

Mark 7:1-37, The Trip to Tyre and Sidon
1-13, Initial Teaching
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Overview

1. Another of the "boat rides," five-part travel sequences with initial teaching, trip out, miracle at the destination, trip back, miracle on returning
2. Distinctives of this trip:
 - a) no teaching to the disciples in either direction;
 - b) no boat ride (an overland trip)
 - c) Theme: cleanness and uncleanness. Highlighted in extended initial discourse, then illustrated with the healing of a gentile (!) child.
3. This lesson focuses on the initial teaching, on the subject of cleanness and uncleanness. The Lord successively addresses three audiences, following the sequence of soils: roadside, rocky, good. In fact, these initial settings so far all emphasize the differing responses that the apostles can expect.

A. 1-13, Discourse with the Pharisees (Wayside)

1. 1, The Initiative: taken by the Pharisees and scribes. cf. 3:22; these are part of the crowd reported in 3:8 "from Jerusalem ...")
2. 2, The Incident: the disciples' failure to follow the ritual washing.
3. 3-4, The Background. Note the resumption in v.5. Mark gives us three successive circles of Judaic legislation.
 - a) 3a, the most specific to the controversy at hand: hand-washing before meals. See Edersheim, II.11ff, for the details on this complicated procedure, which regulated the history of the water to be used, the amount, the position in which the hands were held, how many rinsings were needed, etc. Not just an ordinary hygienic measure, but part of the Jewish genius for turning every aspect of daily life into a part of the religion. Great for preserving the identity of the nation, but superfluous from the perspective of obedience to God.
 - b) 4a, more general: cleansing after coming from the market. Clearly related to the command to wash before eating, since the object being washed is the same (the observant Jew).
 - c) 4b, most general: lots of other things need washing: cups, pots, brazen vessels, beds.
 - 1) Derived from Lev 11:32, provision for cleansing vessels that have been defiled through contact with the flesh of an unclean animal. (Note, 6:28, that the sin offering also

defiles in this way.) Num 19:15 deals with vessels that are in a tent where someone dies; they are purified by sprinkling, rather than washing.

- 2) Note on baptism: in v.4, "wash" is "baptize," and the reference to "beds" has been cited as an example that the word does not have its usual sense of immersion. But Mishna, Miqvaot 7:2-7, discusses the ceremonial cleansing of beds.
 - a> Volume of pool is about 40 seahs, about 300 liters. Our bathtub is about 175 l. So about the volume of a hot tub. Plenty big enough for a low cot or a thin mattress, the kind that one could be commanded to "pick up and walk."
 - b> 7:7 speaks explicitly of immersing a bed, and what the implications are if the legs have to be pressed into the mud in order to get it under.
4. 5, the Inquiry. The point at issue was explicitly the Lord's relation to "the traditions of the elders." The failure to wash hands just right was only a manifestation of this. The explicit accusation has to do with tradition.
5. 6-13, the Indictment
Note the symmetric structure of the two following paragraphs, the first introduced with *eipen* "he said," the second with *elegen* "he went on saying." Each has the same five parts (though the order of the middle three varies):
 - a) First word "well"
 - b) A quotation from the OT (Isaiah; Moses)
 - c) A claim that they minimize the commandment of God for the sake of tradition
 - d) A specific example of the tradition in question
 - e) Concludes: "and many (other) such like things you do."

There is a progression between the two paragraphs. The first merely shows them "laying aside" the commandment of God; the second, "making" it "void."

a) 6-8, Laying Aside the Commandment

- 1) 6a, "Well" here modifies Isaiah's prophecy: "The prophet said it better than I could."
- 2) 6b-7, The Quotation (Isa 29:13). *Follows the LXX, which varies slightly from the MT (thus leading to differences between the two in the AV).* Two contrasts that characterize and invalidate fleshly worship:
 - a> 6b, Its Organ: lips vs. heart.

- 1> 1 Sam. 16:7, "[the LORD seeth] not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."
 - 2> John 4:20-24, "'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God [is] a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship [him] in spirit and in truth.'"
 - 3> Elaborate buildings, vestures, and liturgies do not guarantee orthodoxy, and may even detract from it, just as the temple in Jerusalem lured the people of Jeremiah's day into a false sense of security.
- b> 7, Its Origin: man vs. God.
False teaching manifests itself not just as the denial of what God says, but as the addition to God's word of man's teachings.
- 1> Cf. special cases of this in Rev. 22:18-19; Deut. 4:2; 13:22;
 - 2> Examples:
 - a: Explicit "second scriptures," as in Koran and Book of Mormon
 - b: Informal "tradition," as in Jewish "oral law" and RC "teachings of the Fathers"
 - 3> General principle here and Prov. 30:5,6: "Every word of God [is] pure: he [is] a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."
 - 4> Note that in these general cases the prime prohibition is against addition, with no explicit mention of subtraction. We'll see the reason for this in the next section.
- 3) 8a, The Claim: you "lay aside" God's commands and "hold" fast to human tradition. Somehow traditions that originate in human teaching and are expressed physically seem more appealing, more "religious," than those that God enjoins, particularly when they are more inward. The point of the claim here is that the Pharisees give more priority to the outward and human traditions than to the inward and divine ones, which thus suffer neglect.
- 4) 8b, The Example: he begins with the ceremonial washings

that they had accused the disciples of violating.

