Mark 7:1-23

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Preacher: Joshua Russell

[0:00] So what matters to God? And does what matters to God matter to you? These are the questions I want us to think about this morning.

! Because of course people care about all sorts of things. And religious people care about all sorts of things. But the question is, do we care about the things God cares about?
Or does God care about the things that we care about? Now in our passage today, what the Pharisees and their scribes cared about was ritual washings.
Did you notice that? The Pharisees and the scribes were very strict religious people. And what they wanted to talk to Jesus about in Mark chapter 7 was ritual washings.
Which is really interesting, isn't it? Because we're going to have some ritual washings today. In fact, in verse 4, the Greek word for washing in verse 4 is baptismus.
[1:02] See, the Pharisees were so obsessed with baptisms that they even baptized their cups, their pots, their copper vessels, and their dining couches. We managed to get a photo of one.

No, obviously they didn't fully immerse them, okay? That's just AI nonsense. But they made sure that they washed them. They ritually cleansed them. They baptized them.
And before every meal, the Pharisees washed their hands. When they came back from the marketplace, they washed their hands to get all the grub off them. From the life of commerce.
Now kids, your mummies and daddies might tell you to wash your hands before every meal. And that's because of germs, isn't it? They don't want you to get sick.
And there's nothing wrong with that. You should obey your mummy and daddy. But the Pharisees were not washing their hands because of germs. Now the Pharisees were washing their hands because they thought that it mattered to God.
[2:06] Or did they? It was an important part of their religion. But actually Mark tells us that they washed their hands because they were concerned about holding to the tradition of the elders.

Notice he actually doesn't mention anything about God. See in verse 3 Mark says, Now that should make you think actually.
If you're a curious person, were they doing it for God? Or for the elders, their parents? Was it really about worshipping God?
And doing what matters to Him? Or was it just about doing what matters to other people? Or what mattered to some people who were older than they were? Now the word holding there is worth zooming in on.
It has to do with holding on to something really tightly. So can you clench your fists together? If you're within the sound of my voice. This word is about grabbing on to something.
[3:23] Or seizing it so that you don't let go. And there are some things in life that we should hold on to tightly. Like your mummy and daddy's hands when you cross the road.

But there are other things in life that we should hold to loosely. Or even let go of. The Pharisees wanted to hold on very tightly to the traditions of the elders.
And never let them go. That is the traditions that had been handed down to them from their parents. Traditions like washing their hands. Like washing dining couches.
For generations and generations they had handed these things down very carefully. Now maybe in your family different traditions were passed down.
I don't know. Maybe your parents told you to go to church. Or to go to a temple. Maybe your parents told you to give to the poor. Or not to eat certain foods. Or maybe not to eat certain foods on certain days.
[4:25] Maybe your parents told you you had to celebrate certain special holy days. Like Christmas or Easter or Reformation Sunday. Or Passover.

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Or Hanukkah. Or Eid. Or Diwali. In fact why don't you turn to the person next to you for a moment. And have a chat about some of the traditions that your parents passed down to you.
Right? I'm going to give you 30 seconds. What are some of the traditions in your family. Or maybe the traditions in your culture that have been passed down to you. Just have a chat for 30 seconds. Alright.
Now I don't know. Is anyone brave enough to call out their answers and stick their hand up? Yeah Hayden. So one tradition we've always had in my family.
A Christmas trifle. Sounds like an unimportant tradition. But that's just a joke. Sounds great.
[5:35] Yeah. Christmas trifle. Maybe we can adopt that one. Yeah. Larry. My mother was a fish in in their early years. But it always held to the tradition that you don't eat meat on Friday.

