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Sermon Notes

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Exposing Vain Worship, Espousing Heart Worship

Mark 7:1-13

One of the greatest issues of the human soul stands in front of us this morning: genuine WORSHIP... worship from a pure heart, worship that engulfs the souls and is a fragrant offering to the living God... true, heart-felt worship

It is not difficult to make the case that establishing genuine worship is the entire purpose of scripture, of the gospel, of the work of God in creation, of Christ in atonement, of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. That we human beings would genuinely worship God from the heart.

Arrayed against this precious thing called worship are three of its greatest enemies: LEGALISM, TRADITIONALISM, AND HYPOCRISY

LEGALISM: the belief that God accepts our worship based on how well we keep a set of rules and regulations

TRADITIONALISM: The belief that true worship of God consists in man-made patterns of behavior passed on from generation to generation

HYPOCRISY: acting, putting on a show for God, when our hearts are far from God

These are the issues in front of us in Mark 7:1-13

Setting: Jesus has just fed 5000 men plus women and children, has walked on water, and has cured the whole region of Genneseret

of all kinds of illnesses, healing some people who simply touched the hem of his garment

Jesus at this moment is at the absolute pinnacle of his popularity... in John 6, some of the crowd want to take him by force to make him KING!!

Therefore a delegation of religious police, of self-appointed investigators came to observe Jesus and shut him down if they could

I. The Legalists' Charge Against Jesus: Ceremonial Defilement

Mark 7:1-5 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ² saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

A. The Pharisees and Scribes: Professional Legalists

1. Great escalation of conflict with the Jewish authorities
2. A delegation is sent from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, no doubt there to check Jesus' rising influence
3. They came to find fault, and to try to put a stop to Jesus
4. Who were the Pharisees & Scribes
 - a. Pharisees were religious leaders who made the meticulous study and application of the Law of Moses their full-time business
 - b. Scribes were priests from the Temple in Jerusalem whose full-time occupation was copying the Law of Moses letter by letter, and who taught their interpretations of Scripture to the people

- c. Both groups were legalists who believed God would accept them based on how well they kept the laws of God
- d. Furthermore, they accepted a place of honor in Jewish society... openly proclaimed as the most righteous of all the Jews

5. What is the origin of their legalism?

DURING THE EXILE TO BABYLON... the godly remnant recognized the reason for the exile:

Daniel 9:11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.

- a. Then, when God restored a small remnant of the people to the Promised Land in the time of Cyrus the Great of Persia, they dedicated themselves fully to obey the Laws of God

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

- b. All of this was fine... but in time, the patterns of legalism and traditionalism became entrenched
- c. Schools of religious lawyers developed who spent their full time debating this or that law, trying to nail down exactly what they were supposed to do in every case
- d. Scribes and Pharisees arose who studied the law more carefully than anyone else and appointed themselves ethical police over the daily life actions of others

6. BUT there is a **deeper answer** to the origin of legalism

- a. The wicked human heart wants to fix its own problems itself
- b. We want to work out our own salvation by figuring out our own standards of morality and living by them in our own strength
- c. We want to pay for our sins by doing good works

d. We want to EARN our salvation by making up our own religion

Jesus' key assertion:

Mark 7:7 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.

B. Their Highest Value: Conformity to Legal Tradition

1. By the time of Jesus, there were well-developed schools of Rabbis who spent their full-time teaching minutiae of the law
2. The law of God itself was deemed too complicated for any but the most trained scholar to understand... the common people were deemed a "rabble" who could never understand God's Word
3. So, they began to give additional insights, rules and regulations
4. Rabbi so and so, commenting on Rabbi such and such's observation on the Sabbath said this and that
5. These verbal traditions were erected like a safety fence around the Law of God, keeping a safe zone around the commands God actually gave... "If you keep the traditions of the elders, you are CERTAIN to be acceptable to God... we are going BEYOND what God requires, therefore He MUST accept you."

