

Deliverance From Tradition

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Deliverance

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Bible Text: Mark 7:1-23

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to two very specific places, the gospel of Mark 7 and a little further in your New Testament, the book of Galatians 5. Now we're going to spend the overwhelming majority of our time in Mark 7 today, in fact, you don't hear pastors do this often but when you hear me refer to Galatians 5, we are wrapping up. I mean, we are coming to the end so we're not going to be there until the end, we're going to spend the majority of our time in Mark 7. And if you're a guest or visitor with us or maybe you're new to us and you were here with us in days past and the Lord has brought you back for whatever reason, I want to invite you on a journey through the gospel of Mark, one of the four gospels we have of the life, the ministry, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the shortest of the four gospels but it may be the most action-packed of all the accounts of Jesus Christ. And as we're walking through the gospel of Mark in this season, it's not just a biography or a chronology, we're looking at the ministry of Jesus Christ, his words, his actions as a means of deliverance. Now admittedly so, it's one of those words in our culture that causes us kind of to take a step back but the word "deliverance" simply means "to be set free; to be released from that which is holding us in bondage," or it can mean "to be removed from a place that is detrimental to one that is desirable." Today as we come to Mark 7, we have a group of individuals who do not believe they need deliverance, In fact, much the contrary, they believe that Jesus Christ is the problem and in these verses today, he's going to address a very important subject matter that each and every one of us struggle with, it's this concept of being delivered from our traditions.

Now when we use the word "tradition," I want to begin somewhat secularly here this morning. We all have traditions that we love, whether that's the gathering of our families at a certain time or season or holiday, certain foods we eat at certain events, certain ways we celebrate victories at ballgames, all that and such, that's not what Jesus Christ is addressing here in Mark 7. Here's what he's addressing: when we approach or view our faith from a viewpoint of that which we are comfortable with or that which we are contrary to actually is in violation of or cannot be found in scripture. The men in this passage that Jesus is addressing, they had traditions of faith that could not be justified by scripture and essentially here's what Jesus is calling us to do today: just do it the Bible way. In spite of whatever way we may be comfortable with, in spite of whatever way we

may struggle with, what does the Bible say and we need to conform to scripture rather than allowing scripture to be conformed to us.

So Mark 7, beginning in verse 1, somewhat of a lengthy passage but of a necessary one. It says,

1 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. 2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. 3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. 5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? 6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. 9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. 10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: 11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. 12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. 14 And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: 15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. 16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. 18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; 19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? 20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Now as we address this topic of being delivered from our perceived traditions, please understand that everybody gathered in verse 1 thought they were doing what they were supposed to do. I believe they had the best intentions, however, Jesus Christ, God in flesh, corrects their obvious error. So when we talk about these "traditions," notice that here in chapter 7 it's always qualified: the tradition of the elders, the tradition of men. In other words, not just simply having a tradition but one, according to what we just read, is either contrary to or removes itself from the commandment of God.

So today I want to walk through not only identifying but looking at the implications of our traditions from this perspective, it is, number 1, our preferences, number 2, our prejudices and because of that the predicament that it oftentimes puts us in. So let's identify today our own traditions. Now this can mean us as individuals, it can mean us as a collective body of believers, or just humanity in totality, but we all have preferences, we all have ways of doing things that we're comfortable with. In fact, oftentimes our preferences are not because we "chose them" but it's all we've ever known. How many times have you heard this famous statement, "We've never done it that way before"? Well, that's what a preference is, a preference is something that is just utterly familiar to you, it's the way that it's always been done whether or not it is scriptural or not has nothing to do with our emotional response because here these men were doing what they had known for generations, they were expressing themselves the way they had always been doing so, and Jesus Christ says, "Here's the problem, no matter why you're doing what you're doing, no matter how sincere you are, you cannot line it up with scripture."

Allow me to go back about 500 years in time, a very famous event, we collectively call it the Protestant Reformation but essentially 500 years ago through the implementation of some key individuals, there was a return to scripture, a removal from tradition that had led so many astray for so many different reasons. Do you know one of the most difficult things about not only 500 years ago but even today is more often than not you did not choose the traditions of faith that you grew up with. In other words, your parents, your grandparents, where you live, wherever it may be, it's just kind of a place that you were "born into" and it's what you knew, and you know, 500 years ago something took place in many people's lives that took place in this place today, somebody who was a believer in Jesus Christ but yet early in their childhood had experienced a religious ceremony, had never followed through what we call believer's baptism. You know, in Acts 8 you've got the Ethiopian eunuch that once he professes his faith, then he is baptized, and you see not only when it's done but how it is done and we were faced as humanity with a real faith crisis, do we keep acting out our faith like we've been doing for hundreds of years or do we actually do it according to what the Bible says? Now I know you're at a Baptist church, you're 500 years removed from that, you're thinking what's the big deal? Did you know that in most European countries, when an adult was baptized then, the punishment was execution, considered a traitor to the state simply because it's what the Bible says to do, we're just going to do it the Bible way. Do you see how our preferences can get in the way because it's all we've known, it's what we're comfortable with, and most of our forefathers whom and wherever they are, have kind of followed suit.

