

Gospel of Mark Chapter 7

1. Chapter 7 can be boiled down to three questions: 1) What do we do about religious traditions? 2) How do we deal with someone who has faith in God but needs correcting on some key issue? And 3) How do we help people who need help, but don't know what to do? That essentially, is Chapter 7. I summarize this chapter with the title: "How Jesus works", but in reality, this chapter deals with those three questions. OK, what do these questions have in common and why should I care? That is what I hope to answer through this lesson.
2. Most of this chapter gets into the topic (indirectly) of judging people. Judging is an interesting bible topic. In Matthew Chapter 7, it clearly teaches that we are not to judge others. The point in Matthew is that if we go around putting other people down, it will come back to haunt us. At the same time, Jesus does spend a lot of time judging other people's behavior.
 - a) So do we judge other people or not? The point is we can judge other people's behavior without having to always being critical of other's behavior. In other words, how we treat people and how we judge other people's behavior should be two separate issues.
 - b) Back to the question: Is judgment of behavior appropriate? The answer is definitely yes. In this chapter, we have three distinct stories regarding faith or a lack of faith in God. What we are to get from these stories is that Jesus judges people's behavior and works with their faith (or lack thereof) and I believe God calls on us to judge behavior as well.
 - c) In summary, judging is a "tricky" biblical topic. To judge other people's behavior is not about putting other people down or thinking that we are better than others. God calls on us to regularly examine our own life and see if our behavior is in line with what God wants for our lives. Knowing that, the purpose of judging others is to see how we are to work with others and examine what is their faith or lack of faith in any given situation.
 - i) If we see someone with a misguided faith, God calls us on to find a way to show them their lack of faith and help to draw them in the right direction.
 - ii) If we see someone around us to have "some faith in God", He calls on us to work on their level of faith and in some way, help them to draw closer to God.
 - iii) If we see someone who we can lead to God, we are to help him or her so that they can grow in their faith in God.
3. Believe it or not, I just summarized the chapter in those last three points. It might be best at this point to explain the three stories in this chapter and explain how we are to apply those stories to our lives and the lives of people around us.
 - a) The first story is about some religious Jews and how their own traditions have become more important than doing what God desires for their lives. What we are to learn is not so much the history of religious-Jewish traditions but to watch out that our own traditions don't become more important than what God desires for our lives, no matter how wonderful our traditions are.
 - i) In this chapter, I'm going to tackle some specific religious traditions we have today. My key point here is that such traditions may be acceptable for you or me or a specific church to practice, but the danger is when we require that tradition be observed in order to be considered a follower of Jesus Christ.
 - ii) Jesus' point is that religious traditions may have the best of intent, but they end up being "standards for acceptance" as opposed to what God desires of us.
 - iii) The idea for us is to ask, "What religious traditions are preventing us to be pleasing to God"? The danger for us is drawing others away from God because they won't follow our particular religious traditions. God wants to draw people toward Himself. Notice that "step one" involves examining our own lives and keeping an eye out for traditions that may be displeasing to God.

- b) The second story in this chapter is about a non-Jewish woman who had some faith in God, but didn't understand the point of Jesus' mission to the Jewish people. Jesus works with this woman to increase her faith prior to actually helping her.
 - i) The lesson for us in this story is not so much to be in awe of the miracle Jesus' performed, but to look for opportunities to increase people's faith (and our own faith) in God in order to help people work through a particular situation.
 - c) The final story is about a man who was both deaf and dumb. (That means he does not have the ability to hear or speak.). In that culture, people thought such people are beyond help. Jesus helps this person if for no other reason, than to teach us what God is capable of doing and how we are help such people.
 - i) To put it another way, "What is impossible with man is possible with God".
 - ii) Therefore, no one should be beyond help or prayer. It reminds us of our duty to reach out to all people, no matter what is their physical make up or condition.
4. To summarize this chapter, we have three stories: The first is about people who think they are close to God but their own traditions are drawing them away from God. The second is about a woman with a little bit of faith, but she needed some correction about Jesus' point of His ministry. The final story is about a non-Jewish person with physical disabilities who Jesus heals as to show us 1) the power of Jesus and 2) another way we can pray for people as no one is beyond God's help.
- a) To summarize these stories another way: The first story reminds us to examine our own lives and to watch out for things that can draw us away from God. The second story teaches us how to increase our faith when it is small. The third story reminds us of what God can do with people who are beyond our ability to heal.
 - b) OK, enough summarizing, ☺ let's start Verse 1.
5. Chapter 7, Verse 1: The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and ²saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed.
