



The Gospel of Mark - Chapter Seven

II. Mark 1:14-8:26 - Demonstration of Jesus' Authority (continues)

II.c Mark 6:6b-8:26 - Work beyond Galilee (continues)

Summary of Chapter Seven

This is a chapter that spans many weeks and perhaps months, due to the distances Jesus travelled in the accounts given.

It starts in Galilee, possibly Gennesaret where the foregoing account ended or Jesus may have returned to his main base in nearby Capernaum, when some Pharisees and teachers of the law had travelled down from Jerusalem because of the stories that were spreading about Jesus. They noted that Jesus' disciples did not perform the ritual washing that Jews were required to undergo before meals, which had become part of their tradition, and they challenged Jesus over it. Jesus responded by stating that, rather than honouring the Word of God they actually nullified it through their traditions, giving examples of how that came about.

Jesus then called a crowd to him, teaching them that it was not what they put into their bodies that made them unclean, thus stating that all foods were no longer prohibited, but that it was what came out of the heart of a man that would make him unclean.

Jesus then travelled to the Syrian coast, where he encountered a Gentile woman with a spirit possessed child. The woman asked Jesus to heal her child, to which he responded that it was to the children of God that he had been called. She responded with an excellent example of humility and faith that resulted in Jesus healing her daughter, something he had probably intended to do anyway but wanted to test her faith first.

Jesus then travelled all the way back through Galilee and on into the Decapolis. There he encountered a man who was both deaf and mute. Jesus healed the man, the first example of such a healing related by Mark.

II.c.v Mark 7:1-23 - That Which Defiles

A conflict ensued between the Pharisees and Jesus over the issue of true moral purity. The Pharisees were so steeped in their traditions that they failed to see their Messiah had come and was in their midst, teaching the truths of God, which opposed their own guiding fictions.

¹ The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.

Mark 7:1-2

Pharisees and teachers of the law or scribes were sent from Jerusalem to investigate the situation brought about by Jesus' popularity.

Gathered around Jesus gives the impression that they were trying to harass him with their presence although Mark does not state this openly. Due to their authority and standing in the community, it would have been easy for them to become intimidating for the man in the street but they would have had no impact on Jesus in that regard.

With hands that were defiled. This does not mean that their hands were dirty or unhygienic. It was that they had not undergone the required ritual washing.

³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.

⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles).

Mark 7:3-4

A ceremonial washing. This is not just a question of basic hygiene, and most people would wash dirty hands before eating. Over the generations, the tradition of the elders had turned what was initially a matter of hygiene into a ritual that had to be performed fastidiously by all; otherwise the religious leaders would take action as they were trying to do with Jesus and his followers.

These traditions also included the ritual washing of all the utensils and furniture that would be part of the meal or its preparation, e.g. cups, pitchers and kettles. Some early manuscripts state it was pitchers, kettles and dining couches, on which they would recline to eat the meal.

Come from the marketplace would not simply mean they had been working or shopping there, for it was also a communal meeting place, some coming to socialise, some looking for work: <<**About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing**>> (Matthew 20:3), with others there just to play: <<**To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others**>> (Matthew 11:16), i.e. it was the hub of the community. It would also be the centre of wealth creation and would have attracted the prominent leaders for that reason too:

<<Wail, you who live in the market district; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with silver will be destroyed>> (Zephaniah 1:11).

All the Jews do not eat unless. They held to their ritual so strongly that they would rather go hungry than feel they were eating in an unclean state. It is not clear if the Pharisees or other religious leaders would have declared someone to be formally unclean through failing to follow the traditions and make them go through the full cleansing process as a result, for they were not breaking the Law of Moses.

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

Mark 7:5

In Mark 2:15-28, 3:6, and 3:20-30, as well as here, it is evident that many Pharisees and scribes were intent on convicting Jesus of breaking the written Law of Moses, i.e. aspects of the ceremonial law, such as: **<<Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it>> (Exodus 30:17-19), and: <<Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water>> (Exodus 40:12),** which dealt explicitly with the cleansing of the priests before they came before God, which had then been interpreted by the later tradition of the elders to include many more activities. If they could have convicted Jesus as a sinner it would discredit his authority with the people.

