

MARK

Chapter 7

Traditions and Commandments

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, 2 they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, 4 and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. 5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” 6 And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ““This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ 8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” 9 And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! 10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ 11 But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God) — 12 then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

6:14-8:30 The new section introduced by Ch 6:14 and extending to Ch 8:30 focuses upon a period during which Jesus was frequently in retirement beyond the borders of Galilee. During the mission of the Twelve, Mark calls attention to the reaction of Herod Antipas, who has heard of the mighty works of Jesus. Herod’s suspicion that Jesus is John returned from the dead (Ch 6:14-16) introduces the parenthetical account of the imprisonment and execution of the Baptist (Ch 6:17-29). At the return of the Twelve Jesus withdraws to a solitary place, pursued by multitude. In compassion He provides bread in the wilderness, and five thousand are fed (Ch 6:35-44). A second feeding of four thousand is reported in the region of the Decapolis (Ch 8:1-10), and the striking recurrence of the word “bread” throughout this section provides the pervading motif (Chs. 6:52; 7:2, 28; 8:14 ff). The importance of the two feeding miracles is emphasized when the disciples’ own misunderstanding of Jesus are traced to their failure to understand the significance of the abundant provision of bread. While a single instance of the public teaching occurs in Ch 7:1-23, the accent falls on the instruction of the disciples, whose hardness of heart, unbelief and failure to understand is a prominent element in the record. A point of transition is provided by Ch 8:22-26 where the restoring of sight to a man who was blind signals the opening of the eyes of the disciples as well. A climax in Mark’s narrative is achieved in Ch 8:27-29 when Jesus and His company approach Caesarea Philippi where Jesus’ dignity as Messiah is acknowledged for the first time. (Lane)

7:1-13 Reading past Mk 7:13, we understand that the Pharisees were so concerned about ceremonial washings because they feared becoming spiritually and ceremonially “defiled,” assuming the things that defile a person are external. Jesus corrects this: “From within, out of the heart of man” (7:21) come the evils that defile. We find it much more convenient to blame

external forces for sin than to confess our fault, our own fault, our own most grievous fault. What a contrast is then provided by the Syrophoenician woman (7:24–30). She humbly confesses her defilement: “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

7:1-8 Jesus’ point is that traditional rules added by the community are always outranked by divine statute. (For a treatment of ceremonial washing, see D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* [London: Penguin, 1963] 190–91). The rabbis seem to have required many ordinary people to follow divine statutes that originally were only applicable to the priests. It sounds similar to Jesus’ controversy with the leadership about healing on the Sabbath (2:23–3:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Over centuries of time, the Jewish rabbis collected, codified, and passed down a host of various rules, all intended to “build a fence around the Torah,” i.e., to keep people from coming anywhere close to violating a biblical injunction. On subjects where Scripture was silent, they spoke loudly. The massive collection of these rules was known as the “oral Torah” because it was taught orally until it was finally written down in the period A.D. 200–600 in the Talmud. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

But Jesus says that human traditions, no matter how good their intended purposes, do not infallibly capture God’s intent. In fact, they may result in lip service that barely conceals hypocrisy within the heart. “Councils and popes have often erred,” Luther wrote.

7:1-5 The Pharisees and teachers of the law have come as a delegation from Jerusalem, most likely to keep close tabs on Jesus and perhaps to see if they can find some way to discredit him. They latch onto the fact that the disciples are eating their bread “with hands that were defiled” (*koinais*, v 2). They were defiled because they hadn’t been ceremonially washed prior to the meal, in keeping with the traditions of the elders (*tēn paradosin tōn presbuterōn*, v 3). This lack of respect for the traditions of the elders was what concerned the delegation from Jerusalem. These traditions, which were often treated as if they were of equal authority with the law of God, were interpretations of that law that had developed over time among the Jews. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

If one punctuates according to the Nestle's Greek text, verse 1 is a complete sentence and verses 2-5 are the second sentence with the main verb in verse 5. In that case, "kai" means "then," when they had observed the disciples. If one punctuates according to Westcott/Hort Greek text he places a comma after verse 1 and a period after verse 2, linking the two participles in verses 1 and 2. In any case, verses 3-4 are parenthetical, introduced by explanatory "you see." (Buls)

7:1 *The Pharisees ... had come down from Jerusalem.* Another delegation of fact-finding religious leaders from Jerusalem (see 3:22) sent to investigate the Galilean activities of Jesus. . (CSB)

In contrast to the sincerity of the throngs in Gennesaret, Jesus’ adversaries renew hostilities. They were sticklers for the observance of detailed interpretations of the law. (TLSB)

The presence of Pharisees and scribes indicates that Jesus is in a Jewish area (they never appear in Gentile lands). The Jewish leaders are perhaps an investigation committee (cf. Acts 8:14–15). (CC)

The fact that they are not mentioned from verse 14 on, likely indicates that they found precisely what they wanted, a heretic. It was a bitter confrontation. (Buls)

By the way, Pharisees were a religious party, Scribes a religious profession. But they joined in attacking Jesus on this occasion. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: Matthew and Mark connect this account with the feeding of the 5,000. We must suppose, therefore, that the following rebuke was administered while Jesus sojourned in the land of Gennesaret, before He set out for the north and west. (Buls)

Jesus' teaching differed fundamentally from that of the Pharisees on essential points of common piety. This has already been illustrated with respect to sharing table-fellowship with outcasts (2:15-17), fasting (2:18-22) and Sabbath observance (2:23-28), and is now exhibited in regard to ritual defilement. (Lane)

An instance of typical pharisaic pedantry, of deliberate, unwarranted faultfinding. Jesus had returned to Capernaum for a few days after the exciting and wearying experiences of a strenuous week. Here He finds a company of His enemies assembled; the contrast between the Lord's popularity during the last few days and the hostility of the Jewish religious leaders is brought out very strongly. It may be that this delegation of Pharisees and scribes was the same one that was dogging Christ's footsteps since the casting out of devils, chapter 3, 22; or the authorities may have sent down even more learned and disputatious men than at first, as they were learning to respect the clear arguments and the sharp tongue of the Galilean Rabbi. The purpose of their coming was frankly not to hear the Word of Life, but to provoke disputes. (Kretzmann)

7:2 unwashed – This was not so much an issue of hygiene, but of ritual observance. (TLSB)

"Define" or "unclean" had a particular local usage in those days. "Some of His disciples," the Pharisees and Scribes cleverly and hypocritically attack Jesus through His disciples. (Buls)

Lenski: Mark explains "unclean" for his Gentile readers. (Buls)

Their opportunity came very soon. They saw some of Christ's disciples eat with common, with unwashed hands. This was their cue for an attack upon Jesus. Note: Not the question of sanitation caused them concern, but one which they considered affecting the standing of a believing Jew in the sight of God. (Kretzmann)

The eating of bread without proper concern for the removal of ritual defilement was merely the immediate occasion for this confrontation. Its ultimate occasion was Jesus' evident disregard for the whole structure of oral tradition which examined virtually every aspect of personal and corporate life and sought to regulate it in a manner consistent with the Law under conditions vastly different from those in which the Law was first handed down. In areas where the Law was silent the tradition was vocal, drawing conclusions felt to be implicit in the mandates of the written code. The result was a vast legal complex, oral in form but definite in formulation, which was entrusted to the scribes, the recognized interpreters of the Law, and regarded as binding upon all Israel. (Lane)

7:3-4 Cf. Ex. 30:17-21; Lev. 22:4-7 for laws intended for priests. This lengthy aside explains that the Pharisees required ritual washings, not only of those returning from the market, but also of different cooking utensils and even furniture. To "wash" in Greek is the word "baptize;" and is

the same term used when referring to Christian Baptism. Though this verb may denote immersion, it also describes washings by pouring or sprinkling. Didache: "Baptize into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit" (ANF7:379). This shows the flexibility of earliest Christian practice as it adapted from the customs of Judaism. Archaeologists have discovered ritual washing pools or tanks (Hebrew *miqwaoth*) that held c 60 gallons of water, which would have been running or "living" (cf. John 4:10-11; 7:37-38) according to rabbinic custom. ESV has "dining couches" which were cushions. (TLSB)

In verses 3 and 4 we have three difficulties in textual criticism: (Buls)

1. AAT: "without washing their hands up to the wrist." NASB renders this same word with "carefully." KJV: "Often." RSV and NEB, according to some manuscripts, omit the word altogether.
2. "Wash" from the Greek word "Baptize," or "apply water to." In KJV, NEB, AAT and NIV the word is translated "wash." RSV uses "purify."
3. "And tables" is maintained by KJV. AAT translates "couches." The other translations omit the word. There is sufficient evidence here to prove that "baptize" need not mean "to immerse." Look at Luke 11:38.

