

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Jesus & Tradition

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Series: Unknown
Mark 7:1-23

BIG IDEA – THE POINT OF TRADITION IS TO TRANSFER TRUTH

What a real and raw and honest story and video. C.S. Lewis (he wrote a lot of books, a Christian guy) said that God whispers to us in our pleasures (we often don't hear him), that he speaks to us every day, but he often uses a megaphone in our pain. What you just heard there is a story of walking with God through pains and problems and pressures, which are going to happen to all of us.

What we say here is all you have to do is live long enough and love enough people, and eventually, what comes into your life is a storm. We talked about that the last few weeks. We said there are financial storms. "I lost my job. Inflation is killing me. I went bankrupt." There are relational storms. "I found out something about my spouse. There has been betrayal. There has been distrust. There has been divorce."

There are physical storms. You heard that. "Illness and injury came to my door or the door of somebody I love." There are mental and emotional storms. There's anxiety and depression. We want to say a couple of things really quickly. I think I'd be remiss not to say this. When you see someone in a storm, it's never a sin to be in a storm, and there's never any shame in being in a storm, no matter how you got in there. It's like, "I'm in a storm."

So, what we want to do here is if right now you're in the midst of a storm... Maybe not *that* storm. Maybe it's not a physical storm. It's some other type of storm. We just want to communicate we love you, and we want to pray for you. So listen. If you're going through a storm, would you just stand right now? We want to pray for you. Just stand up wherever you are. Thank you.

We don't know what storm you're going through. We want to communicate that what we do in prayer is pray *with* people and *for* people. So, we're going to do that

together. We're going to pray as a church. In a minute, when I pray, you want to extend your hands.

We're going to pray for multiple things for God to do, because I don't know what you're going through exactly in your life. We're going to transfer the burden to God in prayer. Christianity is a supernatural faith. We believe that when man works, man works, but when man prays, God works. So, let's pray together. Pray with me.

Lord, I thank you for the men and women in here. We see that video, and it's just a reminder that life is hard. Like we just said, Lord, as we love people and as we live longer, suffering comes into our lives. Some people in this room... Like the disciples last week in the boat, it's the fourth watch of the night, and they have been in this storm for months or years.

That's the hard thing about a storm. We don't often know when it's going to pass and how it's going to pass, Lord. So, Jesus, just like you were with the disciples, we pray you'd be with them in the storm. We pray you would bring a comfort. The apostle Paul talks about, in times of difficulty, there being both comfort and peace, and he says there's a peace that transcends all understanding.

It doesn't make sense to the world based on the circumstances. We pray that for them. We pray for them to have the supernatural strength to do what you said in this area. Lord, if this is the right call, we pray for them to grieve. It's not a sin to grieve. It's not wrong to grieve. Christians grieve. The Bible says that we grieve, but we don't grieve as those who have no hope.

Because of the gospel, because of the Holy Spirit, because of the Word of God, we continue to believe. Every Christian is an eternal optimist. We believe the future is bright. We want to come alongside these people right now, and we pray you would bring the help and the hope and the healing of Jesus to them. We pray this in his name, amen.

Well, guys, welcome to Two Cities Church. By the way, look around the room. I want you to see how crowded it is in here. I want you to see how crowded it is in the lobby, and I want you to remember that we have a Saturday night service. I know. Other people should go to Saturday nights. We'd love to have you. I know it's college football season and all that, but it is unbelievably crowded in here. If we don't have a seat for someone, we don't have a place for someone. If we don't have a place for someone, we can't invest in them.

Type or turn to Mark, chapter 7. We've been following Jesus. That's what the Christian life is about. That's what we're doing in the gospel of Mark. If you're new...your friend invited you, you're a seeker, you're a skeptic, you're checking out

Christianity...welcome. One of the things you might find interesting about Christianity is that the center of Christianity is not a place or practices or principles, but it's a person. It's Jesus.

He's the very center of the gospel of Mark. When we're looking through Mark, it's all about Jesus. That's what we could have called this series: "It's All About Jesus." That's what it is. So, he's walking through the gospel. There are only two passages in all of Mark that don't deal directly with watching Jesus. Every other passage, he's healing and teaching and helping and discipling and preaching.

Then we have two passages where Jesus isn't mentioned. They're about John the Baptist, and he's talking about Jesus, so those also count. The whole book is basically all about Jesus. One of the interesting things about Jesus is, as we're watching him teach and preach and heal... That's a good way to think about his ministry. He had a teaching ministry for the mind. He had a preaching ministry for the soul. He had a healing ministry for the body.

As he has this ministry, he continues to be more controversial and more confusing to everybody. There's really a good way to think about this. There are kind of three groups of people that start to come around Jesus. First, there are the *followers*. They're great. They're spiritually dull, and they have their ups and downs, and they have their doubts, but these are the disciples. There are not many of them.

When you look at the followers of Jesus, one time we're told there are 12. Another time we're told there are 70 or 72. Another time we're told there are 120. That's it. Then he has a lot of *fans*. Those are the crowds. They show up. They like a free meal, a Hebrew Lunchable. Remember that? They like free healthcare. They like to be entertained. They like interesting teaching. They like a good TED Talk. So *they* show up.

Then there are the *foes*. Followers, fans, and foes. Who are the foes? The religious people of the day. I just have to keep saying it. The people that we thought, "Oh man, they're going to love Jesus" don't love Jesus. The people we think are going to get Jesus don't get Jesus. The ministers, the pastors, the spiritual leaders of that day are the people who are most confused by and angry at Jesus.

