

Mark 7:1-37

In chapter 6, we saw 3 instances of Jesus healing people whom the OT law would have pronounced “unclean.” In 7:1-13, Mark, almost ironically, picks up on the theme of “cleanness.” The Pharisees, like the Jews to whom Paul addresses in Romans 2 & 3, have a faulty understanding of what does or doesn’t make one unclean. Undoubtedly, this serves as an introduction to the extension of Jesus to the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered to be “dogs” and “unclean.”

1. In 7:2, the KJV says that the Pharisees began to “find fault” with Jesus and His disciples. What is their reason in v.3? Is it Scriptural?
 - ⇒ The Jewish rabbis had promulgated many ‘oral laws’ upon which the Law was silent. Originally intended for good purposes (i.e. to regulate one’s life), these traditions soon became on par with God’s holy Scriptures, as seen here.
 - ⇒ How prone we are as humans to give equal or more ‘weight’ to our traditions than to God’s Word. What are some examples that we as Christians are sometimes guilty of? (E.g. Catholicism, music styles, confessions)
 - ⇒ What is the best way to avoid this? [answer: knowing Scripture better].
2. Though they appeared righteous in their own eyes, what does Jesus call them in v.6?
 - ⇒ The word ‘hypocrite’ was used of actors in plays who would exchange various masks to play different roles. Though looking good on the outside, and though they appeared to be worshipping God, Jesus saw right through their ‘masks’ to their hearts (Cf John 2:24-25).
3. Though such people “worship” God, what kind of worship is it in v.7?
 - ⇒ In fact, what were these people doing so that they could “worship” God in vv. 8-9?
 - ⇒ Even Isaiah was familiar with the rank hypocrisy in his time. In Isaiah 29:13, Yahweh calls such hypocrites “these people” and not “My people.” Regardless of what we think, the only thing that matters is what God does (cf. Matt. 7:23).
 - ⇒ In Isaiah 29:14, God says He is going to ‘astound’ such people by judging them. How many religious hypocrites will be astounded on Judgment Day?
4. In v. 10, Jesus gives an example of such hypocrisy. Though Moses commanded that we honor our father & mother, they found a way to avoid this while still appearing pious in their devotion to God. “Corban” was a Hebrew loanword for a gift that was set-aside to God, to be used as a temple offering. Though the gift was ‘promised’ to be ‘offered’ at a later date, it was still considered his, and thus he could continue to use it for himself, and was absolved from having to help needy others, including his parents.
 - ⇒ Are we sometimes ‘guilty’ of the same thing? Can you think of any examples of how we neglect helping the needy in order to ‘give’ to God? Cf. James 1:27; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8. If so, we too make void the purpose of God’s law by holding to man’s traditions!
5. In vv. 15-23, Jesus tells us what really makes one unclean. What is it that truly offends God?
 - ⇒ Does this verify the doctrine of ‘total depravity’?
 - ⇒ Here Jesus tells us that fellowship with God is not interrupted by unclean hands, but by unclean hearts. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear! (v. 16, KJV)
6. In vv. 24-30, Mark moves from the theme of “uncleanness” to the theme of “Gentiles.” Jews normally had no relationship with Gentiles because many believed that associations with them made the Jews ritually unclean. Here Jesus shows that their oral ‘traditions’ are invalid by deliberately associating Himself (the ‘true’ Jew) with a Gentile woman.

- ⇒ Again, we should not overlook Mark's repetition of his 'Messianic secret' theme in v. 24.
 - ⇒ Though Jesus was being rejected by many of His own people, He is none-the-less sought out by a Gentile, and a woman at that. This is becoming a very common theme for Mark (Indeed, this is very "Good News" for his Gentile audience).
 - ⇒ What does Jesus mean in v. 27?¹ See also John 1:11-12; Acts 13:46; Romans 11:11; Ephesians 2:12-22.
 - ⇒ In Genesis 12:2-3, Yahweh promised that He would bless the nations of the world through Abraham [and as we see later throughout Scripture, Abraham's promised seed²]. Israel largely failed, because they kept the light to themselves. But Christ, in fulfillment also to Isaiah 9:2; 49:6, is the true light to the nations, and brings God's promised blessing [ultimately salvation] not just to the Jew but also to the Gentile also (cf. Acts 11:18; 13:48; Romans 1:16; Revelation 5:9, etc.).
 - ⇒ The response that the woman gives is one Jesus will never reject, regardless of our former ethnic or religious background. What is it? (Cf. Matthew 15:28). It should not be overlooked that this is the only time Jesus is confessed as "Lord" during his ministry (cf. 15:39). In light of our last study, is this accidental or significant in Mark's thought?³
7. Our final section is unique to Mark, and is included to give the reader another (!) healing of Jesus on Gentile territory.
- ⇒ It is not insignificant that Mark says the people there "continued to beg" (present tense) Jesus to heal the deaf & mute man. The Gentiles were quite desperate, as we just saw, and Jesus was willing to reward their intense seeking of Him.
 - ⇒ Again, Jesus could have easily spoken a word, and the man would have been healed (even the sea & waves obey His voice, right?). But Mark shows us again that Jesus has much compassion (cf. 8:2) for the Gentiles also, and is not afraid to touch this 'unclean' Gentile.
 - ⇒ Again, Jesus orders the man to tell no one. He has no desire to be known [now among the Gentiles] as a mere miracle worker, which would result in unwelcome notoriety (v. 26).
 - ⇒ By healing the man, Jesus was doing precisely what God had promised to do when He would come to redeem His people (cf. Isaiah 35:5-6).
 - ⇒ Compare this with 8:18. It is no accident that even, by sovereign grace, the Gentiles are able to see more clearly at times than even Jesus' disciples.⁴
 - ⇒ Remember, Mark has been seeking to answer for the reader the question: 'who is Jesus?' In v. 37, he is undoubtedly drawing upon Genesis 1:31, which highlights the idea that all of Elohim's creative works are good. Well, says the crowd, so is the manifestation of His Son's power. Though they may not have noticed the connection, Mark intends the reader to. General revelation is nice, but special revelation [i.e. the Word of God] saves!

¹ We will see next week that Jesus' feeding of the 4000 is on Gentile territory, something Mark intentionally is making a 'pun' on.

² The "seed" theme is a massive theme from Genesis 3:15 on. God, through the "seed of the woman" will once again restore His creation to Edenic paradise (a major theme in the Bible's last book, Revelation, esp. chapter 21).

³ In Matthew's account, she also acknowledges Jesus as the "Son of David" and "Messiah." But Mark's purpose is centered more on Jesus' title of "Lord."

⁴ This was pointed out to me in a sermon by my NT professor, Dr. Pierre Constant.