

## Sunday 19-June-22

## Jesus breaks with tradition

### Isaiah 29:13-16

<sup>13</sup> The Lord says:

“These people come near to me with their mouth  
and honour me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me  
is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore once more I will astound these people  
with wonder upon wonder;  
the wisdom of the wise will perish,  
the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”

<sup>15</sup> Woe to those who go to great depths  
to hide their plans from the LORD,  
who do their work in darkness and think,  
“Who sees us? Who will know?”

<sup>16</sup> You turn things upside down,  
as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!  
Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it,  
“You did not make me”?  
Can the pot say to the potter,  
“You know nothing”?

### Matthew 15:1-20

#### That Which Defiles

**15** Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, <sup>2</sup> “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God said, ‘Honour your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who

curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’<sup>5</sup> But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’<sup>6</sup> they are not to ‘honour their father or mother’ with it. Thus, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.<sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

<sup>8</sup> “These people honour me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

<sup>9</sup> They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are merely human rules.”

<sup>10</sup> Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. <sup>11</sup> What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

<sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

<sup>13</sup> He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. <sup>14</sup> Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

<sup>15</sup> Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

<sup>16</sup> “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. <sup>17</sup> “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? <sup>18</sup> But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

### Sermon: Jesus breaks with tradition

Before we begin - let me **ask God to give us His understanding and speak to us through this passage**

Let’s pray...

## Intro

We **live** with a **lot** of **traditions**, don't we?

Traditions are: *customs or beliefs passed on from generation to generation*

We have traditions like: **Christmas celebrations** (Christmas Carols, Christmas services, Christmas trees and gifts; Christmas family meals); **Easter celebrations** (services, easter eggs; Easter Show); **New Year celebrations**; **Religious "feast" days**; **Religious "seasons"** (Lent, Advent); **Australia Day**; **Anzac Day**; **Melbourne Cup Day**, **Queen's Birthday**; **Father's Day**; **Mother's Day**; **Remembrance Day**; **Summer holidays**; **Schoolies**, **Family holidays**; **Sunday roast**; **Birthdays**; various **Wedding traditions** – and so on.

(pause)

Sometimes we repeat traditions without understanding why we do them

Sometimes we repeat them without questioning if they are still valid

Sometimes our traditions line up with God's Word – sometimes they don't – sometimes that matters – and sometimes it doesn't.

But it does matter if we insist that our traditions have equal or higher authority than God's Word.

That's the **problem** that **Jesus encounters** in our passage today

## Traditions and Religious Activity don't make us a Christian (vv1-9)

So, we pick up the story in Matthew 15 vv1-2

Where some **religious Jewish leaders** (the Pharisees and teachers of the law) have come all the way **from Jerusalem to the region of Galilee**

They've **heard about His miracles and healings** – and they've **heard about His teaching with authority** – teaching which often **seems to disagree with their traditional teaching**.

And they've come to try and **catch Jesus out**

They **come** to Jesus **with** a **question** “**why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!**”

What are these traditions they refer to?

Well – they are **oral rules/laws** that have been **added on to God’s Word** – and then passed down **from generation to generation by word of mouth** – and these oral laws have been **insisted on as though they’ve come from God!**

We need to understand that the washing they are talking about is **more than just simply washing your hands before meals like we would today.**

From Mark’s version of the story – **we find out this washing is actually a ceremonial washing** (Mark 7:3) – and it was a **really complicated routine in washing your hands and arms several times** – and sometimes repeated in between each course of the meal. So, it had become a bit of a **ritual** and a bit of **rigmarole**.

Jesus’ disciples were not practising this ceremonial washing – and so the **religious leaders** – are **pointing the finger** – and saying the disciples MUST do it otherwise they are unclean and anything they touch is then also unclean!

Surprisingly, Jesus goes quite hard back at them with His own accusation!

And **don’t you love how Jesus answers their question by asking them a question of His own?** [I do that at home – and get in trouble for it?]

Jesus says in v3 “*why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?*”

Jesus takes them to task on another tradition they have been practising in vv4-6.

A tradition called **Korban** and is mentioned more fully in Mark 7.

**Korban** means “*a gift devoted to God*”.

What this tradition allowed the people to do is to say – if they had some money or possessions that they might use to help their parents. They could say this money or possessions has been devoted to God – in doing so – they didn't need to help or support their parents.

