

# Man-made religion vs. Truth

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 31 October 2021

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning everyone, and good morning to everyone watching us. Well, unless you've been in the medical field, your hands have probably never been as clean as they have been over the last, I don't know, 18 months or so.

I mean, it's incredible, and hopefully you don't even work in the shops where they probably have to squirt themselves how many times a day. But I was thinking about this the other day, all those germs and things that we normally sometimes get over the course of winter probably didn't get them as much this year because of all the cleaning we've done with our hands.

And today's passage starts off with a dispute about rituals for making hands clean. But it's actually about something much deeper than that, and it's going to ask some fundamental questions about ourselves.

Are we as clean on the inside as we are on the outside? More specifically, are our hearts as clean as our hands?

And so we're going to look at some fundamental truths today that hit at the heart. Well, Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark, saying that the kingdom of God has arrived, and calling the Jewish nation to repentance and a new way of living.

[ 1 : 25 ] And he's proven his message that the kingdom of God has arrived, that we need to do what he says, with these incredible miraculous signs that we've been seeing over the last few weeks.

Last week, he took a few loaves of bread and fed 5,000 people. More than 5,000 people, 5,000 men. And then, to top it off, he decides to take a midnight stroll across the lake.

But we've also seen that this kingdom that has arrived has not arrived in a vacuum. It's got its enemies. And here, Jesus gets visited by the Pharisees and the religious lawyers from Jerusalem.

And essentially, they're the religious police coming to check up on him. They do a sort of gang up. They gather around him. They sort of herd around him and start asking all these questions, pointing things out.

Essentially, they're looking for excuses to catch Jesus out. They want to cancel him. We don't only just live in the cancel culture in our time. They've been wanting to do that with truth for many years.

[ 2 : 28 ] They saw him and his disciples eating bread with shock and horror, unwashed hands. And they jump into action. But they get the whole thing totally wrong.

They have a religion that misses the heart of the matter. They think they've got a claim, or rather a monopoly, on knowing what will make people clean or acceptable to God.

And everyone else had better listen to them. So here's a clash of leadership and of authority. They have this thing they rely on, tradition.

Did you notice it in the text? Verse 3, Mark tells us, For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders.

And the Pharisees and the scribes, in verse 5, when the Pharisees are talking, they talk to Jesus. Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands, or unclean hands?

[ 3 : 35 ] And they're ostensibly concerned that Jesus and his followers are making themselves ceremonially unclean, which means they're unfit to worship God. And it's got huge implications for them because their whole life revolves around making sure that people do the right thing, so that God would be pleased with them.

And the reason they want to do this is so that God would then send the Messiah and that his kingdom would come. And the irony is that the Messiah is standing right in front of them.

And they should have known that because he's just handed out food, this bread that they're eating, to 5,000 people. The kingdom has begun to arrive, and the Pharisees are completely clueless, because they have no clue as to how God's kingdom actually works.

And the big thing here, getting in their way, is their traditions. Now what is this tradition that they're talking about? Why aren't they referencing the law of Moses here?

He notices the Pharisees and in some translations the scribes, or basically they're the religious lawyers. Surely they should know the Old Testament and apply it and see what's going on.

[ 4 : 51 ] Well, in fact, the Pharisees did have the Old Testament law. They had the Torah, the first five books of Moses. They had the Old Testament. But then they also claimed that God had given them a separate tradition, what they called the oral tradition, that was not written down, but it passed down by word of mouth, and that really explained what God wanted.

In fact, what they say, and they say that to this day, or certain Jewish sects say that to this day, Moses wrote down what God gave him, the Torah, but God gave him an oral tradition that they've got, that's not in the Bible.

So you've got these two centers of authority. They've got the scriptures, but they've got this other thing called the oral tradition that they hold to, that in some ways they say will explain the scriptures.

But the Pharisees, without knowing it, have actually departed from the faith of the Old Testament at this point, and have made up a whole bunch of new rules to keep in order to please God.

This oral tradition that they've got is just really a bunch of laws that explain the gaps in the laws that they think Moses missed in the Old Testament.

[ 6 : 05 ] So you've got 613 laws in the Old Testament Torah. They have added countless more. You can actually go online and find what's called the Mishnah or the Talmud, and if you really want to get technical and essentially bore yourself to death, you can go and read how they talk about the small little things you've got to do and be careful about to completely keep God's law.

They have, in effect, created their own man-made religion based on their own traditions. And here's how insidious man-based religion can be, because it sounds so close to the original. If I had to ask you, did the Jews have to wash their hands and keep themselves ceremonially clean in order to worship God, what would you say?

Most of us would say, yeah, of course. The Jews had to wash their hands and keep themselves ceremonially clean in order to worship God. But there's a catch. There's actually a nuance. In fact, in the Old Testament Torah, in the law, there's only three very specific occasions that hand washings were needed, and that was done by certain people at a certain time.

