

**"YOUR PAST DETERMINES YOUR FUTURE"**

Matthew 15:1-20

The story is told of the man who, while walking on the beach, found washed up on the sand a magic lamp. When the genie answered his rub, he told him that the lamp contained but one remaining wish. The man pondered for a moment, and then requested a copy of the stock page from the local newspaper, dated exactly one year later. In a puff of smoke, the genie was gone, and in his place was the financial news. Gleefully, the man sat down to peruse his trophy; he could invest with certainty, knowing the winners one year in advance. As the paper fell to his lap, it turned over to the obituary column found on the reverses of the page, and the name on the top of the listing caught his attention—it was his! -- Robert R. Shank,

*Winning over Uncertainty*

Do you ever yearn for the "good old days" where you look to the past and wish they were the present?

Or maybe you would much rather leave the past behind and set your sights on the future because, well, quite frankly, the past stunk and you feel the future holds countless opportunities for you. The past and the future....

This morning we continue our series *70 Days of Vision* where we are attempting to set for ourselves a Biblical worldview window to look through rather than a secular world view.

Here in our passage today **we find** the Pharisees and the scribes, **those fine, upstanding Jewish religious leaders pinning a bad rap on Jesus** who they said violated the external commands of God's law- His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate, all the while these same religious leaders violated the internal commands of God's law- such as voiding the Word of God by not honoring one's father or mother in the way God intended. There is an accusation and a counter-accusation. The great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther said, "He [Jesus] places one wedge against the other and therewith drives the first back."

Jesus exposed these Jewish leaders that day for using the traditions of the elders to circumvent the commandments of Almighty God. The Pharisees' criticism had to do with ritual uncleanness but Jesus' criticism had to do with moral uncleanness. It was the issue of traditions that Jesus threw back in their faces.

Now there is nothing wrong with traditions for they can be very meaningful, they can be very rich, they can bring continuity to our fast-paced lives. Traditions are a part of the familiar; they can even give you a sense of belonging. Why, traditions can make us feel safe, comfortable and secure. And yet it is easy to make something that has become a tradition and a mainstay sacred. When you think about it, our traditions should help us better understand the expectations of God but not become laws unto themselves.

Try this one on: could it be said that when it comes to church we sometimes ask people to sit on 15<sup>th</sup> century furniture- pews, play 16<sup>th</sup> century instruments, read a 17<sup>th</sup> century Bible- the King James Version, and sing 18<sup>th</sup> century songs. So are we getting any clues why people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have some struggles with the church and some think the church is irrelevant? If you play out the math we are only 3 centuries behind!

Friends, let it be clear what I am saying-there is nothing wrong with traditions but if they become the focal point and we require them of people today and demand they do as we do and become like us, then we might very well be elevating our traditions to a place that God never intended. And so we need to be careful, for we might be tempted to place some of these things on the same level with the Word of God. Now maybe we never intentionally set out to do this but to that person who does not know the script, the story, the history and does not know us, they might feel this way.

And folks, I need to let you in on a little secret- there are those who have no history with the church who are out there who have those feelings towards us, for there are those who have not grown up in the church and some of these practices seem outdated and irrelevant. Now I am not saying that these practices are wrong but people today might not be able to relate. Let me give you a few examples- the other night we had a gathering of our Presbytery- now our Eastminster Presbytery is made up of 54 churches and at this meeting the 54 churches sent representatives to conduct the business of the Presbytery. We were at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Cuyahoga Falls and guess what- they didn't have any pews, only chairs lined up in rows- how un-Presbyterian to have chairs not pews. Recently I was talking to someone who said, "did you see that young person (20 something) wearing a baseball cap in church? I was almost going to go up to them and tell them to take it off." Folks, maybe that person had never been in a church before and didn't know the protocol, the script.

**Sometimes I wonder if our church practices have become our**

**ceremonial washings for us.** We think we need organ music, hymnals,

pews and even bulletins or it just is not church. And yet we know places

where these things are not present and church is still going on and the Lord

is still being worshiped and glorified. Look with me again at our passage and

see how Jesus addressed the religious leaders of His day who had made

God's laws.

**Jesus pulls the cover off the Pharisees and exposes their**

**hypocrisy.** Look at verse 2- The Pharisees and the scribes ask Jesus a

question but He never directly answers them. What does Jesus do? He

answers with a question. You know my mother had a great way of doing

this- whenever someone asked her a delicate question that she did not want

to answer or buy some time to think more of an answer she would answer

the question with a question- "Why do you ask?" **What Jesus does is**

**point out that the real issue is authority.**

The religious leaders were placing their authority in tradition over what God had said. If you peruse the Old Testament you will find many passages where God tells His people that He values mercy and obedience over rules and rituals. For example, Psalm 40:6 says, "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required." The Pharisees had become so protective of their traditions that they were actually breaking God's law for the sake of their own traditions.

