

Finer Grounds

Mark Lesson 6: The Pharisees Provoked

In our last lesson we saw Jesus' power doubted by many of those closest to him.

Read Mark 7:1-13

This is the beginning of the conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles regarding food. We will see this conflict continue all the way through the New Testament as the Old and New law are put at odds with each other by Christians who do not yet fully understand God's plan. It appears that the men disagreeing with Jesus here were likely specifically selected for their knowledge and influence (Lenski 1961). It is also interesting to note that the accusation is specifically against the apostles, not against Jesus himself.

In verse 6 the word "hypocrites" carries with it the connotation of one wearing a mask (Lenski 1961). Jesus' word choice in verse 8 is also important. He speaks of the traditions of "men" not the traditions of the "elders". In this way he is making a distinct differentiation between the authority of God and man, and denying the respect that these "men" were typically given by Jews of the day (Lenski 1961).

Mark 7:11 is the only time we find the word "Corban" in Scripture. It is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word "korban" (Elwell & Beitzel 1988) and Jesus explains for us what it means.

Think About It:

What do verses 3 and 5 tell us about why the Pharisees had a problem with Jesus?

In what ways are we guilty of wearing a mask? Does the person we are on Sunday mornings truly reflect the person we are the rest of the week, or at home with our kids when we have had a bad day?

Verse 9 is pretty harsh, yet it is an issue we still struggle with today. What are some issues that you personally, or your local congregation, are inclined to put above Scripture? Do you fall out with your brethren over the order of services? What about Bible classes?

Do we make things "corban" in our own lives? Are there good things that we have "set aside" that are actually keeping us from better things?

In verse 13 what does Jesus mean when he says that they are "making void the word of God"?

How do we do this today?

Finer Grounds

Read Mark 7:14-23

Jesus has just had a very public confrontation with the Scribes and Pharisees, and he now calls the disciples to him to discuss what has just taken place. This is a great example of Jesus taking advantage of a teachable moment. His use of the word “defile” once again draws a stark correlation between his teachings and those of the Scribes and Pharisees. The Jewish leaders were focused on being outwardly clean, yet Jesus points out that defilement is a heart issue (Lenski 1961).

Think About It:

How can we better use teachable moments as mommies, grandmothers, and older Christian women?

What does Jesus say defiles a man?

Where do these things come from?

How can we better protect our hearts and minds from defilement?

Take Action:

Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” For the next week, make your life a haven of purity. Put everything that you and your family read, watch on

television, or listen to on the radio, and even your conversations with others, through the Philippians 4:8 test. For at least one week, if it doesn’t meet these specifications, don’t participate. Keep a journal and write down how this impacts you and your family spiritually.

Read Mark 7:24-30

This is an absolutely beautiful passage, and one of my favorite miracles of Christ. It is no coincidence that Mark records this immediately after Jesus says that all things are clean in verse 19. Jesus is once again trying to escape the crowds, and he is once again followed. A Gentile woman comes to him, and begs him to heal his daughter. For a Jew, this entire scenario is completely improper. Jesus is being publicly approached by a woman, which was a no-no, but it is even worse because he is being approached by a Gentile woman. She would surely have been viewed as a “dog” by many of those who were present.

Many ridicule Jesus for the way he responds to the woman, stating that our Savior himself called her a dog. However the word “dog” that Jesus chose to use does not refer to a wild scoundrel of a dog who is feral, mean and destructive, but rather a small housedog that would have been a cherished family pet (Lenski 1961). Jesus is merely referring to the order found in Acts 1:8 where Jesus says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,” (Lenski 1961). The message of Christ, and therefore his miracles, were first for the children of Israel, and then to those of Samaria, and then to the rest of the world. When Jesus uses the word “first” he is stating that the Gentiles will eventually be included in the blessings found in him (Lenski 1961).

Finer Grounds

Think About It:

What is the most amazing thing about this miracle that sets it apart from others Jesus has done?