- a) The first thing to comment on is the term, "The Pharisees and some of the teachers". This is not some group of religious people who happened to bump into Jesus. This is an official delegation sent by the religious leaders in Jerusalem to go examine Jesus and see if He meets up to their (the Pharisee's and the teacher's) standards of practicing Judaism.
 - i) Think of it this way: If we go around preaching Jesus, sooner or later, the religious "establishment" is going to send representatives to check us out to see if we are teaching the right stuff. One way to know if we are doing God's will is that we can expect encounters with established religious leaders to examine our ministry. It may be a bad thing or a good thing, depending on whom we encounter. The lesson here has to do with being careful of religious traditions and whether or not those traditions are preventing them or us from teaching God's truth.
 - b) With that said, let's focus on the specific "religious tradition" that Mark is talking about.
 - i) The religious Jews of that day had a specific ritual of washing their hands prior to eating food. This ritual has nothing to do with being sanitary. This ritual is about washing hands via a specific method.
 - ii) For what it is worth, I once went to an Orthodox Jewish restaurant where there was a place to publicly wash one's hands with a specific ritual similar to the one as described in this chapter. My only point here is such rituals still exist today.
 - iii) In these verses, the religious leaders notice that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands by the specific method that was their religious tradition.
 - iv) I'm pretty positive these religious traditions had the best of intent. Most Jewish and Christian religious rituals start off with the intent of putting a ritual around one of God's laws so we don't violate God's laws. The problem is that over time, those rituals become more important than the laws behind them.

- c) I can think of a number of examples where Christians do rituals are strictly based on our own traditions. The first one that came to mind is the "proper dress of a Christian". The New Testament does not teach anything about how to dress in church other than to not dress in a way that makes one stand out. (See 1st Timothy 2:9).
- i) Some churches are very formal and don't allow people in who don't dress like them. A "casual dress" church may pick on people who dress formally.
 - ii) My point is to be aware of the danger of an unwritten dress code becoming more important than giving one's life to God.
 - iii) When one judges who is a Christian, it is best to remember 1st Corinthians Chapter 15, Verses 3 and 4. In those verses, Paul describes what it takes to get saved. To paraphrase those verses, one has to believe Jesus is both Lord (i.e., in charge of your life) and God (i.e., that Jesus and God the Father are one).
 - iv) My related point is that is "all" it says. The Gospel message doesn't say anything about the length of our hair, the color of our skin, and our view on spiritual gifts or even how we dress. When I visit other churches I want to blend in as to not stand out and therefore, I respect the dress wishes of that church. At the same time, I want to be helpful to others no matter how they dress or look in church.
- d) At this point, let me tackle the text and then I'll get back to the issue of our traditions.
6. Verse 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. ⁴When 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.)
- a) One has to remember that Mark's gospel was written to a non-Jewish audience. Therefore Mark found it necessary to explain the ceremonial washing. Again, it is important to emphasize that this has nothing to do with "cleanliness" and the text is about a specific type of ritual washing.
 - i) In other words, kids cannot use this verse to get out of washing their hands. ☺
 - ii) In the book of Leviticus (Chapter 11) there is a list of what types of animals a religious Jew is permitted to eat. This washing the hand ritual is not based on any particular bible verse, but was simply designed to keep their focus on God and to only eat certain things. In other words, this ritual had the best of intentions.
 - iii) The problem isn't the ritual itself. The problem is the ritual became more important than obeying God's laws.
 - b) The same principal applied to the washing of cups, pots and pans. There is no bible verse that specifically says such items must be washed. It's a good idea to wash them for the sake of germs, but that is a separate issue. My key point is that all of these rituals are symbolic and are designed to teach religious Jews to keep their focus on God.
 - c) As I thought about this principal, what popped in my head was the Catholic tradition of fasting for 40 days prior to Easter (also known as Lent season). As one who grew up Catholic, I practiced this tradition as a kid. I now know there is no biblical basis for this tradition and I no longer practice it. One of the reasons I don't practice it is I understand how Jesus feels about "traditions" and I keep my distance from that tradition. Further, I know people who don't think twice about other sins, but practice "lent" and they think they are in good standing with God just because they practice this tradition.
 - i) My view is that it is "hard enough" to live the Christian life as it is, without having to add traditions to that lifestyle. I try to make a practice of letting go of traditions, even if such traditions have the best of intents to get our focus on God.
 - ii) To live the Christian life is to constantly humble our self and put the needs of others as priority over our own needs. In other words, it is about loving one another. I promise that practicing that command (loving one another) is much harder than any and all Christian rituals, including the practice of Lent.