In keeping this tradition – Jesus says – they are actually breaking the 5th commandment – and **they are not honouring their parents** (Exodus 20:12 and Deut 5:16).

On top of that, it would appear to any on-lookers, that the people following this tradition were very religious and pious because they'd devoted money and possessions to God. But in reality, they were only "saying" they had devoted it to God – but they still used this money and possessions for themselves.

They were basically "looking good" rather than "being good". And they'd found a loophole, so they didn't have to care for their parents.

No wonder Jesus, in v7, calls them hypocrites

The original meaning of **hypocrite** is someone who is "*playing a role – like an actor*"  
The people practicing this tradition were "playing like they were holy and obedient to God" but they were not being holy and obedient to God in reality.

In vv7-9, Jesus quotes from a prophecy from Isaiah 29:13 (our OT reading) –and Jesus says Isaiah's prophecy is actually about the religious leaders in Jesus' time- and Jesus is saying by them following this tradition of Korban – they are just giving God lip service and haven't really got hearts towards God at all. And that **their worship of God is empty** and all about their vanity – and all about following human rules and teachings and not about really worshipping God with all their heart.

So, my **first point** this morning is:

[Slide 1a-traditions/religious activity]

***Traditions and religious activity don't make us a Christian.***

Coming to church each Sunday – and singing a few hymns and reciting the Lord's

**Prayer – doesn't make me a Christian**

Being a Christian is about realizing we are basically sinful – and in need of a Saviour for our sins – and believing Jesus is that Saviour – and it's about - coming to worship God and thanking Him for sending Jesus – and it's about following God's Word – and taking His commandments seriously. Commandments like the one mentioned here – where we are to honour our parents.

Some of us may have ageing parents, regardless of how tough they might have been on us when we were growing up; they are still our parents and we need to honour them and make sure they're cared for in their old age - and not neglected.

Being a Christian is not about what we do on Sunday – but who we are 7 days a week – when we show people, we are true followers of Jesus - by loving God and loving others – and by us being ambassadors for Jesus.

It's worth asking ourselves – whether people would see us as hypocrites – we say we are Christian – but we don't behave like one!

Sunday is not about ticking a box – and saying – *I've given God lip-service this morning – now I can kick off - and do and say what I like for the rest of the week.*

Sunday is about a heartfelt praise for what God has done in sending Jesus which kick starts our whole week!

We even have our own traditions in our service on Sunday – don't we?

We **sing hymns mainly from the Rejoice Hymn Book** – but we shouldn't insist on that – nor should we insist on the old-fashioned words – they are neither wrong nor right

We also **recite the Lord's Prayer each Sunday** – a prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray. **Did Jesus say pray it every week?** – **No!** – He said – *this is **how** you should pray*. If we didn't say the Lord's Prayer one week – would it be the end of the world? **No!**

We also have **the Lord's Supper** – here at our church – **every 2 months** – could we have it more frequently or less frequently? **Of course, we could!** Can we insist it's weekly or monthly or yearly – **No! There's no rule about that in the Bible!**

**Also, in the Lord's Supper** – we use juice not wine – yet Jesus shared wine with His disciples! We have some practical reasons for using juice – some people don't drink alcohol and would miss out – some people might have had a problem with alcohol in the past and it might be a stumbling block to them if we use wine – and some people might be too young to drink alcohol and they would miss out

Another example – **some people might insist that everyone should be tea-total** – but the Bible doesn't say that – **it says we can drink wine** – but we shouldn't be drunkards (Ephesians 5:18)

The point is – none of these traditions and man-made rules we follow – **make us a Christian.**

What traditions or man-made rules are we putting ahead of God and His Word?

**True worship is internal not external (vv10-14)**

Back to Matthew 15 then...

Because the religious leaders have **come to Jesus in public** with their rebuke of His disciples about breaking this hand-washing tradition

**Jesus** then **publicly** corrects the religious leaders – see v10-11

**Jesus** uses an illustration or parable about eating food.

He's saying the food you put in your mouth (even with ceremonially unclean hands)

**doesn't make you unclean and unfit to worship God.** Rather – Jesus says - it's the bad words that come out of your mouth that make you unclean and unfit to worship.

