

2018 LENTEN STUDIES  
AND CONNECT GROUPS  
LAUNCH  
4PM AND 7.30PM  
WED 14TH FEB

# CROWN and CROSS



TALK 1 at our  
TEWANTIN SITE

TALKS 2-6 in  
CONNECT GROUPS

## Lenten studies 2018 - Mark: Crown and Cross

### Study 4 - Sin and dirty dogs - Mark 7:1-30

Read Mark 7:1-30, then watch Pete's talk: <https://youtu.be/1qoiwN1b4s>

1. Why do you think people are often under (the mistaken) impression, that going to heaven is about keeping the 10 commandments and not doing anything 'major' wrong?
2. What's the problem (or, what are the problems) with such an understanding?

#### An insight into religion (7:1-13)

3. What was the ceremonial washing about and why are the Pharisees upset with Jesus and his disciples for not observing the requirement?
4. Read again vv6-8. How do these verses highlight some of the problems with religious observance?
5. Pete said the Pharisees and Jesus agreed on one thing but disagreed on another. Read that section again (just prior to Pete's second heading) and make sure everyone understands what he was saying.

#### An insight into sin (7:14-23)

6. Why is it so difficult for people (for us!) to realise or admit that true 'defilement' actually comes from within the human heart? Why is it, as Pete suggested, such an unpopular notion?
7. What are some of the ways modern society, fails to call sin for what it is? (See for example <http://www.bobrussell.org/americas-prayer-of-repentance> )
8. Not only is sin real, there is nothing we can do about it! Pete quoted Paul Tripp "if you prayed every moment of your life, you could not pray enough prayers to earn acceptance with God. If you gave every penny of every dollar that you ever earned in every job you ever had, you could not give enough to deserve acceptance with God". (See Pete's text below for the full quote.) Why can't we make up for our failings - even if we try really hard?

#### An insight into grace (7:24-30)

9. What then is our only hope and how does this unusual story of a particularly unclean woman, show us the answer?

*Do you find Jesus' diagnosis of the human problem offensive? It is only as we become crystal clear as to the serious nature of our problem, that we can understand with crystal-clear-clarity, the enormity and the cost of God's kindness and grace to us in the Lord Jesus. Only through the cross can we find forgiveness, be set free from our sin and find restoration!*

10. A neighbour wants to talk to you about Jesus. They reckon they live a good life and give a lot to the community in their service club. How do you go about explaining the problem of the human heart and the wonderful solution Jesus provides?

*Share if there's anything in particular which struck you from this talk/study. Pray for one another.*

# Mark: Crown and Cross

## Talk 3 - Cost of the Cross - Mark 6:7-30

### Introduction

There are a number of questions that you can ask someone, that cut straight to the heart of what they really believe. As pastors, Mark Calder and I use them because they get beyond the trivial, and dive deep into the heart of true spirituality. They are enormously helpful as we try to minister the Gospel to people.

One very helpful question is 'if you were to die this very night, find yourself before God, and he was to say to you why should I let you into heaven, what would you say?' That question peels back all the layers in one swoop, and cuts straight to the heart of someone's view of religion, and sin and grace.

I can remember, around 25 years ago, door knocking an apartment block in the city of Pune, in India. And most of the people I would speak to were Hindu. And I can remember being invited into this one lady's house, who had a large poster of Jesus on the wall. And I asked her that question. And she replied... 'well, I have kept the 10 commandments'. In essence - she replied - *I have been good*. And the question is - was that good enough? And that is really what today's section is all about.

Our story today gives us three insights - we get an insight into religion; we get an insight into sin, and we get an insight into grace. Religion, sin, and grace.

### An insight into religion (7:1-13)

So the setting for our story today is that Jesus is now moving from Jewish territory - Galilee, to Gentile - pagan - territory, the region of Tyre. And it is in our first story - when Jesus interacts with the Jewish leaders, that we get our first insight - that into religion. And the presenting issue that is raised is all about moral and spiritual defilement.

