

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

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(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

OUTLINE

Worthless Worship

July 30, 2017

Mark 7:1-13

Pastor Jody Cross

Worship is worthless when it ...

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2. Leads Us Away From Grace (verses 6-8)
3. Leads Us Away From Mercy (verses 9-13)

Conclusion

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Introduction

Good morning. Let's open our Bibles to Mark 7; that's on page 842 in your pew Bibles...Think back to what we have just been learning the past few weeks: Jesus is the Son of God. Not surprisingly, people are astounded wherever he goes: He feeds 5000 people with a small lunch, He walks on the water, He calms the raging sea. People are amazed at His awesome displays of power. They want to make him King.

Last week we saw Jesus healing the sick and broken. Aren't you encouraged to know that Jesus is touched with our suffering and ministers to our needs as we reach out in faith and prayer?

This week, we come to Mark 7:1-13. It is a tension-filled narrative. It is as if we were right there, eyewitnesses to the story as it unfolds. It is a story of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. As you read it, an ominous change is in the air, like when a dark and foreboding weather system moves in and you head for the basement. As the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus impacts more and more people, the opposition against Him grows.

Jewish authorities from Jerusalem mobilize and travel a great distance to confront Jesus. He does not shrink back. He meets them head on. What we see is the compassionate, shepherd heart of Jesus is also the heart that exposes their hypocrisy. In this passage it is **full on** with the religious

leaders. Jesus, the object of their attack, in no uncertain terms, addresses their futile religious practices. What went wrong with them? We will find out in this text as **Jesus confronts their worthless worship.**

Hear now the Word of the Lord, Mark 7, beginning at verse 1.

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, ⁴ and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” ⁶ And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

⁹ And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— ¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:1-13 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – THANKS BE TO GOD!

Worship is worthless when it ...

1. Leads Us Away From The Scriptures (verses 1-5)

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem (Mark 7:1 ESV)

Mark sets before us a sharp contrast – on one hand the ministry of Jesus, reaching out, preaching and healing all over the region, and on the other, the oppressive influence of the scribes and the Pharisees. This “truth squad” from head office, the Jerusalem experts have come to discredit Jesus. This wasn’t the first time Jesus had faced this mob of accusers.

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” (Mark 3:22 ESV)

These were no casual inquirers, no open-minded truth seekers, and no friends of Jesus. They’d already made up their minds, they were there to find Him guilty and destroy Him.

Their point of attack was why Jesus' disciples ate with unwashed and violated the tradition of the elders. Seriously? Hand washing protocol? Sounds a little petty, doesn't it? Not to them.

Let's go back at the text, verse 2,

...they (Pharisees and Scribes) saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they **wash their hands properly**, holding to the tradition of the elders, ⁴and 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.) (Mark 7:2-4 ESV)

Remember, Mark is writing for non-Jews, and likely for Roman Gentiles. Therefore, he felt it necessary to explain to his readers the Jewish custom of ceremonial hand washing, a custom based on the "tradition of the elders. The Pharisees were obsessed with ritual purity. So here's their charge, "Jesus, Your disciples, under your teaching, are breaking tradition." You can see what's implied here, right? They are in error and it's Jesus, their leader who's to blame.

We need to see here that this is not a problem of hygiene. Don't read this as though these disciples forgot what mom told them and never bothered to wash their hands before supper. What bothered the Pharisees was that the disciples did not do it the right way. Religious hand washing ritual was only (biblically) prescribed for the Priests who would enter the Temple for duty as a symbol of the need for a cleansed heart. So, this wasn't about breaking what Scripture says; this is about them violating the elder's (man made) traditions. It was not for cleanliness; rather, it was a prescribed ritual done as a show of piety.

By Jesus' day, adherence to the traditions was as important for the Pharisees as was adherence to the Word of God itself. Did you hear that? Let me say that again, **adherence to the traditions** was as important for the Pharisees **as was adherence to the Word of God itself**. They had ritual without reality. To be clear, the disciples were attacked on a point of ritual, not of faithfulness to God's Word.