But then there's our prejudices. You see, our prejudice isn't what we are familiar with or comfortable with, it's what just kind of rubs us the wrong way. Prejudice are those things that we struggle with. It's not we've never done it that way before, it's we've always done it this way. A prejudice is a position we hold in regards to the expression of our faith that we may be "comfortable with" but the prejudice is, "I don't like that even if the Bible confirms it."

Now this morning, I'm feeling a little frisky so we're just going to go there. I've decided to make this an equal opportunity offensive message so let me begin here and then you'll see where we're headed. Some years ago, much like on our campus today, I was in another state. The worship services of the respective church that I pastored had a variety of styles. I know what some of you are saying, "Oh, we just went there, didn't we?" Oh, yes, we are. Had a variety of styles and the first service looked much like the one that you just participated in and the second service, it was a little smaller, a little darker, and can we say, a whole lot louder. Does that communicate? Well, as I was entering that second service, I had been at the guest reception. What had happened that day was very unusual for us, the choir and the orchestra in that first service had kind of a call to worship kind of like today that was just, I mean, shake the chandeliers kind of thing. So we decided it doesn't matter what the respective style is, it works, let's just hold the choir and orchestra over and let them start the second service. It doesn't sound like a big deal, does it, until a man and his family walked in the door, saw the choir in the loft and said, "Oh, no, no, I am not going back to that," and he went to the parking lot. Hm, isn't that interesting? He had such a prejudice against a choir and an orchestra he wouldn't even bother listening to what they were going to sing.

Lest you think you're going to get off the hook, there's a friend of mine who shares this story. I wish I had been there to see it and hear it. It's just that good, that he was preparing to lead a worship service in a respective church, a lady walked in the back door, sat down and had a holler note, "Ah!" They thought it was a medical condition but she pointed to the drums and she said, "Why is the devil in the church?" Y'all didn't laugh that much at that one. Do you know why? Because we all have our prejudices, we all have what we like, and more importantly, we have what we don't like.

Do you know the problem with those analogies is there's choirs all over the Bible and if you've read Psalm 149 and 150, it doesn't say just to play the timbrel, it says play it loud. Do you see the predicament that we're in? Because of how we were raised or because of what our ears maybe prefer or what we're prejudiced against, there comes times in our life where we will render something not of God just because it's not of me, and as we read through the scripture and we see these individuals, it puts us in a predicament because notice how many times over and over in this passage he talked about the heart. Verse 19, because it enters not into the heart. Here's the predicament: how does the truth of God or the error of the world enter into our heart? Is it because of the décor of the room that we're in? Is it because the brightness of the dimness of the light? Is it because of the respective instrument that is being utilized? Unfortunately no matter what you want it to be, that's not the biblical response. The biblical response is, according to Romans 12:1 and 2, we are transformed by the renewing of our mind. And how does our

mind get altered, changed, renewed? It's typically, not all the time, that which we see and that which we hear, and when I mean see, the word of God we hear and the words we hear being proclaimed and/or.

You see, the predicament is that we all have preferences, the predicament is that we all have prejudices at some level, we have likes, we have dislikes, we have that which makes us comfortable and we have at times that which us very uncomfortable. Sometimes it's a stylistic issue. Sometimes it could be the day of the week or the hour in which it takes place. It could be the level of which the decorum or dress is elevated or diminished. There are a thousand variables that cause us to challenge ourselves. Is the position I hold biblically based or is it tradition based?

Now let's see how this is implemented in our everyday lives walking through this text. Again, let's talk about preferences. Go back to verse 1, "Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem." These men who were being challenged by Jesus Christ, they had a way of doing things that had been that way not just for a few years or decades but for centuries. They had preferences, they had styles, they had means by which that they and their parents and their grandparents and others preferred.

