

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

SERIES INTRODUCTION

In January to May 2018, we will continue our study of the Gospel of Mark.

7 Jan

Hypocrisy That God Rejects

Mark 7:5-23

14 Jan

Faith That God Accepts

Mark 7:24-30

21 Jan

Discerning Christ's Authority

Mark 7:31-8:26

28 Jan

Affirming Christ's Mission

Mark 8:27-9:1

Hypocrisy That God Rejects

MARK 7:5-23

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

Until now, Jesus' disciples have been seen breaking the oral law twice. They failed to fast (Mark 2:18) and they failed to observe the Sabbath (Mark 2:24). The Jewish leaders who had come from Jerusalem, probably to investigate Jesus and find fault with him, now see the disciples eating with "unclean" hands and took the opportunity to confront Jesus. In his response, Jesus exposed the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy and further redefined what it means to be clean or unclean.

For Study and Discussion

1. Read verses 1-13.
 - a) The question raised by the Pharisees in verse 5 is a direct challenge to Jesus. Based on their question and the background given by Mark in verses 3-4, what law did they accuse the disciples of violating?

 - b) The Pharisees revered the oral law because, according to their tradition, it was entrusted to Moses. The Pharisees thus gave their tradition the same authority as God's Word, as recorded in their Scripture (the written Torah). It is instructive that Jesus opens his response by quoting Scripture.
 - i. What words did Jesus use to describe the Pharisees and what did he accuse them of?

 - ii. What was hypocritical about the Pharisees' worship?

 - iii. According to Jesus, when is it wrong to observe human or religious traditions?

- c) How does the example given by Jesus in verses 8-13 show that the Pharisees have allowed the observance of tradition to completely invalidate God's commands?

- d) In what ways may we, like the Pharisees, disregard God's commands in our observance of cultural or church "traditions" today?

- e) How can we ensure that the traditions we practice are consistent with God's commands?

2. Read verses 14-23.

- a) Jesus now turns to address the crowd, appealing to them to listen and understand. He is about to redefine their understanding of what is clean and unclean. According to Jesus, what is it that defiles (damage the purity of) a person? How is this different from the Pharisees' understanding?

- b) According to Jesus, what is the ultimate source of evil thoughts? What examples of such sins are given by Jesus? What other outward sources would we usually blame such sins on?

- c) The Pharisees were concerned about purity and "cleanness" for they argued that "uncleanness" breaks one's fellowship with God. What does Jesus' teaching about the true source of evil and uncleanness tell us about what we can and cannot do in order to be cleansed of sin (made pure and holy)?

- d) How is Jesus' teaching about the source and consequence of "these evils" (v23) a key to understanding why He was sent by His Father on His earthly mission which was accomplished through His death on the cross?

- e) Jesus identified the Pharisees' misplaced concerns as rooted in their distance from God. To draw near to God, how can your day to day priorities reflect God's concern for holiness in your heart through His provision for you in Christ?

Discipleship Pointers

Up to this point in the book of Mark, the Jewish leaders have disregarded the magnificent revelation of God that was manifested through the signs and miracles of Jesus. Instead, they continued to squabble over trivial matters like that of Jesus' disciples eating with unclean hands. Although they seemed to be concerned about following the oral law (in order to pursue purity and cleanness), Jesus exposed their hypocrisy by revealing how they have subverted God's commands with their traditions.

Many rituals or traditions seem to be built on unshakable spiritual logic. However, we must ensure that our human or religious traditions are never elevated to the level of having the same authority as God's commands. We must understand and constantly examine our practices in the light of God's Word so that we do not disregard or invalidate God's commands for the sake of keeping church or even cultural traditions. Ultimately, the Jewish leaders were concerned only with external piety while God is concerned about inner holiness. Jesus' teaching showed that they approached God's law the wrong way: the defilement that God rejects stems from the heart, not the hands. No human cleansing can cleanse the human heart of sin and evil. Only the blood of Jesus, the lamb without blemish or defect, could cleanse our hearts of sin (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Family/Group Moments

Would the words of Jesus and the prophecy of Isaiah ring true of the church today? Would God say something similar (like the statements below) to us?