Not all Jews at every meal had to wash their hands. Only three. I'll give it to you. It was the priests, not the whole Jewish nation, only the priests, prior to making a sacrifice at the temple.

If you want the reference, that's Exodus 30. If you're jotting it down, you can go look it up. So the priests prior to sacrifice, there were certain Israelites who had a bodily discharge.

[ 7 : 48 ] In Leviticus 15, they had to wash their hands. And then the elders of towns who had to give a special sacrifice to atone for a murder if they found someone murdered in their locality.

So only on three separate occasions, with specific groups, did people have to wash their hands. So what are the Pharisees talking about? That every Jew had to wash their hand every single time, otherwise God couldn't accept their worship.

God never said that. This is a man-made thing. So what have they done? Their religion has done two things that have totally undermined God's Word. They have taken God's laws and have gone beyond what He said is necessary in order to live in a good relationship with Him.

So they've taken His laws and gone beyond what God has said is necessary to be in a good relationship with Him. And secondly, they've made their human interpretation the standard by which to judge others and indeed stand in judgment over God.

They are in effect saying, God got it wrong. No, no, no. It's not enough that those people wash their hands. Everyone needs to wash their hands. And we are here.

[ 9 : 00 ] We, the Pharisees, are here to help you understand what you really need to know what to do to get right with Him. How does this miss the heart of true religion? Well, look at what they're concerned about.

Jesus is doing the most amazing miracles, signifying that God is doing a fresh new work in the world. And all they care about is if His disciples are washing their hands properly.

What a waste of time. Something not even God needed of His people. So here's what false religion or man-made religion so often does.

It focuses on the external, what you can see. It focuses on people's actions, what they have to do to please God.

And then it really focuses on something that's really quite inconsequential. But they make that the main thing. And all it does is allow people to have this false sense of security, really of self-righteousness.

[ 10 : 07 ] that if I keep my hands clean, everything else I do will be okay. If I just keep the outside clean, if I just do these sets of actions or rules, then God will be happy with me.

But instead of making people clean, really clean, and making God happy, in reality, madman religion allows people to be hypocrites, to pretend to be one thing, but actually being another.

And it makes God really angry. And Jesus is having none of their religious shenanigans. He's not going to play their game. He confronts them head on.

Look what He says from verse 6. And He said to them, Well, did I prophesy against you hypocrites? Hypocrites. Hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something.

He's got a mask on. It's the word they used for actors back in the day. An actor was a hypocrite. Because he's pretending to be something he's not. And God is saying about His people, These people honor me with their lips.

[ 11 : 16 ] They say they love me. But they've got a problem with their heart. Their heart is far away from me. That word far away is abandoned. It's abandoned me. It's not looking for me.

It doesn't want to know anything about me. All it's doing is doing whatever it wants to do. And then pretending it's worshipping me. In vain do they worship me. They worship me for nothing. I'm not listening to their worship.

Because they teach as doctrines the commandments of men. They are saying, the doctrines there is my doctrines. They are teaching the things that I've said. But I've said this, but in fact it's just people making their own opinion.

Jesus makes this comment, you leave the commandments of God and hold on to the tradition of men. So it's one of the main problems with man-made religion. It lets go of what God has said and then makes up a whole bunch of new rules that you've got to keep that God never says you have to do.

Jesus goes on to talk about this law of the Korban and he shows that this is hypocrisy in action over here. What is this Korban thing all about that Jesus is speaking about?

[ 12 : 23 ] Well, the Korban law allowed for Jews, it's in the Torah, in the first five books, in Leviticus, it's a law that allowed for Jews to dedicate something exclusively for use to the temple.

It was like a donation or a bequest. It was merely meant as a token of thanks for God's blessings. Instead, the Pharisees, with their man-made religion and tradition, allowed people to pretend to be holy, but in reality removing the responsibility for children to look after their parents, which was obviously the more important law to keep.

Not only that, but it seemed the Pharisees allowed people to keep use of it for themselves. So you would declare something Korban because you really wanted to get the interest for yourself, but not allowing anyone else to get access to it.

So essentially, letting them steal from their parents to lie in their own pockets. All the while, looking like they were doing the righteous and holy thing before God and before others. No wonder Jesus was so upset with the Pharisees.

Their false teaching, instead of helping God's people love each other, is leading them away from God and into deeper and deeper sin. It's just making the situation worse.

[ 13 : 44 ] So the reason is that man-made religion totally misses out on the heart of the problem. It's a total misdiagnosis. And that's because the heart of the problem of man, of man's relationship to God, is our heart.

The heart of the problem of man's relationship to God, and often to each other, is what happens on our inside, our heart. And that's why it's so important to listen to Jesus, because only He can help us understand what our real problem is.

