and work in your life if you will place yourself in His constant care. If you recognize you need that work I would just encourage you to come forward as I would love to pray with you about it and talk with you.

Let's pray and we'll worship.

Mark 7:1-30 “A Warning For The Religious”

Verses 2-4

Exodus 30:18-19

Verses 17-23

Matthew 23:25-28

Verses 25-26

Matthew 7:7-11

Verses 27-28

Matthew 15:21-24

Matthew 15:25

Verses 29-30

Isaiah 55:8-9