A bit of background here. Jews at this time lived among pagans, or non-Jews. They would walk past them in the street; possibly live nearby them, they may even shop near each other at local similar markets. And the risk of coming into contact with pagans was high.

And pagans, at this time customarily did things that Jews hated. They would eat food that had been sacrificed to idols; they were known to be sexually promiscuous; adultery and sodomy were common place; they aborted their unborn - therefore defiling themselves by having contact with the dead. Bottom line - to Jews, they were filthy. Impure. And God's people had to be protected at all costs. That is what verse 3 is referring to.

And so outside every Jewish house would stand a large stone jar, where Jews would wash themselves before eating. This was not so much about hygiene, but more about moral and spiritual defilement – just in case the Jews had accidentally come into contact with the filthy gentiles.

And so we pick up the action in verse 5, where the Pharisees say to Jesus ‘Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?’ and what has happened is that they have eaten food without washing their hands.

And Jesus responds in verse 6 – “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

<sup>7</sup>They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are merely human rules.’

<sup>8</sup>You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

Now – here is why Jesus says this. And this is a key point - the Old Testament law did not call for this. The OT did not call for this. Yes, the OT called for priests to wash and cleanse themselves like this, but not for the average Jew.

And the reason that the OT law called on all OT priests to wash a particular way before they came near to God was largely symbolic – God was showing that he was pure and holy and perfect, and as such, a pure and holy God could not let any impure or imperfect thing near him. The law at this point was making the point that God was Holy, and that people were not.

But what the Pharisees had done was take an OT law for priests, and turn it into a tradition for everyone. And that was what this was all about. And Jesus was incensed about this. He knew that rule upon rule upon rule distorted God’s law, and killed God’s people. And he knew that these Pharisees were doing it for their own gain.

And that is what’s behind the tricky little section in verses 9-13. What Jesus here is doing is illustrating his charge, that these men have ‘let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.’

So in verse 10, Jesus says ‘For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ – which is absolutely what the law said in both Exodus and Deuteronomy.

But then Jesus says to them – you are siphoning off money that should be used for parents – according the law – and you are directing that towards the temple. And because someone has said a religious formula

over it 'Corban' – you are saying that it cannot be used to care for someone's parents. You force them to break the law. And then in verse 13 he summarises what he means 'Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.'

Friends I said that here we have an insight into religion – and we do. You have to know that humans are inherently religious creatures. That is why there is no people group on earth that is without religion. Atheists scattered around the place there may well be – but every people group across time and place worships. We have been made to.

But here is the thing. Every religion across the face of the planet also holds that we must do something to get right with God. We have sinned, so we must make amends. It's the whole idea of the scale of justice. If you were to ask your next door neighbour – who was not a Christian – do they think they'll get to heaven – they'd almost certainly say 'I hope so. I think I've been good enough'. What they are saying, and what they feel, is that I think the good outweighs the bad! I haven't murdered anyone – I'm not a bad bloke, so I hope I'm in! Good works. Things I do. Washing my hands before eating. It should make me right with God.

What we have here with the Pharisees is an insight into religion. Now here is the thing. Jesus and the Pharisees here both agree on something. That people can be defiled. That people can be stained. That people can be marked by sin. But that is all they agree on. Where they totally and completely diverge, is in regard to *what causes that*. And this is where we get to our second insight – which is an insight into sin.

### **An insight into sin (7:14-23)**

The Pharisees believe that moral and spiritual defilement is about you coming in contact with something that can make you unclean. It is about something external to you making you unclean.

Jesus sees it completely differently. And what he says next is absolutely crucial in us understanding what the bible says about sin. Have a look at verse 14. "Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."

And with that simple sentence, Jesus turned the understanding and philosophy and ritual and traditions of the Pharisees absolutely on its head. He says – 'you've got it all wrong – it's not things out there that get into you that defile you; it's things in here that get out that defile you.' And then the scene ends. And he leaves.

