

---

# Isaiah in Mark

## Lesson 7

### “Mark 7”

---

**Objective:** To understand how Isaiah is used by Mark to proclaim the good news to his original audience and to understand how this should be understood by us today. How should the gospel message impact our lives. The historical and cultural barriers often cause us to miss, or even misinterpret the message of Mark. This then inhibits transformation into the image of Christ.

---

**Materials:** Books, Journal articles, Targums, the Syriac Peshitta and interviews.

---

**Procedures:** To outline the issues that confront us as we seek to comprehend more fully the powerful ways that the Old Testament, and in particular Isaiah challenged and transformed the world-view and the lives of first century believers. In doing this, it is hoped that we can then transform that understanding into a contextual milieu that will allow our lives to be impacted by the Gospel in the powerful, transformative way that it impacted that first audience.

In chapter 6 of Mark, Watts argues that Mark construes the miracles of Jesus not merely in terms of some general inbreaking of God's rule, but as particularly being connected within the horizon of Isaianic new exodus expectations. Mark places all that Jesus does in the context of the expectations imagined as a result of the prophecies of Isaiah and others speaking words from God in the Old Testament. The exorcisms, the calming of storms, the healings of the lame, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the forgiving of sins and the mass feedings are all iconic testimonies to the inauguration, through Jesus of Yahweh's Isaianic new exodus, with Jesus coming as warrior, and shepherd on behalf of his people. This is not the whole story though, ultimately the very heirs of the Isaianic new exodus promises will reject Jesus, and crucify the warrior of Yahweh. This then begs the question how can this be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies? How are the people to understand this astonishing outcome, especially in light of the fact that the leadership for the Jewish people, who ought to have discerned that Jesus was the Messiah, have actually participated in the events leading to his death? Mark's explanation is

the couched in multiple terms of Old Testament motifs and their imagined imagery of hope for the future.<sup>1</sup>

Mark has already sounded a warning for us by his appeal to Malachi in the opening sentence (Malachi 3:1 in Mark 1:2). This may not be immediately apparent to us, but there is a Jewish tradition that connects the coming of the messenger (Elijah) with calming the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury.<sup>2</sup> On the only two occasions, in this first major section of Mark, where Jesus is challenged by religious authorities from Jerusalem, Mark's account contains two related judicial blinding references from Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9 ff. in Mark 4:12 and Isaiah 29:13-14 in Mark 7:6 ff.). The warnings in Mark stand in congruence with an unfortunate precedent on the part of Israel's leadership. This is not the first time (in Mark) that Israel's leaders have relied upon their own wisdom and in doing so rejected Yahweh's offer of deliverance. It was exactly this same attitude that led to the exile of Israel in the first instance.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2000), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> *Sirach* 48:9-10 "You were taken up by a whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with horses of fire. <sup>10</sup> At the appointed time, it is written, you are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob." NRSV

<sup>3</sup> Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, pp. 74-76; 183-184.

The confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders of Jerusalem, in Mark 7, arises out of the disciples' failure to purify their hands (κοινὰς χερσίν) after visiting the marketplace (verses 1-5). Jesus then, takes the opportunity to rebuke the critics, denouncing them in terms of a citation from Isaiah 29:13 (from the Old Greek translation, the Septuagint). He then goes on to expose their hypocrisy by citing their insistence upon strictly observing the traditions of men while permitting the circumvention of the commands of God (verses 8-13). This then leads Jesus to tell a parable addressed to the crowds (verse 16), where the true nature of purity and defilement is explained (verses 14-23). Jesus makes it clear that purity is a matter of the heart and not the hands.<sup>4</sup> Jesus does not eliminate the notion of impurity, he redefines it. The redefinition of Jesus, however, renders it impossible for anyone to achieve. The net result of the teaching of Jesus is that all foods are declared to be clean while no people are. This passage then paves the way for the mission to the Gentiles; since both are equally in need of the cleansing power that Jesus brings.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, pp. 210-211.

<sup>5</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark* (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), p. 70.