Live according to the tradition. Paul had been a Pharisee and speaks of living according to the traditions: **<<I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers>> (Galatians 1:14),** and provides a warning about doing so: **<<See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ>> (Colossians 2:8).**

Eating their food with defiled hands. The disciples were not breaking the Mosaic Law but rather later Jewish traditions that prescribed ritual washing of hands, utensils, and furniture as noted in vv.2-4. By his example, Jesus implied that his disciples could ignore these traditions: **<<When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal>> (Luke 11:37-38).**

⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honour me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.’

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

Mark 7:6-8

Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. Jesus was quoting Isaiah 29:13, indicating that it was men like these that he was referring to. The Pharisees were hypocrites for at least two reasons:

1. Their actions were merely external and did not come from their hearts, which were far from God.
2. Their teachings were not from God but reflected only the tradition of men.

Honour me with their lips. Outwardly, worship offends God if it is a way of evading him at a deeper level, which is why Jesus quoted Isaiah here. But God will not be set aside. Even in the human cleverness that disregards him, God's overruling power is accomplishing his own purpose.

You have let go of the commands of God. This was not something that had been intentional by the elders of Israel. It had come about as they tried to interpret the laws of God and then make them applicable to changing times. They invented new rules and new ways that became traditions, losing sight of their original purpose.

This is a lesson for the church today as they grapple with a changing society and an evolving worldview on all sorts of issues. It is right that churches should adapt to changing times, but they must do so without losing sight of the fact that the Gospel messages is timeless and cannot be compromised in any way.

⁹ And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!

Mark 7:9

You have a fine way probably alluded to the way that they had made their traditions seem to be the authentic requirements of God for his people rather than simply the wishes of men; sometimes done for genuine reasons through misunderstanding and sometimes to enable them to hold on to their affluent positions in society.

Setting aside the commands of God. Not only are human traditions ineffective for cleansing the heart, they actually lead to disregard for God's Word (v.13). The Pharisees had clearly missed the most important aspect of the whole law that God had given them: <<*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these*>> (Mark 12:28-31).

¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) — ¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

Mark 7:10-13

Honour your father and mother is taken from Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16. No one questioned the importance of this law in the Ten Commandments, especially as it was punishable by death in ancient Israel. Additionally, it is written in the law: <<*Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death*>> (Exodus 21:17), and similarly: <<*Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. Because they have cursed their father or mother, their blood will be on their own head*>> (Leviticus 20:9). Part of honouring a father and mother was to care for them, both financially and personally, in their old age. However, Jewish tradition allowed that funds originally dedicated to the care of parents could be declared *Corban*, both a Hebrew and Aramaic term to declare money or possessions legally dedicated to God, meaning that the person would no longer be required to do anything for their father or mother.

Corban (that is, devoted to God). When Mark uses a term that would be familiar to the Hebrew and Aramaic speakers of his day, he qualified it with a Greek translation, supporting the claims that his initial intended readership were Greek speakers and mostly Gentiles.

These funds could now be given to the temple, if so desired. Such human traditions thus allowed room for the depravity of the human heart, directly opposing the Law of Moses, which so often served to protect the weak and helpless, in this case, parents in their old age, hence making void the Word of God. The Corban tradition was an example, along with many such things people did, of disregarding and rejecting the more important aspects of the Mosaic Law.

Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition. The Word of God should have been their motivating factor for life, not their traditions: <<*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart*>> (Hebrews 4:12).

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”

Mark 7:14-15

Jesus called the crowd to him. Jesus may have wanted to keep the miracles a secret most of the time but his teaching was for the general public to hear: <<*I*

have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret”>> (John 18:20).

