

Mark Chapter Seven

Study Guide

This Chapter begins with Jesus dismissing all Jewish dietary regulation, which constitutes a major controversy with the religious leaders of his time (see also 2:1-3:6 and 11:27 – 12:34). Jesus' adversaries did not agree with his teaching about what is clean and unclean in the sight of God. Even his own disciples did not understand his teaching (v 17) and that remains true of some parts of the church today.

Overall the chapter begins with those most likely to “get it” not getting it. Then moves to those outside of the tradition who “get it” immediately: the gentile Syro-Phoenician woman and the man suffering from deafness. The contrast is stark.

Mark 7:1-12 Controversy about Tradition

In the conversation that Jesus has with the religious of his time, he does not undermine the law, but in fact he upholds the essence and chastises the religious for the “fence around the law that was placed there to prevent inadvertent violations. The passage shows Jesus' frustrations with the way the tradition has created “loopholes” that enable people to undermine the law of love.

Jesus points out that the law was meant to establish a lifestyle of holiness, but the tradition has warped into lifestyles that focus on minutia or excuse a lack of love. We are called to examine our lifestyle lest through it we “leave the commandment of God” (v 8) or make “void the word of God” (v. 13).

In your experience, have you witnessed the church creating rules that undermine the very gospel they were intended to support?

The story calls us to consider not just what is old or what is new in the traditions of faith, but instead to consider what is vital.

Where do you feel the vitality of the gospel? In what ways is Christianity life giving, in your experience/opinion?

The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Deaf-mute of the Decapolis (Mark 7:24-37)

In the previous section of Mark 7, Jesus declared all foods clean (7:19). In this section, he declares all persons clean. A gentile woman in a pagan city and a man of indeterminate ethnicity in an unclean territory both express a faith that brings miraculous healing.

The first story, is interesting because it is one that The Jesus Seminar (a group of New Testament scholars committed to identifying the most historically accurate depictions and sayings of Jesus) agreed was authentic. Their reasoning was that the story puts Jesus in a bad light and therefore must have actually happened.

In what ways does this story put Jesus in a bad light?

The traditional miracle narrative found elsewhere in Mark is preceded by a relatively long conversation in which the woman persuades Jesus to act.

What does this interaction say about Jesus? What does it say about the persistence and power of love?

The miracle itself and the wonder of the onlookers is an aside and the reaction of witnesses omitted.

How does Jesus exorcise the daughter's demon? What does that suggest about Jesus' power?

The Deaf-mute of the Decapolis (region of the 10 Roman towns)

In this story, the miracle activity is very physical and specific.

What does Jesus do in the process of performing this miracle?

What does that suggest to you?

The healing of the man's infirmity (*mogilian* – deaf mute) is a direct quote of Isaiah 35:6. The reference in Isaiah 35 is to the Messiah who will do all things well.

What is distinctive about this particular healing?

These two stories combined point to four themes in Mark:

1. Jesus' mission to both Jew and Gentile
2. The Marcan Secret – Jesus keeps admonishing folks to tell no one
3. Jesus' mission to remove the fence around the law
4. Sovereign power of Jesus

Which of these themes resonates with you the most? Why?

What questions do you have about the Jesus you read about in this chapter?

Resource: Williamson, Lamar Jr. *Mark Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.