Jesus is saying sin comes from the heart, not from your diet and not from failing to wash your hands. It's what comes out of our mouth that makes us spiritually unclean, not what goes in our mouths.

You see **the religious leaders had super clean hands but dirty hearts** – hearts that were determined on catching Jesus out – hearts that were determined to reject His teaching regardless of how true it was – hearts that ultimately wanted Jesus gone – **whilst all the time still looking holy and pious to the people of Israel!**

So, my **second point** is:

[Slide 1b-Internal]

***True Worship is internal not external***

You see Jesus knows that the religious leaders have a **heart problem** and they are **more concerned about externals** – like ceremonial washing – and praying on street corners for everyone to notice them.

At the same time, in fairness to the religious leaders - they have got so passionate about God's Law that over the centuries they've bolted man-made rules onto God's

Law to try to “help” people keep the rules – but they’ve become so obsessed with their man-made rules and traditions– that they’ve ended up nullifying or contradicting God’s Law - as they did with the korban tradition and by not helping their parents.

What about us? Are we sticking to the Gospel of Jesus – or are we trying to add to what Jesus has done – by working our way to Heaven?

Jesus’ disciples come to Jesus in v12 – concerned that Jesus has offended the Pharisees.

Jesus doesn’t need to be told that – He knows He’s offended them.

God’s Word will always cause offense – especially to people who are not following His Word or have overruled it with their own traditions and thinking.

Yet the disciples have always looked to the Pharisees and teachers of the law – as the benchmark – in how to live holy lives – so they would feel rather uneasy that Jesus is taking them on – head on – and going against them!

But Jesus was making a stand for God’s Word – and saying God’s Word is much more important than tradition and looking good on the outside. Remember – appearances can be deceiving.

Anytime someone makes a stand for God’s Word – it rattles cages.

It’s a bit like what Martin Luther did back in 1517 – when He challenged the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. He stood up for God’s Word – and said “Here I stand, I can

***do no other***” – and in doing so Martin rattled many cages – **which led to the Protestant Reformation.**

Are we bold enough - **to stand up for God’s Word?**

The disciples would also have been worried that going against the Pharisees **would bring trouble for them and trouble for Jesus!**

In v13 - Jesus uses the analogy of a plant that was not planted by God; He says - *every plant not planted by God will be pulled up by the roots.*

Jesus is saying that neither the religious leaders nor their teachings **had been planted by God**, and therefore ultimately their teaching would not last.

You see the problem is that internally the Pharisees don’t have God’s Word in their hearts – **instead they have their own man-made rules and traditions in their heart – that’s their treasure**

Remember Jesus said in the Sermon the Mount – *for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also* (Matthew 6:21)

And because the religious leaders’ hearts are all wrong – **Jesus in v14** - tells the disciples to leave them to their own devices

You see even though the Pharisees and teachers of the law had biblical scrolls and interpreted them in the synagogues, this does not mean that they really understood them. After all, they (mostly) didn’t recognize nor follow Jesus; so, they didn’t understand or follow scripture correctly (Carson). Therefore – Jesus says - **they are blind**

**leaders of blind people** and are **leading the people away from God/Jesus and not towards God/Jesus.**

It's worth noting the **people are also blind** not just the **Pharisees**; and so, the **people need a guide who is not blind** – that's of course, **Jesus!**

Again, a question for us – is our example and teaching – **leading people towards Jesus or away from Him?**

### **It's our hearts that need cleaning up (vv15-20)**

Unfortunately, the disciples haven't understood Jesus' illustration or parable from vv10-11 – that eating food does not make people unclean but what comes out of people's mouths makes people unclean

So, **Peter** – always the **spokesman for the disciples** – v15 - asks Jesus to explain the parable to the disciples?

Jesus' reply is quite funny in v16 – *“Are you still so dull?”*

Despite that - Jesus does explain His parable about eating food to His disciples– in vv17 to 20.

