

The Gospel of *Mark*

The Servant Leadership of Jesus

The Servant's Ministry in and around Galilee (cont) (1:14 – 9:50)

A Period of Withdrawal: *Jesus Responds to the Pharisees* (7:1-23)

1-5 Another delegation of Jewish leaders ^{Mark 2:6,16, 24, 3:22} were checking on Jesus' ministry in Galilee. They confronted Jesus for His disciples eating without ceremonially cleaning their hands ^{Luke 11:38}, because ritualistic washing was a binding tradition the Pharisees had decreed for all Jews ^{Galatians 1:14}.

Oral traditions started during the Babylonian captivity and then were recorded in the *Mishnah* in the 2nd century. The *Mishnah* (instruction) proclaims: "Tradition is a fence around the law." Oral tradition probably started out of good intentions to help the Jewish people to keep the Mosaic Law. It was later used to keep the Jewish people in legalistic bondage to the leaders, whose prime concern was outward appearance, not the inward character ^{Matthew 23:25, Luke 11:39}.

This "washing" had nothing to do with cleaning dirty hands, but with a ceremonial rinsing. Initially, water was poured from a jar onto the hands of a man, whose fingers were pointed up. After the water dripped off his wrists, water was once again poured over both hands, but with his fingers pointed down. Finally, each hand had to be rubbed by the fist of the other hand.

Matthew used only 2 verses ^{Matthew 15:1-2} to capture the essence of this material, but Mark gave more detail, because his target audience, Romans, would not have understood the context.

6-9 Jesus called the Pharisees & scribes hypocrites, and quoted an OT verse about tradition ^{Isaiah 29:13}. He then stated they put the legalistic (man-made) traditions they defined over God's commands ^{v.13}.

The term "hypocrites" had its origin in Greek theater, describing an actor who wore a mask. In the NT, the term hypocrites is used to describe a self-deceived spiritual phony ^{Matthew 6:2}.

Following traditions requires only mechanical/thoughtless conformity, without purity of heart.

10-13 Jesus confronted them with quotes from the Pentateuch concerning relationships with parents: the 5th commandment stated positively ^{Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16} & negatively ^{Exodus 21:17, Leviticus 20:9}. Jesus used these passages to illustrate their "nullifying" of God's word by invoking their traditions ^{v.9}.

Jesus pointed out the Jewish leaders promoted the denying and setting aside of God's Word, as well as placing their teachings of tradition to a higher position than the Mosaic Law.

These were blasphemies before a Holy God, since His Word is the ultimate judge ^{Hebrews 4:12}.

Jesus criticized Jewish leaders for allowing the Jews to call all their possessions "*Corban*" (explained by Mark as "a gift devoted to God" for the Romans, as well as other non-Jews),

which allowed them to stop providing anything to their parents (in conflict with the Law), because they supposedly dedicated in a vow everything they had to the Lord ^{Numbers 30:1-2}. So, the Pharisees allowed their tradition + an oath (Law) to override other parts of the Law.

Mark attributed the 5th Law to “Moses”, while Matthew wrote it came from “God” ^{Matthew 15:4}.

14-15 Jesus made His closing remarks very public by speaking to the entire crowd. He startled both the Jewish leaders and the people by de-emphasizing the superficial (what is on the outside, the main focus of the Pharisees) and accentuating the internal aspects of life (the mind/heart).

FYI: The best manuscripts do not have verse 16: “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

17-19 After entering a house, the disciples (actually just Peter ^{Matthew 15:15}) asked Jesus ^{Mark 9:28} the meaning of the “parable” ^{v.14-15}. In calling them “dull”, Jesus expressed disappointment in their lack of understanding of His teaching. His statement was not a parable, but a straightforward exposition. And, defilement is not an external issue, but an issue of the heart (not what enters the stomach).

Jesus cancelled (removed restrictions set out in) the Mosaic system of dietary laws ^{Leviticus 11}.

Mark’s conclusion: “all foods clean” was confirmed in a later vision given to Peter ^{Acts 10:9-16}.

While the Pentateuch is often lumped together, Jesus made it clear the Moral Law will always be important ^{Matthew 5:17-19}, but the Ceremonial Laws were temporary ^{Acts 10:9-16, Colossians 2:13-17}.

According to Matthew ^{Matthew 15:12-14}, Before Peter asked Jesus to explain the “parable”, the disciples asked Jesus: “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they hear this?”, to which Jesus replied: “Sure I know it! Who cares?” (just kidding) **“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides** ^{Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 23:16-24}. **If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”**

20-23 Jesus re-emphasized that all uncleanness originates from within a person, and then He gave specific examples of the depravity ^{Colossians 3:5-8} that exists in every person’s mind/heart ^{Jeremiah 17:9}.

