

Mark 7

Here we have another official delegation coming from Jerusalem to check out Jesus (vv. 1-5). Actually, the concept of Jewish religious leaders evaluating Jesus' ministry was perfectly acceptable. In theory, these religious leaders were responsible for the spiritual well-being of the nation which included protecting Israel from a potential false prophet or false messiah. Their motives may be questionable though, because they immediately found something to criticize Jesus for. This delegation from Jerusalem had already made up their mind about Jesus. Now they are just trying to "pin" something on Him.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law arrived in Jerusalem and what did they immediately find to criticize Jesus for (vv. 2, 5)? His disciples were eating without (ceremonially) washing their hands.

There is no Biblical mandate for ceremonial hand washing. **Where did they get the standard they used to judge Jesus and his disciples (v. 3)?** From the oral traditions of the elders. They did not evaluate Jesus based on God's Word. They had so distorted the law that their oral traditions were considered by the scribes and Pharisees to be just as binding as the Law of Moses itself if not more so. Their perspective was -- if tradition and scripture are not in agreement, tradition wins. It was Jesus' failure to support the validity of the oral law which made him an object of concerted attack by the religious leaders.

Note: According to tradition, for these ceremonial washings, special stone vessels of water were kept, because ordinary water might be unclean. To wash your hands in a special way, you started by taking at least enough of this water to fill one and one-half egg shells. Then, you poured the water over your hands, starting at the fingers and running down towards your wrist. Then you cleansed each palm by rubbing the fist of the other hand into it. Then you poured water over your hands again, this time from the wrist towards the fingers. A *really* strict Jew would do this not only before the meal, but also between each course.

What are some examples of traditions in our churches today? Communion style and frequency (Jesus initially celebrated communion Thursday night at dinner – at the Last Supper). Baptism type. Music style. No alcohol. No R-rated movies.

Is there anything wrong with tradition? There is nothing wrong with tradition unless it trumps the truth of the Bible. When tradition becomes binding and/or when it becomes law and supersedes scripture, it is wrong. Our sole authority in the way we live our lives has to be the Bible. Not my church, my pastor, my denomination, etc.

He accused them of being what (v. 6)? Hypocrites. The people were just what Isaiah had predicted. They professed great devotion to the Lord, but were inwardly corrupt. They pretended to worship God, but they had substituted their traditions of men for the doctrines of the Bible. It is possible to look like a religious or spiritual person, but actually be far from God. This was exactly the case with these religious leaders.

What were the harsh words Jesus had to say about their tradition (vv. 6-8)? *"These people honor Me with their lips but in fact, their hearts are far from Me."* They appeared to be religious or spiritual but actually were far from God. They may talk the talk but they were not walking the walk. They had a heart problem. This is a powerful reminder that what God *first* wants from us is our *hearts*.

Jesus next gave them a practical, real-life example of their hypocrisy (vv. 9-13 11-12). **What was the "Corban" issue all about?** Suppose that certain Jewish parents were in great need. Their son had money to care for them, but didn't want to do it. All he had to do was say "Corban," implying that "I'm sorry Mom and Dad but I can't help you out financially because all my money is devoted to God.....(until or unless I need it for something.)" Whether it was ever deposited into the temple funds was not important. This relieved him of any further responsibility to support his parents.

What biblical principle does that violate? The 5th Commandment. The Old Testament clearly lays out the responsibility of children to honor their parents. The New Testament did not change that standard. Their tradition had invalidated the law of God.

Jesus clarified the intent of the Mosaic Law regarding clean and unclean food (vv. 14-23). **What was the principle He was laying out?** Jesus was here saying, “Let me tell you God’s intent when He gave you these instructions. You’re not unclean because of what you eat. Uncleaness is not a food issue. You’re unclean because you disobeyed God’s Word by eating food God told you not to eat. Uncleaness is a sin issue; it’s an issue of the heart. You’re unclean because of the evil that comes out of your heart in the form of one of these thirteen sins.” At this point Jesus declared all foods to be edible. This signaled the end of the Old Testament dietary restrictions.

How do these thirteen “evils” get into our hearts (vv. 21-22)? The mouth gives access to the stomach but what gives access to the heart? Eyes.... Mind....Sin nature. I feed my sin nature by what I see, hear, think, etc. (James 1:13-15). Jesus took the focus of attention away from external rituals and placed it on the need for God to cleanse one’s evil heart (Psalms 51:16-17).¹

You don’t need to travel a long distance to find the source of your sins. You don’t need to conduct an exhaustive search. All you need to do is look at your own heart. Sin is not a splash of mud upon man’s exterior, it is a filth generated within himself. (Spurgeon)

What was the significance of Jesus traveling 50 miles north to Tyre (v. 24)? He was venturing into Gentile country. Even though His focus was on the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24), Jesus increased His ministry to the Gentiles as He experienced increasing rejection from the Jews. If his own people would not listen, then Jesus would fulfill the mission foretold in Isaiah 49:6: “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” Jesus was fulfilling that prophecy by engaging the Gentile communities.

How would you describe the woman (vv. 25-30)? The woman who heard about Jesus and sought Him out was a Gentile and she was desperate. A demon was afflicting her young daughter, and she begged Jesus to drive the demon out. Her persistent request for help demonstrated her faith in Jesus. She believed Jesus could heal her.²

What did Jesus mean when He said “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (v. 27)? Jesus seemed to discourage the woman, reminding her that the children (the Jewish people) have priority over the dogs (Gentiles like her) when it comes to His mission/ministry.

How did the woman respond (v. 28)? She understood. The woman recognized that, as a Gentile, she had no claim on Him or His benefits; the Jews were a higher priority when it came to Jesus’ ministry. In essence she said, “Yes, Lord. I am only a little Gentile dog. But I notice that puppies have a way of eating crumbs that children drop under the table. That’s all I ask for—some crumbs left over from your ministry to the Jews!”³

Why was Jesus pleased with the woman’s response (v. 29)? The woman displayed strong faith, humility (her willingness to accept whatever Jesus would offer) and persistence. Her response pleased him to such an extent that he granted her request. She serves as a model for us on how to approach Jesus.

What was the significance of going into the region of the Decapolis (v. 31)? He’s still in Gentile territory.

The crowd brought a deaf and mute man to Jesus to be healed. Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched his tongue (v. 33). **Why would Jesus use such an unusual way of healing?** Jesus used many different methods of healing. He healed with a word, healed without a word, healed in response to one’s faith, healed in response to the faith of another, healed those who asked, and He healed those He approached. He healed four blind men differently.

They begged Jesus to “place a hand” on him. Jesus didn’t want to be tied down to any “one method” of healing – It’s not about the method....it’s all about the sovereign power of God. You cannot put Jesus in a box. He is totally unpredictable. He has a wide variety of available ways to heal.

¹ Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (p. 135). Wheaton: Victor Books

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Mark, 2020 Edition, (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 160

³ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1338). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.