As we go back and look a little closer at 7:2 we notice it is “some” (τινὰς) of the disciples of Jesus that were eating with defiled hands. This begs more than one question: 1. Does this mean that only some went to the market. 2. That only some of those went to the market did not wash their hands while some did in fact wash their hands. If the second option is the case then it is perhaps the case that even in the midst of Jesus own disciples there is more than one practice. If so, it may be a tactic on the part of the Pharisees and scribes to drive a wedge into the midst of the disciples of Jesus hoping to create controversy.<sup>6</sup> We need to be clear about this, the washing of hands was advocated as something that was prescribed by the Law, it was not defended only as “words of the scribes” but as having the authority of Torah (*b. Hullin* 106a<sup>7</sup> - Leviticus 15:11). I have noted some scholars who advocate the view that washing was something only prescribed by the scribes and not as an issue prescribed by the Torah.<sup>8</sup> I am not sure at all how they can make that

---

<sup>6</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 280.

<sup>7</sup> “Said R. Eleazar b. Arakh, ‘This serves as a source of proof upon which the sages rest their assertion that the obligation to wash one’s hands before eating is based on the authority of the Torah.’” Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud*, Volume 20, Tractate *Hullin* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), p. 471.

<sup>8</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 280.

---

claim as the quote from the Talmud clearly indicates something different. I know that France was aware of this quote because he cited it, but I can only assume that he did not read the text carefully. The Talmud is difficult to read and the passage cited is only a portion of this larger section.

This is a complex issue and the matter is discussed exhaustively by Booth in his book. He indicates that a good case can be made from (admittedly ambiguous) rabbinic references that by as early as Hillel and Shammai (by the time of Jesus) the matter of the ritual impurity of the hands was a matter of discussion. Booth argues that the sort of impurity that would have been contracted by the disciples of Jesus in the account of Mark would not be removed by merely washing the hands. Such impurity would have required complete immersion on the part of the disciples. Because of this Booth suggests that the Pharisees concerned in this matter would have been *haberim*, who practiced an additional hand washing beyond what was required by Pharisaic tradition. He then proposes what is taking place here is that these disciples are trying to persuade Jesus

and his disciples to adopt their tradition and become part of the *haberim* themselves.<sup>9</sup>

To be honest, this seems to miss the mark at several levels:

First, it seems to fail to take into consideration what the text of Mark actually says. The “they” of verse 2 would include not only the Pharisees of verse one, but also those described as “some of the scribes” as well. If they were part of the same group as the Pharisees there seems to be little point in singling them out separately.

Secondly, at verse 3 Mark tells us that this is a practice undertaken not only by the Pharisees, but also by “all of the Jews.” It is also described as the “tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it ....” Mark does not here seem to be describing the practice of only a part of the Jews.<sup>10</sup>

*Haberim* (“the friends”) were rabbinic societies consisting of people gathered together, generally for charitable purposes.<sup>11</sup> In light of this information and the text of Mark, I see no reason not to accept what

Mark says at face value. Arguments from silence are very weak

---

<sup>9</sup> Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity*, JSNT Supplement series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 250.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob & the Prodigal* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2003), pp. 83-84.

arguments. France thinks that the explanation of the issue of ritual purity is likely addressed toward the Gentile segment of his audience as no explanation would have been necessary for the Jews.<sup>12</sup> Even the *Letter of Aristeas* (305) follows the line of Mark stating, “Following the custom all the Jews, they washed their hands in the sea in the course of their prayers to God, and then proceeded to the reading and explication of each point.”<sup>13,14</sup>

In verse 6, Jesus notes that their traditions are a glaring example of their hypocrisy and he attacks the validity of their tradition before returning to the question of eating and impurity. He attacks them as hypocrites using the text of Isaiah 29:13. The answer of Jesus comes in the very traditional form of Greco-Roman rhetorical style, by first praising the speaker (7:6a) and then quoting from the Old Greek (Septuagint) translation of Isaiah. The quotation from Isaiah performs two functions in the overall plan of the passage: First, it introduces the external/internal contrast that will become crucial in 7:14-23; secondly, with its paraphrase in 7:8 it sets up the contrast

---

<sup>12</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 281.

<sup>13</sup> Charlesworth.

