

Mark 7:1-23

We live in a world that is defined by being distracted.
We do not even relax and watch television anymore.
An American study
by the Mobile Marketing Association
found that “88% Of U.S. Consumers
Use their mobile as a second screen while watching TV”.
Clive Thompson, New York Times Magazine,
“Information is no longer a scarce resource –
attention is.”
We are all experienced at being distracted
and interrupted in life.

When we talk about faith,
I believe we are talking about something that
deserves our focus,
but also needs our focus –
our attention –
our intentional purpose.
Faith is not a one-time experience,
but a life-time journey.
Faith requires that we believe God and
we persist through the challenges we face.
Faith requires FOCUS.
In our passage today,
Jesus redirects the attention of religious leaders
and disciples of his day, and ours.
I want to ask you five questions about the
focus of faith that I hope you will consider –
if I can get your attention!

1. Does Faith Focus on Tradition or Scripture? (Mark 7:1-5)

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him. 2 They observed that some of his disciples were eating bread with unclean—that is, unwashed—hands. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, keeping the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they have washed. And there are many other customs they have received and keep, like the washing of cups, pitchers, kettles, and dining couches.) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with ceremonially unclean hands?”

The trouble with traditions is that my tradition
is your dogma and vice versa.
Tradition can be a distraction from Scripture –
drawing us away from the teaching of the Bible
to comparing ourselves with others and
what they do or do not do.
Tradition is not evil - and can be good –
but it cannot condemn others or draw us away from Christ.

Colossians 2:8 “Be careful that no one takes you captive
through philosophy and empty deceit
based on human tradition,
based on the elements of the world,
rather than Christ.”

2. Does Faith Focus on Judgment or Grace?

If we condemn others for not keeping our traditions, we are living in judgment and not grace.

2 Timothy 2:1 says: "You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

This is grace that teaches us how to live with God.

This is grace that teaches us how to live with others.

3. Does Faith Focus on Outward Acts or Heartfelt Worship? (Mark 7:6-8)

Mark 7:6-8: "He answered them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written:

This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands.

Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition."

God has always desired our heartfelt worship – much more important to him than our outward acts.

Matthew 9:13 "Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

We may think our acts of religious duty are more important than our hearts, but God does not! God desires our hearts, not just our actions.

4. Does Faith Focus on Arrogance or Confessions? (Mark 7:9-13)

Mark 7:9-13 "He also said to them, "You have a fine way of invalidating God's command in order to set up[e] your tradition! 10 For Moses said: Honour your father and your mother; and Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death. 11 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or mother: Whatever benefit you might have received from me is corban'" (that is, an offering devoted to God), 12 "you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things."

Jesus zeroes in on the real issue: the hypocrisy of demanding of others what you will not live yourself. Arrogance seeks to justify self, dragging down others, and failing to see yourself as you are. Confession waters down arrogance by recognizing our great need before God and our lack of status among others. We are all sinners – and we all need Jesus – so none of us can afford the price of arrogance.

5. Does Faith Focus on Self or Jesus? (Mark 7:20-23)

Mark 7:20-23 And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, 22

adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgence, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.
23 All these evil things come from within and defile a person.”

This section ends with a description of the human heart.

I have two reactions to this list:

*I can see now that Jesus knows the real ME.

*I can see now that Jesus loves the real ME and died for me BECAUSE he knows and loves me.

One of my favourite authors Brennan Manning said:

“The gospel declares that no matter how dutiful or prayerful we are, we can't save ourselves. What Jesus did was sufficient.”

The focus of faith is always to be on Jesus.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look Full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim –
in the light of His glory and grace.

Ending:

In a world of distractions,
we can easily find ourselves focused on tradition,
judging others,
empty religious practices,
and a failure to recognize our own sin.

Faith focuses on God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
With Scripture, Grace, Worship, the Real ME:
Faith Focuses on Jesus.

We can have a faith focused on Jesus when we...

- Love people the way Jesus loved them
- Serve others from the heart.
- Worship God - not just attend worship.
- Recognize who we are inside,
and thus how much we need the Lord in our daily life.

Luke 18:9-13 –

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed:

‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance.

He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said,

'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

We focus on faith as we pray the tax collector's prayer:
'God, have mercy on me, a sinner!'

Faith is Focused on Jesus.