It is helpful to get some background here. In their zeal for the law of God, Jewish religious leaders said,

“We need to build a fence around the Law to make sure that that Law is kept. And in order to make sure that Law is kept, let’s put a fence around it away from it and if people stop at the fence, then they’ll never get close to violating the Law. So the fence consisted of generation after generation of rituals and rules and ceremonies and behaviors of all kind, prohibitions, precepts to protect, supposedly, the Law of God.”” John MacArthur

Diagram, 2 (2 concentric circles, The Law of God & The Tradition of Men)

This outer circle was a body of teaching that had grown up around the law, (later called the Mishnah). In the Mishnah, if you can believe it, were thirty chapters about the ceremonial ritual cleansing of pots and pans. (Mom would be really happy; those pots would be really clean!) And they believed the words of the scribes were (more beautiful) than the words of the Law.

Hand washing had become so precisely defined that the amount of water, the posture of the hands, and even the direction of the flowing water we’re all strictly regulated. Cleansing and spirituality depended upon perfectionistic attention to the details.¹ David L. McKenna

This doesn’t sound like the Bible, doesn’t sound like being a God-fearer would be very enjoyable, and doesn’t sound like it came from God. Mark tells the readers in verse 4, this hand washing protocol was just the tip of the iceberg,

And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. (Mark 7:4 ESV)

Can you feel the weight of burden, of what it meant to be a God-fearer in the time of Jesus? Imagine having to know all the rules and then keep them. Imagine supper time, you couldn’t do the dishes until you reviewed pages 18-27, about the kind of dish detergents that were needed to wash the frying pan and cookie sheets. Is this what God had in mind when He called a people to be in relationship with Him?

The contention between Jesus and the Pharisees over ritual washings, what constituted clean (see more of that next week) was only symptomatic of a much deeper issue (we see in verse 3).

For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, **holding to the tradition of the**

¹ McKenna, David L., The Communicator’s Commentary Series, Volume 2: Mark, p. 153, © 1982, Word, Inc. Dallas

elders...(Mark 7:3 ESV)

The tradition of the elders was the very issue they most aggressively defended and the very issue Jesus most aggressively attacked.

Let me illustrate the slide into worthless worship,

The Progression of Idolatry (4 sequential slides)

The Law of God (good)

Tradition of The Elders & The Law of God (helpful)

Tradition of The Elders >> The Law of God (idolatrous)

Tradition of the Elders **nullifies** The Law of God (horrific)

The traditions became an idol. Human wisdom nullified God's holy Word. Here's what Jesus said,

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." (Mark 7:8 ESV)

Good-bye Word of God. Hello chicken soup for the soul. Sinful hearts can be led astray and abandon the Word of God. We can degrade a living faith and turn it into idolatry. We are capable of inventing any sort of damning belief system if we reject the Word of God. We see plenty of examples of this in our own time.

How we need the Word of God, the way that leads to life. How we need the Word of God, a lamp to our feet, the truth that sets us free. Without it we are like sheep without a shepherd.

Worship is worthless when it leads us away from the Scriptures.

Here's the second thing,

Worship is worthless when it ...

2. Leads Us Away From Grace

Look at verse 6,

And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ““This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’
⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” (Mark 7:6-8)

Jesus was not fooled by conduct. He exposed their hypocrisy. He confronted their pride and added even more fuel to the fire with this radical pronouncement against them,

““This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, ⁷ in vain do they worship me...
(Mark 7:6-7 ESV)

Imagine you are a Pharisee – feeling very good about yourself, you are a religious rock star and then Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 against you. You look good, and sound good, and fool a lot of people but Jesus calls you a hypocrite and your entire religious system, useless. You are hypocrites – you are merely are playing a part; actors who are pretending to be spiritual while your hearts are far from me. This tradition was completely nullified by Jesus. It meant absolutely nothing to God.

Perhaps we need to stop for a moment and ask ourselves, “What good are the right words that we don’t really mean? What good are outward actions done with wrong attitudes? What good is going through the mechanics of worship with wrong motives? Jesus says, I will tell you, **useless**.