Don't eat meat on Friday. Fish on Friday. Yeah. Okay. Always eat fish on Friday. Yeah. That would be pretty widespread. You know. A bunch of people might have that in their families. Yep. Any others? Yep.
This is an old one for the oldies. It was 5th of November. Cracker Night. Oh yeah. 5th of November. Yeah. Remember. Remember. The 5th of November. Fireworks night. Yeah.
Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. Hospitality. Yeah. Just to be hospitable. That was passed down to you. Yeah. Very important. Yeah. Tradition. Yeah. Good.
Thanks. That's good. Any last ones? Yeah. Anzac Day. Anzac Day. Okay. Yeah. Great. Another good tradition. Yeah. Okay. So in my family there are lots of traditions.
[6:30] Like celebrating birthdays with a cake. Or saying grace before meals. Going to church on Sunday. Anyways. So one thing not to get wrong about this passage.

Don't misunderstand this passage. Jesus is not saying that all traditions are bad. But the question is which traditions or whether we should hold on to human traditions tightly or lightly.
Right. Tightly. Or are there traditions we should let go of? Maybe traditions that don't really matter at all. You know you can sort of take them or leave them.
Or which traditions really matter to God. Maybe positively or negatively. Wouldn't it be bad if generation after generation we kept on handing things down.
Things that didn't really matter to God. Or even things that God hates. Because we couldn't let go of them. All the while ignoring the things that really do matter to God.
[7:37] Now the scribes and the Pharisees noticed that Jesus and his disciples didn't care so much about the traditions of the elders. So you see in verse 5.

They asked Jesus. Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders but eat with defiled hands? It's a good question isn't it?
Why did Jesus think that this particular tradition was unimportant or maybe even not very helpful at all? So it's a good question.
Unfortunately I don't think the Pharisees were very interested in hearing the answer. But I hope that you are. So keep reading in verse 6. Jesus said to them. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites.
As it is written. This people honor me with their lips. Can everyone point to their lips? But their heart. Everyone put your hand on your heart. But their heart is far from me.
[8:41] 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.

Now Jesus doesn't pull any punches here does he? Have you ever called someone a hypocrite to their face? It's a pretty bold move. Don't you think? But you know what a hypocrite is don't you?
I imagine everyone was standing around quite awkwardly in this moment. But you know what a hypocrite is? It's someone who pretends. In fact in Bible times again this Greek word was often used to describe actors.
Like someone in a play. I might pretend to be a murderer. But I'm not really. Or I might pretend to be a robot.
But I'm not really. I might say to the actress in front of me. Oh I love you forever and ever. Will you marry me?
[9:46] But I'm only pretending because you know I'm actually already married. See Jesus is saying that the Pharisees are pretenders. You Pharisees. You Pharisees.

You say that you love God. And that you worship and honour and respect him. But you don't really. You honour God with your lips. But your hearts are far from him.

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You know the Pharisees would have been in church this morning. But like actors. You know hiding behind a mask.
Or playing a part. You're not who you say you are. So in verse 7 Jesus uses a very strong word to talk about what the Pharisees were doing.
And actually it's in a quote that he borrows from the prophet Isaiah. Can you see what it is? It's the word vain. Now again kids. Do you know what the word vain means?
[10:45] Let me give you a hint. Has nothing to do with the veins that carry blood around your body. That's spelt differently. This word vain has to do with being empty. Being useless.

Worthless. Pointless. Futile. So God said to the people of Israel in Isaiah's day. In vain do they worship me.
Right? Their worship of me. Their honour of me. Is empty. It's worthless. In two ways. Right? Because on the one hand it's empty. In that it's all for show.
There's nothing behind it. It looks good. There's no substance to it. And on the other hand. It doesn't mean anything to God. Right? It doesn't mean anything to them. To you really.
And it doesn't mean anything to God. Because God can tell the difference between true worship and just acting. You see what matters to God.
[11:44] Just what happens on the stage. But what happens behind closed doors. It's not just what's on your lips.

But as Jesus says. It's what's in your heart. And in the Bible. Your heart is the way of talking about your true self. You know. Who you really are inside.
It's not just about your emotions. Although your emotions are important. But it's about more than that. It's about your core identity. The heart is where we think things. As well as feel things.
It's where we trust. And worship. Where we love. And hate. And fear. Where we make choices. And when we have desires. So God doesn't just want you to say that you love him. Or say that you honour him.
[12:39] And respect him. Lots of people say that. But what matters to God. Is that it's really true. God looks upon the heart. And he sees.