7:3 *the tradition of the elders*. Considered to be binding. (CSB)

7:4 *marketplace*. Where Jews would come into contact with Gentiles, or with Jews who did not observe the ceremonial law, and thus become ceremonially unclean. (CSB)

When coming back from market especially, where they might unknowingly have touched something unclean, the strict Jews were most inexorable and oppressive in their demands for cleanliness, a thorough washing of the hands and arms, if not of the whole body, being a prime requisite at that time. This care had become so excessive that it extended to the dishes and the furniture of the house as a matter of Levitical purification. They had received, and adhered most firmly to, the tradition regarding the washing of drinking-cups, of wooden and brazen vessels, and even of couches or sofas. The word used here for utensils of brass is really a Latin word, meaning a Roman measure equal to about 1 1/2 pints. Earthen vessels are not mentioned, since they had to be broken if defiled, Lev. 15, 12. Thus the whole life of the Jews, down to the most minute performances of every-day life, was governed by such laws and precepts. (Kretzmann)

7:5 The Pharisees and scribes expected the disciples and Jesus to follow their ritual practices, especially those involving washing. (TLSB)

The Greek word indicates a way of life. The way of life of the disciples did not follow the tradition of the elders. What a wonderful observation! (Buls)

Bengel: The Pharisees were always giving their whole zeal to mere questionings. (Buls)

Correct. They could never contribute anything positive. They were always asking defensive questions. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: The Talmud is a work in two parts, the Mishnah, containing the traditional legal enactments, and Gemara, with the corresponding interpretative annotations. It is these traditional

regulations which are designated 'the tradition of the elders.' These were based on Deuteronomy 4:14 and 17:10. In the 'tradition of the elders' there was one to the effect that a person should not eat with unwashed hands, in accordance with Leviticus 15:11 . . . Rabbi Jones contended that it was just as sinful to eat with unwashed hands as to commit adultery. (Buls)

Lenski: They are convinced that Jesus cannot answer their question. . . . They are so steeped in their traditionalism and formalism that they are utterly blind to the true teaching of their own divine Torah. (Buls)

7:6-8 Jesus does not answer by becoming defensive about the practices of his disciples. Instead, Jesus responds by quoting Is 29:13 (from today's Old Testament Reading) and applying it to the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Their hypocrisy consists of the fact that while giving lip service to the authority of God's Word, they have in fact elevated "the tradition of the elders" (v 3) to a place equal to or even above the Scriptures. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

Jesus quotes is to rebuke the hypocrisy of His pharisaical accusers. This passage contrasts insincere lip service with heartfelt obedience. (TLSB)

7:6 *Isaiah ... prophesied.* Isaiah roundly denounced the religious leaders of his day (Isa 29:13), and Jesus uses a quotation from this prophet to describe the tradition of the elders as "rules taught by men" (v. 7). (CSB)

"Rightly did Isaiah prophesy" NASB. Thus the other versions, other than KJV. Isaiah spoke as God's inspired mouthpiece for his own time, for Jesus' time and our time. Jesus attacks the Pharisees with the Word of God, not on His own. (Buls)

The intended sense of the Massoretic text, the LXX, and Mark 7:6 are the same. (Buls)

"You, the hypocrites" applies this prophesy personally to Jesus' questioners. Of course Jesus does not mean that it is limited to them. The word "hypocrite" is found ten times in Matthew, three in Luke, but only here in Mark. Not elsewhere in the New Testament. (Buls)

Bengel: We may derive a definition of hypocrisy from this passage. (Buls)

Lenski: The hypocrite tries to appear before men, as marks of fully developed hypocrites are presented in Jehovah's characterization: honor that is mere pretense (with the lips, not with the heart); teachings that are likewise empty pretense (presenting as divine, when they are only put forward by men). The two always go together; for, the moment the heart keeps far from God it leaves also His Word. (Buls)

Hendriksen: The hypocrite is the man who hides or tries to hide his real intentions under a mask of simulated virtue. As the passage now under study presents it: he honors God with his lips but his heart is far from God . . . Their real intention was the destruction of the Very Son of God. (Buls)

Hypocrisy is so dangerous because it is always allied with work-righteousness. Compare the example of Peter in Galatians 2:13. Though Peter knew better, he played the hypocrite and drew Barnabas and the other Christians into hypocritical work-righteousness, by his actions denying that the righteousness of God in Christ is sufficient for the justification of man before God. (Buls)

The quotation from Isaiah 29:13 is from the Septuagint, which has added “They worship me in vain” to the Hebrew text (*Interpreter’s Bible*, 7:749–50). Jesus uses strong prophetic language to judge the behavior of the Pharisees and scribes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

7:7 "Worship" here denotes the entire religious worship of heart, mouth and deed. The nouns "teachings" and "commandments" are predicate to each other. Note that verb and participle are in the present tense, denoting a continuous and customary action. (Buls)

Jesus is not condemning human traditions and ceremonies per se. But when they displace God's Word and righteousness is attached to them, then hypocrisy results and the traditions become sin. Paul did not condemn circumcision. But when the Judaizers insisted on circumcision in addition to justification through faith, then it became wrong and led to hypocrisy. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: These Pharisees and scribes are dead, but their spiritual children have not departed with them. . . . There are many who are strict in the matter of self-made commandments but who simultaneously evince an inconceivable moral laxity in matters pertaining to the definite and revealed will of God. (Buls)

7:8 *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.* Jesus clearly contrasts the two. God’s commands are found in Scripture and are binding; the traditions of the elders (v. 3) are not Biblical and therefore not authoritative or binding. (CSB)

Jesus’ rebuke is aimed particularly at the Pharisees’ elevation of human tradition above divine commandment. (TLSB)

The rebuke of Jesus exactly strikes the sore spot: they put aside the command of God and cling to the tradition of men. (Kretzmann)

7:9-13 In these verses, Jesus gives a practical example of how the Pharisees and scribes have used the traditions in order to set aside the clear meaning of God’s Commandments in order to legitimize sinful behavior on their part. The key in these verses is the word *Corban*, which is a transliteration into Greek of the Hebrew word for offering. A *Corban*, in the sense that Jesus was using it here, was a religious vow. According to the text, a son who wanted to get out from under the financial burden of caring for his aging parents could dedicate his wealth to God. That act of dedication was called a *Corban*. The son could then claim that his wealth was already dedicated to God and couldn’t be used to care for his parents. Yet even though his wealth had been dedicated to God, the son was under no obligation to use it for the temple or synagogue or some other religious purpose. He was free to use it for his own wants and needs. The *Corban* was simply a way to use the “traditions” to excuse his failure to keep the Fourth Commandment to honor his mother and father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

Jesus gives a concrete example of the Pharisees’ hypocritical piety: He describes them as failing to obey the Fourth Commandment (“Honor your father and mother”) because they consider it more important to give special offerings to support elderly parents. Such piety is ultimately self-serving and a sham. Corbin was an offering above and beyond the tithes required by Mosaic Law. (TLSB)

7:9 Having defended Himself successfully and silenced His detractors, the Lord now assumes the offensive. He employs pointed sarcasm: It is a fine way in which you frustrate the commandment of God that your tradition may be upheld! (Kretzmann)

7:10† The fourth commandment is cited in both its positive and negative forms.