So what are the implications? What are the implications if we do not set aside our preferences? Have you ever heard the term moving the goalpost? Now having a son who has a propensity to put a ball through goalposts, allow me to explain. You may or may not know this but the goalpost in high school are wider than in college, and college is wider than the NFL. But I asked him the other day per this illustration, I called him up and I said, "Son, I've got a kicking question." You know, it's funny when you call there and you get a call back, you call about grades, you don't get a call back. But nonetheless, I get a call back and I said, "Let me ask you a question whether you're in high school, college or the NFL, if you hit it down the middle is there any chance you miss?" He said, "Not at all." You see, the term moving the goalpost is actually taking the foundation and shifting it one direction or the next so that where it should go through it does not. You realize that when we make our faith standards, our subjective preferences, we're moving the goalpost. We're basically saying that it's good if you line up with me and it's bad if you don't. It's of God if you see it this way, and it's not if you don't.

Do you see the implications? We end up creating a strata of faith that's not based on that which is solid and firm but that which can change from generation to generation, from fad to fad, or season to season, but the word of God says it will never fade away and it will never depart from us. You see, the implications of holding onto our preferences are very dangerous because sometimes those traditions move us off center.

Well, how about our prejudices? What are the implications there? I want to call your attention to verse 9 in this passage. I know you were reading along with me and everything was going good until you got to verse 9 because you read about this tradition that the elders had, this tradition that the Pharisees had and you looked at it and you said, "Well, it talks about honoring your mother and father, it talks about then in verse 11, you

call it Corban, what is that?" Allow me to illustrate for you what was taking place here and then show you the implications if it happens in your life as well. According to the 10 Commandments you are to honor your mother and father, in fact, it's the only commandment that says that your days will be extended because you do so. Unlike our culture today, they did not have 401k's, 403b's, pension plans and/or Social Security. In fact, the children were the Social Security of their family. That's how things operated in those days, that's how they functioned. And so what they were to do in their culture was they were to set aside the resources and make sure that mom or dad or typically mom because of the age gap there, that they were cared for until their last day.

Well, as you can imagine, these individuals were not a big fan of that so they came up with this idea called Corban. Now in a moment you're going to say where did they get that? They just pulled it out of the hat. It's not based on the 10 Commandments. It's not based on the Levitical law and you can find it nowhere in the Bible. Here's what they said. It is a tradition instead of setting aside money to help mom and dad, we're going to give it to the synagogue, we're going to give it to the temple, we're going to play the God card is what we're going to do. Now let me tell you what that meant. They gave it to the temple, right? They donated. They said, "I'm sorry, mom, I'm sorry, dad. I can't help you out, I gave it all to God." Go back to verse 1 for just a moment, then came the Pharisees and the scribes. How did they receive their compensation? From the temple. Do you see how that works? They claimed, "Oh, we're giving it to God. I'm sorry, mom, I can't help you." And yet that was the way they were funneling the money to themselves.

You say, "Well, we don't have Corban really like that today. We don't see that particularly in our churches." I like to call it the God card. You say, "What's the God card?" The God card is when you claim you're doing something for God when actually all you're doing is claiming a prejudice that you own. Allow me to illustrate. I've heard this, I've seen this a thousand different ways. Young people all of a sudden decide, "You know, I'm not so much interested in dating that person anymore. I don't want to upset them. I don't want to really tell them the truth." So what do you do? You go have a meal and you say, "I'm sorry, I've been praying and God told me we're not supposed to date anymore." You're laughing because you've heard it. Did you hear that? Even the babies have heard it. But it doesn't have to be in that realm, it could be in an occupation, it can be in a service opportunity when we say, "Well, God told me no or God told me yes." You see, we use the God card both ways, "I've prayed about it and just, no."

So can I give you the antidote and I'm fixing to give you the secret sauce, are you ready for this? This is one of those, I mean, this is worthy of writing down, it's revolutionary but it's simple. When somebody plays the God card saying, "Well, God and I have talked about it and that's just not me," chapter and verse. What chapter in the Bible and what verse in the Bible led you to make that claim? Why? Because if you don't, you're moving the goalpost. If you don't, then all you're doing is the same thing they were doing saying, "Well, we're going to blame this on God," but really what it is, is doing what I want to please me. Do you see how subtle that is? How guilty we are of blaming God? "Well, I prayed about it." You may have prayed about it but what does the Bible say about it, and can you defend what you've said or how you view something with scripture?

So here's the predicament: Galatians 5. Now I already gave you the hint, we're getting close. Galatians 5 is the famous passage about the fruit of the Spirit. This is important because all throughout the passage he's talked about our heart, that what goes into the body, that which comes out of the heart, and I want you to notice a very distinct difference. Verse 19, this is Galatians 5, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest," and by the way, it gives a list that's very similar to what we read in Mark 7, it's one of those that if you haven't blushed yet, if you read them you will blush particularly in this environment. The works of the flesh. What does that mean? That means these are the things that happen in life when you manipulate, when you arrange things for your own preference or your prejudice. Look at every single one of those things that is listed and there's a common denominator: selfishness, what I want or what I don't want in my life. I choose this person because I don't like the person I'm with. Or I choose this person because of that reason, whatever it may be. Every one of them, it's the works of the flesh, it's manipulating, you have to strive to accomplish it because it's based on what you like.