Can defile them. The problem of the defiled human heart is much deeper than one might assume: <<*The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.” Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, “Who sees us? Who will know?” You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “You did not make me”? Can the pot say to the potter, “You know nothing”?>> (Isaiah 29:13-16), and: <<*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve”>> (Jeremiah 17:9-10), and significantly more serious than mere ceremonial impurity (v.19b). The core problem of defilement is what resides in the heart, the things which subsequently come out, not things going into a person. Throughout Scripture, the heart refers to the centre of one’s being, including the mind, emotions, character and will.**

{{Early manuscripts do not contain v.16 and it is omitted from the NIV. For completeness it is included from the NASB}}.

{{¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.}}

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them?”

Mark 7:17-18

Are you so dull? This may seem to indicate that Jesus often grew impatient with his disciples or that he was even being insulting toward them. It most likely indicates that he was trying to teach them to become independent of him in their thinking and decision making processes. This is something for the modern disciple to ponder on. All people are reliant on God but he requires them to think and decide for themselves in the day to day matters of life!

His disciples asked him about this parable. Jesus gave further instruction on the importance of a pure heart. The disciples lack understanding: <<*The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. “Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.” Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and*

ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?">> (Mark 8:14-21), but they remained with Jesus and they were gradually learning to become independent.

¹⁹ For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean).

Mark 7:19

Mark notes that Jesus' teaching, in essence, declared all foods clean. The Mosaic ceremonial laws distinguished between clean and unclean foods, which are dealt with in detail in Leviticus 11:1-47. Their purpose was not just to maintain good health. It was also meant to instil awareness of God's holiness and the reality of sin as a barrier to fellowship with God. But once defilement of the heart is thoroughly removed and full fellowship with God becomes a reality, achieved only through the atoning death of Jesus, the ceremonial laws have fulfilled their purpose and are no longer required: <<*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*>> (Mark 10:45), <<*I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean*>> (Romans 14:14), and in a much fuller explanation: <<*But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear*>> (Hebrews 8:6-13). Although, as seen in Acts chapters 10-11, it took several years for the disciples to understand this.

Freedom from the ceremonial laws became a big issue in the early days of the church. Although Paul said it was a matter of personal choice for Jews whether or not they chose to continue to abide by them, he stated that it was not sinful to live in the new freedom that Christ gave from those laws that could cause division in the church between Gentile and Jewish Christians. He also made it clear that Gentiles should not be Judaized before becoming Christians, something the false teachers often tried to impose on them. To Timothy, Paul

wrote: <<They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer>> (1 Timothy 4:3-5), and more generally: <<Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day>> (Colossians 2:16). This was confirmed in Peter's vision in Joppa: <<About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean">> (Acts 10:9-15), which show that ordinary food should be considered made holy by God, and Christians have the privilege of eating such holy food every day. This is in line with what Jesus had indicated here. The Jewish law contained not only basic moral provisions but many aspects of a more ceremonial nature, such as circumcision, the kosher food laws, and many requirements involving external purity and various kinds of sacrifices and festivals. These laws presented a problem for Gentiles, for to live by them would make it virtually impossible to continue in their Gentile communities.

²⁰ He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them.
²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

Mark 7:20-23

What comes out of a person repeats Jesus' earlier teaching (v.15). Here he mentions specific sinful thoughts and actions, and characteristics of a defiled heart, summarising his teaching in v.23; all these evil things come from within.

II.c.vi Mark 7:24-30 - Jesus Honours a Syrophenician Woman's Faith

In this short passage Mark records the opening up of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus went first to the people of Israel. However, these verses foreshadow the future ministry of the disciples to the Gentiles.

²⁴ Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.

Mark 7:24

Jesus left that place. The last named place where Jesus was working was in the vicinity of Gennesaret although Jesus had gone out teaching in the nearby towns and villages, probably making his way back to Capernaum, his main base.