7:11 *Corban*. The transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “offering.” By using this word in a religious vow an irresponsible Jewish son could formally dedicate to God (i.e., to the temple) his earnings that otherwise would have gone for the support of his parents. The money, however, did not necessarily have to go for religious purposes. The Corban formula was simply a means of circumventing the clear responsibility of children toward their parents as prescribed in the law. The teachers of the law held that the Corban oath was binding, even when uttered rashly. The practice was one of many traditions that adhered to the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit. (*that is, a gift devoted to God*). By explaining this Hebrew word, Mark reveals that he is addressing Gentile readers, probably Romans primarily. (CSB)

The Pharisees not only placed the precepts of tradition on the same level with those of God, but by their peculiar emphasis upon them actually set the latter aside. An example of this irreverent and blasphemous method: setting aside the Fourth Commandment for the sake of a probable sacrifice. God's Law is clear on the relation of children to parents, Ex. 20, 12; Deut. 5, 16, also regarding the punishment of those that disregard the rights of the parents, Ex. 21, 17; Lev. 20, 9. He had placed the service to parents next to that of Himself. But the Pharisees took advantage of the fact that God had sanctioned free-will offerings or sacrifices. They taught: If a man says to his father or his mother, Corban, that is, a free-will gift, let that be what you would have from me for your benefit or help. (Kretzmann)

The strongest accusation in the section is omitted from the Gospel reading, but flavors the whole text. The Corban controversy brought divine law and human rule into direct conflict. The command to honor father and mother is a divine absolute. “Corban” was a religious vow stipulating that something could not be used for ordinary purposes. “If the son declared his property *qorban* to his parents, he neither promised it to the Temple nor prohibited its use to himself, but he legally excluded his parents from the right of benefit” (W. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 251). Once made, the rabbis held that the vow could not be withdrawn. The plight of the parents and the divine command were not enough to get the scribes to set the human rule aside (IDNT 3:862–66). Rabbinic literature after Jesus’ time does in fact correct this practice, attesting to the validity of the charge Jesus made against his contemporaries. Jesus’ point: God’s Word outranks everything else (see also Nineham, pp. 195–96). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

7:12 The final understanding of the expression came to be: if a son or daughter took the money, the goods, the earnings, the means, with which he could and should assist his poor and needy parents, and dedicated it to God as a sacrifice or free-will offering for the Temple, he did well. The Pharisees held the mere making of such a vow, the mere use of the expression Corban, for a service done to God, which could very well take precedence of the service due to parents. In doing so, they set aside even the plain truth of the Old Testament, Prov. 28, 24. (Kretzmann)

7:13 *Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition*. The teachers of the law appealed to Nu 30:1–2 in support of the Corban vow, but Jesus categorically rejects the practice of using one Biblical teaching to nullify another. The scribal interpretation of Nu 30:1–2 satisfied the letter of the passage but missed the meaning of the law as a whole. God never intended obedience to one command to nullify another. (CSB)

A mere appearance of piety does not please God. He prefers that people simply obey His Commandments. (TLSB)

Jesus categorically rejects the practice of using one biblical commandment to negate another. In their concern for the fulfillment of the letter of Scripture they forgot that the Law was provided not for its own sake but to benefit men. It is an expression of God's covenant faithfulness as well as of His righteousness and in no circumstance was obedience to one commandment intended to nullify another. The fault lay not in the commandments but in an interpretive tradition which failed to see Scripture in its wholeness. Jesus implicated the scribes who stood before Him in this indictment when He referred pointedly to "your tradition, which you have delivered." They are not merely passive guardians of an inherited tradition but have had an active and responsible role in shaping and transmitting the oral law. The case of the corban vow, Jesus adds, is not an isolated example, but one of many which could be cited where the intention of Scripture had been obscured by the scribal tradition. (Lane)

7:1–13 Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for being overly concerned with man-made observances while failing to fulfill God's Commandments. Such hypocrisy still abounds, as most people worry more about human opinions than what God thinks. Given our own failures in this regard, it is a good thing that the Lord not only commands in His Word, but also graciously forgives and promises goodness. • Lord, cleanse us each day from our sins. We thank You that Jesus was made a fragrant, sacrificial offering for us. Amen. (TLSB)

What Defiles a Person

14 And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: 15 There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." 17 And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

7:14-23 Jesus does not simply refute and criticize the Pharisees. He also teaches the people the correct understanding of God's will and human nature. (TLSB)

7:14-15 After Jesus has rebuked the Pharisees through the Law, he "called the people to him again" to give a word of Gospel. He gives even more understanding to the disciples in the following verses. The Lord models preaching Law to those who need it (the Pharisees), Gospel to those who need it (those troubled by the binding traditions they were judged against), and then further Law and Gospel to his disciples (vv 17–23). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

In his ministry to this point, Jesus had already "defiled" himself in the eyes of the Pharisees by coming into contact with the dead, lepers, and demons (unclean spirits) and had given offense to the Pharisees about their Sabbath regulations and fasting. He even defended David and his companions eating the bread of the Presence (Mk 2:23–28). It seemed only a matter of time before more direct confrontation about uncleanness and food would erupt between Jesus and the Pharisees. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

7:14 *called the people* – This verse begins a paragraph, but not a different occasion. Jesus had likely been talking to the common people in verse 1, when interrupted by the delegation from Jerusalem. Likely at verse 14 the delegation left and Jesus again addressed the people who were misled by the authorities. (Buls)

NEB seems to translate wrongly: "On another occasion he called the people etc." (Buls)

"Called the crowd" is a tender word of invitation. The crowd, misled by the religious authorities, is treated with compassion. "He went on to say." (Buls)

Bengel: An admonition salutary to ALL, in opposition to the prejudice which is most hostile to true Divine worship. (Buls)

No one but God Himself could ever truly speak to men as Jesus did here. (Buls)

7:15 *things that come out* –Jesus' expression did not abrogate the Mosaic laws on purification or erase distinctions between clean and unclean and declare them invalid. It rather attacked the delusion that sinful men can attain to true purity which is powerless to cleanse the defilement of the heart. (Lane)

Verses 17 to 20 make it clear that Jesus is here speaking an axiomatic truth which He then applies in verses 21 to 23 in the spiritual realm. The article appears three times with the word "man." This is called the generic use of the article. It is applicable to all human beings. We translate it with "man." (Buls)

Ylvisaker: No act as such will defile a person; the deed is, in itself, something detached, it is ethically inactive or indifferent. But the attitude of the heart or of the person toward the deed is the determining factor. . . It is the nature of the true morality which Jesus here portrays. The Pharisees made morality practical, a symposium of outward acts. Jesus teaches that it is personal . . . It is the quality of the tree which determines the character of the fruit, and not the fruit that determines the nature of the tree. (Buls)

Lenski: Defilement is not physical, but moral and spiritual. (Buls: And then he adds an important paragraph) Did not God in the Levitical law forbid certain kinds of food to the Jews, and would not eating such foods defile a man? The answer that Jesus is here abrogating the Levitical law is unwarranted; he himself fulfilled every requirement of it as a Jew, and maintained that law for his disciples until Pentecost (Acts 11:1 etc). The true answer is that it was not the food as food entering the mouth that made a man unclean, but the man's disregard of the Levitical law given him as a Jew by God, the disobedience he would be voicing in asking for such food and in justifying his eating thereof. (Buls)