Jesus explains that **whatever food enters the mouth goes into the stomach and comes out as human waste (poo!).** Food never touches our hearts. But what comes out of our mouths - Jesus says - begins in our hearts with thoughts and ideas that then lead to words and actions – actions like - *murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony and slander*

**Murder** begins not with a knife or a gun, but with the **anger and hatred in people's hearts**

**Adultery** begins with lustful thoughts – then a desire for what is forbidden – and then a lack of self-control – and **then acting upon that desire**

**Sexual immorality** – the Greek word *porneia* – where we get **pornography** from - begins with sexual and lustful thoughts – and **can lead to all sorts of sexually immoral behaviour**

**Theft** – begins with jealousy of someone else’s belongings – and **a feeling of dissatisfaction with what we have and wanting more**

**Lies** – begin because we are not satisfied with the truth – we might lie to avoid getting the blame for something – or because we are ashamed and so we lie to cover up – or we lie to make ourselves look better than we are – and lie about others to bring them down. The trouble with lying is – **one lie is usually not enough** – and so we have to tell another and another – to cover up the previous lie.

Which leads us to the last sin that Jesus mentions – and that is **slander** – the Greek Word used is where we get blaspheming from – so in this context it’s speaking against the good name someone – and again the motive for that is to elevate ourself and deflate the other person.

Jesus boldly said that these evil things come from our innermost nature – our heart. They aren’t accidents or mere “mistakes”; they reveal how corrupt we are in our fallen nature.

When we act upon the evil in our hearts – we are basically saying – **we are not happy letting the Lord be in control of our lives** – we want to be in control – and we’re basically saying we know better than God.

Which is precisely what the religious leaders were saying to Jesus – **we know better than God’s Word** – **we know better than God’s Son!**

But unfortunately – their hearts need cleaning up

And so do our hearts.

You see as much as we try – we **cannot** stop sinning – and our hearts are **unclean**.

[Slide 1c-clean heart]

Which is my **third point** – *It's our hearts that need cleaning up*

Again – isn't that what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5:8

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God!*

How do we get a **clean heart** then?

Well – let me give us an example of how this works - from King David

**King David** is described as having a heart for God (1 Sam 13:14 and Acts 13:22)

But David **did the most terrible thing** – He **lusted over a woman** – **Bathsheba** – who was married to someone else – a guy named **Uriah** – and **David's lustful thoughts** –

**moved to words** – He summoned a servant to bring Bathsheba to his palace – **His**

**lustful thoughts moved to action** - He **committed adultery** – and when he found that

**Bathsheba was pregnant** – David arranged for her husband – **Uriah** – **to be**

**conveniently killed in battle.**

Sometime after – **David wrote the most amazing confession in Psalm 51**

*1 Have mercy on me, O God,*

*according to your unfailing love;*

*according to your great compassion*

*blot out my transgressions.*

*2 Wash away all my iniquity*

*and cleanse me from my sin.*

*3 For I know my transgressions,*

*and my sin is always before me.*

*4 Against you, you only, have I sinned*

*and done what is evil in your sight;*

*so you are right in your verdict*

*and justified when you judge.*

*5 Surely I was sinful at birth,*

*sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

**David** then moved on to **ask God** for a **pure heart**

*10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,*

*and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

*11 Do not cast me from your presence*

*or take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation*

*and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

We can join King David and **confess our sins** – like he did?

As 1 John 1:9 says:

*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*

We can join King David and **ask God to create a pure heart in us**

We can join King David and **ask God not to take His Holy Spirit away from us** – because it's the Holy Spirit that will teach us and guide us and remind us of what Jesus teaches.

What Jesus is teaching us this morning is - let's not get bogged down with traditions and ceremonial rigmarole – **let's realize first and foremost** – our **hearts** – like King David - **need cleaning up** – and **Jesus is the only one** who can clean our hearts.

[Slide 2]

And the way that we get that clean heart is to believe what Jesus has done for us – which the Apostle Paul describes like this - in **2 Cor 5:21**

*God made him who had no sin [that's Jesus] to be sin for us [on a cross], so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.*

Let's pray...

*Father, forgive us when we make traditions and our own thinking more important than you, more important than Jesus and more important than your word.*

*Help us to worship you with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind.*

*Thank you than even though we sin, because of the grace of Jesus, and His death and resurrection – we have clean hearts – and you, Father, see us as right and not guilty before you.*

*In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.*

**Benediction (1 Peter 2:24)**

*“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” AMEN*