

True worship

Mark 7:1-23

Introduction

What traditions were passed down to you by your parents? What things did they teach you to do or what things have you passed down to your own children?

The Jews in Jesus day were keen observers of the traditions of the elders. The elders were legal experts who had come up with and assembled lots of different rules to govern most aspects of life. These had been passed down for the Jews so that by following them they might draw near to the Lord and worship him. In this study we examine an encounter between the Lord Jesus and those who loved their tradition.

The traditions of the elders

The Pharisees loved the traditions of the elders. Please read verses 1 to 5 to understand why they became concerned for their traditions while watching what Jesus and his disciples were doing.

1. What did the Pharisees and the teacher of the law see that made them concerned?

2. Why would this have drawn the attention of these people?

Think about it

Jesus and his disciples were well known for preaching the message of the kingdom of God. His message was the kingdom of God was near and that people needed to get ready for it. If Jesus and his disciples were such advocates of getting ready for the kingdom what were his actions suggesting about the place that the traditions of the elders had in getting people ready for the kingdom of God?

The problem with their tradition

When it came to hand washing before meals the tradition of the elders was not a concern about good personal hygiene. It was about something completely different. The Lord Jesus in answer to the questions about why the disciples were not following the traditions of the elders and washing their hands highlighted the problem with their tradition. Please read verses 6 to 13 to understand what the problem was.

3. The Lord Jesus called them hypocrites. Why was their observance of their tradition acting hypocritically?

4. For those who loved the tradition of the elders what was washing before meals all about?

5. What was wrong with the value these people placed on their tradition?

6. How had the tradition of the elders effectively set aside what God had commanded concerning how God's people were to honour their parents?

Think about it

The Lord Jesus made it clear that the tradition related to Corban was just one example of how the tradition of the elders was used to nullify the word of God. It was a way to pay the Lord lip service.

What does it mean to honour God with your lips? What are some examples of how people might do this today?

Why do you think people come up with their own traditions?

What way can we be tempted to offer God mere lip service?

Listen to me

It was not the tradition of the elders that the people needed to heed. Rather, it was what God was saying to them in Jesus. Please read verses 14 to 23 to see what Jesus said about what makes someone clean or unclean.

7. What does Jesus say about the idea that what you eat might make you unclean?

8. What is it that makes a man or woman unclean?

9. What sort of things give evidence to our hearts being far away from God?

Think about it

The tradition of the elders did not make anyone acceptable to God for they could not deal with the problem of our hearts. In this gospel Mark has shown us the way that God intends to deal with the evil within us (1:40-41; 2:1-12).

Please explain how it is possible for people to be cleansed so that they can draw near to the living God.

What is revealed about us if we ignore the Word of God and come up with our own tradition?

Why in the end are those who listen to Jesus true worshippers of God?

How do we guard our own hearts?

What are the implications for us today of Jesus declaring all things clean (c.f. 1 Timothy 4:3-4)?