7. Verse 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 'unclean' hands?"
- a) Let me translate this verse into modern English: The representatives of the religious leaders in Jerusalem asked Jesus, how come your disciples don't do what we do in our religious practices and observes our customs?
 - b) Keep in mind the specific issue is "how we prepare to eat", but the bigger picture has to do with religious traditions as opposed to God's commands for our life.
8. Verse 6: He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' ⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."
- a) Jesus quotes Isaiah (Chapter 29, Verse 13). The reason Jesus quoted Isaiah is first of all, the religious leaders believed that Isaiah was a prophet of God.
 - i) Keep in mind the Pharisee's believed in the entire Old Testament and had their own detailed set of guidelines as to how properly worship God. Those set of guidelines became equally, or more important than God's word itself.
 - ii) Later, Mark will mention the Sadducees. This is a rival group that only believed the first five books of the bible were from God and they didn't believe the rest.
 - iii) If Jesus just said, "You believe this and I believe that, they would immediately "write off" whatever Jesus said. By quoting the bible, Jesus made them listen up.
 - b) Does this mean that Isaiah specifically wrote about this group of hypocrites who lived in Jesus day? Personally, I believe Isaiah spoke about any and all religious Jews who focus on traditions more than God's laws and Jesus applied it to this group. At the same time, I do believe that Isaiah understood that people would reject the Messiah because they focused too much on their own religious traditions.
 - i) Notice the focus of Isaiah's quote is that some people give "lip service to God", but they focus far more on their own traditions than they do God's laws.
 - c) Earlier I picked on the Catholics. It's time for equal treatment for the Protestants. ☺
 - i) Occasionally, I come across some devout Protestants who believe that American Christians should only read the King James Version of the bible. They believe that any other version will lead you down a path that turns one away from God.
 - ii) The problem with that belief is I've yet to see it happen to anyone I've ever met and that is a lot of Christians. If you want to find out why people turn from God, study the parable of the four soils (see Chapter 4). My point is it is not the "brand" of God's word that gets people away from Him, but other issues in their lives.
 - iii) My other argument against the "King James only" crowd is the Mormons. The Mormons use the King James Bible. If that bible version is so convicting, why aren't Mormons by the thousands running to Protestant Christianity? Yes, the Mormon's read other books as well, but my point is if the King James Version is so "perfect", why isn't it, by itself, convicting multitudes of Mormons?
 - iv) With that said, there are places where I actually like the King James more than the modern translations and we'll come to one of those places in the final chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Every week I read through a number of translations including the King James and I want to get the correct meaning of the original Greek, or Hebrew or Aramaic, which are the original three languages of the bible.
 - v) My grumble is not with those that think the King James is the best translation. My grumble is with those who think the King James is the "only" translation and think that people will go to hell if they study from other modern translations that yes, do their best to translate the original languages into modern English.
 - vi) What does all of this have to do with the Gospel of Matthew? The danger is having our church traditions be greater than what God commands us to do.

9. Verse 9: And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' ¹¹But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), ¹²then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."
- a) The first thing to notice is that Jesus goes around the specific issue of the ritual washings and focuses on the bigger issue of "religious traditions versus God's word".
 - b) Jesus discusses a Jewish religious tradition called "Corban". Let me explain that one:
 - i) Let's suppose that a mother and father give a financial gift to one of their children. That grown child (we're discussing the religious Jews of that day) can then make a declaration that the financial gift "belongs to God" and the son or daughter then proceeds to ignore the financial wishes of his or her parents.
 - ii) With this idea of "Corban", religious Jews would try to talk people into giving their inheritance to the "church treasury" as opposed to using it for their own good or more importantly, use it to take care of their parents. (Boy, nothing changes over time. ☹ The concept of using guilt to make people think they are not doing enough for God is still very much alive today!)
 - iii) The point is with this "Corban" tradition; some religious Jews would ignore taking care of their elderly parents and give all of their inheritance to God.
 - c) This leads us back to the Word of God itself. One of the Ten Commandments is to honor our father and mother. (See Exodus 20:12.) That commandment does not just apply to young children. It applies to grown men and women and being responsible enough to take care of one's parents in their old age.
 - i) By the way there is no loophole in that commandment based on whether or not your parents are good Christians or even "good people". The point is God wants us to honor our parents throughout their lives on earth. Yes, if a parent is abusive, one may have to keep some distance. But for most of us, despite the mistakes our parents make, we are to honor them as our parents and part of the responsibility of the Christian as well as the Jew is to provide for our parents as much as possible. That is honoring them. For a New Testament commentary on this command see Ephesians 6:2 and study the text around 1st Timothy 5:3.