So, let's look at it. Verse 1. We'll check it out. I want you to see the foes show back up. Here's what it says. "**Now when the Pharisees...**" We'll talk about them in a second. "**...gathered to him, with some of the scribes...**" They like to hang out together. "**...who had come from Jerusalem...**" They're in Capernaum, and they come from Jerusalem. Guys, that's 90 or 100 miles. I know; for you that's an hour-and-a-half, maybe an hour-and-45-minute drive. For them, this was a multiple-day journey.

So, these two groups of people travel a long way to see Jesus. Now, we have to talk about the Pharisees and the scribes. Do you remember the third category that's missing, the third group of people? They are always with the scribes and Pharisees, but they're kind of separate. The Sadducees. This is interesting to know. (I'm going somewhere with this, and this is going to be helpful for the rest of the sermon.)

What happens in religion and politics (there are some similarities) is that, across time (this happens everywhere), you eventually get a conservative group and a liberal group. Across time, it's the Republicans and the Democrats. If you go to the Jews... Have you ever seen an Orthodox Jew? That would be the conservative arm of Judaism.

Whenever I'm at a large international airport, I like to sneak over to the flights that are heading to Tel Aviv and look at all of the Orthodox Jews. I know it's a little weird, but that's what I do. When I was at Duke, I constantly... I felt like 30 or 40 percent of Duke University is Jewish, and I met... They call themselves *Reformed Jews*. It's like, "You're not wearing the hat, and you don't have the beard, and you don't have the curls. What's going on?"

"Oh! We're going to celebrate Yom Kippur."

"You are? How are you going to celebrate Yom Kippur?"

"I'm going to get drunk with my family."

Hmm. I don't think that's biblical. I don't think that's the purpose of Yom Kippur. Do you know there are conservative Muslims and liberal Muslims? Do you know that the Methodist Church, for the last decade or two, has been wrestling this out? The Methodist denomination is an international denomination. Most denominations, like the PCA (Presbyterian Church of America), are American denominations.

What happened in the Methodist Church is all of the American Methodists have gone theologically liberal, and all of the international Methodists, who live in Africa, are like, "No, no. We believe in the Bible. We believe in heaven and hell. We believe in angels and demons. We believe all sex out of heterosexual marriage is sinful." That denomination is breaking and bending because you have theological liberals and theological conservatives.

What I want you to see today is, back then, there were the theological conservatives, the Pharisees and the scribes. Think about that. The scribes were the Xerox machines of that day. That's what they were. You have to be a pretty serious person to care that much about the Bible to get jot and tittle and word right. They were very serious about the Word of God.

Then you had the Sadducees. I've told you before they were the theological liberals. They didn't believe in heaven and hell. They didn't believe in angels and demons. They didn't believe in a resurrection of the dead. That's why they were "sad-you-see." There you go. Now you know. You're like, "I still don't get it, Kyle." Let me explain it *this* way: they would have a Coexist sticker and a rainbow flag on the back of their camel. You go, "I get it." Yep, that's them. So, that's who they are.

What I want you to know is, in our church (welcome if you don't know this), we are a theologically conservative church. In other words, we believe in heaven and hell. We believe the Bible is God's Word. We believe there's a final judgment. We believe in sin and grace. We believe in the need for personal repentance. We believe in a final judgment. We want to see people personally come to faith in Christ, and we think our job is not to edit the Bible but to change our hearts and minds and lives underneath the Bible. So, we're a theologically conservative church.

Why am I telling you all this? Because when we read about the Pharisees and scribes, you have to realize... If you've been in our church for any amount of time or been in a team, tribe, or tradition like ours, the temptation for you across time is to become a Pharisee or a scribe. The scribes started off good. Does anyone know the first scribe in the Bible? Ezra. Even some of you who don't know your Bible that much are like, "I named my kid Ezra." Yeah, Ezra was a good guy. Ezra was the first scribe.

What happens with a lot of religious people is they have mission creep. They have mission drift. They start off good. Let me tell you how you can become a Pharisee...two ways at least. You become a Pharisee when your knowledge of the Bible increases and increases and increases (that's not a bad thing; that's what we want to have happen) and you start to have a knowledge-based approach only or primarily to Christianity, not an obedience-based approach.

The second way you become a Pharisee, oftentimes (this is how *they* did), is your life starts to get cleaned up, and you start to feel pretty good about yourself. Say someone comes to faith in Christ at Wake Forest University as a freshman. It's like, "All right. Stop getting drunk. Okay. Don't say these four-letter words. Okay. Get rid of the hookup/shack-up/breakup culture. Stop lying to my parents about everything. Okay, great."

You get rid of the four or five or six big sins in your life, and then what most of us do the rest of our Christian lives is we learn how to trade in big sins for little sins that are easier to hide. That's Pharisaism. You can become a Pharisee by caring way too much about secondary and tertiary issues and hobbyhorses and pet projects and strange doctrines.

You wake up one day, and you're like, "I don't love anyone anymore. I don't love God. I don't feel anything on the inside, though I'm doing everything right on the outside." So, that's our danger. What I want you to see today (because Jesus is going to show us how to deal with this) is a conflict with the Pharisees.

Look at verse 2. So, they come, and it says this: "...**they** [the Pharisees] **saw that some of his** [Jesus'] **disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.**" By the way, Mark is going to put parentheses here and explain this to us because Mark is writing to a Gentile Greek audience, not a Jewish audience, so he explains the Jewish traditions.