Tyre. In a comparative version Sidon is also included: <<*Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon*>> (Matthew 15:21), although in v.31 Mark indicates that Jesus did return via Sidon. Jesus travelled to this Hellenistic, mainly Gentile region, where he was already known, especially among its resettled Jewish residents: <<*When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judæa, Jerusalem, Idumæa, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon*>> (Mark 3:8), thus he could not keep his presence secret. Jesus was called first to bring the news of God's Kingdom to the people of Israel. However, he foresaw a later mission to the Gentiles through his disciples (v.27), which is indicated by: <<*And the gospel must first be preached to all nations*>> (Mark 13:10), and: <<*Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her*>> (Mark 14:9). It is a charge he would give to the apostles after his resurrection, shortly before he left them to return to the Father: <<*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"*>> (Matthew 28:18-20), and: <<*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"*>> (Acts 1:8).

Excavations have unearthed many remarkable finds at both Tyre and Sidon. Tyre evidences both Roman and Byzantine structures. These include, largely from after Jesus' time, a hippodrome, an immense bathhouse, a forum, a theatre, and tombs. The city of Tyre was in Phœnicia, which was essentially present day Lebanon, with its primary cities being Tyre, Sidon and Ptolemais. Tyre was the main city of Phœnicia, which had a great history as a sea-trading nation. Originally, it was set on an off-shore island and was heavily fortified and very wealthy. Destruction had been prophesied against Tyre in Ezekiel Chapter 26, partly fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar as per the prophecy, and finally by Alexander the Great, who built a causeway connecting the city to the mainland, set up siege ramparts and finally conquered the city. In Jesus' day, it was once again a major trading port.

Although Jesus visited Tyre and Sidon, he never gave them the same benefits as he did Korazin or Bethsaida, i.e. he taught frequently in the latter places, but the Word had been brought to them. Jesus confirmed this with: <<*"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you"*>> (Luke 10:13-14), and in Isaiah's prophecy against Tyre: <<*Yet her profit and her earnings will be set apart for the Lord;*

they will not be stored up or hoarded. Her profits will go to those who live before the Lord, for abundant food and fine clothes>> (Isaiah 23:18).

²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet.

Mark 7:25

In fact. Despite the secrecy of Jesus visit, news spread just the same and the woman soon heard about him.

Daughter was possessed by an impure spirit. Jesus would later meet a man whose son was similarly afflicted, and would heal that boy too: <<*A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up*>> (Mark 9:17-27).

Fell at his feet. This was the same reaction as the synagogue ruler in Capernaum: <<*Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live”*>> (Mark 5:22-23). It seems to have been more an act of desperation and pleading than one of reverential worship.

²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phœnicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

Mark 7:26

The woman was a Greek means that she was a Gentile and not a Jew. It does not mean that she came originally from Greece even though the region had been Hellenised in the preceding centuries. Mark states that she was a native of Syrian Phœnicia, which included Tyre and Sidon. The subsection title refers to her as a Syrophœnician, a name used also in other translations. In a comparative account, she is referred to by her ancestral tribe, linking her with the former Holy Land: <<*A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son*

of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly”>> (Matthew 15:22).

Elijah had also aided a non-Jewish woman in this area: <<“Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food”>> (1 Kings 17:9), where God would raise her son back to life through Elijah: <<Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?” “Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, “Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, “Lord my God, let this boy’s life return to him!” The Lord heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!” Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth”>> (1 Kings 17:17-24). Mark emphasises that this woman in Tyre was a Gentile too and in great need.

²⁷ “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 the dogs.”

Mark 7:27

Jesus’ noncommittal response was surprising and may seem offensive. He gave three comparisons:

- Bread, referring to the Word of God, his Gospel message.
- Children, referring to the Jewish people.
- Dogs, referring to Gentiles.

First holds out the hope, however, that Gentiles will also become the recipients of God’s grace. Taking into account vv.29-30, it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus spoke as he did merely to test the woman’s faith.

²⁸ “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

²⁹ Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Mark 7:28-30

Even the dogs. The woman’s response to Jesus’ surprising statement (v.27), was both humble and persistent. Perhaps she understood and humbly accepted that

God called Israel first for a particular purpose: <<*Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son'*>> (Exodus 4:22).

