

KINGDOM COME



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Beware Stiff-Neckedness

Community Group Study Guide: **Mark 8:11-21** –Week of January 21st, 2024

1. Be Not a Stiff-Necked Sign-Seeker

Throughout scripture, there are many examples of stubborn rebellion against God. The hardness of man's heart causes them to act with stiff necks. They defy the commands of God, refusing to submit. Often God provides direct evidence that should be convincing, and still, the hardness of heart persists. We see this in our text. The people have seen credible miracles in their midst. Jesus has healed many. He has taken the food for a few and fed thousands upon thousands. He has provided overwhelming evidence of His divine power and authority. Yet, the religious elite of the time have not been sufficiently convinced. They require another sign; they argue with Jesus demanding that He give them further verification of who He is. In response to their disrespectful approach, Jesus sighs deeply, laments the foolishness of their pursuit, and informs them that their demands will not be met. He takes His disciples and departs. This is a clear example of how not to approach God... with a stiff neck and demanding a sign.

2. Beware the Leaven of Stiff-Neckedness

After observing a prime example of stiff-neckedness, Jesus strongly warns His disciples to avoid the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Herod. Jesus calls the disciples to see the hardness of the heart in both instances. The Pharisees, with their certainty in their self-righteous behavior, are just the same as the Herodians with their overt sinfulness. Both had a posture of hardness before God. As Christians, we too can fall prey to being hard-hearted. The Word of God corrects our hearts just like the Pharisees or the Herodians. But the question is, will we be humble? Will we listen to the instruction from God, or will we stiffen our necks? Jesus warns so strongly for the disciple to avoid a hardened heart position because, like leaven in dough, it is infectious to the inner being.

3. Battle Hard-Heartedness by Remembering

DISCUSSION GOALS

Head

Our hearts are prone to hardness. They are prone to trusting in themselves instead of trusting in God. This hardness is not something that remains idle, but that spreads throughout our inner being if not properly attended to.

Heart

To keep our hearts soft, we must continually remind ourselves of who the Lord is, and what He has done. We must intentionally come to His word with humility, and ask the Lord for His help. We should desire our hearts to be transformed by His words and deeds.

Hands

Throughout scripture, God uses His prophets and leaders to remind the people of what God has done. We likewise should continuously remind our hearts of the grace that God has poured into our lives. Remember the provision of the Lord, and His proven faithfulness.

One of the most effective ways to fight against the hardness of the heart is to remember what the Lord has done. Jesus brings this principle to work on the disciples. He directs them back to the works that Jesus had previously done, reminding them of all that was accomplished. There is always the temptation to forget what the Lord has done, which is why it is so vital to daily remind our hearts of all the ways that God has worked in our lives.

Read Mark 8:11-21

1. When has the teaching of God offended you? How did you handle it? How should we respond when we find the Word of God offensive?
2. The Pharisees demanded a sign from Jesus. What does this reveal about their hearts and their attitude approaching Him? What makes asking the Lord for a sign wrong (as in the case of the Pharisees) or right (Isaiah 7:10/Mark 13:4)?
3. Jesus strongly instructs the disciples to “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” What is meant by this warning? What is the meaning of the imagery being used? Why the distinction between Herod and the Pharisees? Where might we see this in our current day?
4. **Read Verse 16-19.** What is happening amongst the disciples? How does Jesus respond to the hearts of the disciples? How do we likewise employ this process to ourselves?
5. Unbelief can creep in when we begin to forget all the Lord has done for us. Think recently, how has the Lord cared and provided for you or your loved ones?
6. **Read Philippians 3:12-16** What is the meaning of what Paul is saying here? How is this perspective tied together with what Jesus had been teaching the disciples?
7. In verse 21, Jesus concludes with a question: “Do you not yet understand?” What is it that He is hoping that they understand?