Second century after Christ, **Rabbi Jehuda** organized the Rabbinic teachings into a book called the **Mishnah**; in time, there arose more and more traditions, disputations, and statements based on the Mishnah itself. These were collected in a work called the **Gemarah**

The Mishnah and the Gemarah, the verbal traditions of at least twelve centuries of Jewish rabbis together make up the **Talmud**. The Talmud is the authority for Jewish life in much of the world.

6. Astonishing attitude toward God's perfect Word
 - a. What we see in Mark 7 in Jesus' accusation against them came true concerning the Talmud

- b. The Talmud came to be put ABOVE the Scripture itself
- c. The traditions of men totally supplanted the Laws of God
- d. Listen to these statements from the Talmud:

“The Sacred Scriptures is like water, the *Mishnah* wine, and the *Gemarah* aromatic wine.” [Sopherim XV, 7]

“My son, give heed to the words of the scribes rather than to the words of the law.”

“He who transgresses the words of the scribes sins more gravely than the transgressors of the words of the law.” [Sanhedrin X, 3]

- 7. Astonishing that the opinions of human beings can take the place of the perfect Word of God!!

C. Their Accusation of Christ: Ceremonial Defilement

They stood around Jesus and watched him and his disciples eating their meal... and they accused him:

Mark 7:5 "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

Mark gives us the detailed backstory about these comprehensive traditions:

Mark 7:3-4 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

This was an elaborate, carefully developed system of ritual handwashing that covered almost every area of life mandated by the elders and their traditions

- 1. Notice their accusation: not that Christ had broken the Law of God, but that he broken the tradition of the elders
- 2. The Ceremonial Washing was TRADITIONAL, not scriptural!

- a. NOWHERE in the Law of Moses is there a general command for all Jews to wash their hands before every meal

3. Don't misunderstand: Nothing to do with GERMS or cleanliness

Germ theory was first developed by Louis Pasteur in the 19th century

II. Jesus' Charge Against the Legalists: Arrogance Over God's Word

Let's reverse the order Jesus takes, and address their arrogance over God's Word... then the deeper issue of their worship of God

First... their arrogance over God's Word:

Mark 7:7 their teachings are but rules taught by men

That is... MAN-MADE RULES... concocted from the imaginations and morals and thoughts of men without the Holy Spirit

Mark 7:9 And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"

In other words... you make a REGULAR HABIT of setting aside God's Word to observe your man-made traditions.

Jesus is being sarcastic here... he uses the word "well" to say how WELL THEY DO at this... they are experts at this evil thing of setting aside God's commands for the sake of their traditions

Then... Jesus cites a clear example:

Mark 7:10-13 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' ¹¹ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.

And he expands it:

Mark 7:13 And you do many things like that.

A. A Serious Attack on the Word of God

Notice how Jesus clearly contrasts tradition with God's word:

Matthew 15:5 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' ⁶ But you say..."

God said... but you say!

1. The whole system of legalism and traditionalism was a **SERIOUS ATTACK** on the Word of God
2. Legalism: Adding to and Subtracting from God's Word
 - a. They add requirements that God did not give
 - b. They thus **OVERTURN** requirements that God did give
3. This case: "a gift devoted to God"...**CORBAN**
 - a. The rabbis decided that a man could designate any money or possession he owned as a "gift devoted to God"; that took priority over any other claim on that money or possession, including using it to care for your parents in their old age
 - b. This concept became a big loophole through which some Jews no longer felt responsible to care for parents in their old age

B. Fundamental Issue: Sufficiency and Clarity of Scripture

1. The legalist adds **new laws** because he feels God's laws are **insufficient** to get the job done
2. OR because he feels God's laws aren't clear enough and need human help in order to get the true point across
3. Either way, it is **ARROGANCE** toward the written word of God
4. This is why God seriously condemned adding to or taking away from His word

Deuteronomy 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

Proverbs 30:5-6 "Every word of God is flawless.... ⁶ Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.