Then in our next scene the disciples are with Jesus – verse 17 – and they ask him about what he has just said. And Jesus says to them – 'Are you so dull?' No wonder the Pharisees didn't get. The disciples don't get it! So Jesus explains.

Verse 18 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.'" (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying the problem with defilement; with sinfulness - is not out there - it is in here. It is in our hearts. By heart - he means the very centre of who we are. Jesus says that our hearts are the problem. He says sin is not an external problem - it is an internal problem.

And the Pharisees would have completely disagreed. And that is easy to understand, because the Pharisees at this point simply feel like everybody feels. I don't need to tell you how unpopular the notion of personal sinfulness is, right? I mean you do understand how offensive that is? And certainly we live in a world that has done away with the antiquated notion that people are sinful. It belongs to another era, it belongs to another time.

What people have done is medicalised, psychologised and socialised sin these days. So people are not sexually immoral - they have sex addiction. People are not self-centred and self-focused, they struggle with narcissism - and it's probably their parents fault. People are not greedy - there just trying to get ahead.

We live in a world that says we are not sinful - we are neutral. But forces out there can play havoc with us. And Jesus says *no*. To a world that says we are not sinful, but sick; not guilty, just gullible, not bad, just broken Jesus says *No*. He says no to the Pharisees. He today he says no to psychologists, and doctors and philosophers and to us. Jesus says our problem, fundamentally, in this world as we relate to Him is not out there, it is in here.

You are sinful. I am sinful. We have hearts that long to ignore God and his truth; and we have hearts that long to live as if we were God, according to a truth that we want to make up.

And as unpopular and as offensive as that sounds to our modern ears, it is exactly what the bible teaches cover to cover. And unless you believe it - you will never understand the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will never understand why God's perfect and sinless son need to die alone on a cross in your place and on your behalf.

I said before that everyone hates this. Certainly those who don't believe. But here's the thing. Even those of us who do believe it here - we hate it here. We hate it. How do I know - because every single one of us minimises, justifies and looks externally when we are caught in, called on or made aware of our own sin.

So someone at work says to you – ‘gee I wish you’d do more work?’ And the first thing we do is we say ‘me? What about you!’ or we say ‘I’d love to do more work. But it is very hard when you are waiting on a document from...’ or we say ‘yeah, I’m not feeling well today’. The last thing we do is this ‘you know what. Maybe I’m being lazy. Let me have a think about that and I’ll get back to you’.

I could have chosen a million examples. But you do know that your first response to your sin, is to sin, right? As the German theologian Karl Barth once famously said ‘even in our understanding of sin, we are sinful’. The problem with our sin is not external to us, it’s internal.

In 1908, the British newspaper The Times, ran a series of essays entitled ‘What’s wrong with the world?’ They asked a number of leading thinkers of the day to submit essays, outlining their perspective as to why the world was in the shape it was in. One man who was asked to submit an essay was the English writer C.K. Chesterton. His essay was the shortest submitted. In response to the question ‘What is wrong with the world’, he simply wrote:

Dear Sirs,

I am.

Sincerely,

C.K. Chesterton.

CK Chesterton’s famous essay is still quoted over 100 years later, because it was profound. Because in two words he captures that very thing that many of us feel, but cannot quite put our finger on. And yet the very thing Jesus himself here knows is the problem with us all. Not external. Internal.

But it gets worse. Not only does the bible tell us we are sinful. It also tells us that there is absolutely nothing that we can do about it. We are enslaved. Sin does not merely turn our hearts against God; sin is also a power that binds us and traps us and prevents us from turning to God to receive his mercy and grace.

And there is nothing we can do. One author put it like this ‘if you prayed every moment of your life, you could not pray enough prayers to earn acceptance with God. If you gave every penny of every dollar that you ever earned in every job you ever had, you could not give enough to deserve acceptance with God. If every word you ever spoke was uttered with the purest of conscientious motivations, you would never be able to speak your way into reconciliation with God. If you gave yourself to an unbroken, moment-by-moment life of ministry, you could never minister enough to receive God’s favour. Sin is too big. God’s bar is too high. It is beyond the reach of every human being who has ever taken his or her first breath’.