 - d) Getting back to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus point here is that the religious Jews took their traditions to such a point that they ignored God's laws and that is the danger of traditions. Again, religious traditions usually have the best of intent. The problem with Jewish or Christian church traditions is that they tend to get our focus off of what God wants us to do and get us to focus on the tradition itself.
 - e) So, how do we recognize church traditions? The key is to compare what we practice against God's word itself. If we are doing some sort of "thing" that is not a specific command in the bible, but we are doing that thing to "protect God's laws", or even worse, just to show our devotion to God. We need to ask ourselves if that tradition is getting in the way of our relationship with to God and what He desires that we do with our lives.
 - f) Let me try this another way: If your church insists that one has to interpret a controversial bible passage exactly "this way" but not "that way" and no deviation is permitted, then that is a danger of a tradition being formed
 - g) I should also state that I don't have a problem with there being a lot of different denominations and views on different aspects of our faith in God. It is ok to hold a certain view on non-salvation issues. At the same time, we need to remember that people who hold different biblical views are still saved, even though their views are different.

- h) Since I've been very serious the last few pages, let me end this with a reminder of one of my favorite Christian cartoons. It shows a man in a hospital bed covered from head to toe in bandages. Sitting next to the man is the church pastor. The pastor said, "It's a good thing you were on fire the other day. Our congregation was worried that you were dancing there for a moment". ☺
- i) The point of that cartoon is that some churches are so worried about people dancing, it becomes a greater issue than if a person is committed to following God.
 - ii) By the way, dancing is another debatable church tradition. It has the best of intents in that it is trying to keep young people away from getting too sexually excited by engaging in dancing rituals. The problem is such teaching is again, a church tradition and the bible does not specifically restrict dancing.
 - iii) Dancing is one of those issues that I best leave to the individual or to any specific church as to what is right or wrong for them. If you believe it is wrong to dance, don't do it. If you believe it is acceptable, change churches and dance away. ☺
The problem starts when we think it is wrong (on non-salvation issues) for every Christian to do a "thing" when we think it is wrong for us to do that "thing".
10. Verse 14: Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'"
- a) Jesus has finished with the big picture idea of the dangers of religious traditions. Now Jesus gets back to the specific issue of the ritual of washing one's hands a certain way.
 - b) Again, there is nothing in the Old Testament about how to properly wash one's hands. The Old Testament forbids the eating of certain types of foods. With that understood, Jesus says that it is not what one puts into one's body that makes one "unclean" but what comes out of the body (e.g., bad language, intent on doing harm, etc.) that makes one unclean in the eyes of God.
 - c) Many Christian scholars state that this statement by Jesus (about all foods being clean), may be the most controversial thing Jesus said in His ministry. That is because of the references in Leviticus (See Chapter 11) that specifically list certain types of animals that were forbidden by God for Jewish people to eat.
 - i) By Jesus saying that "all foods are clean", is Jesus actually teaching that there are aspects of the Old Testament that will no longer apply as Jesus is the fulfillment of God's law once He paid the sacrifice for sin once and for all.
 - ii) I wrote a lesson on those food laws in Leviticus. If you study that lesson, you will learn that the types of animals that are forbidden to eat (that includes some insects as well), teaches us a pattern of how to stay close to God. Therefore, while those specific food laws do not apply to the New Testament believer, they do provide a wonderful lesson on how to stick close to God.
 - d) Whenever I think of the Jewish food laws, I am reminded of a story of a famous Orthodox Jew who converted to Christianity. He was asked to give the meal blessing at a big Christian gathering. The main course on the menu was pork, which is one of the forbidden Jewish foods. His prayer went something like this:
 - i) Lord, if You can bless this food in the New Testament that You have cursed in the Old Testament, then bless it now. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.
 - ii) I can't remember whether or not that man actually ate the pork, but I always remember that specific prayer.
 - e) Meanwhile, Jesus gives further comment on this issue to His disciples (in the next set of verses) as He knew it would be controversial and tough for religious Jews to accept.

11. Verse 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 man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? ¹⁹For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")
- a) First of all, notice that Jesus does care about being "clean" before God the Father.
 - b) The issue at hand is whether or not certain foods make one unclean before God. Jesus is actually teaching against an Old Testament principal here (against the "forbidden food list" in Leviticus Chapter 11) by saying all food for Christians is now clean.
 - c) Remember why Jesus is giving this speech. He was questioned by the religious leaders a few verses back as to whether or not His disciples followed the specific Jewish ritual of washing before eating. In a sense, Jesus is still on that topic.
