

Gospel Gems from Mark



Chapter 7: Jesus challenges Jew and Gentile expectations

Two of the 3 stories in this chapter show us Jesus challenging the expectations of those who spoke to him. Whether they were Jews relying on rabbinic traditions or a foreign woman begging for help, Jesus' words tested their faith--in order to lead them to deeper trust and understanding.



Gospel Gem #1: What makes you clean or unclean? (7:1-23)

What practice of the disciples upset the Pharisees, and why? *(Side note: The word for washing used twice in verse 4 is the Greek word "baptize"--this is an indication this word does not necessarily refer to immersion.)*

What were several problems that Jesus pointed out, not just with this custom but a number of others?

Based on Jesus' words verse 8, what is a constant challenge and goal for all Christians and churches?

What attitude shift did Jesus want his disciples to have when it came to what made a person unclean? *(Notice that Jesus' words anticipate the freedom from Old Testament ceremonial law that God would fully reveal in the days after Pentecost--cf. Colossians 2:16-17)*

What does Jesus' spiritual X-ray of the human heart reveal? What things do you notice about Jesus' list?

What is the only solution to this problem? (see Psalm 51:10, John 3:3, 1 Peter 1:3, etc.)



Gospel Gem #2: A severe test of faith (7:24-30)

This may have been one of the furthest places away from what we normally think of as "Israel" that Jesus traveled in his ministry. This was predominantly "Gentile" territory! However it was only about 30 or 40 miles from the Sea of Galilee.

Even though he was far from home, why was Jesus feeling the need for secrecy? (see Mark 3:8) Notice that this follows a pattern we see in this part of the Gospel.

What is shocking about Jesus' answer? Was it a definitive refusal to help?

What did the woman's reply show that she realized about Jesus' power and God's grace?

While granting her request, how did Jesus' answer also serve as one more test of faith?

How can we use this story...

...when we are tempted to take God's grace and mercy for granted?

...when we don't seem to be receiving the blessings for which we have prayed?



Gospel Gem #3:

Sidon was even further north than Tyre. This roundabout journey would have perhaps given Jesus the time for more privacy with his disciples. The Decapolis is southeast of the sea of Galilee.

Jesus deals with the man in an unusual way. Can we ponder what was his purpose...

...in taking the man "aside, away from the crowd"?

...in using his fingers and spit as he prepared to cure him?

While the people didn't follow Jesus' command not to tell anyone, what beautiful summary of his work do their words provide?

Without offering miraculous healing, what can we do to imitate Jesus' concern in these chapters for those with significant disabilities?

Bonus questions (if time)

"In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.' Today the typical Christian is more concerned with health concerns than ceremonial uncleanness. Yet, what are still some extremes to avoid?"

Gospel Gems from Mark



Chapter 7:

Jesus challenges Jew and Gentile expectations - **answer page**

Two of the 3 stories in this chapter show us Jesus challenging the expectations of those who spoke to him. Whether they were Jews relying on rabbinic traditions or a foreign woman begging for help, Jesus' words tested their faith--in order to lead them to deeper trust and understanding.



Gospel Gem #1: What makes you clean or unclean? (7:1-23)

What practice of the disciples upset the Pharisees, and why? *(Side note: The word for washing used twice in verse 4 is the Greek word "baptize"--this is an indication this word does not necessarily refer to immersion.)* ***They were not following the traditional ceremonial washings prior to eating. As the Pharisees acknowledged, these were not Biblical commands but "traditions of the elders."***

What were several problems that Jesus pointed out, not just with this custom but a number of others? ***The Pharisees thought they were serving God with these traditions but had no real love for God in their hearts, which made them hypocrites. They were proud instead of humble. And in some cases, like the "Corban" custom, their man-made rules ended up causing people to disobey the actual commandments of God.***

Based on Jesus' words verse 8, what is a constant challenge and goal for all Christians and churches? ***We need to make sure that we distinguish between God's laws and our own traditions. We must be careful not to add our own opinions to God's Word. There's nothing wrong with traditions when they are used properly, but we should be careful not to mistake them for Scripture.***