7:16 Although this verse is present in the majority of the Greek manuscripts, it does not occur in the most ancient ones. It appears to be a scribal addition derived from either 4:9 or 4:23. (CSB)

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." The verse is not included in ESV and NIV but does not contradict Jesus' point of basing trust in God's Word (the incarnate Word who speaks to them) rather than in the teachings or word of men. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

7:17 As was often the case, the disciples dared ask afterward, "What does this mean?" Jesus gives further explanation to them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

Jesus provided additional, private teaching for the disciples, away from the crowds (cf 4:10, 34). (TLSB)

7:17-20 – Jesus explains to the disciples in private. (CSB)

Their lack of understanding indicates that in spite of their privileged relationship to Jesus they are not fundamentally different from the crowd. The failure of the disciples to understand Jesus' might acts and teaching is particularly emphasized in this section of the Gospel (6:52; 7:18; 8:14-21) and is traced to hardness of heart. (Lane)

7:18-19 Jesus makes the practical analogy of food eaten, digested, and expelled versus that which is a part of a person and stays with him. There is irony in the implication and impact of Jesus' pronouncement being "incidental" and even parenthetical in the text ("Thus he declared all foods clean," v 19b). The practical impact of this was sweeping and vast, but this was not as significant as the point Jesus made for individual followers to comprehend. (Perhaps an analogy is the 1966 statement by U.S. Catholic bishops that meatless Fridays were no longer mandated but encouraged. It moved from the realm of Law to what we might call "fasting and bodily preparation," a "fine outward training," which could be motivated by the Gospel. The practical impact for millions of Roman Catholics in planning their Friday meals was significant, but the principle was more significant.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

7:19 (*In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean."*) Mark adds this parenthetical comment to help his readers see the significance of Jesus' pronouncement for them (see Ac 10:9–16). (CSB)

into his heart – The new element in Jesus' interpretation is the specific reference to "the heart." In Semitic expression the heart is the center of human personality which determines man's entire action and inaction. This key to the statement in verse 15 was already available in the citation of Is. 29:13: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Jesus now makes this explicit when he traces the source of defilement to the heart, and shows that in an ultimate sense "food" and "the heart" have nothing to do with each other. (Lane)

Cf. v. 15. Ritually impure food does not touch the heart and so cannot contaminate it. (TLSB)

declared all foods clean – Jesus' teaching will affect the future Christian mission. Simply put, Gentiles will not need to observe Jewish dietary laws. The question of food laws caused much controversy in the first-century Church. (Cf. Acts 15:1-35; Rom. 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 8:7-13). (TLSB)

7:20-23 Jesus elaborates with a list of example sins that come from within, to illustrate the vastness and seriousness of such sins. The note on 7:21–22 in *The Lutheran Study Bible* is helpful in defining two categories of sins: "The first six are in the plural form and describe behaviors; the last six are in the singular and have more to do with attitudes" (*The Lutheran Study Bible* [St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2009], 1670). In fact, one could try to align these with the Ten Commandments and clearly find at least Commandments 5–10, as well as the first and greatest commandment (e.g. pride, foolishness: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" [Ps 14:1]). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

7:20 *defiles him*. Jesus replaced the normal Jewish understandings of defilement with the truth that defilement comes from an impure heart, not the violation of external rules. Fellowship with God is not interrupted by unclean hands or food, but by sin (see vv. 21–23). (CSB)

Jesus clarified that what does indeed defile is not what enters from the outside, but rather what lurks in the hearts of fallen people. (TLSB)

7:21-23 The list in these verses is a comprehensive one and is also an accurate picture of society's actions in our own day. And since we have an old Adam, we too, need to take Jesus' words to heart. They prove we cannot save ourselves; He alone can do that. In gratitude to Him we want to avoid these unclean acts, words, thoughts and desires that are a part of our inborn nature, and with His help fight against them. (PBC)

Beginning with sexual immorality, 12 kinds of evil thoughts and actions are combined in a dreadful list of vices. The first six are in the plural form and describe behaviors; the last six are in the singular and have more to do with attitudes. These 12 vices leave no doubt as the wretched impurity of the human spirit. (TLSB)

7:21 *evil thoughts* – This is an explanation. Again the generic "man" is used, the ultimate meaning is "of all people." (Buls)

All sins begin with evil thoughts. The word here denotes the carefully thought through reasonings of the mind. The twelve nouns which follow are examples of these. This is the classic doctrinal location for the total depravity of human nature. (Buls)

Bengel: O how impure is the fountain of our heart! (Buls)

sexual immorality – Fornication is a broad term covering all acts of sexual immorality; it is wider than adultery, which presupposes the breach of the marriage bond, and "licentiousness," which carries the nuance of open immorality. (Lane)

7:22 "Adultery" includes sins against marriage in particular. "Greedy covetousness" is always wanted what belongs to another, compare 9th and 10th commandments. "Lewdness" is the inability to curb the flesh. "Slander" is that directed either against God or man. "Arrogance" is disregarding the first commandment. "Foolishness" includes everything that is the opposite of a sound clean mind. The foolishness of human nature is constantly observable and proceeds from the heart, depraved by nature. (Buls)

Bengel: This is the reason why foolishness is placed last of all, inasmuch as being that which renders even all the rest incurable. Human corruption has its seat not merely in the will but in the understanding also, look at verse 18. (Buls)

deceit – This implies the components of cunning and treachery. "An evil eye" is a Semitic expression for stinginess (Deut. 15:9; Eccl. 14:10; 31:13) or for that grudging jealousy with which a man looks upon the possession of another.

Lenski: Here Jesus reveals what a cesspool the human heart is. (Buls)

Hendriksen: The first six of the twelve items are in the plural, the second six retain the singular. The first six describe wicked actions; the second six the evil drives and words that are related to such and similar actions. (Buls)

7:23 *evil things* – The word for "evil" used in verse 21 usually denotes an evil condition. The word used for "evil" in this verse denotes something that is actively evil. All the items mentioned in verses 21-22 are called "active evils." It all begins in the heart. (Buls)

Verses 20-23 present a somber picture of mankind, Christians included. Christians still have a flesh. How often must not a Christian confess with Paul: "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing." (Buls)

There are those in our society who believe that the primary way to improve man is to cleanse his environment and the pollution which enters man. But Christianity teaches that God cleanses our hearts by faith (Acts 15:9) and the Christian must often pray: "Create in me a clean heart, Oh God." (Psalm 51:10) (Buls)

The final section is an obvious parallel to Galatians 5. The heart produces fruit that reveals a person's character. The point Jesus makes is completed in his discussion with Nicodemus in John 3, "You must be born again." Here our Lord simply diagnoses the human problem. If your heart is far from him (v 6), your deeds will be evil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."

Luke 6:43-45, "⁴³ 'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.'"