<sup>14</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, in *The Anchor Bible series*, Vol. 27 (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 440-441.



between God's will and commandment, and human tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps using the principal that the best defense is a good offense Jesus responds to the hostile challenge of the Pharisees and scribes by attacking them and their concept of tradition. The attack of Jesus consists of two parts, 7:6-8 and 7:9-13, each of which consists of the formula, "and he said to them," a scriptural refutation, and a conclusion contrasting the commandment, or the word of God, with the tradition.<sup>16</sup>

The attack of Jesus would likely have been heard by Mark's readers as supplying the answer to the accusations that they were hearing from the Pharisees and scribes. It is most likely the case that the Pharisees and scribes would not have agreed with Jesus accusation that with their tradition they were betraying the commandments of God. Their perspective will have been that their traditions allowed them to correctly fulfill God's commandments. In their understanding, the tradition was a part of the revelation of God, a part that, though not handed down in written form, had been passed down orally from Sinai through an unbroken chain to the

---

<sup>15</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark* (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, p. 449.

Pharisees and scribes. This perspective of the traditions of the elders was what was given to these traditions by Rabbinic Judaism, a continuity of tradition that is passed down among the Jewish people to this day.<sup>17</sup> Israel was defined by a command from God to, “Be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44) and had been sent into exile for failing to do so and even to the day of Jesus they lived under the dominion of the Romans due to their failure to comply. Jesus moves from a general accusation of the failure of the Pharisees and scribes to obey God, to the specific in verses 10-13. This raises the question as to what God values most, the ritual purity advocated by the Pharisees and scribes, or the ethical purity of one’s responsibility to others advocated by Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

As Jesus moves from the general to the specific he uses two sets of passages from the Torah, Exodus 20:12<sup>19</sup> and Deuteronomy 5:16.<sup>20</sup> He then moves to the passages that deal with the judgment

---

<sup>17</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, pp. 449-450.

<sup>18</sup> Rikki Watts, “Mark” in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 161-167.

<sup>19</sup> **Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.** NRSV

<sup>20</sup> **Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.** NRSV

of those who do not follow this command using Exodus 21:17<sup>21</sup> and Leviticus 20:9.<sup>22</sup> Jesus then highlights their practice of the Pharisees and scribes of Corban, which essentially dishonors father and mother and breaks the commandments leaving them in the position of deserving death. They appear to do this in order to serve their own interests over that of the parents of their followers.<sup>23</sup> They void the word of God with their traditions from the elders. This is a masterful demonstration of how Jesus, who was under attack, goes on the offensive and brings to light their self-serving hypocrisy powerfully and decisively. At verse 14, Jesus then turns from his opponents to the crowd. He seeks to teach them the difference between the appearance of purity and the reality. The difference between following the word of God ethically, and instead creating a distortion screen of tradition in a manner that actually abrogates the law itself. Jesus seeks to bring light and understanding to the people, to

---

<sup>21</sup> **Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death.** NRSV

<sup>22</sup> **All who curse father or mother shall be put to death; having cursed father or mother, their blood is upon them.** NRSV

<sup>23</sup> Rikki Watts, "Mark" in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, pp. 166-167.

---

teach them what true purity is. He discloses for them the true source of impurity, it comes from within human beings.

This teaching represents the pinnacle of the teaching of Jesus in this section. In this moment, Jesus destroys the conception of the Pharisees and scribes that impurity comes from outside a person and contaminates. The ultimate source of contamination is from within the person. This would not be new teaching to the Jews as even Philo says that true defilement is injustice and impiety (*Special Laws* 3.208-209), but despite this he still advocates a literal observance of the ritual regulations of the Torah (*Migration of Abraham* 89-94). The spiritualization of the idea of ritual impurity, therefore does not then necessarily mean that one would not observe the literal purity laws of the Old Testament. Rather, the idea is that spiritualization and literal observance should go hand in hand with one another.<sup>24</sup> Jesus is advocating not the obliteration of the observance of the Torah, but alignment of that observance between the heart and the practice. He is calling upon those in the crowd to recognize the

---

<sup>24</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, pp. 453-454.