"These people attend church, but their heart is far from Me."

"These people read their Bible, but their heart is far from Me."

"These people pray eloquently, but their heart is far from Me."

"These people do ministry, but their heart is far from Me."

Pray that we may humble ourselves and recognize that human logic can never override God's perfect Word and Wisdom. Pray that our hearts may be open to God's instruction and transformation.

2. Jesus' answer to the woman seemed to be "no, it is not your turn". She is not one of God's chosen people and thus she does not have a place at the table, yet. She will have to wait until the right time when Jesus' ministry will extend to all nations. Surprisingly, the woman seemed to understand Jesus' parable and she replies in an astonishing way.
 - a) What was the woman's reply? Why is this reply surprising?

 - b) One might have expected the woman to argue that she deserved Jesus' help right there, right now, since she had a greater need than anyone else – her child was suffering! But she did not assert that right. Instead of arguing that she deserved Jesus' help, how did she adapt Jesus' parable to appeal to His grace and mercy? What was the woman's argument for why Jesus should heal her child?

3. The woman's faith and perseverance were shown to be richly rewarded by Jesus.
 - a) What did Jesus say about the woman's faith? What did he do in response to the woman's plea?

 - b) In what ways do the words and actions of the Syrophenician woman model for us a faith that stands not on the basis of our own goodness but on the goodness of God?

 - c) What does this story teach us about God's grace and mercy, His answers to our prayers, and His power to save?

 - d) How may we be encouraged by the woman's story in situations when we desperately feel like we need God to act or bring help immediately?

Discipleship Pointers

This is another incident when an outsider to the faith became an insider. Jesus came all the way to the region of Tyre and Sidon to encounter this Gentile daughter who surpassed Jesus' disciples in her faith and perception of who Christ is. While the religious leaders were annoyed by Jesus' disciples eating with unwashed hands, this Syrophenician woman came seeking even the crumbs that fell from the Lord's

table. Though the woman had neither experienced nor seen the miracles of Jesus ever before, she exemplified the essence of saving faith, the faith that pleases God. In Jewish eyes, as a Gentile woman, she was considered unclean, belonging to the lower rung of their society. But through her humility, perseverance, and unquestioning acceptance of her portion given by the Lord, she exhibited a faith that was not only accepted but richly rewarded by God.

We often ask God for things that we think we deserve based on our goodness. We often assert our rights, fighting for what we “deserve”. Here, the woman is assertive, but not because she has the right. She does not ask Jesus for help because she deserves it. She accepts she is not part of the chosen people of God (Israel). Instead, she asks Him to give her what she does not deserve, based on His goodness. If Mark 7:5-23 teaches us the doctrine of the radical corruption of our hearts, then this section teaches us that true faith is first a recognition of our total depravity, that we deserve nothing but God’s wrath. True faith, therefore, comes to God in a posture of utter humility, exemplified by this woman. Secondly, true faith rests solely in the One who came to seek and save the lost. Had not Jesus made His way into this Gentile region, it would not have been possible for this woman to encounter Him. The good news is, the Father who sent His Son to this woman also sent His Son to us. True faith recognises that we are saved by God’s grace alone, the God who initiated His grace towards us. Finally, true faith rests in the overflowing sufficiency of this grace. Even the crumbs that fall from His table are more than enough, how much more His precious blood that was shed for us. This is the kind of faith that pleases God. As children of God and recipients of His ultimate redemption in Christ, how should we not gratefully and confidently cling to God’s goodness and grace in all situations?

Family/Group Moments

Are there times when you have felt totally helpless and God was the only one you could turn to? Reflect on how God used such situations to show his goodness and how you have learnt to depend on Him even when there are times when His answer to your prayers might be “no” or “not yet”. Take a moment to rejoice in the sufficiency and richness of His grace towards us.