7:14–23 Jesus teaches that people are not defiled by food or other things entering the body from the outside, but rather by their own evil inclinations and sinful behaviors. This teaching exposes the uselessness of our own excuse-making and dismisses our claims that other people and things are to blame for our shortcomings and failures. However, Jesus does not merely condemn; He also sets free. Through His promises we are liberated from sin and reconciled to God. • Lord, renew us each day with clean hearts. By Your Spirit, give us joyous words, generous spirits, and behaviors that reflect Your glory. Amen. (TLSB)

The Faith of a Syrophenician Woman

24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. 25 But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." 30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

6:14-8:30 The new section introduced by Ch 6:14 and extending to Ch 8:30 focuses upon a period during which Jesus was frequently in retirement beyond the borders of Galilee. During the mission of the Twelve, Mark calls attention to the reaction of Herod Antipas, who has heard of the mighty works of Jesus. Herod's suspicion that Jesus is John returned from the dead (Ch 6:14-16) introduces the parenthetical account of the imprisonment and execution of the Baptist (Ch 6:17-29). At the return of the Twelve Jesus withdraws to a solitary place, pursued by multitude. In compassion He provides bread in the wilderness, and five thousand are fed (Ch 6:35-44). A second feeding of four thousand is reported in the region of the Decapolis (Ch 8:1-10), and the striking recurrence of the word "bread" throughout this section provides the pervading motif (Chs. 6:52; 7:2, 28; 8:14 ff). The importance of the two feeding miracles is emphasized when the disciples' own misunderstanding of Jesus are traced to their failure to understand the significance of the abundant provision of bread. While a single instance of the public teaching occurs in Ch 7:1-23, the accent falls on the instruction of the disciples, whose hardness of heart, unbelief and failure to understand is a prominent element in the record. A point of transition is provided by Ch 8:22-26 where the restoring of sight to a man who was blind signals the opening of the eyes of the disciples as well. A climax in Mark's narrative is achieved in Ch 8:27-29 when Jesus and His company approach Caesarea Philippi where Jesus' dignity as Messiah is acknowledged for the first time. (Lane)

7:24 Tyre. A Gentile city located in Phoenicia (modern Lebanon), which bordered Galilee to the northwest. A journey of about 30 miles from Capernaum would have brought Jesus to the vicinity of Tyre. (CSB)

did not want anyone to know. Ever since the feeding of the 5,000 (6:30-44) Jesus and his disciples had been, for the most part, skirting the region of Galilee. His purpose was to avoid the opposition in Galilee and to secure opportunity to teach his disciples privately (9:30-31). The regions to which he withdrew were: (1) the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (6:30-53), (2) Phoenicia (7:24-30), (3) the Decapolis (7:31-8:10) and (4) Caesarea Philippi (8:27-9:32). (CSB)

People simply gave the Lord no privacy. If it wasn't the 5000, it was the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, or such who needed healing. There was no time to instruct His disciples. This finally forced Jesus to take the unusual step of leaving Israelite territory and entering Gentile territory in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, today known as Lebanon. (PBC)

Since it was apparently impossible to find rest and leisure for connected teaching in the neighborhood of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus arose from there, from the city, Capernaum, where He had had the encounter with the Pharisees. There came a period of wandering far from the usual haunts, of going away with the intention of staying away for some time. Cp. 10, 1. He proceeded into the neighborhood, into the region of Tyre, into the country between Tyre and Sidon. Although the former country of Phoenicia, since the conquest by Pompey, belonged to Syria, there was little intercourse between this country and Palestine and little love lost between their inhabitants. Into this country Jesus went with His disciples, not for the purpose of carrying on the labors of His ministry, but to gain time for the necessary intercourse with His disciples, since their theological training was far from complete, as the recent incident showed. (Kretzmann)

he could not be hidden – Thirteen men are quite a group. (PBC)

He wanted to remain unknown in this distant region... But it was impossible for Him to carry out His program as planned, for His fame had preceded Him, probably by means of the people that

had gone down to see Him during His Galilean tour, chapter 3, 8. There was also a caravan road from Galilee, and the news concerning the Galilean Prophet might easily have traveled along with the merchants. (Kretzmann)

7:25 *had an unclean spirit* – What this entailed for a child is sufficiently suggested by a later account where the acute convulsions and uncontrollable falling into fire or water are symptoms of possession in a young boy (9:17ff.; 20:22-26). The mother's anguish over her daughter's condition is thoroughly understandable and does much to explain her bold persistence in begging Jesus to expel the demon from her child. (Lane)

fell down at his feet – Her prostration at Jesus' feet was a mark of deep respect as well as of profound grief. (Lane)

7:26 *Greek*.† Here probably equivalent to "Gentile." She spoke Greek. (CSB)

Mark stresses this woman's Gentile background, probably because of Jesus' previous debate with the Pharisees over what is defiling (vv. 1-23). (TLSB)

Syrian Phoenicia. At that time Phoenicia belonged administratively to Syria. Mark possibly used the term to distinguish this woman from the Libyan-Phoenicians of North Africa. (CSB)

Her actions and her words show she believed He was able to help. Undoubtedly she had heard what He had done in Israel. (PBC)

Though she was a Greek, a Syrophenician by race, she had become acquainted with the hopes and expectations of the Jews, and for her own person had come to the conclusion that this man was the Lord, the Messiah, that had been promised to the Jewish people. Now her young daughter had an unclean, an evil spirit, she was a demoniac, and her mother determined to appeal to Christ for help. To be sure of the identity of Jesus as the true Helper in every trouble, to trust in His willingness to help, and to ask assistance and the fulfillment of every need from Him alone, that is the essence of faithful trust. She came to Jesus, she fell down at His feet in the attitude of worshipful appeal; she pleaded with Him to have sympathy with her and her small daughter, to heal the child of her terrible affliction. (Kretzmann)

her daughter – This is another case of one person's faithful intercession benefiting another (cf. 2:3-5; 5:22-24; 6:56). (TLSB)

7:27 *not right to take children's bread and throw it to the dogs*. Jesus' response to this woman is surprising on at least two counts. First, He implies she is a dog, which was a great insult. Second, He suggests that He would serve Jewish people first (the children at the table). (TLSB)

This caused a predicament for our Lord. He had been sent to fulfill the promises given by God to Israel. To begin a preaching and healing tour through Gentile territory could have delayed, perhaps even undermined, God's plan of redemption. Still there was great need, and He was the only one who could help. This explains Jesus' words about the children's bread being tossed to their "dogs." (PBC)

Jesus alludes to a current domestic scene, particularly in a Hellenistic household. The table is set and the family has gathered. It is inappropriate to interrupt the meal and allow the household dogs to carry off the children's bread. On this level of understanding the metaphor is intelligible in the life-situation depicted in this text. It has specific reference to the necessity for rest, which

accounts for Jesus' presence in the district and to the woman's intrusion upon that rest. It seems probable that the woman, at least, understood Jesus' statement on this practical (non-theological) level. (Lane)

Jesus' apparent refusal to help in a situation of clear need conveys an impression of harshness and insensitivity. His reference to act immediately on the woman's behalf may be due to the fact that in the Hellenistic world in the first century there were many miracle-workers who attracted popular followings. In Galilee Jesus had been regarded as one of those "divine men" and the crowds had thronged Him for His benefactions (see ch 3:7-10; 6:53-56). The power of God, however, is properly released not in a context of superstition and magic but in response to faith. Jesus therefore put before the woman an enigmatic statement to test her faith. The irony of comparison is intended to invite a renewed appeal. (Lane)

DOGS – Greek *kunarium*, a diminutive form referring to family pets, not wild or street dogs. (TLSB)

7:28 *Yes, Lord.* The only time in this Gospel that Jesus is addressed as "Lord." (CSB)

The woman seizes upon her characterization as a family pet and expresses her willingness to assume even a most modest place within the household. (TLSB)

Jesus' words seemed harsh. The Israelites often called the Gentiles "dogs," meaning scavengers and animals. However the Greek word used here – and Christ seems to have been speaking in Greek to this woman – means "pet dogs" or "puppies." The woman understood Jesus' reply in that sense. She also caught the implied promise in the words: "First ... the children" which suggested then the pets. Jesus had come to bring the gospel first to the children of Israel with whom the covenant had been made. Only then would it be brought to all others (see Acts 13:46). The woman acknowledged that as proper and right, but then also pressed her claim for the mercy she sensed in the words of Jesus. Our Lord rejoiced in the woman's answer of faith and assured her that her daughter had been healed. He had not compromised His assignment. (PBC)