Whether there's true worship in there. Or not. God wants to see deep down inside of us. A real love for him. And honour for him.
That we take him seriously. That we want to know him. And do what he says. The people of Israel in Isaiah's day. And in Jesus' day. Were very proud. That they knew.
The real. True. And living God. The God who revealed himself. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who revealed himself. To Moses and the people of Israel. At Mount Sinai. They were very proud.
That they were not like. All the other nations around them. Who worshipped idols. You know. Statues. Of made up gods. Like Zeus. And Jupiter. And Baal.
[13:36] And Molech. But what matters to God. Is not just knowing about him. Or saying that he's our God. But actually treating him as God.

Listening to him. Letting his word. Rule over our lives. And for all their ritual washings. The truth is that the Pharisees. Cared more about their own traditions.
And what their parents had handed down to them. Than about God's word. So Jesus says. In vain do they worship me. Teaching as doctrines.
The commandments of men. Mere mortals. You leave the commandment of God. And hold to the tradition. Of blokes. And that.
Is a comment that should challenge each of us. Some of those traditions. That we mentioned earlier. And maybe that you chatted about. With your friend. I wonder if. Any of them.
[14:37] Are in conflict. With the word of God. You know. Some traditions. Age like milk. They start off good. But after a while.

They go off. And it's time. To chuck them out. Sometimes traditions. Were just always bad. You know. My ancestors. No doubt.
Were dancing around oak trees. And sacrificing virgins. Maybe yours were there. Right alongside mine. I'm glad. We've stopped that. The Protestant Reformation.
As we've already heard. Was all about. Going back to the word of God. Listening carefully to it. And in many ways. Getting rid of.

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The bad teaching. And the bad traditions. That had crept in. Over time. Into the Roman Catholic Church. And that sadly. Many people still. Cling to today.
[15:36] But you know. While we're pointing fingers. We should at least. Point a few at ourselves. Since in some. Protestant circles. I think holding.

To the traditions. Of the reformers. Has become. Just as important. As holding. To the word of God. The point. Of leaving behind. The Roman Catholic Church.
Was not. To elect. A new pope. In his place. Called John Calvin. Or John Knox. Or Cranmer. Or. Don Carson. Or whoever.
The point. Is not to make us. All popes either. You know. Each of us. Our own. Arbiters of truth. And interpreters. Of the scriptures. The reformers. Directly opposed.
This kind of nonsense. They said. To the. Anabaptists. The continental. Anabaptists. Of their days. You've just. Multiplied. The number. Of popes. You haven't got it.
[16:32] At all. The point. Of the reformation. Was not to give us. A new pope. To follow. Or make us all. Into popes. You know. All of us. Are fallible. We all.

Get things wrong. All the time. The point. Is to keep. Humbling. Ourselves. And submitting. To the word. Of God. So that.
God's word. Can do the work. Of enlightening us. And correcting us. Ruling us. And telling us. What really matters. To God. No other person.
Or document. Can be allowed. To supplant. God's word. As our supreme authority. Now in verses 9 to 13.
Jesus gives. An example. Of how the Pharisees. Cared more. About human tradition. Than God's word. And we won't spend. Very long on this example. But just have a think. About it for a moment. Because it's so. So ironic.
[17:32] Which. Just by the way kids. Again. If you don't know that word. I just mean. It's quite silly. You see. God had told. The people of Israel. Through Moses.

To honor your father. And your mother. Do you remember that one? Right. That's one of the big ten. The ten commandments. It's a really important one. For kids. To remember.
But you know. It's also important. For grown-ups. To remember. For. Because when you get older. Your parents start to get older too. And they start to get frail. And then.
They'll need you. To take care of them. But the Pharisees. Had come up. With a sneaky little. System. To get around this. They called it.
Corban. Basically. You could declare. That something. Belonged to God. Like maybe your house. Or your money. Or something. And then.
[18:27] You didn't have to use it. In fact. You couldn't use it then. To care for your aging parents. You could still use it for yourself. Which is very convenient.

