

# Jesus, Tradition Breaker?

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Preacher: Jonathan Smith

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thanks, Paul. Good to have you here tonight as we look at Matthew's Gospel together. My name is Jono Smith, one of the pastors here at Holy Trinity, and it's good to be getting into a new series with you, looking through the kind of the middle part of Matthew, looking at snapshots of Jesus' life and teaching and seeing what we can learn about him and about ourselves as followers of him as we go.

And I just want to start tonight by making a confession. I know this is a safe place, a place of healing. And so I want to confess that I'm not much of a hand washer.

I'm just not a hand washer. I never have been. I grew up on a bit of a farm, I guess, and we had cows and kangaroos and horses and stuff like that.

And I used to spend most of my time in the mud, pulling out what I could and eating it. And so I like the mud. I didn't want to get rid of the mud. And I hated it when my parents told me I had to wash my hands before I ate, because I'd just been eating the mud anyway, so I didn't see the point.

And it's still true today. I don't wash my hands before I eat. I just want to come out and say that. I don't want to freak you out. I do wash them before I give out communion, just in case you're wondering about that.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] And we've even got hand sanitizer back there behind the table, so don't freak out about that. But I'm not a hand washer. If you look at my hands, you'll probably see some of the ash that I picked up as we were helping that family on Saturday.

And there's pan marks and there's all kinds of stuff. I'm just not a hand washer. I'm just not. And tonight we're going to talk about hand washing. And Jesus is going to have something to say about hand washing.

I think we'll see that I'm the biblical one among us, because I don't really care about hand washing, neither do Jesus. But honestly, I guess, oh, that's a bit of a joke, isn't it?

Because what Jesus is talking about here is about so much more than hand washing. His point is that true religion, true faith is about your heart, not about what's on your hands.

That's what we're going to talk about tonight. I would love to pray for us first. Dear Father, please speak powerfully through your word to these people. Jesus, please help us to see you here for who you truly are and to follow you accordingly.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] Holy Spirit, I ask that you would convict us and change us to be more like Jesus Christ. Amen. We're going to pick it up straight into it from verse one.

So if you've got a Bible, please, please turn there. I'm just going to walk us through this really interesting passage. It's chapter 15, verse one to 20. So we pick it up in verse one and we see that Matthew writes, One thing you've got to notice here is that the Pharisees and the scribes have come to Jesus from Jerusalem.

And this is a big deal. You need to know that at this point, the Pharisees, the scribes, the rabbis, the teachers, these Jewish elders are scattered all over the place. But these guys have come from Jerusalem.

It's like when a politician comes from Canberra. It means more than when they come from the Manningsham local offices. This is an important delegation of important people from Jerusalem.

And they come to Jesus and they're there really to get him into trouble. They want to trip him up. And he's going to run into them over and over again in the coming weeks. And they say to him, they accuse him, they ask him, Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

[ 3 : 59 ] For they do not wash their hands before they eat. What's the tradition of the elders? It was an oral corpus of teaching. It was like a commentary on God's word.

So you'd have all these rabbis scattered about and they would teach from God's word and interpret God's word. And that collection of teachings came to be known as the tradition of the elders.

So it's an oral collection of teachings, kind of commentary on God's word. And what the Pharisees had done, these Pharisees who were very well respected, very learned, knew their Bible better than anyone else.

They had elevated that tradition of the elders to be almost on a par with the word of God. So you've got the word of God, God's very words to us in the Old Testament up here, authoritative word of God.

And they had taken the teaching of these elders, these men, and put it alongside as of equal importance. And so you can see why they're outraged by Jesus. And they say, Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

[ 5 : 05 ] But we learn elsewhere in the gospel that the disciples just do what Jesus does. That's what a disciple is. So Jesus is culpable here as well. So why are you doing this?

Why are you breaking this tradition of the elders, this important tradition? And he responds straight out of the blocks.

He doesn't mind a fight, Jesus. If you know a Jesus who's kind of soft and feminine and meek and mild and lamb-like, and you know only that Jesus, you've got it wrong.

There are aspects of Jesus, of course, that are compassionate, gentle and kind, but he did not hesitate to go straight in with his fists up when it came to people who were trying to accuse him of things hypocritically.

Okay, so verse 3, follow with me. He said, in answer to them, And why do you break the commandment of God, not the tradition of the elders, but the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?

[ 6 : 06 ] Straight back at them. For God said, honour your father and your mother, and whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die. That's Exodus chapter 20, 21.

Clear commandment of God that children must honour their parents. Parents are all sitting here going, what happened to that one? We lost that one somewhere. We should bring that back. Am I right? Maybe not the part about children being put to death, but at least you can resonate with that.