---

hypocrisy of having a ritual observance in one moment and then in the next being abusive, unjust and impious.

Perhaps we might have expected that this teaching would have been clear at least to the disciples of Jesus, but as soon as they leave the crowd the disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable. Jesus seems extraordinarily practical and logical here as he explains in very literal terms that what a person eats simply passes through the body and then goes into the sewer, while what comes from within the person leads to a whole host of evil. These words of Jesus are powerful and also extraordinarily logical, despite the fact that even today we tend to seek to find motives for the evil perpetrated by individuals in every place, but in the human heart. We seem to start from the premise that if a child is nurtured and only given the love and good things their whole life, they will grow up to be good and well adjusted people. In reality, this is just not true. Certainly environment is a factor, but how many people have you known that have been raised in a terrible environment under horrific and evil circumstances, and yet somehow they come to be sweet, loving generous people? The words of Jesus: **“<sup>21</sup> For it is from within, from the human heart, that**

**evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”** Once again Jesus makes it clear that the source of evil does not come from outside but from within a person. Jesus rips apart the veil of illusion and error that had deluded literal observers of the food laws and he reveals the underlying reality that had always been there, namely that no food is unclean.<sup>25</sup>

We move onto verse 24, where Jesus is once again on the move, and he seems to be trying to get away from the hustle and bustle and stealthily enters Tyre, but he is unsuccessful in remaining hidden. Here we encounter a woman who is clearly stated to be a Gentile, the Syrophenician woman. It is important to notice the appropriate approach made by the woman to Jesus. Like Jairus, whose previous request for help from Jesus was successful, so is that of the woman who bows at the feet of Jesus and asks for help for her daughter (7:25-26). There is however, here a remarkable difference as Jesus initially refuses to help her even referring to Gentiles as dogs.

---

<sup>25</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, p. 457.

The closest parallel in antiquity to the conversation between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman is the riddle contest in which the solution to the riddle gains the protagonist access to the desired reward, or status (examples of this can be found in Oedipus and the riddle of the Sphinx<sup>26</sup> and at Judges 14:12-18<sup>27</sup>). The woman does not so much win the argument as she solves the puzzle. The problem requiring a solution appears to be as the result of a misreading of Isaiah, this prophet that was of so much importance to the community that is Mark's audience. Isaiah had been a major source for the interpretation of Genesis 12:1-3 that served as a prediction

---

<sup>26</sup> "What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?" The answer is: a man. A man is a baby in the morning of his life and he crawls on four feet. He is an adult in the noon of his life and he walks on two feet. But when he is old, in the evening of his life, he walks with a cane, on three feet.

<sup>27</sup> <sup>12</sup> Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments. <sup>13</sup> But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments." So they said to him, "Ask your riddle; let us hear it." <sup>14</sup> He said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." But for three days they could not explain the riddle. <sup>15</sup> On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" <sup>16</sup> So Samson's wife wept before him, saying, "You hate me; you do not really love me. You have asked a riddle of my people, but you have not explained it to me." He said to her, "Look, I have not told my father or my mother. Why should I tell you?" <sup>17</sup> She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted; and because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her. Then she explained the riddle to her people. <sup>18</sup> The men of the town said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" And he said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle." NRSV

for the conversion of the Gentiles to Yahwism after Israel was restored from exile (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10; 19:21-25; 25:6; 42:6).<sup>28</sup>

This message then came to interpreted as the “Jews first, then the Gentiles.” Even in the early history of the church this was clearly a problem as in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1) we find the suggestion of this problem as the Hellenized Jewish Christians were being neglected in favor of the “Hebrew” Jewish Christians. After all, had not even the prophet Isaiah portrayed the Gentiles as idolaters, late comers into the covenant community (Isaiah 56:8; 61:5-11; 66:18-21). Jesus resists this transformation of salvation history into a privileged status for some Christians over others. He resists it not with a “rhetorical sledgehammer,” but in a more gentle manner with a contest of riddles. Clearly, the statement of Jesus in 7:27 refers to the privileged status of Israel as God’s elect. They are the “descendants” (τέκνα), whose bread must not be tossed out (βαλεῖν) to the dogs (κυναρίους).<sup>29</sup>