Jesus helps us get to the heart of the matter. Jesus helps us get to the heart of the matter. You know, when you're sick, the worst thing you can do is Google your own sickness, and sort of do a self-diagnosis, and then you decide you know what the problem is, and then you take your medication.

Unless we're trained, we just don't know. Some years ago, I had some pains going down my legs. I thought I'd strained a muscle. Anyway, it wouldn't go away. I'd been on some plane trips.

Google told me I had DVT, deep vein thrombosis. Thought I was going to die. I'm going to get a stroke. That's it. How can I die? I'm so young. Started taking aspirin to thin my blood.

[ 15 : 08 ] Didn't know that I've got a stomach ulcer that helped to aggravate. So I just got worse and worse. Eventually, I spoke to a doctor. I happened to be with my dad. I didn't speak in the first place.

He says, sit down on the bed. Lift your leg. I tried. I couldn't. He said, you're being an idiot. All you've got is a pinched sciatic nerve.

Take some anti-inflammatories. You'll be fine. Boom. 100%. So, when you've got a problem in your life that you can't resolve, who you listen to to help you resolve it is of vital importance.

You want to listen to someone who knows what they're talking about. Would you agree with me that in our passage, or rather in the Gospel of Mark, everything we know about Jesus up to this point in the story would indicate that Jesus is the one worth listening to and not human tradition or others.

Every time we've come across the Pharisees, they're always arguing, always complaining, always picking out the small little things, never really helping anything, just trying to trip people up. But you've got Jesus going around actually helping people.

[ 16 : 23 ] Well, Jesus tells us what our biggest problem is. He tells us that the thing that makes us unclean on the inside is not the food we eat or the things we touch or the hands we wash or don't wash.

Our biggest problem is our heart. We've already seen Jesus' quote from Isaiah that people's problem is that their heart is far from God.

Did you notice that in that quote from Isaiah? Your hearts are far from me. God wants people with their hearts near to Him, with Him, not against Him. He then goes on to explain to the crowds and the disciples that it's not the things that come from the outside that makes us unclean because they don't touch the heart.

Verse 19. But it's the things from the inside, from our very heart. Verse 21. That causes all our problems. And then just look at the ugliness and the uncleanness, really the filth that comes out of our hearts.

It's a horrible list. You almost don't want to go through it. You sort of just read it and sort of skim along. We've got to look in the mirror. If we want a proper diagnosis, we really need to know what our problem is if we're going to take steps to fix it properly.

[ 17 : 46 ] Jesus says, for from within, from the inside, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts. That evil thoughts is sort of the headline for everything that follows.

Then he says, this is what these evil thoughts are like. Sexual immorality. Sleeping around. Theft. Stealing stuff. Murder.

Hating and killing people. Adultery. More sleeping around. Coveting. Wanting stuff that's not yours. And wickedness, just to cover it all, basically doing bad things to other people.

Just being mean. A lot of these are in the Ten Commandments we read earlier. But Jesus goes on. That's not all. There's more. Then there's deceit.

Pretending to be one thing. Lying, basically. Depending on the translation, sensuality or lewdness. Basically having a mind that is always looking to do bad things for sin.

[ 18 : 53 ] Envy. Looking at people horribly and meanly. Wishing someone evil. Being jealous. Slander. Saying bad things about God.

Saying bad things about other people. Pride. Arrogance. Thinking that you're better than you are. Better than the other person. And foolishness.

Not even thinking about what you're doing. Being empty headed. Ah, just going. Just doing it because, well. You know when you catch a teenager doing something? Why did you do that?

Mm-hmm. I... Adults are not too different. Being the opposite of wise.

Jesus shows us what we really are. We hate to admit it, but his analysis is spot on. We need to listen to him here because if we...

[ 19 : 51 ] Because we are so quick to not look at this problem of ourselves and to blame others for our failings and the problems that we have. It's not my fault if only I'd been raised differently.

It's not my fault if only I had a better job. It's not my fault if you hadn't made me so angry. I think I literally said that in the last two weeks or so.

I remember actually saying that. It's not my fault if only my husband would listen to me or my wife. Think about what the politicians are saying about the problems in our country.

We've got the elections next week, tomorrow. Problems in our country. It's because you don't have land. They haven't given the land back.

Or because someone else has too much privilege but of jealousy over there. Or because there's still too much inequality but of greed. Or maybe there's too much violence.

[ 20 : 50 ] That is the truth though. But no circumstance, no other person, no activity can ever fully account for the sin for my actions.

In the end, we're totally responsible for what we do. We are the source of our own uncleanness. Our sins do not make us sinful.

Rather, we commit sins because we are sinful. Do you get that about the heart? It's really that bad. In fact, you can do a study of the heart in the Bible and you'll see all those verses about the heart that God talks about.