That was a commandment of God. Children, honour your parents. But you say, you Pharisees say, that whoever tells father or mother, whatever support you might have had from me is given to God, then that person need not honour the father.

So for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. So what's happening is that these Jewish men who should be taking care of their parents and paying for them to stay in nice retirement villages like the Domain or something like that, instead of doing like that, doing what they're meant to do and take care of their parents, they're going to the Pharisees and saying, what about I give you my money?

What if we dedicated my money to the temple? And that way, I wouldn't have to give it to my parents. So when the parents come along and say, how about putting us up at the Domain?

[ 7 : 31 ] They say, well, I would. I would give you my money, but I've given it to the temple. I'm that godly. And then apparently what would happen quite often was that that greedy man would annul that dedication, maybe give a portion of it to the temple and then take it back for himself.

So Jesus calls them out, not just because the practice is bad, but because they're hypocrites. They're accusing him of breaking a human tradition and yet they are making void the very words of God, the very commandments of God.

They've elevated tradition, not only to be on a par with scripture, but to be above scripture. He says to them, verse seven, you hypocrites.

It's the first time he says it and then he says it a lot about the Pharisees. You hypocrites. He's fired up now. He says, Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said, this people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts, human traditions as doctrines. You know something really, really important. You need to get this.

[ 8 : 50 ] This is really key. When he talks about Isaiah and Isaiah's prophecy, he's not making a secondary application to these people.

Okay, a secondary application is me saying, yeah, Isaiah said that there are people in his day who honoured God with their lips, but their hearts were far away. You guys don't be like that. Have a heart relationship with God, not just a verbal one.

He's not saying that. He's saying, Isaiah, when he said this, was prophesying about them in the flesh. Isaiah prophesied a few hundred years before and he was talking about these guys, the Pharisees.

He says it to their face. They know Isaiah better than anyone else. And Jesus says, when he wrote that, it was about you, hypocrites.

These hypocrites, these people that were in Isaiah's day and in Jesus' day, these Pharisees, they were characterised by this fake relationship with God.

[ 9 : 54 ] They had a love for religion in form, but not religion of the heart. Religion can be a devastating thing when it's religion of form, when it's commitment to form and not to faith, not to heart relationship with God.

And Jesus says from Isaiah that this religion, this very religion that they were practising, nullifies the worship that they go through week in, week out.

So to put it in our context, you can turn up to church every week and you can say the prayers and you can sing the songs and you know it all off by heart. You honour God with your lips, but your heart is far away.

You don't have a relationship with him. And the irony is, that that very act of worship, so-called, that very act of honouring God with your lips only, nullifies the act to begin with.

It makes it void. It makes it useless. God doesn't accept it. He rejects it. That's what religion can do. That's what religion in form can do.

[ 11 : 11 ] And that's what the Pharisees have been doing. Verse 10 here, he moves away from the Pharisees now and he calls to the crowd and he says to them, listen and understand.

It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it's what comes out of the mouth that defiles. This is his key point. He's finished with the Pharisees.

He's done with them. You see in verse 14 in a minute, he has discounted them. They've written themselves out of the picture. And he turns to the people that he's really caring for. These are the people that he fed in the last chapter that Martin preached from, feeding the 5,000 or the 15, 20,000.

These are the people he's been healing along the way. These crowds, these are the people that he has compassion on and he turns to them and he says, listen and understand, I really want you to understand. You need to get this.

It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles, but what comes out of the mouth that defiles. See, the Pharisees say that breaking traditions and rules defile a person, make a person sinful really.

[ 12 : 26 ] That if you break our traditions, if you break our rules, that's how you get sinful. Jesus says, no, it's got nothing to do with that. It's a hard issue. It's got to do with your heart. Who are you serving?

Who are you worshipping? Who are you giving your life to? It's not based on human traditions. It's based on the word of God, of God's intention for our life.

Are we in tune with that? I spent a couple of years back at the turn of the millennium and I was working in America and I just butted heads with some of these people I was working for in a big way.

I was working for some really well-intentioned Christians who had gone a little bit far with their traditions, I think. And the thing we butted heads on was on alcohol.

I had no idea. I just walked into this situation. I just figured that, you know, everyone's cool with alcohol in moderation, right? And so I walked into this situation where I just got beaten down for saying and coming out and saying that I like to, you know, enjoy a cold beer every now and then or even every day and that I brew it.

[ 13 : 43 ] And that didn't go down well at all. I mean, I got fired the first day that I was working for these people because I said that I drank alcohol.

And for them, to drink alcohol is tantamount to saying that I don't believe in Jesus. And the reason we butted heads so hard was partly because I was sinful and at the time enjoyed probably too much alcohol and it was a little too high on my priority list of things that I like to do.

