The Aim of Your Worship, part 1

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us.! To set our hearts and minds every Sunday on the person of Christ and His work, His words.

Nothing better we can do than to fix our eyes upon the Lord Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith. Chapter 6, such a climactic chapter as we saw Jesus perform these two miracles that most of the world, even if they're not believers, even if they're not that familiar with the Bible, have some familiarity with, where He feeds the 5,000 men and then, of course, right after that, He walks on the water.
In our culture, even people who don't ever go to church will have some kind of background with the phrase, walk on water, something that Jesus did that most around us have some background to.
But it wasn't just simply an amazing thing that He did. It was a very profound thing that He did that taught about who He was. The disciples who saw the feeding of the thousands did not understand the full meaning of it.
And when that night came and Jesus walked to them on the water, it's then that they began to grasp more fully and clearly who He is.
[1:57] We looked at the very end of chapter 6 last Sunday morning, at the kindness and compassion of Christ as He healed all of these sick that were brought to Him.

And as we move today into chapter 7, we come to an extremely, vitally important passage here in verses 1 to 13.
Jesus is going to talk straight and confront head-on this issue of the aim of our worship.
And I think one of the reasons why this passage to me is so important for the church to hear is that it helps us to understand a very frightening reality that it is possible to be religious, even possible to be worshipers, and yet to not be pleasing to God.
The Lord does not simply want people to go through religious ceremony. The Lord does not simply want people to be nice.
[3:12] The Lord does not simply want people to do religious things. He has told us what it is to be pleasing to Him. And the reality of it is, both in our nation and all around the world, there are all kinds of people who are highly and deeply religious, yet in no way pleasing to God.

And that's not just talking about people who are devoted to some strange cult-like belief or following. That can even be true in sanctuaries just like ours.
The reality of it is, all over the world, everybody worships. Some worship the God of the Bible. Some worship made-up gods.
Some worship other people. Some say they don't worship, but in reality, they worship money, or they worship their status, or they worship their own self-reliance, or their own health, whatever it may be.
But everybody worships. Everybody has something to which everything in their life revolves around. Whatever it is that always wins when competing interests hit, that's what you worship.
[4:40] And so, everybody does. It's even possible to be in a church, a church like ours, and to sing songs, and to listen to sermons, and to sit in Bible studies.

It's possible to give offerings. It's possible to serve in the church and still not be pleasing to God. And this reality is so important.
Because it means that for every single one of us, there's a word here that we just can't afford to miss. I think sometimes people think that if they just show up to church on a Sunday, they've done their part.

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I think sometimes we think that if we're just physically present, the Lord must be pleased with that. I mean, after all, you could be in bed asleep. You could be home watching television.
But you got up and you came. Surely that means the Lord is pleased with us. But all over the world, there are people who have shown up in buildings on Sunday mornings, and they are involved in things so far from pleasing the heart of God.
[6:13] And with everything within me, I do not want my own heart to be given over to things that aren't pleasing to God.

I don't want to be a part of a church that's highly religious and committed to our ways, and yet not pleasing to God. And some of the warnings that Jesus speak here in this passage, while helpful and enlightening and for our good, are just frightening.
To think that what He says to these people in Mark 7 would be the same words He would say to so many people in our day, even to those who are in church services this morning.
The text itself really breaks down into just two parts. The accusation, and then from Jesus, the answer. So we'll just walk through this and pray and hope it'll be helpful for us.
First, in verses 1 to 5, the accusation is given. Look at the text with me here in Mark 7. Now when the Pharisees gathered to Him with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of His disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.
[7:37] For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly. Holding to the tradition of the elders. And when they come to the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash.

And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. Here's the accusation.
And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?
That's the accusation. Why in the world, Jesus, are your men not doing everything that we've come up that they should do to be pleasing to God?
Why is it that your people, your guys, seem to not be obsessed with the rules and the traditions and the ways that we have come up with and elevated?
[8:57] Why do your men ignore our tradition? Now, at first glance, we might think this is just kind of an incidental encounter.