Was the problem that the Pharisees were uncommitted, undedicated to religious observances? Clearly no. Rather, they were über-meticulous, impeccable in their performance of religious duties, unsurpassed in their precision. They saw themselves as religious rock stars, grand slam upper deck religious sluggers. They were disciplined, but in the wrong direction. Rather than moving toward God, they were running away from God. Remember our theme verse for this month,

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.
(Isaiah 66:2b ESV)

Outwardly they looked good – their conduct appeared to honour God, but it didn’t match the inward reality of a heart that trembled before the Word of God. They had ritual without

righteousness. Because they left the Word of God in favour of their own traditions, they were running down the road of a shallow, showy, self-centred ritual. Their worship was based on externals. It was not grounded on God's truth, or about the heart and one's relationship to God and others. They weren't responding to the grace of God, they were trying to earn the grace of God. Remember these words from Exodus 20,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Exodus 20:2 ESV)

Did God redeem His people because of how good they were? Did His salvation come because they'd earned it? NO! It was all about His grace! What enables us to have a relationship with Him? Grace.

But tragically, the Pharisees worship led them away from the grace of God. They were ultra-legalistic, and filled with pride. We see this same boasting in a familiar character, Saul the Pharisee, prior to his conversion. This was his testimony apart from Christ,

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Philippians 4:4b-6 ESV)

Saul, a top-notch, ultra-zealous Pharisee was blameless in regards to religious observance. No grace was needed; no Saviour was required. When you do a great job of rule keeping, you can get pretty puffed up. Right? Just in case we missed it, Jesus tells us exactly where this proud Pharisaical attitude will lead us. Listen,

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14 ESV)

What we see here is the Pharisee saying, "God, you must be impressed with me." What we see here is God saying, "You must be impressed with your sinfulness and my mercy." What you trust in to be made right with God determines whether God gets the glory or you get the glory.

Can God change the heart of a proud Pharisee? After Saul met the Risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, praise God, there is great hope for us all, by the grace of God, he was humbled, radically changed and found his satisfaction in Christ alone. This was his testimony,

⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Philippians 3:7-8 ESV)

All I had, all I did, all I achieved was garbage, compared to knowing Christ. Paul saw this, but tragically these Pharisees did not. They did not tremble before the Word of God. They did not love God nor worship Him from a sincere heart. They did not see their need for the grace of God. Biblical worship is not about outward forms or mere external compliance. The eyes of God, to quote a well-known worship song, “Search much deeper within, through the way things appear...” God looks further and deeper in. He is looking into our heart. He is looking for a heart of worship. The prophet Samuel said,

For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7 ESV)

Here is a test of the authenticity of our worship: What are we trusting in for our salvation? Worship is a response to what God has already done for us in Christ. We were slaves, Christ died for our sin. We don't earn our salvation by what we do. We start with what God has already done and respond in grateful obedience. Worship is a response to the grace of God in Christ, and we boast not in what we've done. Our boast is in Christ alone.

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)

Our boast is that the grace of God has reached for us and pulled us from the raging sea of damning, legalistic, self-righteous blindness. Worship is worthless when it leads us away from grace.

Here's the third thing,

3. Leads Us Away From Mercy (verse 9-13)

Having exposed their hypocrisy Jesus stays on the offensive, charging them with breaking the Law of Moses, specifically, the Fifth Commandment to “honour their father and mother” (Exodus 20:12).

Look again at verses 9-13,

And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— ¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ **thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.** And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:9-13 ESV)

What is Jesus saying here? You have rejected God’s Word in favour of your own tradition (verse 9). Tradition has replaced the holy Word of God, you seek to obey tradition above the Scriptures. As a result you have broken the Fifth Commandment. You pervert God’s Word by allowing your traditions to justify sin.

The command to honour your Father and Mother is nullified by *Corban*. You say, “What is Corban?” It was a way of breaking the law without feeling guilty. Corban means, an offering, vow, or a dedicated gift. Here’s how it works. You could make a vow to God and dedicate your money to Him, as *corban* (an offering), then it was set apart for only spiritual purposes. This would exempt you from responsibility to your parents. But even though it now technically belonged to God, you could still keep it do what you want with it. Now that it was given over to God, one could evade the commandment of God in favour of a higher duty (as determined by the traditions of men). God never intended that the good principle of devoting something to God should be twisted to dishonor fathers and mothers. Here’s how it might play out:

“Hey mom, I heard that your fridge stopped working. I know money’s tight and getting a new fridge is going to be a problem for you. I really want to help you out, but all my money is (corban) devoted to God. I’m sure you can see that my money is going to a higher purpose. I have given it to God. Sorry but I can’t do much for you.”