Read Mark 7:31-37

This miracle is very interesting because it is much more involved than most of the miracles Jesus has done. In the last passage we saw Jesus cast out a demon from afar, yet here Jesus touches the man, puts his fingers in his ears, spits, and touches his tongue. Some scholars believe that the reason for this is so that Jesus could communicate to the man what he was about to do (Lenksi 1961). Physically touching him would have been Jesus' only way of communicating with the man, therefore he touched his tongue and his ears, the two areas that Jesus was about to heal. It would have been very disconcerting to the man to suddenly regain his hearing without having had any idea that anything was transpiring. And once again Mark paints a beautiful picture for us of this miracle, including the exact words Jesus used to restore the man's senses.

Think About It:

The passage closes with yet another command for silence. Jesus' popularity has already spread near and far, why would he continue to command those he healed to be silent?

Read Mark 8:1-10

With this miracle you can just picture Jesus shaking his head in disappointment and frustration. Jesus has already fed an even larger crowd than this (Mark 6:30-34), yet the apostles

do not even consider the possibility of Jesus being able to miraculously feed these hungry people. Yet despite his apostle's lack of understanding, Jesus once again feeds the hungry crowd. Verse 8 tells us that everyone was able to eat until they were satisfied, or full.

Think About It:

Has there ever been a time you did not trust in God when you knew better? What did you learn from that situation?

How many baskets of food were leftover from the feeding of the 5,000?

How many baskets are left over in this miracle?

Read Mark 8:11-13

These verses are very interesting, confusing and disturbing. The entire nature of this confrontation with the Pharisees is challenging. In fact, Mark uses the strong word "argue" for what transpires during this conversation. Mark goes on to tell us that Jesus, "sighed deeply in his spirit," and left that area all together by getting back in the boat and sailing away.

Think About It:

With what we have already seen from Jesus in Mark's gospel account, what is the irony of the Pharisees asking for a sign?

Finer Grounds

What motive did the Pharisees have in asking Jesus for a sign?

What specific type of sign were they looking for?

Take Action:

How many times are we like the Pharisees in that we are always asking God to do things our way? For one week set aside some time for prayer in which you do **NOT** ask for **ANYTHING!** Instead all you do is give God praise, honor, and glory for what He has already given you and done in your life.

Read Mark 8:14-21

Once they are back in the boat, Jesus seizes his opportunity for an object lesson. It appears that it is approaching mealtime as the apostles are discussing what they will eat, and Jesus uses the one loaf of bread to emphasize how quickly false teaching can creep in. Yet the apostles completely miss the point Jesus is trying to make because they are focused on their hungry tummies. Jesus is not happy, and he lets them know it! He fires question after question at them trying to shock them into really thinking about what he's saying, he is like the frustrated parent who walks in on his child misbehaving and shouts out, "What do you think you are doing?!"

Think About It:

What is the irony of where the Holy Spirit led Mark to place this account? What has just happened twice and what are the apostles concerned about?

Do we ever miss spiritual truths and applications because we are focused on the physical?

Have you ever been frustrated with someone you were studying with (maybe even your kiddos) when they didn't understand something as quickly as you thought they should? How did you handle the situation?

Has Jesus been patient with you as your knowledge and understanding have grown throughout your years as a Christian? What are some ways you have grown in these areas as you have spent more time in God's word?

Take Action:

Find a passage of scripture that you have struggled with understanding in the past and revisit it. This time, do not stop studying it until you feel that you not only have an adequate grasp on what it means but also how it should affect your life.

Finer Grounds

Read Mark 8:22-26

Once again, Mark's timing is beautiful. Jesus has just performed many great miracles resulting in instant healing, he has fed over 9,000 people with minimal supplies, and he has dealt with the Pharisees head-on attack, yet even his own apostles are not fully "seeing" what he is trying to teach them. Then a blind man comes to Jesus to be healed. Every miracle Jesus has done has immediately been successful, except this one. Initially the man's vision is only partially restored, and then Jesus heals him all the way.

Think About It:

Why would Jesus have healed this man in stages?

How does this healing fit with what has just transpired between Jesus and his apostles?

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In Baker encyclopedia of the Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.