It's not. The scribes and Pharisees sent a delegation from Jerusalem to Galilee to interrogate Jesus. This is a purposeful encounter.
These men were the experts in the Old Testament law. They were also the experts in the pervasive rabbinic tradition that is so heavy in that day.
Now, we read this at first and we think, well, it makes sense. After all, we teach our children to wash your hands. Why don't your disciples wash your hands? It seems just to be about hygiene.
It seems to be just about good health, common sense. That's not at all what this is about. This isn't about hygiene. This is about ceremony. It's about tradition.
[10:00] And ultimately, this is all about power and authority. This isn't about your disciples come in and they're eating with dirty hands.

This is about your disciples are not washing their hands. The exact way, the exact form, in the exact manner that our tradition has dictated.
And why do they think they are above our authority? The scribes and Pharisees in Mark 7 are not concerned about the health of the people.
They want to know why Jesus thinks that he and his men are above their man-made rules. The washings that are referred to in Mark 7 are not commanded by God.
They are washings and traditions that have been established by religious leaders who have elevated their tradition now to the place of a commandment.
[11:06] These washings are permissible. They're not wrong to do, but they're not an obligation. And what happened is men in power began to elevate their own law, their own ways, their own rules, their own tradition to set them up as the ultimate authority over people's lives.

And if somebody dared to not follow their authority, they want to know who do you think you are.
Now, just a little background about the tradition of the elders that's mentioned here in Mark 7.
If you'll remember in the Old Testament, our men of the Institute are walking through this right now in our Old Testament survey course.

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The kingdom splits in 931. And when the kingdom splits, you've got the northern kingdom and you've got the southern kingdom. That northern kingdom is overtaken by Assyria in 722.
The southern kingdom of Judah is overtaken by the Babylonians in 605. Culminating in 586 when the temple is destroyed and that's when they begin to deport people from Jerusalem there into Babylonian exile.
[12:26] During this 70 years of exile, what happens are people are trying to keep their law, keep their tradition. And it's around this time in the exile, these extra-biblical traditions and rules became to be collected.

These collected oral traditions that we know as the Mishnah were written down around the 2nd century AD.
These would have been the collected oral traditions of Jesus' day. Then you have that Mishnah, the collected oral traditions. And you had leaders who added commentary to that, known as the Gemara.
And those traditions and the commentary are collected together in what we know as the Talmud.
And what happened is, as time went on during these next couple of centuries, these traditions that were becoming collected, became elevated in the eyes of the religious leaders.
So much so that the traditions of men, the tradition of the elders, became in their eyes, became in their eyes the most authoritative thing.
[13:46] They elevated their own tradition and their own ideas and their own rules and their own laws over and above the law of God. That's the problem.

They have taken their ideas and elevated them above the Lord's in so doing, claiming to be in themselves the ultimate authority for the people.
And so the question becomes, why is it that Jesus and the apostles don't see their tradition the same way?
They're saying, our tradition is the ultimate authority. Jesus says, no, it's not. The Word of God, the law of God is our authority. But this is the heart of the issue.
Why do your men not bow down to our man-made rules? Why are you not as obsessed with our tradition and our authority as we are?
[14:55] That's the accusation. Their tradition was not trying to help people follow God. Their tradition was to try to help people with human means worship with unchanged hearts.

What their tradition was doing was setting up this intricate list of things you could do and things you couldn't do and rules and commentary and interpretations and all these laws they came up with so that they kept their authority and they could go through all the religious routine and ceremony.
And yet, they never worshipped with their heart. And when tradition becomes more important than God, the tradition has become an idol.
When man's ways become more authoritative than God's Word, man's ways have become an idol.
So, that's their accusation. It's not a question about hygiene. It's a question about authority.
[16:30] Jesus, look around here. Don't you notice everyone's doing what we command? Everybody's washing the way that we taught them to. Everybody's doing exactly what we prescribed for them to do. Why do you and your apostles not give us the authority that everybody else does?

That's the accusation. The answer comes in verse 6. And it's shocking. He said to them, Well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites?
Now, you stop right there. He's not easing into this, right? He doesn't say, you know what? Maybe we could find some middle ground. No, because Jesus understands that their questions have nothing to do with hygiene. It has everything to do with authority.
And in his first sentence, his first phrase, Jesus says, Isaiah prophesied and well right did he prophesy of you hypocrites.
[17:52] You're familiar with the background of the term hypocrites. We've looked at it through the years. We've studied through different books of the Bible. The word hypocrite would refer to an actor. They would have plays.