A son could justify neglecting his parents, on religious (tradition) grounds and still use the money for his own pleasure without violating the law of the Pharisees.

It is any wonder Jesus said,

And he said to them, “You have a **fine way of rejecting the commandment of God** in order to establish your tradition! (Mark 7:9 ESV).

Jesus didn’t stop there; he went on to say,

¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ **thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.** And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:12-13 ESV)

The example of Corban was simply **one expression** of a hard heart that had turned from the merciful heart of God. When someone turns away from the Scriptures and turns away from grace, they will also turn away from mercy that displays the heart of God.

Here is a test of the authenticity of our worship: Does worship lead us to love others with the mercy and love of God? What does James tells us,

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27 ESV)

Are you motivated to be merciful? A heart of worship is a heart of mercy, of compassion for others. It is a heart that loves. It is a heart that seeks to lead people to wholeness in Christ. It is a heart that remembers that we were once separated from God, but the Gospel came to us and Jesus saved us.

Worship is worthless when it leads us away from mercy.

Conclusion:

What about us? What does God say about our worship? What does God see in your heart? Don’t we want God to be pleased with our worship giving Him the glory He deserves?

What good is our worship if we disregard God’s Word? What good is our worship if our hearts are far away? What good is our worship if we boast in our ability and forget the grace of Christ? What good is our worship if we neglect mercy?

What does God want? The essence of worship is honouring God with our heart. Worship is to know God truly and then respond by honouring Him with your whole life. The treasuring of God

then overflows in worship by the praise of our lips and actions of love in serving others for the sake of Christ. How are we doing in our worship? In our hearts? In here? Out there? God is looking into our hearts this morning.

The Jewish leaders were extremely zealous, but their worship was worthless. They abandoned the Scriptures in favour of their traditions. Their worship drove people **out of the scriptures**. God-honouring worship leads us **into the scriptures**: We tremble before the Word of God as our only authority. We will read God's Word, preach God's Word. We will seek, by God's grace to obey God's Word. The services we plan, the prayers we pray, the songs we sing, the sermons we preach - must be rooted in the text. This we seek to do by God's Spirit and for His glory.

The Jewish leaders were extremely rigorous, but their worship was worthless. They rejected grace of God in favour of self-righteousness. Their worship drove people into the **burden of legalism**. God-honouring worship leads us to **glory in the grace in Christ**: our worship is Christ-centred; it remembers the gift of God in sending His Son to live, die and be raised to life for our salvation. Our worship rejoices that we are chosen, adopted and loved. Responding to this we will offer God heart-felt prayers and passionate songs of worship. This we seek to do by God's Spirit and for His glory.

The Jewish leaders were extremely meticulous, but their worship was worthless. They failed to show mercy in favour of greed. Their worship caused people to **neglect God's commands**. God-honouring worship **delights in showing mercy**. It responds to the mercy of God: fuelled by the love of God in us and through the use of our resources, our time, talents & treasures, we look to extend that love and mercy, to sacrificially serve others for their good. This we seek to do by God's Spirit and for His glory.

I am terrified that God would write over my life, your lives or our services, **vain, worthless**. Over First Baptist Church (RCC) worship: **vain, worthless**, our singing, our preaching, our praying, all for nothing. "This people honours me with their lips but their heart is far from me." But may God continue to teach us how to worship at FBC / RCC. O to grace that God might write over my life, your lives and over our services, "**pleasing, honouring worship from your lips and lives and heart**. Amen and amen!

What matters is a humble heart that loves God's Word, loves His Son and loves others. This is worship that honours God and this is the Word of the Lord.

Prayer

Our Father, we confess the many, many times we have performed before you, have done the outward things with the inward heart far removed. We too have been guilty, like the people Isaiah spoke of: "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Our words are right, but our actions are wrong and we have been guilty of exalting our traditions above Your Word. But we thank you, Lord, for your forgiveness. Thank you that you understand our frame. You know us, Lord, and you have already made provision for our forgiveness and cleansing. And now we would worship you in spirit and in truth -- the great God of glory, who knows how to teach his people how to worship him. We thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.