This account certainly comforted Mark's Gentile readers. They then knew that from the beginning Jesus had included them also and not only when He first said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and also to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This was also a lesson the disciples had to begin to learn. Though Christ was sent to Israel first, He was not sent for only Israel. It was just a priority of time and, sad to say, it was not a lesson perceived by Israel, the majority of whom rejected the Savior (see Acts 13:46-52). The Gentiles were not excluded, but included – even as this woman and her daughter before their time. Nor were these the only Gentiles with whom the Lord dealt so graciously (see Mark 5:1ff; 7:31ff). (PBC)

The woman clearly understood this and did not hesitate before the apparent obstacle before her. She felt no insult in the comparison between children of the household and the pet dogs. Instead she neatly turned it to her advantage: the crumbs dropped by the children after all, are intended for the dogs! Jesus' comparison is not rejected but carried one step further, which modifies the entire scene: if the dogs eat the crumbs under the table, they are fed at the same time as the children (and do not have to wait, as implied by the affirmation in verse 27a). Indeed, let the children be fed, but allow the dogs to enjoy the crumbs. There does not have to be an interruption of the meal, for what she requests is not the whole loaf but a single crumb. The acceptance of the comparison, the clever reply, and the profound respect for Jesus in her address show that her confidence in His power and good will has not been shaken. (Lane)

7:29-30 This outsider's great faith contrasts sharply with that of the Pharisees and even the disciples, who fail to understand much of what Jesus is teaching. Such unswerving faith results in the daughter's full recovery. (TLSB)

7:29 *you may go... demon has left* – The irresistible confidence of the woman in Jesus delighted Him. Her interpretation of His statement bore eloquent witness both to her humility and her simple trust in His power to confront the demonic when all human help fails. This is the faith which is alone capable of receiving a miracle. She placed herself unconditionally under Jesus' lordship and received His acknowledgement and promise. (Lane)

7:30 *child lying in the bed* – Presumably she was exhausted, but her state of calmness indicated that the paroxysms of possession were past and her person healed. In later tradition this account was retold and embellished. The mother was given the name of Justa and her daughter received the name Berenice. Mark, however, reduces the story to its bare minimum and presents this episode as an example of true faith toward the person of Jesus. While the scribes and Pharisees forget the reality of life in their attachment to casuistry and the disciples remain dull and hard-hearted (7:1-23), a Hellenistic woman shows a profound confidence in Jesus and is not disappointed in her expectations. (Lane)

In the regions of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus reveals that he has come to save the Gentiles along with the Jews. Unfortunately, the all-encompassing nature of his Gospel is viewed today as a threat by many Christian communities; outreach to other cultures might be ignored. But Jesus calls us to repent of such notions, and he reaches out to all people. No one lies beyond the scope of his love and grace – Lord, help us to share the Gospel with all people, especially those who are different from us, that all may be edified in the faith. Amen (TLSB)

Jesus heals a Deaf Man

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

6:14-8:30 The new section introduced by Ch 6:14 and extending to Ch 8:30 focuses upon a period during which Jesus was frequently in retirement beyond the borders of Galilee. During the mission of the Twelve, Mark calls attention to the reaction of Herod Antipas, who has heard of the mighty works of Jesus. Herod's suspicion that Jesus is John returned from the dead (Ch 6:14-16) introduces the parenthetical account of the imprisonment and execution of the Baptist (Ch 6:17-29). At the return of the Twelve Jesus withdraws to a solitary place, pursued by multitude. In compassion He provides bread in the wilderness, and five thousand are fed (Ch 6:35-44). A second feeding of four thousand is reported in the region of the Decapolis (Ch 8:1-10), and the striking recurrence of the word “bread” throughout this section provides the pervading motif (Chs. 6:52; 7:2, 28; 8:14 ff). The importance of the two feeding miracles is emphasized when the disciples' own misunderstanding of Jesus are traced to their failure to understand the significance of the abundant provision of bread. While a single instance of the public teaching occurs in Ch

7:1-23, the accent falls on the instruction of the disciples, whose hardness of heart, unbelief and failure to understand is a prominent element in the record. A point of transition is provided by Ch 8:22-26 where the restoring of sight to a man who was blind signals the opening of the eyes of the disciples as well. A climax in Mark's narrative is achieved in Ch 8:27-29 when Jesus and His company approach Caesarea Philippi where Jesus' dignity as Messiah is acknowledged for the first time. (Lane)

7:31-37 In the verses of Mark 7 that precede this reading, Jesus has been disputing with the Pharisees and scribes over what it is that defiles the sinner. The Pharisees and scribes have asked why Jesus ignores "the tradition of the elders" (7:3, 5) and eats with hands that are unwashed and thus spiritually defiled. Our Lord Jesus unmasks their hypocrisy and then makes the point that "evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (7:23). Our text follows immediately, with Jesus entering "the region of Tyre and Sidon" (7:24), a region inhabited by Gentiles. This is significant, since Gentiles would be people that the Pharisees and scribes considered defiled. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

This section of Mark is filled with Jesus traveling from place to place, teaching and healing. Both his words and his deeds point to his identity and his authority. Of course, the high point of this section is Peter's confession in Mk 8:27-30. But we aren't there yet. Jesus made quite a claim in 7:8 ("You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men") and is backing his words up by loving, serving, teaching, and healing regardless of man-made designations of clean and unclean. Why? Because he is God incarnate. He is love incarnate. By doing all of these things, Jesus shows that he is the Son of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 3)

Though Matthew 15:29-31 speaks about the same occasion as Mark 7:31-37, Mark alone records the plight and healing of this deaf-mute man. Evidently it happened just before the feeding of the 4,000. Look at Matthew 15:32-38 and Mark 8:1-9. (Buls)

7:31 *region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee.* Apparently Jesus went north from Tyre to Sidon (about 25 miles) and then southeast through the territory of Herod Philip to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. The route was circuitous possibly to avoid entering Galilee, where Herod Antipas was in power (see 6:17-29) and where many people wanted to take Jesus by force and make him king (Jn 6:14-15). Herod had intimated a hostile interest in Jesus (6:14-16). (CSB)

The verses just before our text tell the miracle that occurred in Tyre, a coastal city outside Israel where the people could lay no claim to God's promises. Nevertheless, Jesus healed the girl born in Syrian Phoenicia, the daughter of a Greek woman. In that case Jesus did not touch, see, or hear the person who was healed by his power. The previous chapter includes several other healing miracles, the record that Jesus walked on water, and the feeding of the five thousand. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

Lenski points out that Jesus is traveling on the outskirts to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee, where he had healed the demoniac and had contact with the Syro-phoenician woman. (See also Mt 15:21-39.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 3)

Decapolis. Literally "10 cities"; this region lay southeast of the Sea of Galilee. (TLSB)

Ylvisaker: According to the better manuscripts, Jesus has journeyed farther north along the coast through Serepta to Sidon, after restoring the daughter of the Canaanite woman. Why this journey was undertaken Mark does not say. Possibly Jesus has desired to remain apart with his disciples for a protracted period, and has avoided the regions where He was known for this reason. (Buls)

Decapolis, ten towns, was a territory east and south of the Sea of Galilee. Before the conquest of Canaan it was inhabited by the Amorites. After the conquest it was known as Gilead and was inhabited primarily by pagan Gentiles. It was in this territory where Jesus permitted the unclean spirits to enter the swine and perhaps those who brought this deaf and dumb man were believers but that is not certain. (Buls)

Hendriksen: In dealing with people the Lord chooses his own methods. Naaman had to learn this lesson (2 Kings 5:10-14). And so did Jacob, much earlier (Genesis 42:36; 45:25-28). So did also Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 50:15-21). And so, later did Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). We should never try to tell God what methods he should use in answering our petitions. . . His own way is always best. (Buls)