C. Christ Perfectly Upholds the Law: Honor Your Father and Mother

1. In this example, Christ cites the case of the fifth of the Ten Commandments
2. Ten Commandments two tables: vertical and horizontal
3. The fifth commandment, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER" is foundational to the horizontal commandments
 - a. If a child will not learn to submit to parental authority, he/she will be rebellious all their lives
 - b. God in his wisdom set us in families to train us in submission to God-ordained authority from the very beginning
 - c. Two key words governing a child's duty to his parents

Honor: "Honor your father and mother"

Obey: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right"

- d. The word "honor" means far more than grudging compliance... doing whatever they say with sullen reluctance

Honor means to give someone a high place in your mind and heart, to reverence them, to esteem them highly, to respect them

- e. Christ upholds the authority of parents over their children
- f. Jesus even goes so far as to cite the death penalty established for rebellion against parents

"Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death."

That is a direct quote of Exodus 21:17

So many children these days scorn their parents, roll their eyes when their parents tell them to do something, mock their parents behind their backs, etc.

The word of God does not CODDLE that rebellion that has become so prominent in our day... Jesus said rebellion against parents deserves death

4. So clearly, Christ is extremely distressed with the Scribes and Pharisees arrogant handling of the Perfect word of God

III. Jesus' Deeper Charge: Hypocrisy in Worship

Mark 7:6-7 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷ They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.

A. Isaiah's Prophecy: Exposing an Ancient Problem Still with Us Today

1. Seven centuries before Christ, Isaiah the prophet exposed the problem of hypocrisy

Isaiah 1:11-14 "The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

The MACHINERY OF RELIGION can mask a heart far from God

2. As in Isaiah's day, so also in Christ's day—with the Scribes and Pharisees
3. As in Christ's day, so also in our day—with people playing Church on Sunday and living secretly sinful lives the rest of the week

There is the outward show of religion... but is it possible that our hearts are as far from God as theirs were?

B. Hypocrisy: Acting Righteous When You're Not

A hypocrite is a person who says one thing and does another.... claiming to have moral standards to which we do not conform

1. The word "hypocrite" is actually a Greek word brought straight over into the English... *hupocrites*
2. The word comes from the Greek stage... an **ACTOR!** Actors who wore masks to play a role in a staged drama... a comedy, with a happy smile face; a tragedy with a painted mask showing intense grief... but the actor feels **NONE** of it
3. Some of our culture's greatest heroes are actors and actresses
 - a. We applaud their skillful range as actors, the wide range of roles they can play believably
 - b. Playing a president in one movie, then a homeless street person, then a Nobel prize-winning physicist, then a bloodthirsty Mongolian tribal chieftain, then an institutionalized autistic savant
 - c. Playing roles, speaking lines, displaying intense emotions... and feeling **NONE** of it!!
 - d. I've often wondered what it would be like to be married in real life to a great actor... and noticing that all of their facial expression which they are giving at any given time they've used in movie roles... **IS ANY OF IT REAL???**
4. The Pharisees and Scribes **PLAYED** at being righteous
 - a. Acting religious, acting righteous... **BUT THEIR HEARTS WERE FAR FROM GOD**
 - b. The audience was never God... it was always other people

Matthew 23:5-7 Everything they do is done for people to see

Matthew 23:27-28 You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

C. Hypocrisy in Worship: Acting Reverent When You're Not

1. **True Worship: A heart aflame with the glory of God... a mind captivated by God's nature: his power, his knowledge, his compassion, his righteousness, his holiness, his achievements in history, his promises for the future**
2. A hypocrite feels NONE of this... there is a major disconnect between outward show and inward passion

IV. True Worship Versus Traditionalism

Mark 7:3 The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders

Mark 7:5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

Mark 7:7 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.