 - i) Jesus' answer to that question is in effect, "You can't be unclean before God based on what type of food you eat. Uncleaness is based on what "comes out of your body" and not what one puts into one's body.
 - ii) I should state again, that this has nothing to do with physical cleanliness. If we eat food that has not been washed or is covered in disease, we will suffer from eating it. The issue is not cleanliness, but what foods are proper to eat.
 - d) Because this issue was so difficult for a religious Jew to accept, it took a separate incident in the book of Acts before this "sunk in". Remember that for the Christian, the Law is fulfilled in Jesus sacrifice. That doesn't mean we can't learn from the Old Testament or that there are wonderful principals that are taught in the Old Testament. It just means that Christians (who trust in Jesus' payment for sin) are now free from the punishment of disobeying God's laws, and that includes the food laws as listed in Leviticus.
 - i) In Acts Chapter 11, Peter had a vision with all sorts of animals. I'm convinced that vision included animals that were forbidden to eat by the Jewish Law. The main point of that vision was to teach Peter (and us) that the Gospel message is not just for Jewish people, but also for all people. The other thing to get out of that vision is that if one accepts Jesus payment for our sins, we no longer have to worry about eating only certain types of foods as listed in Leviticus, Chapter 11.
 - e) Going back to the meal prayer of the Jewish person who converted to Christianity, it is acceptable for him to eat that pork as those Old Testament laws are no longer valid for the life he is now living in Jesus Christ.
12. Verse 20: He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"
- a) If I had to pick the most important verses to learn in this whole section about traditions versus God's law, it would be verses 21 and 22. In these verses, Jesus gives a whole list of things that make a person unclean before God.
 - b) This gets back to the question of "who is saved"? If a person confesses Jesus as both Lord (in charge of their life) and Savior (the one who paid the price for our sins), is that person now free to do the sinful things listed in these verses? After all, if we are forgiven of sins, wouldn't that mean we are now free to sin all we want?
 - i) In a sense, if we do any of these things, and then confess it as sin, we are saved. The point here is that if a person who claims they are following Jesus and willfully and continually engages in these things, it is a sign that this person is not saved.
 - c) This leads me back to my lesson-opening issue of judging people's behavior. We can't judge if a person is saved or not, simply because we don't know what they are thinking. Only God can decide who can and who cannot be in heaven as only He can read our hearts and therefore, only He can judge the sincerity of our desire to turn from sin and live a life that is pleasing to Him.

- d) This leads me back to the list of sins in Verses 21 and 22. Jesus point is that if a person is truly following Him, such a person would have no desire to do any of the things listed in those verses. Therefore, that list is of things for Christians to avoid as much as possible.
- i) The underlying point is that our behavior does matter to God. Yes, the Christian is forgiven of sins, but that does not give us the license to go out and sin all we want. If we have the freedom that complete forgiveness of sins brings us, we are to take that freedom and give it back to God. We should say to Him in effect we are now His servants in exchange for His paying the price for sins for us.
 - ii) In other words, if we are grateful to God for completely forgiving our sins, then in turn we should want to live a life that is pleasing to God in all that we do. In that sense our behavior does matter as a Christian.
 - iii) If we care about living a life that is pleasing to God, we are to do our best to avoid things that are not pleasing to God. Not that it will earn us points in heaven, but because living that type of life is what God desires of us here and now. Violating one of those sins won't by itself get a believer sent to hell, but it will make us less of a witness for God when we don't live the lifestyle that is pleasing to Him.
 - iv) The conclusion is our behavior does matter and therefore, we should judge our own behavior and judge the behavior of those around us. Our behavior does not affect our salvation if we do believe God has forgiven all of our sins, but our behavior affects our ability to be a good witness for God for those around us.
 - a) Judging other people's behavior doesn't mean we talk down to them. It means we work with them to show them how to be pleasing to God.
- e) Getting back to the specific list of sins in Verses 21 and 22, most of us know the definitions of all those words already. Let me briefly comment on the ones that are not so obvious:
- i) The first is "evil thoughts". The point is to think bad thoughts is sinful and is something that must be confessed. Whether or not thinking evil thoughts is as bad as acting out those thoughts is debatable. The point is when one is thinking of something not pleasing to God that is to be confessed as sin.
 - ii) The next one on the list is sexual immorality. To put it quickly, it is the idea of any sort of sexual practice outside of the bonds of marriage. Enough said there.
 - iii) Let me comment on "malice". It is the idea of desiring things that are not pleasing to God. It includes the idea of planning some sort of theft or planning some sort of harm to an innocent person.
