

READ THIS FIRST

The Gospel of Mark: The King and His Kingdom

Note from Pastor Luke Simmons

The mission of Second Mile Church is to “embody Jesus’ mission and message in every place that God sends us.” The Bible refers to the followers of Jesus as his “ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20) and expects us to faithfully represent him to the world. In order to faithfully live out this mission we must grow intimately familiar with who Jesus is and what he has done. Thus, it makes sense to have our first weekly study focus on the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, as described in the Gospel of Mark.

Though this series, “The King and His Kingdom,” will not be an exhaustive study of the person of Jesus, we will become thoroughly acquainted with his message, mission, attitude and actions. Not only will we see Jesus in action, but we’ll also get a glimpse of what life looks like in Jesus’ Kingdom. Mark is a fast-paced, hard-hitting, action-packed book and we will spend fourteen weeks examining the highlights of his account.

This study guide, designed for individual study or for use in Community Groups, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply the things we learn. The Bible calls us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). These study guides are designed to help us not just hear the word on Sunday, but put it into practice Monday through Saturday.

My prayer for this series is that God will use it to deepen your love for Jesus. Whether you are just beginning to explore what it would be like to follow Christ or you’ve trusted him for a long time, my hope is that your heart would be delighted by his majesty, power, humility, trustworthiness, sacrifice and victory. Only as we grow satisfied in Jesus will we be able to bring his love and grace to our hurting world.

Because the Tomb is Empty,

Luke Simmons
Lead Pastor

The Format

Each study begins with a **key verse** that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. These key verses, if memorized, would allow you to learn the big ideas found in Mark’s Gospel. Then there is an **introduction** to the passage that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, you can track with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for **investigation** (getting into the text) and **implication** (applying these truths to daily life). Each study concludes with a section on **other issues**, which expand on any other issues or questions raised by the passage that we may not take time to cover during the sermon.

Suggestions for Individuals

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study and write out answers to the questions.
- Resist any temptation to skip over the **implication** section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.
- Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you’ve learned and how you’d like your life to change as a result.

Suggestions for Community Groups

- It is recommended that you study the passage *after* it has been preached. This way you can discuss the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study itself.
- In your time together as a community, focus on the **implications** for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and care for one another. Resist the urge to try to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

Questions or Comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to info@secondmilechurch.com.

Week 7

KINGDOM MOTIVES

Mark 7:1-23

.....
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.
.....

(Mark 7:6-7, ESV)

Introduction

What traditions are important to you? It's always interesting to talk with newly married couples who are celebrating their first Christmas together because it's often a clash of different family traditions. Should you open presents on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning? Should they be opened one at a time or as a free for all? Arguments arise as each person says, "That's not how we did it in my family!" Though viewpoints may vary on these questions, we typically feel strongly about the traditions we hold. The word "tradition" is defined as "an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior."¹⁶ Many traditions are good and helpful. They create cultural stability and often many wonderful memories.

Despite the positive aspect of tradition, Mark 7:1-23 describes a collision that's even bigger than a newlywed Christmas. In this passage, Jesus squares off with the Pharisees and the many extra-biblical traditions that they valued.

The Pharisees were a sect of religious leaders in the first century who cared greatly about piety and religious practice. As a reaction against the worldliness and paganism of Roman culture, the Pharisees (the term means "separatist") the Pharisees devised careful rules, attempting to ensure that they would not break any of God's laws. Though started with good intentions (as all religion is), their approach quickly deteriorated into legalism and empty ritual (as all religion does).

As Jesus teaches in this passage, true holiness and piety come from the inside out as our hearts are renewed. If you're looking to make some changes in your life in order to more faithfully obey Jesus, this passage will help you discover how those changes take place. May God use it to make us truly holy!

Investigation

Read Mark 7:1-23

1. The word "tradition" is used six times in verses 3-9. What is the difference in Jesus' mind between the "commandment of God" and the "tradition of men"?
2. In verses 10-13 Jesus gives an example of how the Pharisees used their tradition as a way to avoid doing what God commanded. How would you summarize Jesus' example in your own words? What were the Pharisees doing with the issue of "Corban"?
3. What does Jesus mean by saying that evil comes out of the heart (7:21-23)?
4. How can somebody "worship" and "honor" God and yet have a heart that is "far from him" (7:6-7)?

¹⁶ Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993).

Implication

5. The religious leaders drew up specific moral guidelines for their faith community that went beyond those laid down in the Scripture. What are some ways Christians 'add' to the law today?

6. It is hard for many people to admit responsibility for their sin, but Jesus says that our outward sins are caused by our inward heart condition. What areas of sin and disobedience have you been previously unwilling to take responsibility for? What or who have you blamed these things on?

7. Is your heart currently far from God or close to God? What factors contribute to your sense of intimacy and closeness to God?

8. Imagine that somebody came to you and said, "I know that I'm responsible for my sins and I'm really trying to change and get past them, but I just can't seem to break free." How would you try to help them?

Other Issues

How can Jesus just "declare all foods clean"? Is he just writing off a big chunk of the Scripture? (see Matthew 5:17-18)

Is Jesus saying, "Some parts of the Bible don't hold any more; some parts of it are obsolete?" That doesn't seem to fit in with what Jesus says about the Law of God in Matt. 5:18: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." This categorical statement doesn't seem to fit in with Mark 7:19 at all! But maybe we should look closer. Immediately before his statement about the Law in Matthew 5:18 Jesus tells us his relationship to it: "I come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets... but to fulfill." This means that Jesus did not "declare all foods clean" by abolishing the clean laws, but by fulfilling them.

In Zechariah 3, the prophet has a vision of the High Priest standing before the Lord, covered in excrement and filth (v. 3). But God does not rebuke him or strike him. Rather the Lord turns and rebukes Satan who is standing by the High Priest accusing him of sin (v. 2). Then he says: "Take off his filthy clothes... See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you..." (v. 4-5). Later, the Lord speaks of a day in the future, when "a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity" (13:1).

Jesus was treated as unclean, and crucified outside the camp, on a garbage dump, that we could "draw near to God in full assurance, having our heart sprinkled clean from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:19). Jesus fulfills the clean laws so that, in him, we are "clean."¹⁷

How is external religion different from the gospel?

Tim Keller offers the following contrast between religion and the gospel:

External Religion	The Gospel
"I obey—therefore I'm accepted"	"I'm accepted—therefore I obey"
Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.	Motivation based on grateful joy.
I obey God in order to get <i>things</i> from God.	I obey God to get <i>God</i> —to delight and resemble him.
When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe, like Job's friends, that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.	When circumstances in my life go wrong I struggle, but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while he may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.

¹⁷ Timothy J. Keller, *The Gospel of Mark Study Guide*, 80.

When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person.' Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.	When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a 'good person.' My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ. I can take criticism. That's how I became a Christian.
My prayer consists largely of petition and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.	My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with him.
My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident—I feel like a failure.	My self-view is not based on a view of my self as a moral achiever. In Christ I am simultaneously sinful and lost yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was <i>glad</i> to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling.
My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work, or how moral I am—and so I <i>must</i> look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to 'the Other.'	My identity and self-worth is centered on the one who died for his enemies, who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace. So I <i>can't</i> look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace I am what I am. I've no inner need to win arguments.
Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, my moral record, my personal discipline, my social status, etc. I <i>have</i> to have them so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I say I believe about God.	I have many good things in my life—family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely <i>have</i> to have them, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.
I repent only for my sins.	I repent for my sins, as well as for the wrong reasons I do good things.