And you wouldn't necessarily have an actor for every, a different actor for every role. And so, the actors would wear a different mask on the stage so they could be playing different parts. And so, the word hypocrite referred to someone who wore a mask.

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It came to be known as those who were fake. Phonies. And Jesus says, well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites.
You mask wearing phonies. And he quotes now from Isaiah 29 verse 13. And he applies it to these religious leaders.
Here's the quote. This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.
[19:10] I wonder what Jesus really thought. He says, you've read the Old Testament.

You know the Old Testament. When Isaiah wrote what we know as Isaiah 29 verse 13, it's fulfilled in part in you.
When Isaiah talked about hypocrites, it speaks of you. When Isaiah talked about people who went through the religious routines and motions, but did not truly worship in a way that pleases God, he spoke of you.
When he talked about people who with their lips said and sang and prayed, but their hearts were far away, he was speaking of you. He says, you want to talk about authority, let's talk about the authority of the prophetic word from the prophet Isaiah.
This is a word from God that it's possible to sing and to give and to teach and yet to not worship in any way that's pleasing to God.
[20:21] Verse 7, in vain do they worship me. The word here carries the idea of emptiness. It's empty. They offer me empty worship.

In fact, in the Gospels, there are 23 times that Jesus uses the word hypocrite. Of the 23 times, 21 of them are directed toward religious leaders.
Now, I want to be careful here because there are some of you in this room who are not Christians. You come to church regularly. Some of you come to church occasionally. Some, this may be your first time you've come. And one of your excuses is, I don't need to go to the church because the church is full of hypocrites.
Or, I don't need to give my life to Jesus because, after all, I always think that religious people are hypocrites. And after all, here's the pastor of the church saying that Jesus himself said that most of the hypocrites, that term is referring to religious leaders.
[21:40] It's true. Let me also remind you of the words of Jesus that says, broad is the road to destruction and many will find it. Narrow is the gate to eternal life.

If you say, I don't need the church because they're all hypocrites, what you're doing is aligning yourself with the broad road that leads to destruction.
It would be a tragic thing to take a sinful example and make that your model.
Now, for those who are in the church, it would be a tragic thing to assume that just because we're here, that God is pleased.
Here, my friends, is what I desperately want you to understand this morning. When Jesus is speaking to these religious leaders, and He's applying the prophecy of Isaiah to them, understand this, their feet brought them to the right place.
[22:55] Their hands brought sacrifices. Their lips said the right things, but their worship was empty because their hearts were sinful.

That's what Jesus is confronting. And this day, in this room, your feet have brought you to the right place.
Your lips have sung biblical songs. Your ears are hearing the preaching of the Word. Your eyes are looking at the sacred text.
And yet, it's possible for your worship to be empty if your heart does not love Jesus. This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.
In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men, taking man-made rules and commentary and law and saying this is equal to God.
[24:37] Verse 8, you leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.

Do you understand in our world today that while we sit in here, gathered here for worship, there are millions of people in houses of worship.
Millions. Some of them worshiping false gods. Some of them listening to charlatans who are nothing more than slick salesmen with an occasional Bible verse.
and many who are physically present with hearts that do not love Jesus.
And the Lord Himself says, that kind of worship is empty. It's vain.

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[26:09] There's nothing to it. He goes on in verse 9 and He said to them, you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

Let me just stop for just a minute. I want to commend you as a congregation on something here. So many churches are ripped apart by tradition.
Now tradition by itself is not a bad thing. Traditions can be quite helpful. Traditions in your home, traditions in the church, they can be quite helpful.
They remind us of spiritual realities. They can be very good things. The problem is when you love the tradition, the shadow, more than the substance to which it points.
And I just want to commend you as a congregation because I don't think there's a church anywhere that is able to handle these kinds of things better than you have. We have ministries.
[27:21] We have programs. We have events. We have things that we do and things that we've done for years that mean a lot to us. And sometimes those programs go away.