That's a hard truth to accept but if we stumble here, we'll miss out on the cure and we want the cure. True religion then, as taught to us by Christ, focuses not on the external but on internal attitudes and desires, the things that our heart longs for and reaches out and wants to grab.

It tells us what our actual problem is. It tells us what the actual source of our troubles are and it's our heart. It tells us that it's not a small problem but a seriously significant one.

[ 22 : 05 ] In fact, it's a problem that we can't overcome because it's so part and parcel of who we are. We can't do open heart surgery on ourselves. We need someone else to come and do that for us.

It's not a problem that we can fix on our own. We're going to need help to get the problem solved. Just like with COVID when you're in a really bad way and they've got to intubate you and you're lying down in the hospital and they're keeping you alive, that's the kind of help we need.

We need to realize that the small little changes in our lifestyle, trying this, trying that, blaming this, none of that is going to cut it. We need open heart spiritual surgery if we want to get right with God and then get right with others.

And the only person that we know of that's able to deliver that is Jesus. Mark doesn't give us the full solution here to the problem of our heart, but he does want you to know that Jesus is the one with the answers.

That's why Jesus is here telling us the truth. Mark wants us to realize that Jesus is the cure to the sickness in our heart. We have to do business with Jesus if we are going to be able to deal with the problem in our hearts.

[ 23 : 19 ] I've got to ask you if you've done that and if you continue to do that. Are you looking all over and for different places to fix the problems you face in life?

The wonderful promise of the gospel, as we've heard all through our service today, as we tell you whenever we talk here at Mark, is that Jesus does exactly this. Think about what we've seen about him doing in Mark so far.

We've seen how Jesus specializes in healing the broken, in healing the sick, in raising the dead.

Jesus is not worried about being unclean. Rather, he spends time with people who are unclean in order to show them that he's the one that can make them clean.

And to this day, that hasn't changed. That offer still is open to all who want his help. You've got to do business with Jesus if you want to get your heart clean.

[ 24 : 21 ] You've got to trust him to show you that he knows what he's talking about when it comes to matters of the heart. And once we've done business with Jesus, and we've had our hearts changed, we then need to continue to do business with our own hearts.

So part of the problem is that our hearts talk to us. I don't know if you know this, but strange as that may sound. But in that verse 21, those evil thoughts that I mentioned, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts.

The word for that can be translated evil dialogues or evil conversations. So your heart is having these constant little evil conversations with you about what you should want and what you should do.

Those conversations are so crafty and tricky, you don't even know you're having them. All those sins come out of the heart who is in a sense telling you to do them.

So then part of the solution to having a clean heart is to talk back to your heart and tell it about Jesus and tell it what Jesus has done and what Jesus wants you to be like.

[ 25 : 30 ] So essentially you need to have a heart to heart with your heart if you want to be clean with God. We need to spend time talking to our hearts. So just some thoughts about this.

When you pray about the things you've done wrong, when you think through your day or your week in your life, all these things, be careful not just to pray about things you've said and done, do that, but spend time thinking about how your heart is involved in it.

What is happening on the inside that you get so quickly reactive? Why do you get such a strong response when someone says such a small little thing? Why are you always looking for this?

Running after that? What is your heart telling you? Do you notice in Psalm 51, David didn't just pray about his external sin and that prayer is about his sin with Bathsheba.

It's a major sin. He didn't just pray about that, but he prayed for a pure heart. He involved his heart in his prayers to overcome sin. So in your prayer life, ask God, Lord, help me understand where this is coming from.

[ 26 : 37 ] Help me to see what's going on in my heart. Speak to your heart. Speak to your heart and remind it that it has a new boss now. It has a new leader.

It has a new king. Apostle Paul was well aware of the battle that rages inside of us. He wrote in Romans chapter 7, he says, I find this law at work.

He's thinking about his life and being a Christian. Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, on the inside, I delight in God's law.

But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law at work within me.

What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? The answer? Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[ 27 : 40 ] Getting a clean heart is a hard battle, but it has been fought and won by Jesus. The best way to lead a changed life is to rest in a sure and certain hope of that victory and remind yourself as often as you can of it.

In fact, in closing, one way to remind yourself and to redeem this totally worthless, it's not a worthless COVID situation because God is in control of it. So many lessons to learn about.

Every time you go to the shopping center, wherever you have to spray a little bit of clean on your hands, just quietly remind yourself, thanks to Jesus, I'm just as clean on the inside.

Let's pray together. Dear Lord Jesus, you show us the true meaning of religion, of true religion, and how it's a matter of our heart and not just of what we do and say and all the things we get wrong.

Lord, we ask that you will continue to do what you've done throughout history, which is to call men and women to your service by changing their hearts and cleaning their hearts and making them holy and making them beat for you and love you.

[ 28 : 59 ] Lord Jesus, continue to do that work in our lives, through all our days and through all eternity. Amen.