Isn't it? But you had effectively made it off limits. To your parents. Because that was sort of. Secular use. And you know. It was sacred now. Now. Do you see the irony?
Right. In the name of tradition. Which is about honoring your parents. In the name of honoring your parents. They were dishonoring their parents. Isn't that silly?
But again. You see why Jesus is pointing out. This particular tradition. He hasn't picked one at random. It's because he wants to expose. The Pharisees. As pretenders. Actors.
Frauds. The Pharisees. Don't really care. About honoring God. And actually. They don't really care. About honoring their parents. They're just stuck.
[19:26] In this pretend world. Pretending to be righteous. Pretending to be good. Because they don't really want to do. What God says. And they can't face.

The hard reality. Of their own sinfulness. So Jesus calls them out. Hypocrites. And then in the last part of our passage.
Jesus calls the people to himself. And he explains to them. What really matters to God. So take a look at this. It's our unclean hearts. See verse 14.
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. And when he had entered the house. And left the people. His disciples asked him. About the parable. A parable is not necessarily a story. It just means a proverb.

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[20:24] Or a riddle. Like an enigma. They asked him about this little puzzle. He just said. 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.
Made sure that all kids should giggle at that point. Catherine and I used to have that verse. Pinned up in our toilet. And he 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.
[21:22] And they defile a person. See. What matters to God. What actually offends God. Is not unclean hands. But unclean hearts.

What matters to God. Is not being clean on the outside. But being clean on the inside. In your heart of hearts.
This is why Jesus didn't like the pharisaic rituals. Of washing their hands. Because being right with God. Is not about what you eat.
Or washing your hands. Is not. So many religious traditions. Are about that aren't they. About what you eat. On particular days. Or whatever it might be.
Don't eat this. Don't eat that. Don't touch this. Don't touch that. But Jesus says. What really matters. Isn't what you eat. It's not what you touch. It's not what's outside of you.
[22:16] It's not about the rituals you might do. It's what's in your heart. It's honouring God. In your heart. And with your whole life. In fact the summary of the law. Jesus says elsewhere.

Is to love the Lord your God. With all your heart. And with all your soul. And with all your mind. And with all your strength. And to love your neighbour as yourself.
That is what God really cares about. But of course. That begs another question doesn't it? How can we clean our hearts? I mean it's easy to clean your hands.
But if God requires that our hearts are clean. How do we get. Evil thoughts. Sexual immorality. Theft.
Murder. Adultery. Coveting. Wickedness. Deceit. Sensuality. Envy. Slander. Pride. Foolishness.
How do we get these things out of our hearts? We've all got those things in our hearts.
[23:14] Don't we? I know I'm on that list. If you think you aren't. You might like to look at pride and deceit. So how can a sinner like me.

Get my heart clean before God. And be acceptable to God. And the answer is actually. That's exactly what Jesus came to do.
We didn't read it this morning. I kind of want to keep reading through the whole of Mark. And get to the end with you. But actually. In the very next section of Mark. Jesus cleanses a young girl.
With an unclean spirit. Simply because her mother. Asked him to. And you know. That's a model for us. There's no trick to it.
Or special secret. Right. Faith is not like a mystical or magical thing. Where I've got lots of it. But you might not be able to find it. Or something. It just means trust. We're all trusting in our chairs right now.
[24:14] An easy way to express your trust in someone. Is simply to ask them for help. In the gospel records. Jesus shows again and again and again.

By his miracles and his teaching. That he. And only he. Can truly make us clean. And all we have to do. Is trust him.
Ask him. To help us. To cleanse us. And the wonderful news is. Jesus promises to help us. He promises to cleanse us. Even though we don't deserve his help.
Even though. We can't make up. For all the evil things we've thought. And said. And done. And all the good things we've failed to do. Even though.
The sin in our hearts. Has such a tight grip on us. It's like a ferocious monster. Or stage four cancer. We are riddled with it. But Jesus promises to cleanse us.
[25:10] If we come to him. And ask for his help. He'll take care of it. So. Time to wrap up. What matters to God.