"(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition...)" That's going to be an important word. **"...of the elders..."** So, they show up, and it says some of Jesus' disciples weren't washing their hands. I know what you're thinking. Some of you go, "What's the big deal? I never wash my hands."

Some of you... Someone else shows up in a public restroom, and you're like, "Oh no. I have to fake it. I have to act like I'm washing my hands for a second." (Pay attention to who's laughing.) This actually had nothing to do with health. It had nothing to do with hygiene. They didn't understand germ theory back then. That is not what this is about.

By the way, I want you to notice it says some of Jesus' disciples washed their hands and some didn't. I'll get into what this is in a second. We don't know. Was it 2-10? Was it 6-6? Was it 7-5? Was it 8-4? Who knows? Some of the disciples, because it was tradition... Jesus said, "Hey, if this means something to you, do it. If this doesn't mean something to you, don't do it."

So, it doesn't say none of his disciples did. It didn't say all of his disciples did it. Some of them didn't. Now, here's what's happening here. They had this idea back then of the ceremonial law. Let me explain this. Sorry. Put your thinking cap on with me. It's going to be a little bit more of a technical sermon than normal.

Back then, God's law was broken into three areas. There was the *ceremonial law*, the *civil law*, and the *moral law*. This helps understand the Old Testament. Every once in a while, you'll have someone go, "Really? You believe the Bible? Why do you eat bacon?" You're like, "Because it's good, and because I'm allowed to." I'll tell you why in a second.

There was the *moral law*. The moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments and applicable for every person in every place for all of time. That's the moral law. It's a direct reflection of God's character. Jesus re-teaches the moral law, primarily

through the Sermon on the Mount and in other places. Paul re-teaches the moral law. In fact, mostly what Jesus does is deepen, develop, expand, and enhance all of the teachings of the moral law.

Then there is the *civil law*. The civil law was what Israel was under while they were under a king, led directly by God, called a *theocracy*, for a certain period of time in the Middle East. The people of Israel were under a theocracy, so they were under the civil law. There was basically no difference between the church and the state.

Then there's the *ceremonial law*. That had to do with what we're talking about today...sacrifices, clothing, what you ate, how you washed. Part of the ceremonial law told just the priests... It was in the law. Just the priests. "Hey, you need to wash your hands before you go into the tabernacle to sacrifice."

They had an extensive thing. They would actually go like *this*, and then someone else would pour water on them, and then they would go like *this*, and someone else would pour water, and then they would go like *this*, and someone else would pour water. It was kind of an extensive cleaning ritual.

Part of this was because... Well, they had this idea back then (we'll talk about this a little bit as we go on) that there were certain things that could defile you. Now, Jesus is going to move it from the external to the internal, but they thought if you touched somebody who died or an animal that died, you could become unclean. If you had some kind of disorder or discharge, you could be unclean.

They even said if you had diarrhea you could be unclean. Some of you go, "I'm unclean." There were multiple things that could make you unclean. By the way, let me tell you this. What happened is a command that was given to the priests ended up being taken by the Pharisees and scribes, and they applied it to everybody everywhere for everything. This is part of what happens.

I want you to see the issue here, by the way, is tradition. Do you see that in verse 3? I want to read it one more time. **"(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders...)"** By the way, *tradition* is a key word we're going to focus on. It's used multiple times here.

The tradition of the elders, by the way, is what we call today the *Mishnah*. (I told you it's a little more technical today.) The Mishnah was a bunch of conservative rabbis who wrote a commentary on the Old Testament because they were worried about Israel going liberal theologically.

So, it would be like if your favorite, I don't know...John Piper, Tim Keller, David Platt, or whoever you listen to...if they all got together and said, "Let's write a commentary on the whole Bible." What happened was it wasn't just a commentary on the Bible; it was also how to live it all out and how to apply it. It became called the *tradition of the elders*.

Now, here's what was supposed to happen. The tradition of the elders, which is called the *oral tradition*, was always supposed to be underneath the written command. So, there's the written command, and underneath that, what serves it, supports it, and submits to it is the oral tradition. What happened was it went like *this*, and then it went like *this*.

Watch what Jesus says in verse 4. **"...and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other..."** Here's that word again. **"...traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches."**

Okay. We need to talk about tradition for a while. This is going to be an interesting conversation for us to have together. If I ask you, "Is tradition a good thing or is tradition a bad thing?" the answer is "It just depends." So, what is tradition? Let me talk about it *this* way. Tradition is a good thing in that it lets you know what to expect and how to act.

Every home has traditions. If every night you ate in a different part of the house, it would be anxiety causing. "Tonight we're eating on the floor." "Why?" Traditions are part of what regulate your emotions. You're like, "Okay. I know how to act. I know what to expect."

This is why, when you travel internationally, one of the things that exhausts you, outside of time change, is you get some place and realize they have all of these different traditions. It's psychologically and emotionally overwhelming to you. "I don't know when to eat. I don't know how to eat. I don't know how to dress. I don't know how to act. I don't know how to talk." It's because you're in a totally different culture with totally different traditions.

Here's the point of tradition. This is one of the most important things I'm going to say today for us to understand. Every church has traditions. Every family has traditions. The point and purpose of tradition is to transfer truth. That's it. That's the whole point. The problem with tradition is when you have the tradition but have lost the truth.

