



Mark 7

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Tape #8035
By Chuck Smith

As we get into chapter seven of the gospel of Mark, we read how,

There came together unto Jesus the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, who had come up from Jerusalem (7:1).

Now you know that they only came up to cause trouble, to look for trouble. It wasn't really a very friendly, social call, but they were always just trying to find some fault.

And when they saw some of his disciples eating bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault (7:2).

Washing your hands before you eat was even more important in those days I suppose than it is now because you ate with your hands. They didn't have utensils, knives and forks and spoons, but they just ate with their hands. And as a general rule, you had the round flat bread and you just pull off part of the bread and you dip it in the sauces and if you had a roast, you just pull off the meat and eat it and of course, your hands would get greasy, and so quite often, you would wash them several times during a meal. But most generally, at the end of the meal, you take your final piece of bread and with it, you'd wipe the grease off of your fingers and all, and on to the bread and then you'd toss the bread to the little puppies under the table. And they always waited for that final piece of bread that you'd use to wipe your hands, that was their napkin, they didn't have napkins in those days, and so that final piece of bread served as a napkin for them.

The issue isn't just washing your hands. The issue is washing your hands in the ritualistic way and according to the ritual of washing your hands. You had to have a measured amount of water. You could not wash your hands in a basin but you had to wash them in running water. And thus, you needed help, you needed someone to pour the water over your hands as you wash them. And the measured amount would be poured over your hand but you'd have to hold your hands out and pretty straight up as you rub them up and down as they pour the water over them, careful that the water didn't run up your arm. You wanted it to drip straight down. And then, having washed them up and down, then you would wash them with them pointing down and again, the water just dripping off on to the floor or the ground, but they had to be in running water and there was a whole ritual attached to it.

Remember that these disciples were fishermen, four of them at least, and washing their hands probably wasn't the most important thing to them. The issue really is that the Pharisees and the scribes looked at the washing of hands as an act of righteousness. It wasn't just for hygienic purposes. But it was for righteousness. Thus, they considered it sinful to eat without first washing your hands in this ritualistic way. And because they did wash their hands in the ritualistic way, they felt that that constituted a righteous superiority over others. And so the whole issue is not just the washing of hands, it's how you wash your hands, whether or not you're washing them in this ritualistic or traditional way by which they had developed this tradition of washing their hands. So Mark explains,

For the Pharisees, and all of the Jews, except they wash their hands often, they will not eat, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they would come from the market, except they wash, they would not eat. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, and brass vessels, and of tables (7:3,4).

So all of these ritual ways of washing these things. It's interesting that even today they have special silverware for their meals when they have meat. And they do not use the same silverware for meals where they have, for their regular vegetarian type meals, they're very careful that they, or where they have dairy products, they have one set of silverware, one set of plates, and so forth for dairy products, and then another set for meals where you have meat. And they won't even use the same silverware, a spoon, if you'd stir it and you put cream in your coffee, then that spoon would be defiled. You couldn't have it at a table setting where you were going to eat meat because maybe you didn't wash every little bit of cream off of the spoon and heaven forbid that you should have any kind of dairy products mixed with any meat products in your stomach. And so separate dinnerware and all for the dairy meals and the meat meals. And even to the present day, they're very, very strict and conscientious on this issue. And to them it is a matter of righteousness. In other words, this constitutes my being righteous. This makes me righteous. This gives me a righteous standing before God, they feel. And thus, it's done religiously.

Now, there's probably something to be said concerning all of the washing as far as the hygiene is concerned, but if you would spill a pan of cookies on the floor and pick them up and eat them, it probably isn't hygienic but it's not a sin. And that's the problem, they looked at it as sinful. And they look at the ritual of the washing as a righteous thing to do. And so,

The Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why do not your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders, but they eat the bread with unwashed hands? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (7:5-7).

So Jesus refers them to the prophecy of Isaiah where he spoke about how that the people would honor God with their lips but their heart was far from God. And then Jesus adds, "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, as they teach for doctrines the commandments of men." That is not out of Isaiah, but out of there is a prophecy in Jeremiah that is somewhat similar to that.