Is listening to him. And obeying him. What matters to God. Is not so much. What we say. But what's in our hearts.

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What's really true. What matters to God. Is not. Whether we keep. Human traditions. Or not. But whether we keep.
God's word. Human traditions. Are something that we should hold on to. Lightly. Chuck out. Eagerly.
If needed to. If we need to. When they're getting in the way of God's word. Or confusing people. Whereas God's word. Is something that we should hold on to.
[26:05] Tightly. And hand down to our children. On Reformation Sunday. We can thank God. For men like Tyndale. Luther. Calvin.

And Cranmer. These men in the 16th century. Who left behind. The Roman Catholic Church. Church. And the reason they did that. Is because they realized. That much of what the Roman Catholic Church.
Was teaching. Was human tradition. Not the commandments. Of God. And actually. God's word. Was being squeezed out. And suppressed.
By the commandments. Of corrupt. Men. And we can celebrate. The Reformation. Because. Exactly the same thing. Is happening today. Now of course.
This was a scary thought. For Luther. At the time. And a scary thing to do. To leave behind the church. He loved. He never set out. To do that. Imagine.
[27:00] If you started to realize. That all those prayers. All that church going. All those relics. All those pilgrimages. Doing penance. Saying your Hail Marys.

Or confessing to a priest. Imagine coming to realize. That these things were all worthless. Vain. Empty. In the sight of God. This is what the reformers realized.
And they weren't the first. Actually. By the way. Just in fact. Even Augustine complains. In one of his letters. About the multitudes. Of man-made traditions.
That plagued the church. That was a thousand years. Before the reformers. Because of course. It's part of our sinful hearts. That we constantly invent.
And then exalt. Our own inventions. Our own ideas. Above the word of God. Was happening in Augustine's day. Was happening in Luther's day.
[27:59] And still happening in our day. Even among Protestants. Like copying. Protestant parents. And Protestant traditions. Can be just as worthless. As copying Catholic ones.

What matters to God. Is not the labels. Or the lip service. But the reality of the heart. The baptisms. We perform today. There's nothing wrong with them. Again. That's not what this passage is about. Jesus tells his disciples elsewhere. To perform baptisms. But there's nothing particularly magical. Or extraordinary about them either. What matters to God. Is your cleansed heart. Which only comes by faith. Listening to God's word.
Trusting and obeying it. So does what matters to God. Matter to you. Or are you just going to hold on to your parents.
[28:58] What your parents taught you. No matter what. Your parents raised you Catholic. So that's you. You're going to be Catholic till the day you die. No matter what God says.

The God you claim to worship. Your parents raised you Hindu. Buddhist. Muslim. Baptist. Presbyterian.
Pentecostal. Even atheism is a sort of religious system. But we don't have time to go into that now. But you see. It doesn't matter what tradition you were raised in.
Or happen to be born in. What matters surely is the truth. What actually does God care about? And do you actually care?
At St. Lucia Bible Church. We need to make sure. Don't we? That the Bible is not just in our name. But in our hearts. Ruling our lives.
[29:58] If you've been coming here for ages. When's the last time you changed. Based on something you noticed. In God's word. There's no point celebrating Reformation Sunday.

If we've stopped reforming. Let's pray. Loving Father.
Thank you for this precious passage. In your word. Thank you for Jesus. And his courage. To call the Pharisees. Hypocrites to their face. And to call them out. So that we too.
These many years later. Might be protected. By this moment. Be reminded. We pray that your word. Would be at work. In our hearts. In our consciences. Prick us.
Correct us. Rebuke us. Where we need to be rebuked. That we might be. Those who truly. Worship you. Who honor you. Not just with our lips. But in our hearts. And through faith.

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[31:03] In the Lord Jesus. Are found acceptable. In your sight. We ask all these things. In Jesus name. Amen.

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