I don't know if you've ever heard of the story of that young couple that got married. The wife is excited about cooking a Christmas ham, so she says to the husband, "I'm

going to cook a Christmas ham," and he says, "That's great." So she starts cooking a Christmas ham. Right before she puts it in the pot to put it in the oven, she cuts off both sides of the ham. The husband says, "What are you doing?" He's thinking, "My mom never cut off both sides of the ham."

He says, "Is that a cooking strategy?" She says, "No. This is just what my mom always did." He says, "That's interesting. Do you mind if I call your mom?" She says, "No. Call my mom." He calls her mom. "Hey, it's our first Christmas, and it's interesting. Your daughter cut off both sides of the ham. She said she got that from you. Why do you do that?" She says, "Oh, that's what my mom always did."

He says, "Can I call Grandma? I just have to get to the bottom of this." He calls Grandma up. "Grandma, hey, we're celebrating our first Christmas. It's really exciting. My wife is making your famous ham dish. She's cutting both sides off of the ham right before she puts it in the pot. I heard that her mom did that because *you* did that. Why did you do that?" She goes, "Because the pot was too small."

I just explained tradition to you. Isn't that such a great story? So many times, there was a reason we did things, and we forgot it. This is the difference between tradition and traditionalism. If you want to ruin something, add an *ism* to the end of it. Tradition, it has been famously said, is the living faith of the dead, and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.

Here's what tradition says. Think about it *this* way. (I know this is a lot of stuff today.) Tradition can either be a wise king or a tyrannical ruler. So, here's what tradition normally says: "People have been thinking about this for a long time, and our ancestors were not stupid. They probably thought about the Christian faith and how to do it and how to practice it a lot more seriously than any of us, and by the way, this is how they've passed it on to us." It's a wise king.

Basically, the wise king says, "This is the best way to do this we think," but the tyrannical ruler says, "This is the only way to do things." Traditionalism kills churches. They say the famous last words of a person are, "Hold my beer. This will only take a second." They say the famous last words of churches are, "This is how we've always done it." So, tradition is there, but it must be serving truth.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Why do churches have steeples? We've forgotten these things. We don't even do these things anymore. Churches had steeples because they used to be the tallest buildings in town. Part of what a steeple does is it makes you look up to heaven, and part of what churches wanted to communicate...

Often, you'd build the church as the tallest building in town because, usually, as a general rule, whatever is the tallest building in town is what that city worships. Some of you go, "That's why in Charlotte all of the big buildings are the financial headquarters. I get it."

People say, "Okay. Why were there stained glass windows? I don't get it. Why did they do that?" Because most people were illiterate. That's why they were there: because they didn't have screens. They were trying to communicate stories to a mostly illiterate people.

Why did ministers wear black robes? This is a perfect example of what has happened with tradition and truth, how they became untied. After the Protestant Reformation, ministers began to wear black robes and black linens to basically communicate to people, "I'm just like you. I'm a sinner. I dress in black. I'm underneath the judgment of God apart from the grace of God. I'm more like you than not like you."

Now what happens when you show up and see some minister in a black dress? They feel more distant from you, usually, in our culture today. This is why we prefer the polo and the pants. This is the modern, updated version of saying, "I'm just like you." By the way, that's another thing. Two things we always have to do with tradition is we always have to *explain* them, and we always have to *update* them. That's the way you get out of traditionalism.

Donovan just did this. "Hey, guys. This is why we sang today. Let me just tell you right now why we're doing what we're doing." Then we always update them. "Hey, that tradition is no longer holding the truth like we thought it was in this new generation, so we need to hold to the same truth, and we need to cover it or support it with a new tradition." I want you to see this. Here's what happens. Go to verse 5.

"And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition...' There's that word again. "...of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' And [Jesus] said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.'"

Jesus looks at them and says, "Hey, guys. You know that book of Isaiah you love to study and that you love to read and that you had to memorize and that you like to teach out of? Remember that whole part where he talked to some people about being hypocrites? He's talking about you." Yikes.

Hypocrite, by the way, is Jesus' favorite phrase to use for religious people. He uses it, I believe, 26 times in the Gospels, and 23 or 24 of those times he uses it specifically for the scribes or the Pharisees or the Sadducees. I want to talk about being a hypocrite for a second, because what we're getting into now are the three dangers of traditionalism.

01 DANGER ONE OF TRADITION: HYPOCRISY

The first danger of traditionalism, or tradition and forgetting the truth behind it, is *hypocrisy*. When you think about that for a second it makes sense. Tradition is about the external. That's what it's about. Tradition is about the acting out of it. It's not about the inside. So, what can happen with tradition is you can learn all of the traditions and not be changed on the inside. We try to talk about this all the time.

By 7 or 8 years old, you can learn how to say you're praying for things when you're not. By 10 years old, you know the right answer Mom and Dad want to hear about the Bible, about your life. By the time you're 15, you can talk about struggling with sin when you're giving in to sin. We can learn all of the right words.

Let me explain what hypocrisy is. The younger generation tends to think hypocrisy is when I do something I don't feel like doing. No, that's called being an adult. It's like, "Well, I don't feel like reading my Bible, but I'm going to read it. I feel so hypocritical." No, that's called being mature. "I don't feel like going to church, but I'm going to go anyway." That's not being a hypocrite; that's called being a grown-up.

Hypocrisy is when you appear to be something on the outside and you're something different on the inside. The literal word for it in the Greek is one who wears a mask. No, not a COVID-19 mask, a different mask, a literal acting mask. Back then there were shows, and they had a few actors, and the actors would wear different masks. It would be like three people doing a whole show.