Our text, like so many stories in the Bible, starts with an itinerary. Jesus went from one place to another. It's easy to skip by the geographical and chronological details. But they are important. This is not a "once upon a time" story. It happened in a certain place and at a certain time. God in Jesus Christ was there, a part of the events. "Decapolis" sounds too important. It would be better translated as "the ten towns." Jesus visited the area of ten small villages, so unimportant that the individual names were not recorded. Instead they were lumped together. Jesus practiced what he preached by going to the byways. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

The people in that area had heard about Jesus. Perhaps some of them had been among the 5,000 who ate the meal of bread and fish that Jesus had hosted. Maybe one of them had a neighbor whose brother-in-law had seen Jesus perform a miracle. The word had gotten around. The unnamed man who could not hear and could hardly talk did not come to Jesus. The people brought him. They had not been able to tell a deaf man about the miracle worker, so they had to bring the man to Jesus. Notice that the people who brought the handicapped man asked Jesus to put his hand on him. Jesus touched the bodily members to be cured, and even placed his own spittle on the man's tongue. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

As Jesus makes his way back to Galilee, he makes one last stop in the region of the Decapolis. Significantly, those whom the Jews would consider defiled are given the opportunity to witness a miracle of Jesus and be amazed by what he does. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

Decapolis was a region of Hellenistic, that is, Greek culture, and therefore predominately Gentile. Our Lord performed many miracles in Decapolis and also preached the word there. He again showed that Gentiles were not excluded from the kingdom of God. (PBC)

We do not know how long this journey from Tyre to Decapolis took. During this time when Jesus shuns the public eye, He devotes His time to instructing His disciples privately – a very important task, since they were to take the gospel out into all the world. (PBC)

Jesus had been in Decapolis once before (see 5:20). That time the people had asked Him to leave when they suffered the loss of a herd of pigs. But the demon-possessed man whom Jesus healed had gone throughout the area proclaiming Jesus' power and mercy. This witness, by just one

man, brought a remarkable change. When Jesus returned, crowds gathered (see Matthew 15:30 and Mark 7:33) and brought their sick to Jesus. Mark related just one of the healings Jesus performed, undoubtedly the most striking one. (PBC)

7:32 *deaf and had a speech impediment* – Because those unable to hear have difficulty learning to speak correctly, it is probable that this man had been handicapped from birth. (TLSB)

He apparently suffered from a spasmodic condition of the tongue which can extend to the facial muscles as well. If the man had been born deaf and mute he would not have learned to speak and would possess no concept of language. This was not the situation. He had become deaf later in life apparently as a result of disease or injury and could speak only with great effort. Mark's use of an extremely rare word to describe the man's speech defect is almost certainly an allusion to Is. 35:5 FF, which celebrates God as the one who comes in order to unstop the ears of the deaf and provide song for the man of inarticulate speech. The fulfillment of the prophecy was expected in the Days of the Messiah in the exegetical tradition of the rabbis. By means of the biblical allusion Mark provides his readers with a sign that the promised intervention of God took place in the ministry of Jesus. (Lane)

Only Mark reports this specific encounter. The man's verbal abilities were extremely limited (*mogilavlo* is a hapax legomenon; see also the messianic prophecy in Is 35:6), able to produce only unintelligible sound. It is interesting to note that friends ask Jesus to lay his hands on the man, thinking that this was the way Jesus worked. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 3)

"A man who was deaf and had a speech impediment" is brought to Jesus. *kōphos*, translated "deaf," can also be translated as "dull" or "blunt." *mogilalos*, translated as "a speech impediment," is sometimes translated as "mute." Most likely this man spoke with great difficulty and was hard to understand. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

lay his hand on him – This request indicates the presence of Jews or of Gentiles who were familiar with this Jewish practice in connection with blessing and healing. The great surprise exhibited by the people when the afflicted man spoke clearly suggests that they had not expected healing, but had brought the man to Jesus for His blessing. (Lane)

7:33-34 It is important to note that the healing of the deaf man takes place in connection with the spoken word of Jesus, not in connection with the physical touch of Jesus. Jesus apparently touches the man's ears and tongue in order to indicate to the man what he intends to do for him. Jesus then speaks the Aramaic command "Ephphatha," which means "Be completely opened" (author's translation). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

Six actions of Jesus, before He spoke the words of healing, are noted. Three aorist participles are each followed by an aorist verb in verses 33-34, giving us a total of six. (Buls)

- First Jesus took the man apart from the multitude by himself;
- Then He placed His fingers into the afflicted man's ears;
- Thirdly, Jesus spit.
- Fourthly, Jesus touched the man's tongue.

We are not told where Jesus spit. A few think He spit on the man's tongue. Most think Jesus spit on His own finger and then transferred it to the man's tongue. Lenski objects strongly to both. He calls it "sign language." But compare 8:23: "He spit on his eyes." Lenski missed this one. (Buls)

We note Jesus' compassion for this unfortunate man. He takes him apart from the crowd so that the man would rivet his whole attention on Jesus. (Buls)

7:33 *taking him aside* – Jesus took the man aside from the crowd to establish contact with him. He regarded the personal relationship between Himself and the sick to be of supreme importance, and in this instance all of His actions are intelligible in the light of the necessity of communicating with a person who had learned to be passive in life. (Lane)

Rather, Jesus takes the man into a private place to emphasize that his full attention will be on this man. He places his fingers into the useless ears. Then he spit (the minor action, participle) and touched the man's maligned tongue (the major action, finite verb). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 3)

touched. Here, touch made communication easier. Jesus tended to use touch in His healings (cf 1:31, 41; 5:28–29, 41; 6:56; 8:25). (TLSB)

7:34 ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, “upon looking up into the sky”: This is an indication that Jesus is no “magic man”; rather, he is the Son of his heavenly Father, one who does the Father's will. This act is the first negation of a magical, folk-remedy understanding of what is about to happen. (CC)

he sighed – A physical sign of emotion. (TLSB)

Why did Jesus sigh? We agree with Luther that the sigh indicated Jesus' compassion for the people on whom Satan had worked so much havoc. Though a different and strong verb is used in the case of Lazarus, John 11:33 and 38, the situation is somewhat analogous. Jesus groaned in spirit because of Satan's strongest tool, death. (Buls)

Ephphatha! An Aramaic word that Mark translates for his Gentile readers. (CSB)

Aram word was used later in the Church's baptismal liturgies in order to emphasize the Spirit's power to open ears to the Gospel. (TLSB)

- Fifthly, Jesus looked up to heaven.
- Sixth, He sighed.

There is nothing in the text which indicates that Jesus, like Elijah and Elisha, prayed for strength so that He could perform the miracle. He did look to His heavenly Father but He was also true God. (Buls)

Now follows the climax of the account, the opening of ears and loosing of the tongue. "EPHPHATHA" is an Aramaic imperative. At Jesus' word two things happened immediately. Very likely the deaf man heard Jesus say this word. Mark gives the Greek for his Gentile audience. "Be completely opened." When a verb is used in more than one sense, the figure is called *zeugma*. We have a *zeugma* here. The two things which happened because of Jesus' word are recounted in the next verse. (Buls)

Looking up into heaven and sighing, Jesus speaks. With one little word, Jesus restores the man. The man hears and speaks. The man had nothing to do with the miracle. This was all Jesus' doing. The Greek word for "open," *dianoivgw*, occurs also in Lk 24:45: "He opened their minds," that is, Jesus taught his disciples the truth of Scripture concerning himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 3)

7:35 *his ears were opened his tongue was released and he spoke plainly.* Jesus was doing what God had promised to do when he came to redeem his people (see Isa 35:5–6). (CSB)

Once the man's ears were healed, he was also able to speak clearly. He immediately put this gift to work in praise. (TLSB)