The choice of the vocabulary here is important. The noun *teknon* (τέκνον) can be used figuratively as a term of affection or

---

<sup>28</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>29</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, pp. 76-77.



compassion (Mark 2:5; 10:24), but its literal meaning is that of being a descendent, or offspring (Mark 10:29-30; 12:19; 13:12). This is a word that is used of Abraham's son Isaac in the Old Greek translation (the Septuagint) at Genesis 17:16 and 22:7-8, and later of the subsequent descendants of Abraham at John 8:39 and Sarah at Galatians 4:28, 31. The verb "to cast" (βαλεῖν) implies a typically Jewish understanding of the relationship between dogs and human beings. Jews did not keep dogs as house pets. In a rural setting Jews might have kept dogs as guards for the sheep (Job 30:1), but overall they were considered to be lazy, gluttonous scavengers (Isaiah 56:9-11a; Psalms 59:14-15; 1 Kings 21:24; 22:38; 2 Kings 9:35-37). In the writing *Joseph and Asenath* 10:14<sup>30</sup> a distinction is made between the house dogs of the Egyptian princess Asenath and the wild dogs who live outside the house, to which she "throws" all her food as she begins to fast.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> "And Asenath took her royal dinner and the fatlings and the fish and the flesh of the heifer and all the sacrifices of her gods and the vessels of their wine of libation and threw everything through the window looking north, and gave everything to the strange dogs. For Asenath said to herself, "By no means must my dogs eat from my dinner and from the sacrifice of the idols, but let the strange dogs eat those." Charlesworth.

<sup>31</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, p. 77.

The Syrophenician woman solves the riddle by changing the terms. In her answer, the “descendants” (τέκνον) become “little children” (τῶν παιδίων), and the street curs become puppies “under the table” (κυνάρια ὑποκάτω τῆς τραπέζης Mark 7:28). Unlike the Jews, the Greeks and the Romans commonly kept house dogs. Therefore, by changing the cultural context, the Syrophenician woman solves the problem of priority by replacing the image of sequence and implied scarcity (the dogs eat last and only if there is anything left) with an image simultaneity and superabundance.<sup>32</sup> This same concept of scarcity of resources haunts human beings to this day. We see it in the immigration debate, the healthcare debate, taxation, and even in the decision-making of churches as they prepare their budgets. It is important for us to note that Jesus is thoroughly impressed by the understanding of the Syrophenician woman and he answers her “understanding” and faith by doing as she requested. There is a tremendous lesson for us to learn in the response of this woman to Jesus as we live out our lives. God has no shortage of resources, man continues to have a shortage of faith in

---

<sup>32</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, p. 77.

---

God, therefore mankind does not have access to the fullness of God's power.

Jesus travels on to his next destination, the Decapolis, via a somewhat circuitous route, no reason is given for the route. Here Jesus has a deaf man brought to him who also appears to have a speech impediment. In verse 34 Jesus looks up to heaven as he heals the man to indicate the source of his healing. It is not by magic, or so other methodology, it through the power of heaven that this man is healed. "he has done all things well!" (7:37b) is an allusion to the Old Greek translation (the Septuagint) of Genesis 1:31 (and perhaps secondarily to Ecclesiastes 3:11 and Wisdom 8:1). The second part of the response of those who have witnessed the miracle makes a connection between the work of Jesus and the expected eschatological exodus of Isaiah. In an allusion to the Septuagint of Isaiah 35:5-6 their acclamation interprets the significance of the actions of Jesus for the audience. Isaiah 35 provides the exiles with a promise of redemption and deliverance (Isaiah 35:4, 9-10). The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the mute will sing (Isaiah 35:5-6a). A holy highway (35:8) will provide safe passage for

---

the exiles to return to Jerusalem. This miracle then acts as a sign of the inbreaking of the eschatological reign of God as imagined in the words of Isaiah the prophet. This is the continuing backdrop for the “good news” proclaimed by Mark.