But part of it was because they were trying to impose on me a legalism that I didn't see in the Bible and still don't see. I don't see anywhere in the Bible where it says, do not drink beer.

Nowhere. I see plenty of occasions where it says, do not get drunk. For sure. But nowhere did I say, do not drink at all.

To me it was like in our Introducing God course a couple of days ago we saw that the speaker was talking about a knife.

[ 14 : 51 ] How a knife in and of itself isn't good or evil but it can be used for good purposes like cutting up a roast chicken or it can be used for evil purposes like killing someone. And to me this was one of those issues.

The same could be said of sex. To me alcohol was something to be used and enjoyed in worship to God and not abused and used to get drunk.

Do you see the issue? They had elevated it to a salvation issue. They had elevated a human preset, a human tradition to the level of the Word of God.

And recently we're still going at it. They reinstated me in the end. Just. But I got a call recently I was at the opening of the Docklands Church down there in the Docklands funnily enough and I was having a beer there at the pub and Channel 10 News was there and I got interviewed about the church that had a little bit to do with kind of in the early stages unofficially and so anyway I got interviewed and I was on Channel 10 News and of all people to pick up the story was Entertainment Tonight in America.

They had it on the fact or fiction segment. If you're laughing I hope it's because you don't like the show and not because you think oh yeah I remember that. Anyway. And there was me with a beer going Jesus is awesome.

[ 16 : 21 ] Cheers. And I got a call from one of the guys I worked with in the States just saying you know out of genuine concern I'm worried about you I want to know are you still a Christian?

I saw you on Entertainment Tonight drinking a beer. I was like Matt you were watching Entertainment Tonight whose faith should be called into question here?

We're going to elevate something to the you know I think this is an issue a very similar issue to this one here okay so very powerful men who are very well respected in the religion of the time are coming along and saying if you don't wash your hands before you eat then you're going to be defiled you're going to be sinful you're going to be outside of the Jewish religion you're going to be made common and they had all kinds of detail for this rule like you couldn't wash the same hand you know both hands at the same time there's a certain amount of water you had to use and it just got ridiculous and Jesus sees straight through it and says forget all that it's not about washing your hands it's not food that goes into your body doesn't make you unclean or sinful it's what comes out that makes you sinful remember when Jesus said out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks that's what he's getting out here your heart will reveal what kind of person you are let's skip ahead a little bit to verse 17 we'll come back but just to keep on this track he says do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer right we can all relate to that verse 18 but what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this is what defiles this is what makes you sinful for out of the heart coming evil intentions murder adultery fornication theft false witness slander these are what defile a person but to eat with unwashed hands that doesn't defile how do the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and the hands act and the body follows he lists seven evidences there of a sinful heart evil intentions these are just evil thoughts you're constantly having evil thoughts about revenge and about who knows what lust sinful actions that comes out of the abundance of your heart who you are murder obviously killing someone made in the image of God adultery having sexual intercourse with someone else's husband or wife fornication that Greek word there is pornea sexual immorality you name it right having sex with someone outside of God's intention downloading pornography all kinds of sexual immorality are mentioned there theft taking from someone what isn't yours false witness this could be literally false witness in a courtroom situation trying to get someone into trouble who shouldn't be or just general lying and speaking badly of others gossip and linked to that slander bad mouthing others and also bad mouthing

God blasphemy all these things come out of a heart that is defiled a heart that hasn't been changed by Jesus hasn't been regenerated that's the evidence Jesus says of a sinful person not whether you wash your hands or not whether you observe certain traditions not whether you cross yourself when you come to church or you don't cross yourself or whether you kneel when you pray or you stand up or you sit that's irrelevant it's form it's a way of doing something what matters is the heart let's go back to 12 the disciples approached him I love this they said do you not know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said it's a bit awkward the disciples really would have held these guys in high regard these Pharisees these are the guys of the religion at the time and not just the religion but of the culture highly respected highly learned and

Jesus you've just offended them did you realize that you offended Jesus realizes exactly what's happened he's called them out in their sin and they're offended because they see exactly what he has meant they've got the point of what he said and they've still rejected him he says 13 he answered every plant that my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted let them alone let them go I'm done with them they are blind guides of the blind and if one blind person guides another both will fall into a pit but Peter said to him explain this parable to us then he said are you still without understanding track back a bit the blind leading the blind we hear this all the time today it's a turn of phrase today and and and what Jesus really means is that they're blind why because they haven't recognized who he is