Sometimes those events are replaced by something else. And some churches get ripped apart at the seams because what they really love are their traditions more than anything else.
And while we want to value the past and honor our past, we never want to be held by our traditions. Traditions can be helpful. But they're just shadows that point to the reality and that reality is Christ.
And so, through the years when programs have been changed or something new has come or schedules have been tweaked, whatever it may be, this church just continually over and over and over again lives out the reality that what we love is not our tradition.
What we love is Christ. Christ. That's so important. And you as a church family do that so faithfully well.
[28:37] Jesus said, you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition. What you do is you say, well, we love God and so we have these traditions.

But your traditions become more important to you than God Himself. Verse 10, for Moses said, honor your father and your mother and whoever reviles father and mother must surely die.
But you say, incidentally, it's never good when Jesus says, Scripture says this, but you say, that's a bad place to be.
make sure you don't live your life like that. Don't live your life saying, I know the Bible says this, but I really think, because whatever's about to come next is a bad argument.
But you say, verse 11, if a man tells his father or mother, whatever you would have gained from me is Corban, that is given to God, then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.
[30:00] Let me give you a little background and help with what he's talking about here. In Jesus' day, what people would do is they would take their resources, money, homes, and they would dedicate them to God.

The word that Mark uses here is the word Corban. It's a Hebrew term that means to be devoted to God. And what they would do is they would say, to kind of bring this into our culture today, they would say, my house is dedicated to God.
My savings account is dedicated to God. So when I die, my money, my savings, my house, it's going to go to the Lord's work.
They would pronounce Corban over it. This is dedicated to God. But it wasn't about worship. It was about a loophole.
Because Jesus says, remember Moses, and he quotes here in verse 10, honor your father and mother. Take care of your family. Love your family.
[31:14] He says, but what you have done is you've taken your resources, your money, your houses, and you've pronounced Corban over it. Dedicated to God. Because here's the way that it worked.

If I had a house and I had dedicated it to God, what I'm saying is when I die, that house is going to be given over to the temple. So, when my parents are sick and they can't take care of themselves, and they say, hey Michael, can we move in with you?
We don't have a way to take care of ourselves. I say, so sorry, wish I could. That room upstairs, it's dedicated to God. I can't give it to you. And when my neighbor says, I don't have any food.
Do you have any extra food? I say, I wish I could help you. I've got a pantry full of extra food.
However, I've pronounced Corbin over it. It's the Lord's.

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And if I gave it to you, I would be taking away from what I'm giving to God. And when somebody has great need and I have extra money, I say, I sure wish I could help you.
[32:27] But my savings account, well, that's been dedicated to God. I can't give to you what I've dedicated to God. Jesus says, you love to sound so spiritual.

You dedicate your house to God, your money to God, your resources to God, but it's not about a heart of worship. It's all about a way for you to stay religious even though your heart is far from God. Do you see his point? Do you see why this text frightens me? Because it's very possible for people to come to church and say to themselves, I came to church, God's pleased.
I gave an offering, God's pleased. I didn't complain when you changed the schedule. I didn't complain when you moved our room.
I didn't complain when this ministry went away. I didn't say anything when I didn't get my way. God's pleased. I didn't complain when you sung more hymns than I liked.
[33:45] I didn't complain when you didn't sing as many hymns as I liked. God's pleased. God's pleased. All the while, it can all just be religious jargon to excuse the reality that our hearts do not love Jesus.

And Jesus says, you know the commandment of God, honor your father and mother. Verse 11, but you say, if a man tells his father or mother, whatever you have gained from me is Corban, that is given to God, then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition.
In other words, if you don't love and honor the word of God, that everything you offer up in your act of worship is all void, no value.
And he says in the verse 13, and many such things you do. Let me give you a few implications for us this morning from this.
Number one, it is possible to love your religion for all the wrong reasons. It is possible to love your religion for all the wrong reasons.
[35:29] These religious leaders loved their laws. It gave them power. It gave them control. It gave them a sense of superiority. And the way they did it, it allowed them to feel religious while they still ignored people and lived self-righteous lives.

It's like the people that go to the gym and they walk in there and for about 45 minutes they talk to people, tell a few jokes, drink a little water, watch other people work out, and then think, boy, that was good.
And they go home and they say, at least I went to the gym today. You did. And it was of no value. Now, if you want to go to the gym for that, who cares? Just don't sit on the machine I need while you play on your phone. That would be great.
it. But when people play those kinds of games with God in their worship, it's tragic. Number two, it's possible to be devoted to spiritual exercises and leave Christ completely out.
[36:58] It's possible to be devoted to spiritual exercises and leave Christ completely out. You can sing songs and not love Jesus.