Discerning Christ's Authority

MARK 7:31-8:26

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

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KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

Jesus continues ministering in Gentile territory, travelling from Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon) south to the Sea of Galilee, continuing into the region of the Decapolis. This section comprises the repeated miracle of the feeding of four thousand, sandwiched by the accounts of the healing of the deaf-mute and the blind man. Jesus also made a short return to the Jewish provinces on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, only to be confronted by the Pharisees, whom He rebuffed when asked for a sign. This passage points to a key requirement in rightly discerning who Jesus is.

For Study and Discussion

1. Read Mark 7:31-37.
 - a) Consider Jesus' actions in the process of healing the deaf and mute man. We know that Jesus could heal someone instantly and from a distance. What might be the significance of each of these actions? How does Jesus try to point the people to the giver, rather than be focused on the gift?

 - b) Like the rest of Jesus' miracles, the healing was meant to show the people His true identity and to bring individuals to faith. Consider the reaction of those who witnessed the healing. How do their actions reflect their misunderstanding of who Jesus is?

2. Read Mark 8:1-10. The account of the feeding of the four thousand has much in common with the first miracle of feeding the five thousand in Mark 6:30-44, except that this second miracle happened in Gentile territory.
 - a) Having witnessed the first miracle, how would you have expected the disciples to respond to Jesus' statement in verses 2-3?

- b) Instead, the disciples seemed to have completely forgotten what Jesus did in a similar situation not too long ago. In what ways may we also be as forgetful as the disciples when it comes to situations in our lives when Jesus had clearly shown His compassion and power? How may we prevent ourselves from forgetting as the disciples did?
3. Read Mark 8:11-21.
Travelling back into Jewish territory across the Sea of Galilee, Jesus encountered the Pharisees who asked Him for a sign from heaven. Clearly, it was a challenge and a test, which Jesus refused to entertain.
- a) How may we, at times, also challenge and test our Lord Jesus using the supposed reason of asking for signs or seeking God's will in certain matters?
- b) Jesus warned His disciples against the yeast (or leaven) of the Pharisees and Herod. Clearly, the disciples misunderstood Him, thinking that He was referring to physical bread. Jesus' questions to the disciples exposed the "heart" of the problem. What was preventing them from truly understanding Jesus' meaning?
- c) Luke records Jesus' explanation that "the yeast of the Pharisees" was their hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). What is the difference in heart attitude between true seekers/believers and those who seek to discredit or disobey Jesus while being outwardly sincere in their questioning of the faith? How does Jesus' warning to the disciples in verse 15 apply similarly to us?
4. It is interesting that Jesus' healing of the blind man at Bethsaida follows Jesus' questioning of His disciples, "do you have eyes but do not see?" Here, the healing was carried out in two stages. The first stage of healing gave the blind man sight, but not completely. The second stage restored the man's sight and he saw everything clearly.
- a) If there are times when we "have eyes but do not see", what does this passage teach about who can and will give us true healing and understanding?
- b) If we truly understood who Jesus is, we will turn to Him and seek Him as the source of all we need and will ever need. Yet, we are like the blind man with the partially restored sight. God has healed us and restored us to a right relationship with Him through Jesus' saving work on the Cross. But we do not yet clearly and fully experience the effects of this healing and restoration (1 Corinthians 13:12). What gives us hope that we will one day "see" clearly? Consider Philipians 1:6.

- c) How should we respond to Jesus' completed work of healing and restoration today, even when our knowledge and righteousness is far from perfect?

Discipleship Pointers

Jesus' mission is to restore the spiritual hearing and sight of Israel (see Mark 4:11-12 and Isaiah 6:9-10). Central to this passage is Jesus' question to His disciples, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (Mark 8:18). The disciples were blind to their own blindness. This blindness was chiefly a problem of the heart. Their minds were locked onto earthly things while Jesus was teaching them heavenly truths. The miracles restoring hearing and sight showed that it was important for the disciples to rightly discern who Jesus is in their discipleship journey. This discernment was still lacking in them but would be granted to them over time as they continued to follow Jesus.