In Colossians chapter two, in regards to the traditions and all that had been developed by the Jews through the years, Paul writes, and he said in verse eight of chapter two, "Beware lest any man spoils you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him [that is, in Christ] dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And you're complete in him, which is the head of all principalities and powers: In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision that is not made with hands, in the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances" (Colossians 2:8-14).

And this is the thing that, remember in the attempting to determine what relationship the Gentile believers should have to the law when the church council met, and Peter said, Why should we put on them a yoke of bondage that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? They made it to where you resented it because of all of these little traditional things that they added to the law of Moses. And so Jesus, he said, "Blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that were against us, which were contrary to us, and he took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled the principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in your meat, or in your drink, or in respect of a holyday, or the new moon, or the sabbath days: These things were all just a shadow of the things to come; the real substance is Jesus. And therefore, let no man beguile you of your reward in voluntary humility and the worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head [that is, Christ], from which all of the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God. Wherefore if

you are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to these ordinances, of (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; but not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh” (Colossians 2:14-23).

These things only make you self-righteous and it has nothing to do with true righteousness. The true righteousness is yours through faith in Jesus Christ. It doesn't depend upon traditional ways of washing or the ordinances or whatever. It's your faith in Jesus Christ that is accounted for righteousness as far as God is concerned. And so here they are, they're finding fault with the disciples because they're not following the traditions. And they challenge Jesus, Why don't your disciples follow the traditions and the washing of the hands? And Jesus said, “Isaiah nailed you hypocrites, because you have an outward, you draw near with your mouth, and there is an outward righteousness, but within, your heart is far from God. And you worship the Lord in vain because you teach for doctrine the commandments of men.”

This is something that is so easy for a person to get caught up in. Cultural things. And it seems like every area has its own culture. It is interesting how that cultural traditions are more binding to a person than the scriptures. It's harder to break tradition than almost anything else. Tradition just is a part of us, it seems. And with the Jews, the traditions are just, they consider it being a Jew is keeping the traditions. If you don't keep the traditions, you're really not a Jew. That's what makes a Jew, keeping these traditions. So He said,

Laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, in the washing of the pots and the cups: and many other such like things you do (7:8).

In other words, God's law speaks one thing but you guys go far beyond it in the washing of your cups and all, you're teaching this as doctrine, this is holy, this is righteous to do this way.

And then he said unto them, Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you might keep your own tradition (7:9).

And this is true today. Even in the church there are churches, some of them, that are steeped in traditions. And they will keep their traditions over the commandment of God. God's commandment was you're not to make any graven image or likeness of things that are in heaven, to bow down to worship them. And yet, in so many churches, we see statues of Jesus or the saints, you see people going up and kissing the toe of the statue, what about God's commandment? Well, the traditions. And they take precedent over the commandments of God. Now He gives an example to them.

For Moses said, Honour your father and your mother; and, Whoso curses his father and mother, let him be put to death (7:10):

The thought of honoring your father and mother was to actually take care of them in their old age. It used to be that that was considered an obligation. They didn't have a welfare state, and so when the father and mother got too old to work anymore, the children were to take care of them. They were to provide for them. After all, your father and mother provided for you for the first several years of your life. So the idea was you were to take care of them. And that was a part of the honoring your father and mother.

You remember when Naomi had come back with Ruth and when Ruth then married Boaz and had a son, all of Naomi's friends came and were rejoicing and they said, Now you'll have someone to nourish you in your old age. There will be someone to take care of you. And that was just a part of the responsibility of the children, is providing and taking care of their aged parents.

But you say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is, I've dedicated that to God, [I've dedicated my bank account to God] that by which you may have been profited by me (7:11);

that which I should have given to you, no, I dedicated that to God, I'm sorry, I can't give you that, I dedicated that to God. It said,

And you will suffer him no more to do ought for his father and mother (7:12);

You don't have to give it then to your father and mother, you dedicated it to God. I've heard people say, Everything I have belongs to God. But He never sees it. But they get around, I don't have to give because it all belongs to God. Everything I have belongs to the Lord so I give Him nothing, 'cause it all belongs to Him, you see. And that's basically, I've dedicated this to God, so he said, then you say, that's alright, then you don't have to take care of your parents. It's been dedicated to God. And so,

You make the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which you have delivered: and [He just said,] you do a lot of things like this (7:13).