- 5) 8c, The Conclusion: "many other such like things ye do." This is not an exhaustive list. Can't say, "I'm not into washing, so I'm OK."

6. 9-13, Rejecting the Commandment

This section doubles the claim and distributes it as an inclusion around the two middle portions, thus binding them more closely together.

- a) 9a, "Well." Now emphasizes how thoroughly they reject God's law. Seems to be ironic in effect: "you do a fine job of rejecting God's commandment."
- b) 9b, The Claim (first occurrence). Note the shift from v.8. They do not just "lay aside" God's commandment, preferring human traditions; now their tradition comes in conflict with God's, and they "reject" God's in favor of their own.
 - 1) This is a natural tendency, and a deadly one. Teaching that issues from people will inevitably clash with God's law, because we are fallen, sinful people. If we begin by preferring man's law to God's, we shall end by rejecting God's law for the sake of man's.
 - 2) Thus the extra importance of the instruction not to add to God's word. A deletion is only a deletion, but an addition frequently becomes in effect a deletion as well, by overriding something to which we ought to pay attention.
- c) 10, The Quotation. Two, both from Moses, forming a pair that covers both positive and negative sides.
 - 1) Exod 20:12, the fifth commandment, positive: commands honor.
 - 2) Exod 21:17, negative: prohibits cursing.This time the quotation is a specific example of a divine commandment that their tradition leads them to reject.
- d) 11-12, The Example.
 - 1) Presupposes general filial obligation to support parents in their old age. Then, as now, some children were eager to avoid this obligation.
 - 2) Judaism gave them a "way out."
 - a> Begins with the basic premise that our duty to God is greater than our duty to our parents.
 - b> Specific detail: something we owe to God should be given to him, rather than to our parents. Example: firstborn livestock, Exod 34:19: "All that openeth the matrix [is] mine; and every firstling among thy cattle, [whether] ox

or sheep, [that is male]." So a farmer could not give a firstborn lamb to his parents; it must be given to God.

c> This is extended by way of the law on vows, according to which a man might promise to give something to God in the future. Cf. Hannah, 1 Sam. 1, promising to give her son to the Lord. The OT warns against failure to fulfill such a vow, Deut 23:21. Clearly, if a man has promised to give an article of his property to the Lord, he could not otherwise dispose of it, even for the benefit of his parents.

d> Jewish tradition permitted a man to cobble these laws together in the following legal fiction: declare all of your property that might conceivably be of use to your parents as a gift to the Lord. Don't have to transfer title right away. You could claim to be pious and still not provide for your parents, retaining the use of your wealth for yourself. The synagogue and temple should have condemned such hypocrisy out of hand. Instead, they tolerated and supported it (perhaps because, when goods eventually did get transferred, it would be to the temple treasury).

e> How about the eventual transfer?

1> Note that the exact goods are not specified. Could argue after the fact what the exact things were that might have profited them.

2> Very little "fear of God"; might just "forget" about the vow.

3) Modern example: annulments in the RC organization. On paper, RCs have a strong stand against divorce. However, they have constructed an elaborate definition of what constitutes a "valid" marriage under canon law, making it possible for those who want "out" of a marriage to find a loophole to argue that they were never really married in the first place. Rome goes along with this game, rather than condemning it at the outset.

e) 13a, The Claim (second occurrence). Their tradition makes God's law of no effect. A restatement of v.9, closing out the *inclusio* and reminding us how *preference* for human tradition over divine law can lead to *rejection* of God's law entirely.

f) 13b, The Conclusion. Again, this is only an example of a more general tendency.

B. 14-16, Instructing the People (Rocky Soil)

1. This admonition is a direct slap at the rabbinic traditions of washing, and can only have hardened the hearts of the leadership

against him. Defilement is not caused Externally, but Internally; the focus is not on what comes Into a man, but what issues Out of him.

2. "He that hath ears to hear"--presented as a riddle, a proverb, or (v.17) a parable. Cf. Luke 4:23 for another example of a brief proverb or maxim called a "parable."

