

The Gospel According to Mark

Lesson 6

Mark 7:1 – Mark 7:37

Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, the ebb and flow of the crowd that surrounded Him was positive. Very little negative interaction had taken place among the people or even with the scribes and Pharisees. At this point in Mark's record, the tone of Jesus' ministry is about to change. An envoy from Jerusalem has arrived with the intent of cataloging all the indiscretions of the Lord. They will start with the issue of unclean hands.

The envoy from Jerusalem

Mark 7: ¹And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, ²and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. ³~~(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; ⁴and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)~~

The twelve baskets of food collected from the Lord's feeding of the five-thousand, did not go to waste. The close disciples of the Lord took them to eat at a later time. Most likely, they carried the baskets in the boats as they traveled across the Sea of Galilee. At some point, they became hungry and began to eat the leftover food from the baskets. In those days, it was a Jewish custom for Jews to wash their hands before eating meals. However, out in the open areas, clean water for washing was often difficult to obtain. Hungry, the men ate the food without the proper washing. The scribes and Pharisees were not complaining about the proper washing before a meal for sanitary reasons; they were complaining that the men were not ceremonially clean. After the proper washing of the hands, the Jewish zealots required a ceremonial cleaning which involved the use of two small cups about the size of half an egg shell. The Jewish man would bunch his fingers together in the air and pour one cup of holy water on those fingers. If the water ran all the way down his arm and off his elbow, that hand was ceremonially clean. The same process was repeated for the other hand. The followers of the Lord may have washed their hands before eating the food from the basket, but most likely they did not perform the ceremonial cleansing. Seeing the Lord's disciples fail to follow the traditions of the Jewish elders, the scribes and Pharisees questioned the Lord.

The Traditions of man

Mark 7: ⁵And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" ⁶And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY

FROM ME. ⁷ 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' ⁸ "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." ⁹ He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH'; ¹¹ but you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (~~that is to say, given to God~~),' ¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; ¹³ *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

The question asked by the Pharisees and scribes did not surprise Jesus. Hundreds of years before, He had prepared His answer to their question through the prophet Isaiah and their leader, Moses. The commandment that they should have been following was clear and present in their religions writings. But their oral traditions had become more important to them than the Word of God. Jesus quoted one of their oral traditions to them:

"If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban, you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

A big difference can be seen in the commands of God and the oral traditions of men. With His reply, Jesus caught the Pharisees off guard with their own tradition which had been manufactured to cover up God's Word. As they withered before Him, Jesus reminded them that they had set aside His commandments. The Jews used the word "Corban" in this tradition which means "an offering or gift to God." If a father or mother has a need and their son has the ability to help but does not want to, he can tell them he had already given what they needed to God with one word, "Corban." In the last part of the tradition, the son is justified in his trickery and lie and is then prohibited from helping his father and mother even though he could use what he said was a gift to God for his own purposes. Nothing in the Scripture ever supports this kind of deceptive thinking, yet it was an oral tradition well publicized and used in Jewish life. Deceptive traditions of this nature void the truth of God's Word. Jesus will now turn the tables on the Pharisees and scribes, infuriating them all the more.

Nothing that enters a man can defile him

Mark 7: ¹⁴ And after He called the multitude to Him again, He *began* saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. ¹⁶ [~~"If any man has ears to hear, let him hear."~~]

The Pharisees and scribes sought to catch Jesus breaking their law. They did it in front of the entire multitude which constantly gathered around Jesus. Turning to the multitude, Jesus continued to address the issue of eating with unclean hands brought up by the religious hypocrites from Jerusalem. The Pharisees and scribes tried to make a point that food eaten with unclean hands would defile the person, but Jesus rebuked that thinking by proclaiming that nothing eaten by a person will defile him.

Quickly, Jesus announced that the things which defile a person come from the heart, not from what he puts in his mouth.

Not the heart but the stomach

Mark 7: ¹⁷And when leaving the multitude, He had entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. ¹⁸And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; ¹⁹because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (~~Thus He declared all foods clean.~~)

Now back at Peter's house, the disciples questioned Jesus about his rebuke of the Pharisees. They understood the Pharisees' position because they had lived under their traditions all their lives. Food of any kind, clean or unclean, goes to the stomach not the heart. Eventually the body eliminates the food through waste or expended energy. Even food eaten with the filthiest of hands cannot defile the heart of a man.