They'd come out as one person with a mask, and then another person with a mask. The whole point is you don't get to see the real person. We have to talk about hypocrisy, because, first, hypocrisy is a big theme Jesus teaches. Secondly, it's a big accusation that the world has against the church. Have you noticed that? Or maybe people who have been in the church in the past. "The church is just a bunch of hypocrites."

You can understand why people would think that. It depends on what they're reading and what news station they're watching and what social media they're following. I mean, there are a lot of Christians in the world. I think most Christians and, for the most part, who I've met, most pastors are trying to live godly lives. They're trying to

be consistent. They're trying to repent of known sin. They're trying to live lives of integrity.

Every once in a while, somebody blows up or burns out. We talked about that. That makes the news, and then everybody is remembering the worst thing that person ever did, and a lot of non-Christians are rejoicing, and they're fallen. Anyway, when someone calls the church hypocrites, I think the best response is to say, "I know, we're trying." We're trying to be humble hypocrites.

We're trying to talk a lot about our weaknesses so that it's obvious we know what they are. We're trying to talk a lot about our sin so that's super obvious. We're trying to talk about all of the places where there's a gospel gap in between what God says and how I'm acting and how I'm embarrassed by that. We talk a lot with our kids about that so our kids know Mom and Dad are... It's not about perfection, but it's about the direction of my life.

But there has been a lot of hypocrisy in the church. Some of the hypocrisy (not all of it) has been the church holding to its traditions and not God's truth. The most classic example of this in the history of our nation would be slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow laws. There was a season where the church... Not every church. There were good churches. Not every Christian. There were good Christians. Not every pastor. There were good pastors.

But where a lot of people were saying, "Hold on a second. Black people can sit in the church." "Nope. That's not how it has been." Or "No, black people have to sit in the balcony." Where is the "Black people have to sit in the balcony" verse? "This is how we've always done it." A tradition that had no truth connected to it... Now the world looks at us and says, "Hypocrisy."

Jesus makes hypocrisy very personal. Let me show you what he does. Verse 6: ***"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*** This is so simple. You probably get this, but this was so profound when Jesus said it. There's a difference between your lips and your life. There's a difference between your heart and your hands.

What he's telling us is that you can do something externally and feel something completely different internally. The best way to think about this is in our church... I think Two Cities is a great church, but in our church... Or let's even make it more personal for you. In your Community Group or, to make it more personal, in your family, two people could show up and do the exact same thing from two completely different hearts.

Say a married couple shows up at Two Cities. They're a great couple, and they come to church. Let's say they're really godly, and they go to Saturday night service. (Something to pray about it.) So, husband and wife show up to church. Now, we don't know why they came. Maybe they don't know why each other came.

Why did they come? Maybe one came because "It's what we've always done. We grew up in Winston, and it kind of feels weird not to go to church." Then the other person comes because they genuinely love God and want to worship the Lord, and they love to be with God's people, and they're hoping to be edified and equipped and strengthened in their faith. I can't see by you walking through the door and sitting in the seat which one you are. That's what Jesus is saying.

He's saying two people can read their Bibles for completely different reasons. For one it can be a religious exercise. It could be to find an insight. It could be to make themselves feel good. It could be a checklist. Then the other person could read their Bible because they're reading the Word of God because they want to know the God of the Word.

Two people can give the exact same amount of money, percentagewise, and one gives because they love the tax deduction or they love to watch themselves be a generous person, and the other person can give because, genuinely, they see "God is the owner of everything, and I want to give God my first and my best. I'm genuinely excited about the forward advancement of the kingdom of God, and I have to invest in this." You cannot see the difference on the outside.

Jesus is saying two people could refrain from sin for different reasons. People refrain from sin for all types of reasons. They don't want to get caught. They don't want to get fired. They don't want to be embarrassed. Well, okay. That's one reason to refrain from sin. Another reason to refrain from sin is because I genuinely love God, and I realize that when I sin it hinders my relationship with God, and I view sin not as an escape *to* pleasure but as an escape *from* pleasure. You can't tell.

02 DANGER TWO OF TRADITION: LEGALISM (HOW WE VIEW AND USE GOD'S WORD

So, Jesus warns us, first, of the danger of hypocrisy. The second danger is *legalism*. Look with me at verse 9. "***And [Jesus] said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!'***" There it is again: the written commands versus the oral tradition.

I don't have time to get into this. If you look earlier, he actually says, first, you teach your own thoughts. He says, secondly, you leave God's command. Now we've gotten to the third kind of slippery slope: you reject. When I talk about legalism, it's kind of a

technical thing. There are many different types of legalism that theologians have talked about. The three main are...

The first type of legalism is I try to earn my way to God. That's not what this is talking about. That's what Paul is talking about in the book of Galatians. The other is I add to God's Word a bunch of things it doesn't say. That's what Jesus was talking about a little bit earlier. That's not what *this* is talking about.

He's saying that this is actually a third type of legalism. It's where you reject God's Word and replace it with your words instead. What's interesting is everybody, because I believe we were created to be commanded... That's like the first thing that happens to us. Adam and Eve are in the garden. They wake up. God is like, "Hello. Be fruitful and multiply. Don't eat from this tree." It's like, "Oh, I was created to be commanded."

So, when I reject God's Word... This is what the world does. When the world rejects God's Word, it replaces it. What does it replace it with? Well, normally, today, it usually replaces it with whatever society says. So, public opinion on every moral issue is always changing, and every career politician is trying to re-figure out what their new platform is going to be because of what has happened in the culture.

