

Life Application Notes: Jesus Talks 4 – Mark 7:1-20

“Their hearts are far from me”

Introduction

Throughout our studies in Mark we have seen that the Pharisees are continually at odds with Jesus, trying to show that Jesus isn't who he says he is – in this passage the Pharisees have travelled over 100 miles to try and catch Jesus out! We live in society where we encounter rules or laws in most areas of our lives either at home or at work. For example things such as “You must wear a suit to work”, or “No pudding if you don't eat your vegetables first”.

Are there any other examples that spring to your mind? In your experience, was there any tolerance in how the rules were applied or differences in the way they were interpreted? Any loopholes or grey areas?

Digging In

Read Mark 7:1-16

“...eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.”

Mark's gospel does a fantastic job of helping us to understand the context of the time, particularly when it comes to Jewish tradition (see v3-4).

- Why are the Pharisees so concerned? (clue: it's not about hygiene! – they were concerned about spiritual purity)

“Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

- What was the aim of all of these traditions?

While the 'rules' (the 10 Commandments and other laws) were 'God given' – the 'traditions' were added later on. The traditions helped the Pharisees to not break the rules God had given them – which doesn't immediately sound like that bad of a thing right?

“These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

- What is Jesus's view of these traditions?
- What is the deeper issue that Jesus is pointing out about the Pharisees and these traditions?
- What is it that Jesus is pointing out in v9-13?

The Pharisees were concerned about breaking the law of Moses to “Honour your father and mother” if they were to hold back resources from their parents. They did this with a 'loophole' of declaring certain items 'devoted to God' (the term 'Corban') which prevented them from giving those things away. The tradition no longer pointed to the godly way of living that God gave the Israelites, instead it became a way to justify an un-godly way of living.

Jesus points out that the real issue isn't one of handwashing, but of heart attitude. The Pharisees are trying so hard to follow the rules that they miss the whole point! Jesus can't stand hypocrisy – so he calls them out on it!

- What happens when we try to earn spiritual purity?

“Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”

Read Mark 7:17-20

- Without grace, through Jesus, what is the natural 'state' of our hearts?

Without grace, through Jesus, we are all 'defiled' on the inside by our sin. Romans 3:23 says “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. (No amount of ceremonial handwashing can cleanse our hearts – there are no loopholes or grey areas!)

Read 1 John 1:5-9

- What does this passage say is needed to achieve spiritual cleanliness/purity?

Paul's letters consistently and repeatedly make it clear that our spiritual cleansing of sin is not through our actions – it is only through confession of our sin and faith in Jesus that we are made right with God. (see Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 9:30-32)

- How can we practically apply this in our daily lives?
- How does living in light of these truths change the way that we live?

Rounding Off

While it is easy to read this passage and see how the Pharisees were missing the point – there is a real challenge for us today. It's not about how often we go to church, or how much money we give in the offering (although those are both good things!). We see again (just like our study on the parable of the sower) that our hearts need to be closely rooted in Jesus.

Think for yourselves and spend some time reflecting on these two questions::

- How is the state of your heart? What do you need to confess to God?

PRAY TOGETHER – remember the gift of GRACE through Jesus!