What attitude shift did Jesus want his disciples to have when it came to what made a person unclean? *(Notice that Jesus' words anticipate the freedom from Old Testament ceremonial law that God would fully reveal in the days after Pentecost--cf. Colossians 2:16-17)* ***Instead of focusing on outward matters like eating, they should focus on correcting the sinful attitudes of the heart and the actions that flowed from them.***

What does Jesus' spiritual X-ray of the human heart reveal? What things do you notice about Jesus' list? ***The human heart is wretchedly sinful (cf. Genesis 8:22). No wonder we need a Savior! Our natural desires are totally opposed to God's standards for holiness.***

It's interesting that Jesus starts his list with "evil thoughts" from which all other sins flow. The list includes not only notorious sins like adultery and murder but also attitudes like arrogance which are just as spiritually harmful.

What is the only solution to this problem? (see Psalm 51:10, John 3:3, 1 Peter 1:3, etc.)

We can't clean the sin out of our own heart; we need to be created anew by God's own power, "born again" through the work of the Spirit. Thanks be to God that he not only sent his Son to pay for sin, but gives us his Holy Spirit in the Word and Sacraments to sanctify us and give us new life!



Gospel Gem #2: A severe test of faith (7:24-30)

This may have been one of the furthest places away from what we normally think of as "Israel" that Jesus traveled in his ministry. This was predominantly "Gentile" territory! However it was only about 30 or 40 miles from the Sea of Galilee.

Even though he was far from home, why was Jesus feeling the need for secrecy? (see Mark 3:8) Notice that this follows a pattern we see in this part of the Gospel. *Many people from this area had come to see Jesus and request miracles, so he was well known even in this region.*

What is shocking about Jesus' answer? Was it a definitive refusal to help? *He seems to be calling the woman a dog! But his remark was not about her individually, he was speaking about God's preferential treatment for Jews in his Old Testament-time plan of salvation. Yet, he stopped short of absolutely refusing her--a test of her faith.*

What did the woman's reply show that she realized about Jesus' power and God's grace?

Both are so overflowing and abundant that they cannot be limited to one group of people alone.

While granting her request, how did Jesus' answer also serve as one more test of faith?

He didn't go with her; his answer called on her to believe that what he had said was true and she could return home.

How can we use this story...

...when we are tempted to take God's grace and mercy for granted?

We may be so used to hearing "God so loved the world" that we fail to realize what a miracle it is! How wonderful that we have a God whose grace we can share with anyone and everyone. How thankful can we be that salvation was not restricted to a certain class, race or ethnicity.

...when we don't seem to be receiving the blessings for which we have prayed?

Don't give up but continue to seek God's help! Trust that his love is sure!



Gospel Gem #3:

Sidon was even further north than Tyre. This roundabout journey would have perhaps given Jesus the time for more privacy with his disciples. The Decapolis is southeast of the sea of Galilee.

Jesus deals with the man in an unusual way. Can we ponder what was his purpose...

...in taking the man "aside, away from the crowd"?

He gives the man personal attention--showing the man that he was truly important to Jesus as an individual, not just a "prop" for a miracle display.

...in using his fingers and spit as he prepared to cure him?

This would unmistakably show the man that it was Jesus who had healed him, and also communicated to him during his time of deafness so that he was not confused or alarmed.

While the people didn't follow Jesus' command not to tell anyone, what beautiful summary of his work do their words provide?

"He has done everything well"--a summary of his entire earthly life of total obedience to God and perfect love for all those around him.

Without offering miraculous healing, what can we do to imitate Jesus' concern in these chapters for those with significant disabilities?

We dare not overlook them just because they are more challenging to reach or communicate with! Their souls are just as precious to Christ as our own.

Bonus questions (if time)

"In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.' Today the typical Christian is more concerned with health concerns than ceremonial uncleanness. Yet, what are still some extremes to avoid?

It's good that we work to maintain our health in our eating. We "honor God with our bodies" (1 Cor. 6:20) by doing what we can not to harm our physical bodies that are also gifts of God. Yet, sometimes what is deemed healthy eating can change, and opinions and research on this can greatly vary. We should be careful not to judge others about their eating habits, especially if they are Christians giving thanks for their food they have received. Jesus' words remind us that our eating and our health decisions generally should not create divisions within the church (cf. Romans 14:17).