

## Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

### Week beginning Sunday 2 September 2018 Spirit of the Law

Pray that we might understand better how Jesus came to fulfil the law and how without ignoring the need to take the letter of law seriously we might get a better grasp of how we need to live to keep to the spirit of the law.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Mark 7:1-8.

Background The religious establishment had developed a complicated, some might say fastidious, set of rules and regulations which complicated to the nth degree to the requirements of among other things health and hygiene. In a world where personal hygiene and cleanliness were hard to uphold the rules on washing were quite far seeing. However, things had got out of hand and often these rules were used to set apart (as superior) those who were pernickety and who used this as defining what who was truly religious and acceptable to God. Jesus was adamant that it was the condition of our heart and our openness to God in a spiritual way that counted far more than the way we wash our pots and pans.

#### Possible questions/points to consider

1. There is good environmental health advice in the Old Testament's teaching on cleanliness. Where do you think things got out of hand so that the way you washed your utensils became a decisive religious position for some religious leaders? We wouldn't get too uptight about how pots were cleaned (as long as they were) at least not in a religious sense but can you think of other areas of Christian life where we might unwittingly have imposed rules and regulations which have themselves become decisive? Thinking afresh about any of these: what would Jesus' attitude be? (Bear in mind his stance in the passage).
2. Putting things more positively – what is it that Jesus tried to highlight as being key? When things that are significant crowd out something that is vital the former become a hindrance to what is really important. How might that thought help us to understand Jesus' stance in the passage? How do we assess things that are important to us in the Church and in our faith in the light of what Jesus says is vital? Do we do that carefully enough? How might we review things? What might need to change?
3. On Sunday, I used some illustrations from my experience as a rugby referee and coach. If you did not find these helpful please jump to the next question! If they were of some help – how might they point to how we treat others who offend against us (advantage)? How might the idea of “spirit of the game” help us to better relate to others? Sometimes it is just not enough to say “I've done nothing wrong” when Jesus expects us to go the second mile.
4. There seems to be something inherent in the human psyche that wants to prove ourselves worthy. Perhaps that helps us to achieve goals and keep us striving to improve things (not always just in a selfish way). However, we can't please God by keeping to a list of rules. The Christian faith is built on the premise that we've all fallen short of God's standards and that only in and through Jesus are we acceptable to him. Over emphasising rules can detract from the gospel. Without throwing all rules out the window and totally ignoring them how do we ensure that forgiveness and acceptance in Jesus comes to the fore? How do we ensure that it is key in the way we treat others who might treat us poorly?
5. Please discuss/consider anything else that arises from the passage or service.

Prayer Lord thank you that you accept us and forgive us in Jesus, not by our own efforts but through grace. Help this to affect how we live our lives, how we treat others and how we seek to be disciples of your Son Jesus. Amen.