Traditions are first concocted by people, then passed down from generation to generation unchallenged and unchanged

A. What Is Traditionalism?

Elevating a past pattern of blessing to a level of religious permanence

1. Trying to Capture the Holy Spirit in a Human Response

Illus.: One church, "Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart" was sung and a powerful revival broke out; the word of God had been faithfully preached and hearts were ready for the Spirit to move; the hymn was played, and many began to weep and

repent and turn to the Lord... it was a revival worked by the Spirit of God, but it just so happened to occur while that hymn was being played. Well, for the next half-century, every single worship service at that church ended with the song "Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart" being played

One of the most courageous worship pastors in recent history finally led the church to new ground simply by not playing that hymn one Sunday

2. Imposing that Moment as a Rule for Future Generations to Follow

- a. That's traditionalism
- b. Outward, human actions and ceremonies are captured for all time and established by rules and regulations
- c. If you want to have a revival, this is how to do it
- d. If you want to be holy and pure, wash your hands three times in the prescribed way; bow three times toward Jerusalem and pray this specific prayer
- e. These are the "traditions of the fathers", and they are a poor substitute for true spiritual worship

B. BUT There IS an Essential Place for Tradition

1. Our modern era: many delight in what's new and unusual, establishing a strong disconnect from history
2. What's New is What's Hot
 - a. We love what's "Trending" on social media
 - b. Things rapidly "GO VIRAL" because they are new and cool
 - c. Very little delight in history or tradition
3. Churches afraid of becoming "irrelevant"... or "left behind"

- a. Americans have a very short attention span; churches want to keep them interested by a constant stream of new spiritual experiences
 - b. Connection to 2000 years of church history and of brothers and sisters in Christ from ages past is undesirable to this mentality
4. BUT tradition is actually VITAL to our faith if it is tied directly to the Scripture and the truth of God

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

“Passed on” is same Greek root as the word translated “tradition”

There are certain traditions of doctrine and practice that are essential to our faith, stemming directly from the apostolic teachings

- 5. AND knowing traditions helps us learn timeless lessons about the application of biblical truth to every generation and every culture
- 6. Summary: Tradition is VITAL to our faith... we are not reinventing Christianity every generation
- 7. BUT traditionalism is DEATH to our faith... failing to apply unchanging spiritual truths to our constantly changing world

C. What Is True Worship? Three Key Observations

1. Not man-made, but initiated by God

- a. Key concept: **revelation, then response**

Matthew 16:15-17 Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you... for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

2. Not based on human rules, but based on the Word of God

- a. God has revealed himself most clearly in his Word

b. Therefore, the Word of God is the foundation of all true worship

3. Not hypocritical, but from a heart drawn close to God

Mark 7:6 These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

True worship is a heart drawn CLOSE to God

- a. Awe, reverence, fear, wonder, amazement, feeling, tears, shouts of joy, exultation, surprise, astonishment... these experiences and others are consistently at the center of TRUE WORSHIP
- b. True worship is **heart-felt** response to what God has revealed
- c. It is not an act, not hypocrisy... what you TRULY THINK about God, and how you TRULY LOVE Him based on that

V. Application

- A. KEY QUESTION: AM I ACTING or is my heart genuinely right with God??
- B. Non-Christian: true worship begins at the CROSS of Christ
- C. Christian: am I merely going through the motions?
 - 1. Children act at being grownups by playing dress-ups... putting on grown-up clothes... it doesn't change who they are
 - 2. Drama clubs act when they put on a play
 - 3. Diplomats do a ton of acting when they are negotiating a vital treaty with a foreign diplomat
 - 4. Spies have to act out a convincing role to set their enemies at ease and gain valuable information from them... they have to be utterly convincing in their cover as a factory worker or dockworker or importer or teacher
 - 5. Politicians act much of the time they're on the campaign trail... smiling constantly, shaking hands warmly with total strangers

6. That's all well and good... but it is DEADLY when it comes to worship

D. Worship God in Spirit and Truth

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.