

- 1) **Mark 6:45-46** - *The proper response to the crises of life* - "Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. [46] And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray." We probably don't picture this time of prayer adequately. Jesus did not just decide that this would be a nice time for a devotional break - a relaxed, leisurely, quiet time alone. Some very important words are recorded in John's account of the same incident: **John 6:14-15** - "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'" [15] Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

Once again, people were badly missing the whole point of the ministry of the Son of God. It must have been deeply distressing and painful for Jesus to have to fight off the crowds who wanted to force Him to be their political leader. It is in the face of this crisis that Jesus knows He must **get alone and seek the Father's face**. Nor was this a one-time occasion for Jesus to do this. His constant response to pressure was prayer (see **Mark 1:35-39, 6:45-46, 14:26-42**). While we can't possibly understand all of the inner workings of the Trinity, we can see some very important truths coming to the surface here:

**First, Jesus takes the time to refocus on what His ultimate purpose on earth is** (not to follow the crowds on the path to political greatness, but to die on the cross and redeem fallen mankind). **Second, He reaffirms His commitment to the Father's will**. Not that He ever **doubted** God's plan, nor that He even had thoughts about **forsaking** it. I don't mean that at all. Rather, we see that Jesus' life wasn't just a phoney model of our earthly existence. He didn't live life on automatic pilot. He genuinely **sustained** Himself in prayer. And we can learn much from His example. Prayer is linked to **keeping first things first**. It is how one can **ground oneself** in God's will and plan all over again. We all need these tender lessons from the example of Jesus, who was tempted in **all** points as we are, yet without sin.

- 2) **Mark 6:47-52** - *Gaining strength for the present from miracles in the past* - "And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. [48] And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, [49] but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, [50] for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.'" [51] And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, [52] for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."

This passage ought to be of interest to us. It speaks to precisely the situation we find ourselves in as Christians today. Most of us read of the great works of Jesus in the pages of our New Testaments. And that is exactly what Jesus talks about in these verses. New Testament history is never meant to be contained merely in the past. The disciples **could have been greatly helped in the storm if they had thought deeply enough about what Jesus had done in the feeding of the five thousand**. (52). They had **marvelled** at what Jesus had done without dwelling on the **significance** of it. Mark says that the disciples didn't understand about the miracle with the loaves because **"their hearts were hardened"** (52). We tend to think of hard hearts in unbelievers only, yet these were Christ's **chosen Apostles**. Jesus was addressing a problem in the **religious mind**.

We have already studied the problem of **hard heartedness** in Mark's gospel in the parables of the soils (**Mark 4:4 & 14**). The Word can be **heard** without being **applied**. When this happens the effect of the seed is wasted in the heart. The disciples **should** have been more than just physically fed as the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand took place, but they failed to remember the **significance** of

the event. Jesus really **could** supply all their needs as the Bread of Life. They had no need to fear.

Eventually the disciples learned this lesson more deeply. The lesson of learning from the past works of God became foundational in their times of prayer and seeking God in times of crisis (**see Acts 4:23-31**).

3) **Mark 7:1-23 - How spiritual life gets sucked out of religion** - The length of Jesus' response shows the nearness of this subject to His heart. At issue here is the root difference between His idea of true religion and that of the Pharisees'.

a) Jesus stated three times that these men were actually using their religion to wipe out the law of God - **Mark 7:6-13** - "And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; [7] in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' [8] You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." [9] And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! [10] For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' [11] But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God)— [12] then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, [13] thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Jesus wasn't striking out against all tradition. He Himself instituted the two sacraments of baptism and the communion service. But He was teaching that the traditions of religious people **only have value when they are used to keep alive something of a living, holy, and current relationship with Father God**. In fact, apart from the life of Jesus imparted by the Holy Spirit, mankind has a very suspicious history of **using** religion itself, not to **find** God, but as a clever, less guilt producing way of **avoiding** the revelation of the one true God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ - **see Romans 1:20-25**.

b) People have a tendency to generate laws to cover areas where the law of God is silent. The OT law regarding ceremonial washings is found in **Exodus 30:17-21** and **40:12**. From these commands **regarding the priesthood**, the elders had **extended the application** to cover all the people.

The simple fact is that **rules tend to multiply in religion when the Holy Spirit is left out**. This is because, apart from the inward transforming work of the Spirit, man-made religion has no other way of legislating morality than extending the number of outward laws. Jesus saw the Pharisees' codified life as a terrible burden to the common people. Even today, we need to be very careful about **making something a Christian law that God has nowhere defined in the Scriptures**.

c) Outward regulations, while useful at times for **restraining** evil, never **transform** the human heart (**Mark 7:14-23**). Jesus was not saying that all regulations or customs were bad. Rather, He was trying to make these leaders see that **only God can change the inner life!** Regardless of how many laws these leaders cranked out, they would still need a Redeemer. See also **Colossians 2:20-23** - "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— [21] "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" [22] (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? [23] These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh."

- d) The danger of manmade regulations is their tendency to **replace** the law of God as the measuring stick for holiness (**Mark 7:9-13**). Our fallen tendency is always to replace things of **greatest** importance with things of **lesser** importance. Jesus gives a striking example here. The Pharisees were using their regulation regarding **the use of something dedicated to the Lord (11-12)** to wipe out the intent of the **fifth commandment of Moses - "honor your father and mother"**.

Without changed hearts, people will always do **two things** with religion: **First**, we will use God's Word to lovelessly stick it to other people in order to make ourselves feel righteous. **Second**, we will use our religious rituals to cancel out what we know God wants to change in the deeper parts of our lives - **Psalm 51:16-17** - **"For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."**