When a word is enclosed in the kind of brackets found here in the Greek text, the editors are indicating to the reader that it is difficult to determine whether the word should be read or not. At any rate, we are told that first his ears were opened, and then that which bound his tongue was loosed. The first indicates the completed end of a deed, the second that he began and continued to speak. "He spoke naturally." The word used for his condition in verses 32 and 37 does not necessarily mean that he was totally dumb. NIV: "Could hardly speak." NASB: "Spoke with difficulty." AAT: "Tongue-tied." Very often a tongue-tied person is practically dumb because it is so difficult to understand what he wants to say. (Buls)

The result is instantaneous. The man can hear and is able to speak plainly. Literally, the text says that "the band on his tongue was loosened or released" (author's translation). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

7:36-37 In these verses, we see that it is not only the deaf man whose tongue is loosened. In spite of repeated requests from Jesus "to tell no one," Mark records that "the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it." In v 37, we are told the reason for all the talk. The crowds are "abundantly amazed" (author's translation) by the miracle they have witnessed. They exclaim, "He has done all things well." *kalōs*, translated as "well," can also be translated as "good" and reminds the reader of the words of the creation story: "And behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31). In the life and ministry of Jesus, something truly amazing is happening. The Lord has begun his new creation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

7:36 *tell no one* – Is Jesus speaking to one or two groups? Are the antecedents the same group of people? We think they are. Because of the parallel passage in Matthew 15:29-31, Bengel distinguishes antecedents for the two "them/they." He says that the first denotes the bearers and the second the spectators. But then, he thinks, the bearers joined the spectators in noising the report abroad. This is ingenious, but can't be proved. (Buls)

In each case we have an imperfect verb, both denote continued action. Their zeal to broadcast this miracle cannot be called good. They disobeyed Jesus. they were disobedient. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: These people had not yet reached the point at which they could correctly give witness about Christ or make His name known . . . Their enthusiasm was simply superficial and soon passed away. (Buls)

It amounted to momentary enthusiasm. (Buls)

Lenski: Matthew 15:30-31 reports that Jesus healed many more on this occasion: dumb, cripples, lame, and blind. A multitude was present, as Mark also reports in connection with the healing of the deaf-mute. The command not to report the latter miracle must thus be extended to include also the many others. Since Mark himself records no reason for this command of Jesus, we are left to figure this out ourselves . . . He has only a few months left, and He does not want the excitement to spread far and wide about his being the Messiah. The people generally connected earthly political ideas with that title, the very ideas which Jesus combated. So he did what he could to keep his miracles quiet at this time. But, as in this instance, he did not succeed. (Buls)

Hendriksen: Many Christ-admirers are lost. The true mark of discipleship is revealed in John 15:14. Compare John 8:31-32. These people were doing just the opposite. (Buls)

The first thing the man heard was a command from Jesus not to tell anyone how he had been healed. Not only could he talk, but he now had something to talk about. The people who had brought him to Jesus now had seen a real miracle in their own neighborhood. They didn't have to depend on the people from more important places to tell them. But Jesus also tells them to keep it under wraps. However, they ignored his direct command. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

Why did Jesus tell the people not to report the miracle? Some want to think that Jesus used reverse psychology here. Tell them to keep it a secret, then they'll want to tell everyone. I cannot see Jesus using such a method. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

The fact is, Jesus did not want to be known only as one who could heal deaf mutes. He had a lot more to give than physical healing. The other people could already hear and speak. He had something for them too. Later the healed man could use his gift of hearing to learn that Jesus had died as the sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world. He could hear that Jesus, who died, lives again. Later he could use his newly functional vocal cords to tell of Jesus' greatest miracle: his destruction of sin and death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

Jesus instructs the crowds not to tell anyone about the healing. This was an earnest command, not some reverse psychology. Jesus knew that at this point in his ministry healings he did in love would not yet be grasped in their proper context. They were only penultimate; they were only glimpses of his ultimate act of love, going to the cross. Jesus knew that focusing on these would cause many to be disappointed in and reject his final purpose (cf. Jn 6:15, 66). Thus, while we can understand the crowd's refusing to obey his command to keep quiet, we must also recognize that refusal as sin. Now, of course, we see Jesus' miracles in the full context of the cross, and they become for us a powerful motivation to witness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 3)

Jesus commanded the people not to tell anyone because the Jewish people of His day had a totally false, political conception of the coming Messiah. Christ made it clear that He had not come into this predominately Gentile territory to organize a political insurrection. He had come on earth to lay down His life as a payment for the sins of the world. He was determined to let nothing compromise the purpose for which He had come. (PBC)

Today the command not to tell anyone no longer applies. In fact, this one of the great miracles of our Lord which we are to proclaim so that others too may come face to face with the divine power and love of the Savior and turn to Him for all blessings, both temporal and spiritual. (PBC)

7:37 *he has all things well* – This summarizes all of Jesus' works. The Pharisees will demand more signs (8:11-12). The crowds were awed and remained positive toward Jesus but, like the disciples, did not truly understand who Jesus is. (TLSB)

The combination of adverb and verb is very strong. They were deeply moved. Very likely this indicates continued action, and manner. They showed their utter amazement by what they said. The verb they use indicates lasting results. "He is making." This coincides remarkable with the parallel passage in Matthew 15:29-31 where we are told that Jesus healed many sick people on this occasion. Mark gives but one example, but what the people say in 37 indicates that He healed others. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: By nature, we are all spiritually deaf and dumb. If we are to secure help from Jesus, He must take us apart from the people, He must speak His 'Ephatha' into our hearts. (Buls)

Lenski: Matthew reports that they glorified the God of Israel, thus indicating that most of these people were Gentiles. . . These people rightly conclude that at any time Jesus can make the deaf to hear and the speechless to speak. (Buls)

Luther: For that this poor man is hurt in this manner that he can use neither tongue nor ears, like other people, those are blows and thrusts of the accursed devil. Before the world it may seem, and everyone be of the opinion, that they be natural ailments; for the world does not know the devil that he does so much harm, makes the people mad and foolish, inflicts all manner of misfortune upon them, not only in the body, but also in the soul, that they die for terror and sorrow and cannot attain to true joy. But we Christians should deem such defects and infirmities nothing else but blows of the devil; he causes such distress on earth and does damage where he can. (Buls)

Luther: He refers especially to these two members, ears and tongue; for the kingdom of Christ is based upon the Word, which cannot otherwise be grasped or understood but through these two members, ears and tongue, and it reigns only through the Word and faith in the hearts of men. The ears take hold of the Word, and the heart believes it; but the tongue speaks and confesses, as the heart believes. Therefore if the tongue and the ears are removed, there is no noticeable difference between the kingdom of Christ and the world . . . With us, thanks to God, the tongue has gotten so far that we speak plainly, for there are everywhere pious people that hear the Word of God with desire. But aside from this there is also great ingratitude and terrible contempt for the Word of God, yea, secret persecution and secret suffering. (Buls)

Note what the people said about Jesus: "He has done everything well." They had seen Jesus perform a miracle, but they thought it was the height of his ability. Jesus had done other good things not included in vv 33–34. He had come to the place of the ten towns. He was there with the suffering and needy people. He does that well—even today. He cared about people and he heard their requests. He does that well—even today. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

7:31–37 Jesus heals another person in a Gentile region, further emphasizing His love for every race and kind of people. This serves as yet one more example of why we need to avoid the temptation to narrow the scope of the mission and to ignore opportunities to reach out to those who are different than ourselves. Jesus' healing of this man, immediately after He restored the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, underscores that He desires to love, cleanse, and heal all people. • Lord, You have done everything well. Help us also to see the depths of Your mercy and grace, that we understand them as gifts meant for all. Amen. (TLSB)