---

# Synopsis

As we continue our journey through the text of Mark again and again we can see, if we are willing to look, the teachings and miracles of Jesus set against horizon of the expectations created by the prophecies of Isaiah, of the new exodus of God. In the midst of this great tale of hope though, there is great tragedy as well. Those that would be expected to be the first to recognize and accept this inbreaking of the kingdom of God into the world actually are some of its staunchest opponents. This too serves as part of the backdrop for the Gospel of Mark. How is it possible that the leaders of the Jewish people can be found to be in opposition to the coming of the Messiah, even being participants with those who killed him? This too is woven into the texture of the Gospel account as explanation of how the people chosen by Yahweh could continue to be blind to his coming, choosing their own wisdom and understanding over that of Yahweh and his warrior Jesus.

Mark uses the warnings from the Old Testament itself such as from Malachi and Isaiah to form the backdrop of explanation

---

for this troubling array of events. Here in Mark 7 the particular warnings of Isaiah 29:13-14 are used to explain the unfortunate precedent that continues to be followed by the leadership of the Jewish people. They are now set on the same path that previously led to their exile. They fail to follow the wisdom and guidance of God and instead continue to follow their own wisdom and understanding.

Here in Mark, the battleground of this section centers on the issue of ritual purity, at least for the Jews, for Jesus he quickly shifts the battle along the lines of actual purity rather than perceived, or ritual purity. He conveys teaching that cuts to the heart of the matter and declares that it is not the case of what one puts into their body that creates impurity, but what comes out. He challenges the religious leaders to see that in their practices they are actually breaking the law of God in both intent and actuality through their traditions. Jesus declares them to be hypocrites and lawbreakers. He then moves from challenging his accusers to trying to teach the crowd the truth of his message. He challenges them to an ethical purity that honors God and his commandments over and above the traditions of men. In providing this teaching,

---

Jesus declares that actual source of impurity is not external, but from within men. His challenge is for his audience to see this and to recognize their true path before God. At the same time he does not strip from them the obligation to keep the tenets of the law, but to align them with a heart truly devoted to God and all that is just and right before him.

In the account of the Syrophenician woman, Jesus deals with more false notions from his audience. This time he deals with the idea that the priority of salvation was first to the Jew and then to the Gentile and that somehow the salvation of God was not sufficient, but limited in some way. In a powerful and sweeping manner Jesus deals with these hot topics with a mastery and majesty that must have left his audience breathless. This was an issue that was deeply engrained in the interpretations of Isaiah particularly and would continue to be an issue into the era of the time of Acts and beyond. Jesus acquiesces to the request of the woman because she reorients the discussion in a manner that indicates here great understanding of God, and his plan for salvation. She understands that the grace of God is sufficient for all, there is no shortage or limit. This would certainly be a

---

teaching that will have resonated with the early church as Gentiles began to come into the church.

The final miracle of Jesus also fits well the theme of Isaiah as Jesus heals a man that was both deaf and had a speech impediment. With the context of the prophecies of Isaiah as a backdrop the continuing inbreaking of the the kingdom of God unfolds. Those things that seem difficulties, or to be unexpected, are explained and expounded as the Gospel account continues. This indeed is the “good news” as proposed by Isaiah.



---

# Questions

1. What are some of your expectations regarding how the kingdom of God will continue to expand in the world? Why?
2. What are some things that the words of Jesus regarding purity bring to your mind? Why?
3. Why do you think it is a challenge for people to trust God over their own wisdom and understanding?
4. What are some ways that God has surprised you by doing things differently than you expected?
5. How do you think the words of Jesus in this chapter should change the way we live our lives?
6. How does what Jesus teaches here regarding impurity impact your view of God?
7. In the story of the Syrophenician woman, what are some ways that this story challenges your worldview?
8. As you make decisions what are some ways that you should demonstrate a trust in God?
9. What are some ways that this chapter challenges your perspective on resources available to you and to God?

- 
10. What are some ways that you think we may have a tendency toward hypocrisy in the church today?
  11. How can we help each other avoid hypocrisy in our lives?
  12. What do you think this chapter teaches about the place of traditions in the church? Why?
  13. What do you imagine that God would think of the way we live as followers of Christ today? Why?
  14. How do you imagine God's involvement in the affairs of the world to be unfolding today?