We've rejected God's command, but we always have replaced it with something else, so it's with societal and cultural norms. For some people it's just the self. "I just could never believe in a God who..." It's like, "Who made you the final arbiter? Something doesn't exist or isn't right because you can't believe it?" That's what has happened. We've taken our feelings and our emotions and our experiences... We've rejected God's Word and replaced it.

In the church, we're more sophisticated than that. We wouldn't want to do that. We wouldn't want to outright reject God's Word. What we tend to do in the church is look to somebody else or somewhere else to tell us what we're doing is okay. "Is there a podcast that will tell me it's okay? Is there a YouTube channel that will tell me it's okay? Is there a book that will tell me it's okay? Is there a church that will tell me it's okay?" It's 2022, so the answer is "Yes." There will be a book. There will be something that will tell you it's okay.

I want you to look at what they did here. I want you to see this. This is very interesting. Look with me at verse 10. "***For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'...***" That's the written Scriptures. That's the written command of God. "***...and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say...***" So, here's the oral tradition.

"If a man tells his father or his mother, 'Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban...'" Again, Mark is going to explain this. ***"...(that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void [irrelevant] the word of God by your tradition..."*** There's that word again. ***"...that you have handed down. And many such things you do."***

Let me explain this. The Bible says, "Honor your parents," which is different than "Obey your parents." When you're under your parents' authority, you obey them. When you're in their house, when you're under their home, when they're paying for everything, the language in the Bible is that of obedience...as long as they're telling you not to sin.

It's like, "I may not understand everything. I may not agree with everything, but my job, when I'm under the home of my parents, is to obey them." Then, eventually, you move out, and you get a job, and you start your own family or buy your own house and have your own job, and you don't continue to, from a distance, try to obey your parents, but you always honor them. We talked about that a couple of weeks ago. Honor goes up; blessing comes down.

Honoring your parents is primarily three ways: how you talk to them (some of you go, "Okay, I need to work on that"), how you talk about them (that's how you talk about them to other people), and then it's how you take care of them when they get old, which we've completely forgotten as a society and as a culture. The Jews never forgot this. To this day, they say the Jewish people are the absolute best at taking care of their elderly. It's in the collective conscience.

The way it works is that they took care of you when you were young, and you will take care of them when they get old. Now, we're not putting down traditions and rules on exactly how this has to happen, but what happened here is they found a way around taking care of their parents.

I was at a nursing home not that long ago, talking to some people there, and found out some sad stories of some people who were tricked by their kids into signing over everything to their kids, and then they were put in a nursing home while their kids spent their inheritance early.

We're not saying it's a sin to put someone in a nursing home. We're saying it is a sin to put your parents in a nursing home in a way that dishonors them. A couple of people were telling me no one ever visits them. They just left them there to die for the last 15 years.

They did something very sophisticated. They had corban. Have you ever heard of corban? I had never heard of it. We don't talk about it today. Corban was this way to

say, "Okay. My cryptocurrency, my stocks, my property, my possessions, my car, my 401(k), my Roth IRA, and all of it, is corban." You go, "What's corban?" It was this oral tradition where they said, "I devote it to God." It sounds very spiritual.

Basically, you devoted it to God, and then the church, or the synagogue, got it when you died. It was estate planning, but it was a very sophisticated type of estate planning, because there was a loophole in it. The loophole was, "Okay, I devote it to God so no one else can have it, and I can do whatever I want with it until I die. If I want to spend it on me, it's fine, but when I die, it's devoted to God."

I think we learn two things here. I think we learn that true religion shows up in our finances. That's what this was. This was property, possessions, money, finances. We don't have corban, but everybody kind of has their own little traditions of why they're not as generous as they could be. "I can't be generous until we get out of debt." What do you mean? School debt? Car debt? Mortgage debt? If we're talking mortgage, it's going to be a long time.

"I can't give until I make *X* amount of money." "I can't give until I save this much each month." We have our own rules. I'm not saying we tell everybody else. We tell ourselves, partly because we're moral, so we have to even justify our own behavior to ourselves.

Here's the second thing I think is a bigger deal. The Pharisees and the scribes were looking for a loophole instead of grace. How about *your* life? Where are you looking for a loophole instead of God's grace? I mean, it could be a sin you need to repent of. It could be an area you need to be generous in. It could be a relationship you need to reconcile and forgive.

How many times are we looking for a way around it, a loophole, instead of grace to go through it? We're just looking. "There has to be a verse here that says it's okay to drink too much. There has to be a category or a story so I don't feel bad about not being generous. On this command about sexual sin, there has to be an asterisk, and when I turn to the back of the Bible there's a picture of me that says I'm the exception." It sounds silly when we say it like that.

Instead... "God, you know what? It's going to be very hard. I'm not looking for a loophole. I'm looking for grace. I'm looking for a way to confess this. I'm looking for a way to get help. I'm looking for a way out with you helping me. I'm looking for the ability to be generous. I'm not trying to tell myself that I don't need to forgive this person; I'm trying to find the grace to forgive this person." That's different.

03 DANGER THREE OF TRADITION: STAYING DIRTY (HEART)

That leads to the third danger of traditionalism. The first danger of traditionalism is hypocrisy because it's about the external, not the internal. The second danger is legalism because it's about replacing God's Word with what you think and others have said. Thirdly, it's about never really getting changed on the inside. Let me show you. Here's what it says in verse 14:

"And he 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. 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.)"