Remember what ritual washing was about in the OT. It was a symbol to teach that God was pure, and that people were not. We are sinners. The problem is internal. And we can do nothing about it.

Now you might be sitting here today and this is the very first time you have ever heard this. You may well be quite shocked. The bible's teaching on sin is shocking. You'd be right to feel that.

And so naturally that raises the question - then what can we do? If we're sinners, and the problem is internal, and there is nothing we can do about it, then what hope is there for anyone? And that is where our third story comes in, and this is where we get our insight into Grace.

### **An insight into Grace (7:24-30)**

So Jesus has now moved from out of Jewish areas, and he has entered a gentile area. And he enters a house there, and our story then zooms in on this woman. A woman who has sought him out, because she is in desperate circumstances. We find out that her daughter is demon possessed. So she finds Jesus, falls at his feet, and begs him to drive the demon out.

And then Jesus says something very strange to this woman. In verse 27 He says 'First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' Which sounds like he is calling her a dog. And - by comparison - he is.

Jesus here is using the example of a family, with children and a pet dog. And this gentile asks him for help, and he says - 'it's not right for me to help you now, in the same way that it's not right to feed your dog, before you feed your own children'. He is saying to this woman - I have come for my own people first. I am Israel's messiah. I have come for Israel first.

And then, quick as a flash, this woman says 'Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Notice what she doesn't do. She doesn't say 'how dare you call me a dog'. She doesn't say 'how dare you prioritise people' she doesn't even say 'isn't my daughter precious to you?' All the things we'd want to say.

What she says is this - 'sure - you don't give your children's bread to the dog; but the dog is welcome to come under the table and eat up the crumbs'. She is saying - I may well be a dog, but even dogs receive small blessings from the family to which they belong.

And what she does is she shows both humility and insight. She is prepared to acknowledge that she is a gentile - a dog - with absolutely no claim on the Kingdom of God. And yet she stands before Jesus - with great humility, and with great hope, and with great faith - and she says - can you help me?

And she is right. Because in verses 29 and 30, we read 'Jesus told her 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.' She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.'

And friends – we get our insight into grace. And at the very same time we get our answer to the problem of our personal defilement, our sin, our internal heart issue, that we can do nothing about. And it comes to us from the most unclean of the unclean – a Greek, Syro-phoenician woman with a demon possessed daughter. And here is what she shows us. The only way we can deal with our defiled hearts is to seek out Jesus - with great humility, with great hope, with great faith – and it is to say to him – will you help me? Will you forgive me? Will you purify me? Will you wash me, and make me clean, that I might find peace with God?

## **Conclusion**

Let me finish by addressing one more thing. There will be people here today who feel that it is unkind, unfair and very possibly repugnant for God to say that people are sinful. I understand that well. It's sort of shocking.

There will also be people here who will find it unkind, unfair and very possibly repugnant that Jesus would call this woman a dog. I also understand that well. It's sort of shocking.

But here is the thing. If Jesus did not tell this woman that she was a dog – with no right to claim any blessing from him – she could not respond to him, in the right way. Jesus' diagnosis of her was the way she was enabled to seek him rightly. What way is that? The way of humility, and hope, and faith.

And in exactly the same way, if Jesus did not tell you that you were sinful, debased, entrapped and enslaved – and that there was nothing you could do about that - you could not respond to him, in the right way. Jesus' diagnosis of you is the way you are enabled to seek him rightly. What way is that? The way of humility, and hope, and faith.

But the fact is Jesus does tell us all that we are sinful. He tells us that we have a heart issue, so that we might turn to him, ask him for help, seek his forgiveness, and allow his death on the cross to cover over us, heal us and set us free.