And so then he called all the people unto him, and he said, Harken to me every one of you, [listen to this] and I want you to understand this: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him (7:14,15):

In other words, a little dirt won't hurt. It doesn't defile you, it doesn't make you unrighteous, to pick up that piece of candy off the floor and eat, doesn't make you unrighteous. Nothing from without a man, nothing that you eat like that is making you unrighteous. It may not be good for you, of course you eat a lot of things that aren't good for you and I don't believe that you should ask God to bless it. Just eat it and suffer the consequence. Pizza at midnight is just not good for you. Pepperonis and all, if you want it, go ahead, eat it but then just say, thank you, you can thank Him for it but don't ask Him to bless it. But it'll pass and that's basically what Jesus said, it will pass through you and so it doesn't defile you. But this is what defiles a man, it's what comes out of his mouth, that's what's really defiling. And so He said,

But the things which come out of him, these are they which defile the man. And if any man has ears to hear, let him hear (7:15,16).

That means, this is a true, get this, Jesus is saying, listen to me now. They've just had this conversation, now listen to me. It's not really what goes into your mouth that defile, it's what comes out of your mouth.

And so when he had entered into the house with his disciples away from the crowds, they said, Lord what did you mean by that? And he said unto them, Are you also without understanding? Do you not perceive, that whatever thing from without enters into a man, it can't really defile him; [It doesn't make you unrighteous.] Because it enters not into his heart, but into the belly, and it goes out, purging all meats? And he said, That which comes out of the man, is that which defiles. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceeds the evil thoughts, the adulteries, the fornications, the murders, the thefts, the covetousness, the wickedness, the deceit and lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and these are the things that are defiling (7:17-23).

The things that are in your heart, those are the things that are defiling.

He arose from there and he went over to the coast, to the Phoenician city of Tyre and the area of Sidon [which is not very far from Tyre], and he entered into a house, and [he sought to just do it secretly] no man would know it: but he could not be hid (7:24).

Even though He wasn't on television and all, they had communications and when Jesus would go anywhere, the word would buzz around.

And a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: and the woman was a Greek, or a Syrophenician [she was not of the covenant people]; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter (7:25,26).

There at His feet begging that He would cast the devil out of her daughter.

But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: it's not right to take the children's bread, and cast it unto the dogs (7:27).

Now there are many people that have difficulty with the way Jesus was responding to this woman because it seems so completely out of character with Jesus and that which we know of Jesus. Over and over again we've read how that Jesus had compassion on people. He was moved with compassion. And here is a lady kneeling at His feet, begging that He would heal her daughter. And He insults her, calls her a dog.

It's interesting there are no curse words in Hebrew. If they want to curse, they have to use English or some other language. That's sort of neat, no curse words in Hebrew. But about the meanest thing you can say is, He's a Gentile dog. Now they had wild scavenger dogs that run in packs that were mean, vicious. And so that word "dog" was a very derogatory word. And that's about the worse thing they could call you is a dog, one of these wild, scavenger, vicious dogs that's skinny and roaming around and attacking. But Jesus didn't use that Greek word when He said to the woman, It isn't right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. He used a diminutive form and it could be translated. It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the puppies. He didn't use that mean, derogatory scavenger dog. So don't think too harshly of Jesus on this.

And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the little puppies under the table eat the children's crumbs (7:28).

Jesus knew all things. After all, He's God. He knew the faith of this woman and I think He was just seeking to draw out her faith to the full expression. I think He intended to heal the woman's daughter the whole while. I don't think He thought, Well I'll just heal her for that one. I think that He was deliberately drawing out her expression of faith. And whenever He would take one step back, she'd take two steps forward. And thus He was drawing her out to the full expression. And so now Lord, the little puppies, they eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table.

And he said unto her, For this saying go your way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter was lying upon the bed. Now again, departing from the area of Tyre and Sidon, he came to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis (7:29-31).

Decapolis were the ten major cities in the Upper Galilee region. They have, Decapolis of course is Greek, ten cities. And it was called the Galilee of the Gentiles. And so Jesus is going through, still, what would be the Galilee of the Gentile area in the cities of the Decapolis, the ten cities.