 - iv) Let me also comment on "lewdness". The idea here is to speak bad things about others. In short, one's speech should at all times be "pleasing to God" (See 2nd Corinthians 6:7). The point is that if one says something that one knows is not pleasing to God then it should be confessed as sin.
 - v) The rest of the list is pretty straightforward and doesn't need a lot of comments.
 - vi) Getting back to Jesus main point, it is that what goes into the body (i.e., food) does not cause us to sin, but what comes out of the body (the list of sins) is the problem.
- f) Going back to food, I suspect most religious Jews don't think much about why certain foods were forbidden in the law, just that they "are" and therefore, shouldn't be eaten.
- i) Jesus is not saying those food laws were no good, just that He is the fulfillment of obedience to the law, and therefore, belief in His payment for sin also means that we as Christians no longer have to worry about what type of food to eat.
 - ii) However, we still have to worry about the food we eat, if for no other reason, then to not to get sick from eating contaminated food.
- g) The really good news is that I'm done with this section of the text and we are ready to move on to the next story in the bible. If I had to pick one thing to remember from this section, it is the danger of church traditions and to be careful of what "comes out of us" far more than what we put inside of us.

13. Verse 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. ²⁵In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.
- a) Just as there was some sort of time gap between the end of Chapter 6 and the start of this chapter, we have another time gap here to where a new story takes place in Verse 24.
 - b) The one problem Jesus had at this point was He could never get away with the disciples to rest as there were always crowds around Him. With that said, this is the only recorded time where Jesus actually left Israel (not counting when he went to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, as traditionally, that area is still considered part of Israel, even though the east side of that Sea was primarily a gentile population at that time).
 - c) In these verses, Jesus traveled north to Tyre. That city no longer exists today as it was destroyed by Alexander the Great and later (post-Jesus) completely wiped off the map. There is a prediction in Ezekiel (26:5) that the "great city of Tyre" would be a place for the spreading of fishing nets, and essentially, that is all it is today. That city if it would exist today would be in the country of Jordan. The only point to remember is that the ancient city of Tyre was outside of Israel and the spot is located in what is today Jordan.
 - d) The text just says that Jesus entered a specific home in Tyre. The text does not say why that home was chosen or how the occupants knew Jesus. The text does say that a woman of that city essentially started begging Jesus to heal her daughter. The text specifically points out that the woman is not Jewish, but a Greek (born in Syrian Phoenicia).
 - i) The fact that this woman is not Jewish is significant. In this story, Jesus cures this woman's daughter of demon possession. We never actually met the daughter, as it is the mother who does all the talking. After some dialogue, Jesus performs a miracle on the daughter who was not present in the house at that time.
 - e) So why is this story significant? I think it is to show the disciples that Jesus can help someone who is not Jewish. Remember that Mark's intended audience was primarily to the non-Jewish reader and that was important for that audience to understand that Jesus was not just sent to help Israelites, but to be Lord over all who call on Him.
 - f) I believe the purpose of traveling to this house was to get rest. Yet here was this woman coming to Jesus because her daughter was demon possessed. Jesus still helped her (after a dialogue exchange) despite the fact He came to this town in order to get away from all the pleas for help. With that said, let's get back to the story itself.
14. Verse 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 their dogs."
- a) Jesus does not immediately help her, but instead states this line about not taking the bread intended for children and giving it to the dogs.
 - b) Know that Verse 27 was not meant to be taken literally, but it is a one-line parable.
 - c) So why did Jesus say this? Was He being cruel at this point? It actually helps to read this story in Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 15). In Matthew, we learn that she approached Jesus as the "Messiah". The point in Matthew's Gospel is the "Messiah" (which means king) is only appropriate as a title for the Jewish people.
 - i) In other words, Jesus the promised Messiah is to rule the world one day (part of His second coming) from Jerusalem and is the king over the Jewish people. This woman can approach Jesus as "Lord" (ruler of all) but not as the Messiah. Once she calls Jesus "Lord" in the next verse, He helps her.
 - d) From the perspective of Mark's gospel, the point is similar, but less obvious. The analogy about the "children's bread" is Jesus pointing out that He came to be the promised Messiah (king) of Israel. It is only after the official (national) rejection of Jesus as their promised Messiah that Jesus can then be Lord over all people.

- e) Let me explain this concept another way: One purpose of Jesus coming into this world was to prove to Israel that He was their promised king. Could Jesus help non-Jewish people? Yes He could and there are a number of miracle stories involving non-Jews. Yet Jesus wanted to emphasize the point here that His primary mission is to the Jewish people, and that is why He makes the statement about the "bread" going to the children.