That which comes from a man defiles him

Mark 7: ²⁰And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²²deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. ²³"All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

Food eaten with unclean hands never causes a person to do the things listed in this passage. These evil things come from the heart and mind of the man, not from his stomach.

The Gentile woman and her daughter

Mark 7: ²⁴And from there He arose and went away to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. ²⁵But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, immediately came and fell at His feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." ²⁹And He said to her, "Because of this answer go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." ³⁰And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having departed.

From Peter's house it was about thirty miles to the city of Tyre. The text says that Jesus came to the region of Tyre which extended from the city several miles and was

in Syria, not Israel. The Gentile woman who came to Jesus concerned about her demon-possessed daughter was from the region of Phoenicia, Syria.

Jesus arrived in the region of Tyre to rest, yet the appearance of the Gentile woman drew His attention. Evidently, the Roman audience understood this parable and it needed no explanation. Mark's report is so short that we cannot grasp the meaning without help. Fortunately, Matthew records the same story and gives insight to the meaning of the "children" being fed before the "dogs."

Matthew 15:21-28 And Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." ²³But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to *Him* and kept asking Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us." ²⁴But He answered and said, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" ²⁵But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶And He answered and said, "**It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" ²⁷But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered and said to her, "**O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish.**" And her daughter was healed at once.

Throughout the world in ancient times and in some cultures today, a person who is not of the same ethnicity is considered a "dog." In Jesus' day a Jew considered a Gentile to be a "dog." To a Syrian, a Jew was a "dog." To a Roman, a Persian was a "dog." Today, the Koran instructs the Muslims that anyone who is not of their faith is a "dog." In Mark and Matthew the children are to be fed before the dogs. Instead of asking who the dogs are, let's ask who the children are. Matthew records Jesus' words, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" Jesus was sent to proclaim His gospel to the children of Israel first. Jesus knew He would die for the entire world, which included both Jew and Gentile, but, at this time, His focus, at least in front of the multitudes, was on the Jews. After the Jews were fed, the food would then be given to the dogs, which in this case included the Phoenician woman from Syria and her daughter. Her quick reply is not correctly translated in the English versions. It should say, "Yes, Lord; but even the little pet dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Her words cleared the air for those with Jesus. All she was asking for was the crumbs, the bits and pieces of Jesus' ministry that fell from the table. She wasn't asking for that which belonged to the Jews; she was asking only for the leftovers. Her faith was persistent and because of her faith in the Lord as Savior, Healer, and Master, her daughter was healed, even out of Jesus' sight.

The deaf man

Mark 7: ³¹And again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. ³²And they brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they entreated Him to lay His hand upon him. ³³And He took him aside from the multitude by himself, and

put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue *with the saliva*; ³⁴and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" ³⁵And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he *began* speaking plainly.

From Tyre Jesus traveled up through Sidon, about twenty-five miles away; then He returned to the area around the Sea of Galilee. We can only wonder why Mark included this healing since it is not included in Matthew, Luke, or John. Jesus had healed many people during His ministry. What was so special about this healing? Perhaps it was important because the man could neither hear nor speak easily. If he could speak, it meant that he was not deaf from birth but became deaf later on in his life. The time he spent with the Lord was intimate and private. He had not heard about the miracles of the Lord; neither had he testified that he believed in the Lord. Jesus had to take him aside, at the bidding of his friends and family, to heal him. Mark saves the Aramaic word in the text. The English translation says it means "Be opened!" But Jesus' word "Ephphatha!" really means "be unbarred." The deafness and the speech impediment were a prison for this man and the picture portrayed by the Lord implies that He set him free. The Lord did not just heal the man; He released him from his imprisonment.

The astonishment of the people

Mark 7: ³⁶And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. ³⁷And they were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

Just as with the leper and the demon-possessed men, the people could not keep the things of the Lord secret. Every time the Lord instructed them not to tell, it caused them to tell all the more. Human nature is interesting. The faithful will always follow the rules, but the superficial followers will always break the rules. Those who told were actually harming the reputation of the Lord with the Pharisees and scribes rather than healing the relationship. They are also the ones who will fall away when His trial begins.