



This week we continued our time in Mark's gospel as we reached chapter 7.

Here we found Jesus interacting with the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law who berate him and his disciples for not washing their hands in line with the 'Traditions of the Elders'. Jesus rebukes them sharply by means of the Isaiah 29, stating that they honour God with their lips but their hearts are far from Him. They seem like they are interested in honouring God but actually don't really care.

He gives an example about 'Corban' - a (human) way of dedicating money to the Lord at the expense (in the example here) of caring for parents. They keep the human tradition at the expense of God's ways. What's going on is their righteousness is all about externalities and laws that have been set up, rather than the heart. Their human traditions were not, in and of themselves, bad things but were when they trumped the Law of God.

Jesus goes on to explain that their entire 'righteousness system' is faulty. Being unclean is not about what goes into you (dirt etc from food or via unwashed hands) but rather what comes out of your hearts. The Pharisees were pumping all of their energy into keeping the dirt away when the reality was they were dirty on the inside (see v21-23). External uncleanness is controllable, internal is not. We need hearts that are washed and changed and transformed.

Which is why the New Covenant is such extraordinarily good news. We read again from Ezekiel 26v25-29 and noted 4 brilliant aspects prophesied by Ezekiel and fulfilled in Christ.

He will cleanse us from our impurities.

God will come and get rid of the dirt and make us clean.

He will give us new hearts of flesh.

This is a key point and needs some clarification as we're those who still struggle with sin – one person has put it like this::

"When the Bible talks about the gift of a new heart, it doesn't mean a heart that is immediately perfected, but [rather] a heart that is capable of being changed. Our heart of stone, which cannot be molded, becomes a heart of flesh, which is now malleable."

He will put his spirit within us

- each day and in every situation you have his Holy Spirit living in you helping you to live for Him, helping your heart to be increasingly conformed to His heart.

We will truly know Him and He will know us

We then looked at the example of the Syro-Phoenician woman from v24-30 – an example of a lady who by many standards of the day was 'unclean' and yet our kind and gracious king provides her generously what she needs. In the same way he'll help us in our uncleanness with the grace that we need. This is what we need to remember in our more cynical or tired moments and we're more familiar with v21 and 22 than we should be.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

From Mark 7

Why did the Pharisees only try and control external uncleanness? Were they wrong to add extra laws (tradition of the elders etc)?

What was the problem with adding extras?

What was Jesus saying to them about real uncleanness?

How was it seen?

Define the words in v21-22 – how do we see these things present in and around us?

How do we simply try and keep the dirt from going in, rather than dealing with our hearts? Are we wrong to set up rules and laws to protect ourselves?

From Ezekiel 36(v25-29)

What do each of these 4 mean for the Christian?

1) He will cleanse from impurities

2) He will give us new hearts of flesh

3) He will put his Spirit in us

4) He will be our God and we will be his people

Why is each one such good news?

How do they help us to live for Him each day?

So, why do we still sin?