 - f) So, did this mean that Jesus didn't want to help this woman? No. It just means that Jesus wanted this woman to see Him as "Lord of all" and not a Jewish Messiah (King). Once she made that realization, He performed the miracle that she asked for.
15. Verse 28: "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."
²⁹Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."
- a) Here, she calls Jesus "Lord". The woman responded to Jesus statement about "food being for the children" by reminding Jesus that household dogs (actually the word means puppies) eat the crumbs that fall off the table where people are eating.
 - i) From her perspective, Jesus' "crumbs" are good enough to help her daughter.
 - ii) She got the fact that Jesus' primary mission was to reach out to the Jewish people. She also understood that Jesus was more than capable of helping non-Jewish people and that "Jesus' crumbs" are more than sufficient to help out others.
 - b) Does this mean as non-Jewish believers in Jesus, we should beg for "His crumbs"? No it does not. Once the nation of Israel "collectively" rejected Jesus prior to the cross, He started to focus on His role of being God over any and all people that are willing to turn over their lives to Him. That "purpose and role" was not the primary focus of Jesus at this particular moment in time. Still, Jesus had some understanding of that other role even at this time and that is why He still helped that woman albeit in a delayed fashion.
 - c) Does this mean I should be anti-Jewish so Jesus could help more Gentiles? No, and if you think that way, you are missing the point of living the Christian life. The purpose of Romans Chapter 10 is to teach that we are currently (for the past 2,000 years) living in a time era where Paul says the world consists of either believers or nonbelievers. We as Christians are to work to strengthen other believers and at the same time try to help nonbelievers see the truth about Jesus.
 - i) Romans Chapter 11 focuses on a future day (even future to us) where God will once again focus on the nation of Israel as a people. I believe that day is coming soon and is evident by the fact that the nation of Israel exists again as a nation.
 - d) Meanwhile, back here in Mark's gospel, because the woman spoke of Jesus' helping her as "crumbs given to a dog", He "gave the word" and healed her daughter.
 - i) So did Jesus help her because she thought of His help as "crumbs"? I believe the correct answer is that she understood that Jesus' primary mission is for the Jewish people but that if asked properly (i.e., seeing Jesus as Lord of all), Jesus was more than willing to help her daughter and the demon possession.
16. Verse 30: She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.
- a) Verse 30 tells us that her child was not even there with her.
 - b) It also teaches us that Jesus is capable of helping people who are not physically present at the exact moment. That shows us we can pray for people who are long distances away and those we pray for don't have to be right next to us in order for Jesus to help them.
 - c) Now I can get back to my opening theme about how Jesus works and judging behavior. In the first story in this chapter, Jesus is warning of the dangers of church tradition. In this second story here, Jesus is teaching a non-Jewish woman how to properly approach Jesus as "Lord of all" (i.e., someone who can help anyone at anytime).
 - d) In the final story (coming up next) Jesus helps a deaf and dumb person by physically touching the places in their body that doesn't work. One of the points of the next story is to show that Jesus can work by "direct touch" as well as healing a person who is not even present like the child in this story here.

17. Verse 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. ³²There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.
- a) In Verse 31, we have another time gap. In this verse, Jesus and his disciples left the area around Tyre and ended up in the region of the Decapolis. If you recall from Chapter 5, the last time Jesus was in this area is when the legion of demons were cast into the herd of pigs. The town's people asked Jesus to leave the region (again, Chapter 5) as Jesus did damage to the economy. Jesus granted that wish, but at the same time, Jesus left a witness in that town as the man who was cured of the demons was told to go spread the word about Jesus. Now He is back in the Decapolis (on that east side of the Sea of Galilee) in that same set of towns where those past miracles occurred.
 - b) The only additional point Mark makes here is that some people brought Jesus a man who was deaf (couldn't hear) and dumb (couldn't speak). Notice there is no mention of any demon in this man, just that He had these issues.
18. Verse 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. ³⁴He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "*Ephphatha!*" (which means, "Be opened!"). ³⁵At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.
- a) In this story, Jesus healed a man of both of these issues. The story makes a point of telling us that Jesus physically touched the man's ears and that He touched the tongue by applying His spit to the man's tongue. At that point the man was cured.
 - b) I believe the first thing we should notice about this story is to compare the "curing method" to the last story of the woman whose daughter was cured of demon possession. In that previous story, the daughter was not even in the house with Jesus. In this story, Jesus physically touched the spots where the man was "ailing" in order to cure Him.