Jesus ends by talking about this interesting idea. I don't know where you'll hear this outside of church. He talks to us about a theology of defilement. When was the last time you thought about *that*? He talks to us about a theology of purity. It's the same thing. He's talking to us about a theology of cleanliness, spiritually, morally, which sounds foreign to us.

The first thing he says is, "Hey, guys..." It sounds so simple, and, again, we read it, and he says something this simple: "Hey, guys, what you eat can't make you unclean." He gives kind of a general... He basically goes "In your mouth and through your stomach and out the other end." That's what he basically says. His whole point is it doesn't touch your heart.

Here's what's interesting. I think it was Don Carson who said the more a society becomes morally bankrupt, the more it becomes obsessed with what it eats. We're not sure what the connection is. We read this, and we go, "Oh, how silly! They thought if they ate certain things, they would be defiled."

Some of you are like, "I can't eat non-GMO! My eggs need to be conflict-free, cage-free, pasture-raised," whatever all this stuff means. You go to the store. "Honey, sorry. They have four labels. They don't have the fifth. We can't get these." Look. I grew up on Pop-Tarts and Toaster Strudels, and I turned out just fine, I think.

We are obsessed with what we eat today, which tells us something about... I don't know. I don't have it fully figured out. It tells us something about our moral condition when a society becomes overly obsessed with what it eats. I think the average

American would be more ashamed to be caught with a bag of McDonald's than to be caught looking at pornography.

So, Jesus is telling us there's nothing that goes inside of us that can defile us. It could be healthy or not healthy for you. It could affect your body, but he's saying if you eat trans fats you'll be fine spiritually. He's saying it's what's inside of us that defiles us. Now this is very interesting. Jonathan Haidt, professor at NYU, a secular Jew, very well educated, not a Christian... He has written several books.

The Coddling of the American Mind is his most recent *New York Times* best seller. He wrote a book called *The Righteous Mind*. It's very interesting. Try to follow this for a minute. He writes about morality in the West. Really, he writes about morality in the world, but he focuses on morality in the West. He said there are five components to morality, three of which Americans have forgotten.

He says the first component of morality that Americans still get is *harm*. You've heard that. "I shouldn't hurt you, and you shouldn't hurt me, and if it doesn't hurt you and it doesn't hurt me, then it's okay." We get harm. Maybe we're obsessed with harm. Maybe we think things are harmful that aren't harmful. Who knows? But harm is a big category.

The second big category is *fairness* or *reciprocity*. "I should treat you how I'd want to be treated (it's the Golden Rule), and you should treat me how you'd want to be treated, and if you do something for me, I should do something back for you," and maybe some version of "Eye for eye." We get that.

What are the other three we've forgotten? The other three are *authority*, *loyalty*, and *purity*. Authority is, as a general rule, I should obey the person in charge, and it is wrong to go against authority. We've lost that in the West. There's a whole category of morality that flows from the morality of authority which we've lost.

He said the other category is loyalty. Loyalty is "I should really honor my family, and it matters where I came from. I need to be a part of a community." In our transient way, we've completely lost that. He said the final fifth one we've lost the most, of the three we don't care about anymore, and it's purity. He did an interesting study. Sorry, this will be a little bit crude, but this is what they did.

He said they went around and asked a bunch of very secular people this question about purity: "If a sister and a brother are on vacation together, they're adults, they're not married to anyone else, they're over 18 years old, and they decide on vacation to have a sexual relationship, is that okay? They're not married to anyone else. They didn't cheat on anyone else. It was completely mutual. They just did it a couple of times. It's over. Is it okay?" He said most people said, "Yes." You have to

understand the modern mind has no category outside of "Did it hurt someone and was it mutually reciprocal?"

Jesus talks about a theology of defilement located in the heart. Look at verse 20. ***"And he said, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart...'"*** That's the seat, sum, and center of you. ***"...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."*** So, Jesus talks about the heart. He talks pretty directly about the heart.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was in the gulags during the Soviet Union. He experienced a lot of terrible things under Stalin. He wrote while he was in the gulags *The Gulag Archipelago* and many other things. One of the things he said was what he noticed by dealing with all different types of people is that good and evil runs right down the center of every human heart, and every day it's a choice of whether or not I'm going to do something good or something evil.

Here's what this means. Let me just tell you practically. I don't know how else to say this. I want to say this winsomely but directly. Here's what Jesus is saying: you're not a victim. We believe in victims. Yes, there are victims. We listen to victims. We care for victims.

Most people in America have a victim mentality. A victim mentality is "It happened to me, and I couldn't help it." Here's another way to say it. People think the problem is on the outside. "It's my boss. That's the problem in my life right now. I'm a victim."

"It's my spouse. He's not very attractive."

"It's my wife. She's not very sexually available. That's the problem."

"It's my job. It's not very satisfying."

Or if you're a college student, you start thinking the problems are even bigger. "It's capitalism." Really? "It's the environment and climate change." Really? That's the big problem? "It's our democratic republic. *That's* the problem." No. Jesus tells us "Look inside if you want to see the problem."

The problem is not that you were bullied in fourth grade. The problem is not that your dad didn't hug you. Guess what. There are a lot of people who were bullied in fourth grade and didn't turn out like you. We choose how we respond. The heart is not neutral. You need to take responsibility for your heart and the actions it does.