You can take sermon notes and not love Jesus. You can talk to people and not love Jesus. You can quote scripture and not love Jesus.
If you come to church and sing all the songs and go home and disrespect your spouse, you've missed it. If you come to church and take notes and go home and disrespect and dishonor your parents, you've missed it.
If you come to church on Sunday morning and go to Sunday school and go home at night and let your mind and your eyes indulge in things that are sinful, you've missed it. Many people are deeply religious but have no Christ.
That is not worship. Not that's pleasing to God. third, it's possible to use Bible language to excuse disobedience.
[38:11] It's possible to use Bible language to excuse disobedience. This is exactly what Jesus said they were doing. You keep saying over your property and over your stuff, Corban, devoted to God.

Doesn't that sound good? We've taken our house and we've dedicated it to God. That sounds so good. We've taken our resources and dedicated them to God.
It sounds so holy. But sometimes our religious language is just an excuse to be disobedient. James picks up on the exact same thing.

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In James chapter 2, he says, if a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food and you say to them, go, be warm and be filled.
It's just religious jargon. He says, what good is that? Don't you know that faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by works, is dead?
[39:14] Jesus says, if you don't really love Christ, your worship is vain, it's empty. James says, if you use religious jargon just to excuse your disobedience, then your worship and your faith is nothing but dead faith.

So, somebody comes to you and says, I have a need, and you say to them very religiously, be warm, be filled, brother. Just go ask somebody else.
This isn't my words. This is James from the New Testament. He says, your faith is dead. Jesus says, your worship is in vain.
It doesn't matter how much religious terminology you know or how many verses you can memorize and quote, if we don't love Jesus and if we don't obey Him from our hearts, our worship is empty.
Which leads to a fourth implication. It's possible to be in church every week and not be pleasing to God.
[40:31] It's possible to be in church every week and not be pleasing to God. Jesus said in John 4, 24 that we must worship in spirit and in truth, spirit from the heart in truth according to Scripture.

So, the question is not just did you show up, it's did you worship in spirit from your heart and in truth in accordance with the Scripture. So, it's not, Jesus said it's not just do not murder, it's do not hate. It's not just do not commit adultery, it's do not lust. It's not just give, it's give cheerfully. It's not just do whatever you want, just be sincere, it's worship in truth.
truth. The heart matters. See, it's true you're not supposed to murder, but Jesus says, what's the heart?
Where does murder come from? It comes from hatred. So, make sure you don't hate. It's not just do not commit adultery, it's where does that come from? Well, it comes from lust.
[41:42] So, in your heart, leave no room for lust. It's not just to give an offering, the Bible says to give cheerfully, to give joyfully, why?

Because that's an issue of the heart, not just of the hands. So, what Jesus continually is getting at is don't pay attention simply to where your feet take you and to what your hands offer and to what your lips say.
Pay attention first of all to your heart. Who do you love? Who are you trying to please? What is the aim of your worship?
Is it to impress people? Is it to alleviate a guilty conscience? Is it because you think it's going to earn you points with God?
Or is it because you love Him? and you seek to honor Him? And more than anything else, you delight in the one who laid down His life for you so that you could be saved and be called His and welcomed into His family.
[43:11] And you've never been able to get past the amazement of His grace poured out upon you. That's biblical worship.

That's what I pray is true for us. That's what I pray will always be true of this church. Not just that we show up, and not just that we take notes, not just that we give, and not that we just don't complain. Those are all good things. I'm thankful for all those things. But you could do all those things and not love Jesus.
Jesus. My question for you today is are you certain that you love Jesus? The one who died.
The one who was resurrected. The one who is coming again. The one who said I am the way and the truth and the life.
[44:23] Nobody comes to the Father except through me. do you love Jesus? That's what it means to be a believer.

To know Him, to believe in Him, and to love Him more than anything else. I pray that would be true of us today.
Our Father in Heaven, we thank You today for Your kindness, even through Your word. Thank you. Thank you.

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