Now look in verse 22, "But," you know I like that word in the Bible, "But the fruit of the Spirit." You see, here's the amazing thing about fruit: you can't make it happen, you cannot force fruit, you cannot manipulate fruit. If you don't believe me, I dare you go to any fruit tree in Lee County today and go try to make it bear fruit. You can't do it, in fact, the Bible talks about that just like in the agricultural world, fruit is born when we water our lives with the, according to Ephesians 5, the word of God combined with sunlight, Jesus called himself the light of the world, what happens? It is a natural, should I say supernatural response, that fruit is born. I want you to notice the very first fruit, we won't go through the whole list: love. That's a word we've twisted and turned in our culture today but can I share with you what the biblical definition of love is? More concerned about what somebody else needs than what you want. That's what love is.

So when we talk about our traditions, we all have preferences, we all have prejudices, but if the fruit of the Spirit of love is born in our life, we are actually more concerned that somebody who has not heard the gospel does than we do it the way we like, and that's just the first of all the fruit that is listed. You get into joy and peace and gentleness and all the list there and do you see the difference? You see, the works of the flesh are all selfish. We manipulate it, we twist it, we turn it, we make it what we like, but the fruit of the Spirit, love, means it's not about us, it's about others. You see, every one of us has our past, every one of us has our preferences, every one of us has our prejudices, but what do we discover Jesus saying? It's not the room you're in, it's not the clothes you're wearing, it may not even be the instrument that's being played, what's coming out of your heart? Is it words and actions that are all about you or is it all about others? And therein lies the distinct difference. In verse 1 it was all about what pleased them, what he challenged the disciples was, "What is it that comes out of your life, not necessarily the environment that you find yourself in?" What a challenge to each and every one of us today.

Let me close with this. Which one of the two respective groups are still here? You say, "What do you mean?" The Pharisees and the Sadducees died off years ago but these men started the church that bore the fruit of you today. You are here worshipping the Lord

2,000 years later because they bore fruit of love and not the preferences and prejudices of the others that gathered.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Today when we talk about a matter of the heart, you know, maybe you're that individual today who would be honest not only with yourself but with God and say, "You know, when it comes to faith, when it comes to religion, it's all been about a bunch of do's and don'ts, it's been about lists and checking off boxes and did I do the right thing at the right place." The Bible says in Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. That's not a tradition, that's not a preference, that's not a prejudice, that's just a simple declaration from scripture that if you call on the Lord Jesus Christ, you confess and claim that you're a sinner and you ask him to forgive you, he will save you.

Maybe you're that person today, maybe today you would be honest with God and yourself and say, "I have been all about tradition, right place, right time, right words, right this, right that," and maybe today you say, "Do you know what? It's never been a matter of the heart. I've never confessed my sins and asked Jesus to save me." Maybe today would be that day, it's not about the exact phrase you use or the repetition of what somebody else might say, this is your heart's cry as Romans 10 says, and so allow me to somewhat assist or guide but please make it your own. Maybe today your heart cry to God would go something like this, "God, today I want to be honest and transparent and state for the record that I now understand what you know about me, I'm a sinner. I have messed up. I've gone places I shouldn't have gone. I've done things I shouldn't have done. I've said things I shouldn't have said. And I've thought things I shouldn't have thought. And God, I admit today that no amount of religious duties are ever going to solve that sin problem. God, I believe that Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for my salvation. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to be born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a life of sinlessness, rejecting all temptations of the world. God, I believe that when they nailed him to his cross, he was bearing the punishment and the pain of my sins. And God, I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the issues and the struggles of this world but I do know this, that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if you had that conversation with the Lord today, we want to celebrate with you. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us. After I'm done praying, we're going to stand and sing together and we just want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a whole team of folks who'd love to hear your story and pray with you and pray for you. But maybe today you say, "You know, I had that conversation with the Lord years ago." In just a moment when we stand, it's not about stepping forward and coming here, really it's about going to your Sunday school class, it's about going out to the highways and byways and doing an honest self-analysis, "Do I hold my preferences and prejudices based on what the word of God says or simply just what I like?" It's a tough response that requires us to look inside at our hearts.

Lord Jesus, thank you today that you have come to transform our heart, you have come to renew our heart, God, you have come to set us free. God, today I simply pray whatever decision you've laid upon our hearts that we would be more concerned with what you have said than even our own feelings, emotions or what others think. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.