And they brought unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed [or he groaned], and he said unto him, Ephphatha, which is, Be opened. And immediately his ears were open, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. And so he charged them that they shouldn't tell anybody: but the more he

charged them, so much more a great deal did they publish it; And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well (7:32-37):

Quite a testimony concerning Jesus. He's done all things well.

For he makes both the deaf to hear, and the mute to speak (7:37).

I find this interesting that Jesus did not follow a particular pattern in healing people. He healed many blind people, and we do remember the one case where again, He used spit, spit on the ground, made some mud, put it in the guy's eye and told him go down and wash it out at the pool of Siloam. Others He just spoke to them and they were healed. Others He laid hands on them. He was always doing things in different ways. And I think that He was seeking to teach a lesson.

We like to develop patterns, formulas, traditions, and so it's easy to even develop the traditional way of laying hands on people to pray for them. There's a traditional way of anointing them with oil. And I don't know where they, but we seem to so easily get caught up in a pattern, in a way of doing things and if you don't do it this way, then you haven't done it right. And that's exactly what Jesus is dealing with here, the fact that they were upset because the disciples weren't washing their hands in the traditional ways. And Jesus speaks out against their traditions. Now He is using a variety of methods in order to bring healing. With the deaf fellow, He puts his fingers in his ears. And then He says, Ephphatha, Be opened. And then He spit, now I don't know what He did with it, but He loosed the fellow's tongue. Whether He spit on his tongue, I don't know but He was doing it different ways, not getting caught up in one particular pattern because He knows how prone we are to want to get a formula, to want to develop the right way.

He was doing it, I feel, to keep us from developing traditions. Knowing that God is not bound to one way. It is really the traditions that usually bring the divisions within the church. Traditionally, we baptize people backwards. Well traditionally, we baptize them forwards. Then we can't worship with you, we'll form our own denomination. We sprinkle them. Well that doesn't bury the devil, just makes him mad. We can't worship with you because you've developed this pattern of sprinkling. And so these traditions are the things that bring the division within the church. Because we hold to this tradition tenaciously. And if someone isn't doing it like we do it, then we're prone to think that he's not as spiritual as we are. God probably isn't interested in him because he's not doing it the way we do.

And so this chapter is more or less dealing with the traditions and how Jesus really was very untraditional and kept changing methods in order to keep traditions from developing. So it will probably be good for us to examine our own lives and our own spiritual experiences because it is usually when someone violates our tradition that we get rankled. We can accept a lot of things, and we can be pretty broad and pretty tolerant until you come up against my tradition. And then you're in trouble. And so God help us. Gets back to that old proverb, doesn't it? Blessed are the flexible, they shall not be broken.

The moment you get bound in a tradition then you get rigid, you get inflexible and that's where you're in danger of being broken. Be free, be flexible. Let God work, however He wants to work. Whether it be in the traditional way that we have been accustomed to, or God wants to work in a new way. Let's be open, let's let God work in a new way in our hearts and lives, in our church if He so desires to. Let's not get locked into tradition because you know what will happen if we do? The Spirit wants to work and the Spirit will work but traditions are like the old dried wineskins that you can't put the new wine in them or they'll break. They're no longer flexible. And so let's just keep open. God has been working in a glorious way. We're thrilled with what God is doing. But we don't know what's coming.

We don't know what adaptations that might be necessary to reach the new generation. Have we not been flexible and willing to let the Lovesong and the other groups come into the church, it was not traditional. We

took a lot of flack for it. But God was wanting to move in a non-traditional way. And He did move. But now let's not make a tradition out of how He moved then. You see, it's obvious you're not hippies anymore. And so how God worked among the hippies was great for that era. But let's stay open, let's not get locked and freeze God out because we're set in rigid traditions. Let's draw near to Him not just with our mouths but with our hearts. An open heart always for the Spirit of God to work and to move.

Father, we thank You for these lessons and Lord we pray that You'll help us not to get bound up in outward forms of righteousness, outward ways of doing things, but Lord may our hearts ever be flexible, ever open, that You might move Lord in our hearts and lives. And Father, we pray that You'll purify our hearts, wash them, cleanse them, that out of our heart, Lord, there will come love, kindness, forgiveness, tenderness, compassion. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.