In the same way, we continue seeking Jesus, following Him by faith, even though there is still much we have to learn. We must beware the yeast of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy that results from pride and unbelief. We must turn to God, asking Him to grant us humble and seeking hearts, so that we might see and hear rightly what Jesus wants us to understand, remembering what He has already done for us.

Family/Group Moments

Are there times when our pride and arrogance result in hypocrisy? Pray that God may send brothers and sisters who will restore us in truth and love when that happens.

Do we ask God for signs even when we know clearly what is pleasing in His sight? Are our hearts so overcrowded by earthly things that we have little room for heavenly truths that God wants to teach us? Pray that we may have faith in His Word and promises.

Affirming Christ's Mission

MARK 8:27-9:1

GENERAL SURVEY

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Introduction

From Bethsaida, Jesus travelled north to Caesarea Philippi. This was where Herod Philip II built a temple for Augustus Caesar. Here the Son of God chose to announce his first Passion Prediction, revealing His true identity as the Supreme Son of the Most High. Up to this point, His hearers had failed to fully grasp who He is and what He had come to do. While Peter confessed Him to be the Christ, the anointed King, he failed not only in understanding Christ's mission but in his acceptance that Christ should die. Allegedly, Peter seemed ashamed of a suffering Messiah. Yet true discipleship is a call to acknowledge Christ's mission. The glory to come then serves to strengthen Christ's followers to face sufferings like their Master.

For Study and Discussion

Read Mark 8:27-9:1. This part of Mark's gospel contains Jesus' most important statement in the whole Gospel, the meaning of discipleship.

1. The Object of Discipleship: Who is Jesus? Verses Mark 8:27-30.
 - a) Why did Jesus ask the question in Mark 8:27 despite knowing what His disciples were thinking about Him?

 - b) Why is Peter's answer so significant?

 - c) What are the views of the common person today about Jesus?

 - d) How would their views of Jesus influence the way they live and act?

 - e) How about you? How have your views on Jesus changed in your relationship with Him?

 - f) Why did Jesus forbid Peter and the disciples to proclaim Him as the Christ at this juncture? V. 30.

2. The Basis for Discipleship: What has Jesus come to do? Verses 8:31-33. Jesus turned to the disciples as He rebuked Peter, seemingly implying that Peter vocalised the thoughts of the disciples. While Peter knew Jesus' true identity, he did not understand Jesus' mission. He was like the blind man in Mk 8:22-26 who could see but only partially.
 - a) What did Jesus predict what would happen to Him?

 - b) In the context of the miracles performed and the triumphant entry that had just happened in Mark 11, if you were one of the disciples, how would you have reacted to Christ's prediction of His suffering and death?

 - c) Try to defend Peter as to why he rebuked the One he had just called "the Christ"?

 - d) In turn, why was Jesus so harsh with Peter, declaring him to be "Satan"? What is the interest of man? What is the interest of God?

3. The Demands and Promises of Discipleship: What do the identity and mission of Jesus mean for you and me? Verses 8:34-38.
 - a) Verse 34 highlights three demands for discipleship. Jesus taught them to correct and turned His disciples away from their alignment with Satan's interest.
 - i. What are the three demands?

 - ii. What do they mean?

 - iii. What are some examples in the context of Singapore?

 - b) In v. 35-38 Jesus explains why it is so important that they should follow Him regardless of what the cost is.
 - i. Describe in your own words, the paradox Jesus gave in verse 35?

 - ii. Let's reread verses 36-37. What's the teaching regarding the value of one's soul?

 - iii. What does it mean to be ashamed of Christ? V. 38
 - (1) What is the warning/implication?