Jesus’ words (and Paul’s writings ^{Romans 3:10-24}) indicate defilement is inherent in all humans, which can only be resolved by receiving a new heart ^{Psalms 51:10, Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26, 2 Corinthians 5:17}.

The Jewish leaders chose to ignore the writings of Moses that clearly stated God wanted love and obedience to come from the heart ^{Deuteronomy 6:4-6, 10:12-13, 16, 30:6}, not from legalistic rules.

A Period of Withdrawal: *The Faith of a Syro-Phoenician Woman* (7:24-30)

24-26 To escape the pressures from Jewish leaders and begin preparing for His upcoming crucifixion, Jesus “went to the vicinity of Tyre”, but His desire for secrecy did not last ^{Matthew 4:24}. A Greek woman from Syrian Phoenicia (and of Canaanite ancestry ^{Matthew 15:22}) came to plead with Jesus to heal her “little daughter”, who was “possessed by an evil (unclean) spirit” ^{Mark 1:23-25, 5:2-13}.

Tyre: a city outside of Israel on the Mediterranean coast, north of the city/valley of Megiddo.

The woman came to Jesus in spite of all the factors being against her: nationality (Gentile, not Jewish), gender (a woman had no standing in that culture), Satan (daughter was possessed), and the disciples (they urged Jesus to send her away ^{Matthew 15:23}).

27 In a test of the woman's faith, Jesus stated bread must first go to children, then to dogs ^{Romans 1:16}.

The symbols are key to understanding: children ⇒ Jews, bread ⇒ blessings, dogs ⇒ Gentiles.

This reference to "dogs" is the Greek for pet dogs (*kunariōn*) ^{Matthew 15:26-27}, while a different Greek word means street dogs (*kuōn*) ^{Matthew 7:6, Luke 16:21, Philippians 3:2, 2 Peter 2:22, Revelation 22:15}.

28-30 The woman responded to Jesus with (1) a humble faith ^{Hebrews 11:6} ("Yes, Lord"), (2) persistent passion ^{Matthew 5:6}, (3) wisdom (a statement using the very words of Jesus) and (4) humility ^{Psalms 51:17} (by accepting the position of a "dog", as first mentioned by Jesus). As a result, Jesus honored her "great faith" ^{Matthew 15:28} by removing the demon from her daughter "that very hour" ^{Matthew 15:28}.

This is the 2nd time Jesus rewarded the faith of a Gentile by healing from a distance ^{Luke 7:1-10}.

A Period of Withdrawal: *Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute* (7:31-37)

31-32 Jesus left Tyre, went north to Sidon, then southeast to the Sea of Galilee and the area of the Decapolis ^{Matthew 4:25, Mark 5:20}. A group of concerned people ^{Mark 2:3} brought to Jesus a deaf man who spoke very little ^{Matthew 9:32, Luke 11:14}, so Jesus could heal him by His touch ^{Mark 1:40-42, 5:27-34, 41, 6:56}.

33-35 Jesus took the man away from the people in order to convey to him what He was about to do. He healed the man by putting His fingers in his ears, touching his tongue, looking up ^{Mark 6:41, John 11:41} to sigh ^{Mark 8:12} and proclaim "*Ephphatha!*", which, as Mark explained, is Aramaic for "Be opened!".

Mark is the only gospel writer who mentions Jesus' use of spit in His healing process ^{Mark 8:23}.

Note the ministry of Jesus: His touch (symbolic of genuine caring), His look up (modeled trust in God the Father), His sigh (revealed deep passion), His word (displayed His commitment).

Mark's target audience was the Romans, which was illustrated once again by his defining "*Corban*" and "*Ephphatha*", because the Jews would have readily understood both terms.

36-37 The Gentile people of the region were "overwhelmed with amazement" by all Jesus had accomplished, so they shared it with enthusiasm, even though Jesus "commanded" them not to.

Previously, Jesus cured a man in the Decapolis (Ten Cities) of demon-possession ^{Mark 5:1-20}.

The healed man was so thankful that he begged to go with Jesus when He was leaving, but Jesus told him to stay and share what had happened with his family. However, the man did more. He spread his joy and evangelized the entire region of the Decapolis. The results of the man's efforts can be seen in this story ^{v.31-37} and in the story in next chapter ^{Mark 8:1-9}.

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