It says there are four categories. First of all, there are *evil thoughts*. Evil is always creative. That's the definition of evil. When someone does something evil against you, what will hurt most is they thought about it. What will hurt most is they knew what they were doing. Some of you need to know that all of the evil in your life will start with your thoughts, and it usually starts with "How can I creatively lie about this?" or "How can I creatively plan this?"

Secondly, you can see the category of *sexuality*. Sexual immorality is mentioned in every vice list in Scripture, and almost every time it's mentioned first or second. Here we get two words: *sexual immorality* (*porneia*, where we get the word *pornography* from) and the word *sensuality*.

The third category is *relationship with other people*. You can see that category. He says, "Envy, strife, slander, and coveting." It's the compare/compete/conquer culture that we create. Then, finally, he says *pride* and *folly*, which are the junk drawers. Pride is "I only think about myself. I'm first and foremost in my thoughts." The fool is not someone who's not intelligent; the fool is a moral moron.

So, he ends with all of this, and what Jesus is trying to show us... All of this is pointing us to the cross. Jesus is trying to tell us this. What you've been told is a lie. All your life you've been told the problem is outside of you and the solution is inside of you. I promise. You go to any school, you go to any place, they're going to tell you the problem is outside of you (it's your husband, it's your kids, it's your job) and the solution is inside of you. "Just listen to your heart."

It's the opposite of what the Bible says. Jesus says the exact opposite. He says the problem is inside of you and the solution is outside of you. G.K. Chesterton, a famous Christian, writer, and theologian... Years ago, some news agency or radio agency wrote an article, and they were asking all of the politicians and leaders of nonprofits and CEOs and celebrities the question, "What's wrong with the world?"

They got dissertations back. "This is what's wrong. This is what's wrong." The shortest answer they got to the question "What's wrong with the world?" they got from G.K. Chesterton. It was only two words, and it said, "I am." What's wrong with the world? *Me*. What's wrong with the world? *You*.

So, Jesus comes, and he doesn't say tradition is bad. He says tradition can go bad. He doesn't come and say, "Okay, you don't need to be cleaned." He's saying, "You don't know how to clean yourself." You actually need to be cleaned not from the outside in. That was his critique of the Pharisees. "You're a whitewashed tomb. You clean the outside of the cup. You don't clean the inside."

His idea is you have to be cleaned from the inside out. Well, that's a miracle. That only happens through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible talks about Christ coming into your life, coming into your heart and cleansing you. Because here's what sin does. Sin does three things to you. Sin makes you guilty. This is why your conscience condemns you. This is why you wake up at 3:00 in the morning. This is why you lie about things. You know you're wrong. You know you're guilty.

Sin makes you broken. You go, "Yep. Things don't work. My life doesn't work the way I thought it would." Well, you're guilty, so you need to be forgiven; sin breaks you, so you need to be healed; and sin makes you dirty and defiled, so you need to be cleaned. Jesus came as the answer to Ezekiel's prophecy.

I want to read you this as we close. In Ezekiel, God made a promise that "One day I'm going to come, and I'm going to do the inside-out work of cleaning." Cleaning cannot happen from the outside in; it has to happen from the inside out, because the problem is within. Look at what God says in Ezekiel 36.

"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.

And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God." Then he summarizes it by saying this: ***"And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses."***

That's why Jesus Christ came. The only thing you have to do to be cleaned by Jesus Christ is to admit you can't be clean and to ask him to clean you instead of trying to clean yourself and cover up yourself. This is what our first parents did. They tried to hide behind a bush to hide their uncleanness. It didn't work. They tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. It didn't work. You need to come clean so God can clean you.

There are two other things I want to say culturally for our church. When I read passages like this, I always think, "God, how do we not become like the Pharisees and the scribes, because it's the temptation of every church?" There are two commitments we're recommitting to today, as a church, and I'm recommitting to you.

First, we are always going to be about true spirituality here at Two Cities, not about pretend righteousness. We are going to, as much as we can... We can't see the inside

of you. I can only see the inside of me. We're going to focus as much as we can on the inner man and the inner woman, not the external conformity.

The second thing we're recommitting to today is to make the plain things in Scripture the main things and to make the main things the plain things. Part of how religiosity and traditionalism and all that happen is when you start having all of these secondary and tertiary issues.

We want to have a church where people say, "I love it when you talk about Jesus. I love it when you talk about the cross. I love it when you talk about being saved from God's wrath. Kyle, just give us another sermon on sin and grace," because we want to see people come to faith in Christ, have their lives transformed, and be sent out on mission. What we're about here is making and mobilizing disciples and doing it all in an environment of prayer and worship. So, let's end by praying together. Let's pray.

Lord, we lift up, wherever we are, each of our stories. The truth is we each came here today doing the exact same external tradition. We got in our car and came to church. We sat down and sang songs and listened to a sermon, but there are hundreds and hundreds of different hearts in this room...why we came, how we're responding, what we're going through, what we're believing, what we're feeling.

I just pray for each person that you would do a great work in us internally, Lord. Help us to avoid the dangers of traditionalism and realize the good traditions and the truth they hold. Lord, I pray against the dangers of tradition. I pray against any hypocrisy. Where there needs to be humility, where there needs to be confession, where there needs to be repentance, I pray that it would happen.

Lord, I pray we would not be a church that rejects your Word and replaces it with something else, but we would be a church that lives under your Word. I pray, Lord, that we would be a place where people all over our city come to find the cleansing they can only find in Christ. We pray this in his name, amen.