(2) What is the promise/reward?

c) Summarize verses 34-38

i. What does it mean to be a Christian?

ii. Why is it so important to be a genuine Christian?

iii. How does this contrast your understanding of what a Christian is?

Discipleship Pointers

This study put together the answers to these most important questions: Who is Jesus? What has He come to do? And what does it mean for your life? A person's heartfelt answers to these questions will determine if he/she is a genuine Christian.

Jesus had been demonstrating his power and authority over nature, diseases, demons, and even death up to this point in Mark's Gospel. They established His identity as the Son of God. But from this point onwards, Mark's Gospel will be showing us God's power through Jesus' human fragility, sufferings, and death. They are a part of His mission. However, His death is not the final end. Jesus also foretold His resurrection and His second coming in this text. Together they show us what it means to follow the ways of the King of Kings and Lord of lords, which is to deny self by saying "not as I will but Your will", to take up the cross, being willing to become obedient even unto death.

By following the way of Christ, not our own clever invented ways, but the way of submission and obedience to His word even if it means sufferings, we acknowledge Christ and align ourselves to His mission. We reveal our hope in the final resurrection and the glory to be revealed at His soon return. To do otherwise is to be ashamed of Him, His words, His ways, His mission, and His promises. It reflects a low view of Jesus.

Your view of Jesus must result in actions and a life that is aligned with that view. Therefore, the preaching of Christ without identifying with His mission, thereby submitting to the demands of the Gospel while looking to its hope, distort the truth about who He is. It will lead to a truncated gospel that is not able to save. Therefore, reflect on your understanding of what the Gospel is and consider any changes that you might want to make so as to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Family/Group Moments

What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you able to confidently proclaim the answers to the three questions?

What do we need to give up in order to gain our soul in eternity?

Verse 37. Reflect and consider our life's path.

What area of denying and carrying of our cross that we need to grapple with?

What prayer support do you need?

Daily Prayer Guide

Sunday: The Church

Church members & families
Visitors
Pastor & church leaders
Sunday School teachers
Worship leaders
Small group leaders
Other churches
Outreach efforts

Monday: The Workplace

Supervisor
Co-workers
Subordinates
Customers & suppliers
Difficult situations
Work attitude
Work performance

Tuesday: Acquaintances

Mentors & mentorees
Accountability partners
Friends
Neighbours
Merchants
Public servants
Teachers & other school Workers
Children's friends & their families

Wednesday: My Country

Public officials - executive, legislative,
& judicial
Armed forces
Public morality
The media
The economy

Thursday: The World

International peace & understanding
Missions and missionaries
Persecuted churches
Hunger, sickness, & disaster relief

Friday: My Spiritual Growth

Maturity
Understanding
Faith
Love toward God
Love toward others
Servanthood

Saturday: My Family

Spouse
Children
Grandchildren
Parents
Brothers & sisters
Extended family
Unsaved loved ones

*"Call to me and I will answer you and
tell you great and unsearchable things
you do not know."-Jeremiah 33:3*

Little Steps To Great Learning!

Preparation:

- Attempt all questions in the relevant Bible study before your group meeting.
- Expect spiritual growth by thoughtfully working on the Bible study questions (and the suggested reading, if any) throughout the week.
- Seek the Holy Spirit's insight and guidance by praying daily in reflection of what you have learned through the Bible study.

Group Time:

- On the following Sunday, take notes during sermon to assist in focusing your thoughts.
- Be punctual for your group meeting.
- Share the insight gained through the sermon with your group.
- Be frank in sharing your response to the questions in the discipleship pointers.
- Encourage others by attesting to God's goodness and reality by sharing to the group (and others) how the Word has changed your thinking and action in response to your study in the past week.
- Using the front sheet, summarise how the lessons have helped you to understand God's revelation in the Bible through Jesus Christ, and your response to the revelation.

THE BIBLE is to be...

Read through...

Reflected in...

Lived out...

Given away...