 - i) The point is Jesus used different methods of healing to show us that we should not focus on the healing methods, but on the person doing the healing. If the bible only had one method of curing a person, I guarantee everyone would be trying to imitate that exact method. By Jesus using lots of different methods to help people, it gets us to focus on the person doing the curing and not any sort of method that Jesus specifically used.
 - c) So does this mean that every person who is either deaf and/or dumb should be prayed over and immediately Jesus will cure him or her of this issue? I suspect there are many with these issues who have been "prayed over" and yet, the problem is still there.
 - i) My point here is that performing miracles are up to God and not up to us. God does not perform miracles simply because we ask Him to. It is up to Him to work on His timing and His way.
 - ii) At the same time, we should not ignore the idea of praying over people who have such issues. We never know if Jesus is going to heal someone today of these issues unless we ask Him in the first place. It's not a matter of just praying "the right words" or touching that person just like Jesus did. It is a simple matter of just praying to God and letting Him make the decision to answer that prayer.
 - d) Just like the miracle of the story of Jesus healing the woman's daughter, this man who was deaf and dumb, was also probably non-Jewish. The word "Decapolis" means "ten towns". There were ten small towns east of the Sea of Galilee that were primarily non-Jewish in their population, so therefore, this man who was healed was probably non-Jewish.
 - i) Like the last miracle, the purpose is to show that Jesus can and does help non-Jewish people who ask for His help as well as Jewish people.
 - ii) Another reason Jesus did this miracle "here and now" is to show that Jesus is more than willing to return to a location if He is asked to help someone even if Jesus was asked to leaving that location earlier.

- e) Getting back to the text, Mark made a point of quoting Jesus directly in the original Aramaic language in that Jesus said in effect, "be opened". OK, why is that original quote in the text and why should I care?
 - i) God has the power to take away someone's ability to hear or speak or "whatever". Further, it is God Himself, who can change that situation. These miracles that are impossible from our standpoint, are possible with God if it is His will.
 - ii) The exact method Jesus used to help this man is not something to be memorized as much as it is for us to understand that Jesus is capable of fixing situations as difficult as this and as difficult as anything we ourselves can get exposed to.
19. Verse 36: Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."
- a) The final verses of this chapter once again show Jesus telling people to keep quiet about the event and in turn, people went out and spread the word about this miracle.
 - b) OK, if Jesus is God, why did He tell people to be quiet about it? For starters, so people would not crowd around Him so much and now, Jesus can work.
 - i) Let me ask this question again: If Jesus is God, doesn't that mean He knew that people would disobey His command to keep quiet and spread the word about Him? Does that mean Jesus knew what was going to happen, but He just wanted to go on the record of saying it would have been better if word of this miracle was kept to just the disciples? That is exactly what I am saying.
 - c) Know that today God wants word of this miracle and all miracles to spread. If God wanted Mark to keep quiet about it, it would not have been recorded in the Gospel.
 - i) Further, I suspect Jesus knew that people couldn't keep quiet about something like this and Jesus had to deal with the results of people crowding around Him.
 - ii) Still, it was important for Jesus to state for the record for people (at that moment) to keep quiet about it, so Jesus could still preach and work.
 - iii) The failure of the crowd to keep quiet may have helped spread the word about Jesus the "miracle worker", but I suspect it also did damage to Jesus the "preacher" as now He had a harder time spreading the word about His mission.
20. OK, that's the end of the chapter, so let me once again tie all three of these stories together.
- a) In the first story, Jesus confronted a group of religious Jews who were complaining that Jesus (and His disciples) were not following their specific religious traditions. The point for us is not to learn about Jewish religious traditions but to examine our own life and to make sure we are not adding to what God wants us to do. Living the Christian life is about submitting ourselves to God's will and about submitting ourselves to the lives of others in order to help people grow in their faith in God.
 - i) "Traditions" are all about trying to please God via our own efforts. Christianity is about letting go in that we let God work through us to make a difference for Him.
 - b) In the second story, the underlying issue is understanding who is Jesus and what is His purpose. The lesson for us is that helping people is not just a matter of granting their specific wishes of the moment, but helping them to understand that Jesus is "Lord of All" and understand what He is capable of doing in our lives.
 - c) In the final story, it shows that Jesus can work even (or especially) in situations where it is beyond our ability to help a particular person.
 - d) In other words, these three stories are to teach us, "It is all about God's will getting done and not our will in any and all situations".
21. Let's pray: Father help us to remember that we are here to do Your will. Help us to not add to that desire of You, but to live to make a difference for You in all that we do. Help us to let go of our traditions and help others (and ourselves) to look to You to work through all situations. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.