Jesus gets His point across when He makes reference to the commandments of honoring one's father and mother, looking out for their well-being, and helping them financially. But the Pharisees had come up with a program to amass economic wealth at the temple and permitted a bad-mannered son to sidestep his duty to his parents by saying that his gift was dedicated to the temple. And what they did was strip the commandment of God to honor one's father and mother of its meaning.

The term used was *corban* and it meant that a person refused to help his parents' saying it was all dedicated to God. Jesus is calling their bluff by exposing their hypocrisy and the loophole they had created, and, in essence, avoiding the real intent of God's Word. **These Jewish leaders were worshipping for appearance not out of love of God.** And so I ask, could churches and people in churches ever be so devoted to certain ministries, and styles and methods and programs that they neglect the true intent of God's Word? Could people in churches be more committed to traditions than to the Gospel itself?

Look at what happens next in verses 10-11: **Jesus gives an explanation of what He has just said to the Pharisees.** Jesus called them hypocrites in verse 7, He quotes Isaiah 29:13 in verses 8-9 and in verses 10-11 He nails them with His teaching. Jesus tells the crowd that the Pharisees were wrong to think that they were acceptable to God all because they were clean on the outside.

And here is Jesus' punch-line: **defilement is not an external matter**

**(keeping the food laws, ceremonial washing, the Sabbath**

**requirements) but an internal one.** And so it is like this- what comes

out of our mouths, our words reveals the condition of our hearts. Sin begins

here- in one's heart.

And so **Jesus** goes for the jugular and **judges the Pharisees as**

**false teachers.** Friends, over time, the Jewish laws and restrictions had

become more important in themselves than the meanings behind them. And

so the Jews began interpreting these laws to mean that they could be clean

before God because of what they refused to eat- pork, fish that does not

have fins and scales, and the list goes on. What Jesus is saying is that sin

and defilement doesn't come from eating forbidden foods, but from

disobedience that starts in the heart. And so Jesus calls the Pharisees blind

guides who need to be left alone. And Jesus finishes up by teaching what

makes one clean or unclean in verses 15-20.

Jesus constantly is coming back to the idea that sins begins in a person's heart and what comes out of one's mouth can be traced back to that person's heart. Who among us has a heart that God needs to work on in order for us to be able to truly enter into worship of our God and until we do, our worship will be out of focus?

Someone once said, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead.

Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." (repeat) When we read Hebrews 11 we are inspired by the acts of faith of the Biblical heroes who are listed. But our faith can dead when people define the substance of the faith as habits. It is religious and ritual, but not spiritual. That's why, for the life of me I can't understand people who have no interest in the church wanting to have their child baptized somehow thinking that if I just get my child baptized that magical act, which it is not, will be the ticket for them in case anything happens to that child.

Now we believe in a loving God who would welcome that infant, that child into His eternal kingdom baptized or not, but it is the idea that the sacrament of Baptism can be taken so serious on the one hand- I have to get my child "done" but have no other lasting significance like bringing that child to church and making the Christian faith and church an integral part of the family life so, in reality, that baptism becomes nothing more than a ritual.

People of God it goes like this, we have plenty of traditions that aren't bad, but if they keep us from doing what God put us here to do, namely, make disciples of each other and of those out in the world, then we are not getting passing grades. Could it be, could it be that some traditions that helped those who have gone before us- our grandparents or even our parents have become, for us, stumbling blocks that have lessened our effectiveness to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who do not know Jesus? The packaging that carries the content of the faith is important

to get in touch with because it has worked in the past. But an unwillingness to change because of selfishness and the mindset that says, “but we’ve always done it that way” puts us in the company of the Pharisees. And Jesus rejected the Pharisees.

Getting the Good News of Jesus Christ out to people who do not know Him in whatever way or fashion that connects them with Jesus puts us right on the money; and Jesus smiles. Amen.

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Introduction: a man, a beach, a magic lamp and a genie...

Our passage- Matt. 15

We find those upstanding Jewish leaders pinning a bad rap on Jesus

Traditions...

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our \_\_\_\_\_ washings for us**

**Jesus pulls the cover off the Pharisees and exposes their**

vs. 2

What Jesus does is point out that the real issue is \_\_\_\_\_

These Jewish leaders were worshipping for \_\_\_\_\_ not out  
of love of God

**Jesus gives an \_\_\_\_\_ of what He has just said to the  
Pharisees**

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Defilement is not an \_\_\_\_\_ matter but an \_\_\_\_\_ one

Jesus judges the Pharisees as \_\_\_\_\_ teachers

Someone once said, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."

We have plenty of traditions that aren't bad, but if they keep us from doing what God puts us here to do (make disciples of each other and those out in the world) then we are not getting passing grades

Conclusion: Getting the Good News out to people who don't know Him in whatever fashion that connects them with Jesus puts us right on the money; and Jesus smiles.