[ 21 : 52 ] Jesus will say that anyone who knows the Bible that well and can't see that he's the Messiah they're blind they're just blind to know the prophecies about the coming Messiah and to see Jesus in the flesh and see what he's doing the miracles that he's performing the teaching and with what power and yet still reject him they're blind they're blind guides leading the blind Peter says to him explain this parable to us he's talking about back at verse 11 where Jesus says is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person it's what comes out of the mouth he calls that a parable he says can you please explain this we've got to have a little bit of of understanding here for the disciples I think because they've grown up with this Jewish culture where what the Pharisees have said that's what we all believe and Jesus has come in and he's turned it on its head or he's turned it the right way up really but Jesus really doesn't have compassion for them he says are you still without understanding he's angry he's been teaching them he's he's just fed the 15 20,000 he's walked on water he's been healing people and now they're still asking him to explain things that he's explained to them he said to them listen to this

I want you to understand and yet they still don't understand I guess the encouragement for us is that they do in the end I mean if you identify with the disciples then the encouragement for us is that they get it they persevere and Jesus perseveres with them and I guess a point of application might be an encouragement to you if you leave here on Sunday night and a lot of the time you have no idea what we've just said from up the front you're just you're not getting it you haven't been able to pick up the threads of what we're saying or we haven't explained it well enough or you just haven't quite captured the essence of this faith and of what Jesus has done the encouragement for you here is that his disciples were the same but they persevered they persevered they kept asking the questions they kept following him wherever he went they kept trying to interpret what he was saying and Jesus persevered with them even after he died he sent his spirit to give them understanding and they became the greatest preachers teachers evangelists church planners that the world has ever known so I want that to be an encouragement to you if you feel like you leave here quite often without having got it keep persevering keep coming along to every Bible study thing we run every group that we run soak it up and God will give you understanding and God will persevere with you

I guess another point of application on the flip side of that would be to the old hands in the room you know the people like me have been going to church for years and years and years there's a word of warning for us here I hope you haven't missed it I hope you don't see the Pharisees come in with cloak and dagger and reject them and because so often we can be so similar to these men the big danger for you if you've been going to church for a long time is that you'll end up like these guys you honor God with your lips but your heart is far away I mean does anyone resonate with this I do do you get so used to a certain form to certain set of saying things to a certain set of songs do you know your Bible so well that you're starting to get a little cold inside not for a second saying that you shouldn't enjoy the kind of worship that we have here the form the liturgy the words that you shouldn't know your Bible well not at all but we need to be vigilant and and save ourselves when we feel our hearts going cold just let it never be said about any one of us that they honor me with their lips but their hearts are far away please God never never let that be said of us I know there are times when you come here and you're tired or it feels like the same thing over and over or the sermons too long and you tune out I'm not talking about that I'm talking about over time becoming more and more cold towards the things of God towards the gospel maybe you've heard the gospel a million times we know Jesus died on the cross for our sins he was raised three days later for our salvation just become second nature and you become cold to it don't let that happen there's a warning here for us we're not exactly like the Pharisees and Jesus isn't going to reject us but the warning is there in addition to that we need to be aware of putting human traditions human precepts and and preaching them as doctrines taking the issue like the drinking issue I'm willing to arm wrestle with people after the service if you're with my my

Yankee buddies on this one but maybe it's a certain form of worship maybe it's a certain style of singing and music when it comes to style and form we need to be really careful that we don't elevate it to being a first order issue to being a salvation issue because we come just like the Pharisees I'm going to leave it there I'm going to leave it on that thought if you're new I know that some of you are new Christians and you said you've said to me I don't know what you're talking about week in week out right you didn't grow up in a church family you don't know your Bible you're doing courses with us to find out more you're researching you're learning that's great persevere with it Jesus will persevere with you additionally to those of you who have been around a while just be careful be careful that you're not becoming cold to God that you're not honoring him with your lips while your heart is far away

I'll pray for us let's bow our heads Father thanks again for an opportunity to come before Jesus to see him in your word to come into contact with his teaching which is at times really harsh and blunt I pray Lord that we wouldn't be repelled by his blunt teaching but that we'd be changed by it like a hammer on an anvil Lord just take us to that anvil and and beat us into shape where we need to be Father thanks for the people particularly in the last few weeks who have been coming to this church and just don't have any idea about what Christianity is all about we thank you for them and pray that you would encourage them tonight to persevere to sit at the feet of Jesus and to learn from him I also pray for us who have been around for a while that you would convict us tonight of the areas in which we've been growing cold the areas in which we've been coasting in our Christian life the times that we haven't been moved or changed by hearing the gospel please just light a new fire in our hearts and warm our hearts towards you please let it never be said of anyone here that they honoured me with their lips but their hearts were far away pray it for Jesus' sake

[ 29 : 48 ] Amen So the Lord Thank you Thank you Thank you Thank you Thank you Thank you