For such a reply. Jesus honoured the woman's simple faith, so that upon returning home, she found that the demon had left her child.

II.c.vii Mark 7:31-8:26 - Additional miracles in Decapolis and Bethsaida

As Jesus continued his ministry of teaching and healing, the disciples' hearts remained hard. They knew their teacher was very special and sent by God, but they still failed to understand who Jesus really is, something that remains in the societies of the 21st Century, despite the overwhelming evidence.

II.c.vii.1. Mark 7:31-37 - Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man

During Jesus three years or so of ministry he must have walked hundreds, if not thousands, of miles, for the Synoptic Gospels do not even mention several of his Jerusalem visits. Jesus undertook yet another lengthy journey, which Mark only referred to succinctly. Although there were crowds gathering to Jesus, Mark wanted to focus on this one poor afflicted man, for this type of healing had not been recounted by Mark. Yet it was a particular part of Jesus' mission: <<*So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor"*>> (Luke 7:22).

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.

Mark 7:31

Jesus preached far and wide to Galilæan and Judæan Jews, as well as to the remnant people of Israel, who by this time had resettled in the Hellenistic regions of Tyre, Sidon and the Decapolis. It is also implicit that Gentiles would likely have been in the crowds, drawn initially to the miracles then later to the teaching.

³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

Mark 7:32

Was deaf and could hardly talk. With such poor communication skills the man would unlikely have found work in that era. He would most likely have had to beg to earn a living.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

Mark 7:33

Jesus took the deaf man aside so as not to make a spectacle of his healing, which was the same as when he raised Jairus' daughter back to life: <<*He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When*

they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was>> (Mark 5:37-40). Healing the deaf was part of the prophecy for the Messiah: <<Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert>> (Isaiah 35:5-6).

Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears, spit and touched the man’s tongue. Unlike his other healings, Jesus used physical intervention to heal this man. The healing not only demonstrated Jesus’ power; it also allowed him to confront his disciples by word and deed with the problem of spiritual deafness and blindness.

³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”).

Mark 7:34

He looked up to heaven. Jesus looked to the Father in performing such miracles, probably for mutual affirmation but most definitely to demonstrate to those around him that miracles and all other good things come from his heavenly Father: <<Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all>> (Mark 6:41), and as seen in the raising of Lazarus to life: <<So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go”>> (John 11:41-44).

With a deep sigh. Jesus probably sighed over the hard-heartedness, unbelief, and physical weaknesses that had arisen on account of mankind’s fall.

“Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!” shows that once again Mark gives a translation for those who did not speak Aramaic. It also adds eye witness authenticity to include the original words Jesus used.

³⁵ At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

Mark 7:35

He began to speak plainly. Once again, the healing was immediate and complete: <<Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed>> (Mark 1:42), <<Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished>> (Mark 5:42), and:

<<“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road>> (Mark 10:52).

³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.

Mark 7:36

Not to tell anyone. Jesus’ injunction to silence was addressed to all who had witnessed the healing on account of the fact that he had now become more widely known in the Decapolis, probably due to a more open approach in this region earlier in his ministry: <<*Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you”*>> (Mark 5:19). However, the healed man and the witnesses disregarded Jesus’ prohibition and went out to proclaim the miracle.

³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Mark 7:37

Overwhelmed with amazement. The people were astonished in the sense that they wonder whether Jesus is the Messiah. They were not expecting a suffering Messiah, despite prophecies such as: <<*He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted*>> (Isaiah 53:3-4), for they interpreted the suffering servant of God to be Israel herself. Rather, they expected a political and military liberator along the lines of the earlier Maccabæan uprising (166-160 BC), as indicated by his key disciples shortly before his ascension: <<*Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*>> (Acts 1:6). Jesus would go on to do much more than revive the hopes and aspirations of a small nation; he would open up a new Kingdom to the whole world, to any that would call upon his name.