C. 17-23, Instructing the Disciples (Good Soil)

1. 17, Setting: This section is an amplification and explanation of the two statements to the multitudes. As a "parable," they require special interpretation to be fully understood. Note the location "in the house," here (as frequently) reflecting special teaching reserved for the disciples (1:29, after the synagogue teaching; 3:19, after calling the 12; 9:28, explaining their failure to cast a dumb spirit out of a boy; 9:33, rebuking them for their argument by the way; 10:10, further teaching about divorce).

Structure: Two paragraphs, one for each sentence of the parable, with an editorial comment at the end of the first.

2. 18-19a, External Things Do Not Defile.
Gives two reasons that food (or contamination on food) cannot defile a person morally:
 - a) The organ it affects: it enters the belly, not the heart, and the heart is the seat of purity. This is not a new teaching; the OT knew it well (Prov. 4:23).
 - b) Its transience. It doesn't remain in the person, but passes out into the sewer.
3. 19b, Editorial Comment
What does "purging" modify?
 - a) The draft (sewer)? Hard to understand the meaning.
 - b) Better: describes the effect of the entire statement. The effect of his statement was to render all foods clean, thus overruling the Levitical dietary laws. Thus his statement to the crowds not only invalidates the (human) rabbinical teachings about hand-washing, but has the further implication that a portion of the OT law would no longer be applicable.
 - c) While Matthew also records this episode, only Mark has the note; might have been specially meaningful to Peter, to whom the Lord had to repeat the lesson with the vision of the sheet let down from heaven in Acts 10.
 - d) *Technical Note: Two readings: MT is neut nom/acc sing ptc,*

the other is masc nom sing ptc.

- 1) *masc could be either the sewer (but that should be accusative, _kaqarizonta_, not nominative), or Christ as the speaker. If the sewer, it does not fit grammatically. The best one can say is that the draft (the sewer) "purges all meats," but the Greek ending is wrong, and it's not clear how a sewer purges its contents.*
 - 2) *The only neuter nom antecedent is _pan to exwqen_ "whatsoever thing from without." But how can food purge food?*
 - 3) *Compare Heb. 12:27, where a reference to a term is in the neuter. Here the reference might be to _pan to exwqen_ as a citation: "This 'whatever comes from without' effectively purges all meats." Compare Winer %59.9b (p.533), "A Neuter adjective or participle refers to the whole clause," though he refers the effect only to the clause about the draft. This approach leads to the same result as the reference to Christ, and then _kaqarizwn_ is a later simplification.*
4. 20-23, Internal Things Do Defile
Again, the key is the role of the heart, which is the seat from which evil things come forth.
- a) Structural notes:
- 1) A list of "evil things" within an inclusio repeating the theme of the parable.
 - 2) The Greek order suggests that "the evil thoughts" (the only definite term in the list) is the summary of all the things that come forth, later explicated in terms of its different components. "From the heart the evil thoughts issue, specifically, adulteries, ..." Thus the Lord traces wickedness back to the initial thought or plan, just as in the Sermon on the Mount he condemns the adulterous thought as much as the act, the hateful word as much as murder.
 - 3) The remaining twelve items are in two groups of six, the first plural, the second singular. Within each group the first three are specific, the second three the corresponding general items (NOT in MT!).
- b) The plural actions (numbered according to the Ten Commandments in Exod 20)
- 1) adulteries, 7: sexual impurity in which one partner is married to someone else.
 - 2) fornications, 7: the more general term, sexual impurity of any form.
 - 3) murders, 6: premeditated malicious slaying of another human being. The verb in "Thou shalt not kill" refers specifically to murder, not to capital punishment or holy war.

- 4) Thefts, 8: taking property that belongs to another.
 - 5) covetousness, 10: harboring a desire to possess what belongs to another.
 - 6) wickedness, either a general summary to the plurals list, or an abstract "malicious actions" underlying "murder."
- c) The singular actions
- 1) deceit, 9: saying what is not true
 - 2) lasciviousness, 7: even more general than fornication; the inner orientation
 - 3) an evil eye, 5 (cf. Matt 20:15, stinginess, which in the context most immediately refers to the use of Qorban for depriving parents of their due) or 4 (seeking to enrich oneself through violation of the Sabbath)
 - 4) blasphemy, 6 (under the terms of Matt. 5:22) or 9 (specifically, bearing false witness); or is this 3 (taking name of the Lord in vain?)
 - 5) pride, 1&2; the inward elevation of heart (Lk 1:51) against which God sets himself in battle array (Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5; Prov 3:34).
 - 6) foolishness, 1: "The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

5. The Role of the Heart

Both interpretations focus on the heart as the locus of purity and impurity. Cf. the note on the disciples' calloused heart in 6:52, and recall the underlying lesson from Proverbs 4:23-27, "Keep your heart with all diligence," followed by the practical outworking of this keeping. The key is in the preceding 3 verses, 4:20-22; "keep [my words] in the midst of thine heart." God's Word is the best heart preservative there is. Apply frequently and liberally--it's free.