

Lesson Six

(Mark 6:45 - 7:37)

Jesus Walks on the Water

(Mark 6:45-56)

45 At once Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida, on the other side of the lake, while he sent the crowd away. After saying good-bye to the disciples, he went away to a hill to pray. 47 When evening came the boat was in the middle of the lake, while Jesus was alone on land. 48 He saw that his disciples were having trouble rowing the boat, because the wind was blowing against them; so sometime between three and six o'clock in the morning he came to them, walking on the water. He was going to pass them by. 49 But they saw him walking on the water. "It's a ghost!" they thought, and screamed. 50 For when they all saw him they were terrified.

Jesus spoke to them at once, "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!" 51 Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind died down. The disciples were completely amazed, 52 because they had not understood what the loaves of bread meant; their minds could not grasp it.

53 They crossed the lake and came to land at Gennesaret, where they tied up the boat. 54 As they left the boat, people recognized Jesus at once. 55 So they ran throughout the whole region and brought the sick lying on their mats to him, wherever they heard he was. 56 And everywhere Jesus went, to villages, town, or farms, people would take their sick to the market places and beg him to let the sick at least touch the edge of his cloak; and all who touched it were made well.

Jesus *at once* made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead to Bethsaida (they must have expected to pick up Jesus there and go on to Capernaum, compare John 6:17). This leads us to think there is some connection with the fact that the crowd intended to make him the leader and focal point for an armed rebellion against the Romans. John tells us: "Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself" (John 6:15). With the faulty understanding, which the disciples had, they might have been in danger of being caught up by the intense emotion of the crowd. Even after the crucifixion and resurrection, they still thought in political terms (see Acts 1:6). And possibly Jesus himself was tempted by the thought (since the Devil had used this to tempt him, see Matt. 4:8-9). Mark seldom mentions Jesus praying, but now he shows Jesus going away to a hill to pray. This suggests a crisis. (Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin, Heb. 4:15.)

Meanwhile the disciples are making very slow progress as they try to row against the wind. They are still in the middle of the lake (they probably had intended to go around the lake rather than across) and it is between three and six o'clock (fourth watch). This means they have been rowing against the fury of the storm for some eight or ten hours. This helps us understand their terror when Jesus comes to them walking on the water. They think Jesus to be a "ghost," and they *scream with fear!* The Master speaks

at once to calm them: “Courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid!” “*Courage; do not be afraid*” is God’s word to his people when they are in a crisis. Compare Isaiah 41:10; 13; 14; 43:1; 44:2. “It is I,” (literally *I am*) may only be him identifying himself to them, but it might also have a hint of the “I AM” of God (compare John 8:24; 28; 58; Exod. 3:14). Mark is showing us the *authority* of Christ Jesus, and there is certainly the strong evidence of divine power in all that took place.

(Matthew gives some additional detail. He shows us Peter getting out of the boat and also walking on the water -- in response to the Lord’s authorization. Yet this is also evidence of the power of faith. As Peter’s faith begins to evaporate, he begins to sink in the water. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him. They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. If Peter is to be identified with Mark’s Gospel, this would be a truly embarrassing event to him.)

Verse 52 presents a puzzle. Matthew shows the disciples worshipping Jesus, but Mark introduces what could be taken as *doubt*. Mark seems to be saying that they were “taken by surprise” in this revealing of Jesus’ power, because they did not understand the true meaning of the feeding of the five thousand men. Alford says: “They did not, from the miracle which they had seen, infer the power of the Lord over nature... there was no intelligent comprehension *founded* on the miracle of the loaves.” The phrase in some versions, “*for their heart was hardened,*” is better translated, “*their minds could not grasp it*” (compare Mark 8:14-21).

John tells us that after Jesus got into the boat, “*immediately the boat reached land at the place they were heading for.*” Since they were originally sent to Bethsaida at the top of the lake, the storm must have caused a change in plans. “*Immediately*” certainly indicates a miracle, rather than normal travel. We see Jesus “mobbed” by the crowds who seek healing for their diseases.

Religious Tradition

(Mark 7:1-13)

7 The Pharisees and some teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. 2 They noticed that some of his disciples were eating their food with unclean hands -- that is, they had not washed them in the way the Pharisees said people should.

3 For the Pharisees, as well as the rest of the Jews, follow the teaching they received from their ancestors: they do not eat unless they wash their hands in the proper way, 4 nor do they eat anything that comes from the market unless they wash it first. And they follow many other rules, which they have received, such as the proper way to wash cups, pots, copper bowls, and beds.

5 So the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law asked Jesus, “Why is it that your disciples do not follow the teaching handed down by our ancestors, but instead eat with unclean hands?”

6 Jesus answered them, “How right Isaiah was when he prophesied about you! You are hypocrites, just as he wrote:

*‘These people, says God, honor me with
their words,
but their heart is really far away from*

me.

*7 It is no use for them to worship me,
because they teach man-made command-
ments as though they were God's rules!*

8 "You put aside the commandment of God and obey the teachings of men."

9 And Jesus continued, "You have a clever way of rejecting God's law in order to uphold your teaching. 10 For Moses commanded, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who says bad things about his father or mother must be put to death.' 11 But you teach that if a person has something he could use to help his father or mother, but says, 'This is Corban' (which means, it belongs to God), 12 he is excused from helping his father or mother. 13 In this way you disregard the word of God with the teaching you pass on to others. And there are many other things like this that you do."

This could also be called "counterfeit religion." The confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus show us two types of religion. What the Pharisees were trying to do is described by Paul in this way: *"They have not known the way in which God puts people right with himself, and instead they have tried to set up their own way; and so they did not submit themselves to God's way of putting people right"* (Rom. 11:3). Two basic questions run through this chapter: the question of the things that make a person "unclean"; and the question of "the teachings of men and man-made rules and traditions." Note the quotation from Isaiah in verses six and seven.

Mark explains the things unfamiliar to his Gentile readers in verses three and four. It is true that these rules about washing had a good result from the viewpoint of health. They improved sanitation. However, this is not the purpose that the Pharisees had in mind. They had a special *ritual* of washing which they believed would prevent possible defilement from certain contacts and would make a person religiously clean. The Jewish law did prohibit certain foods and practices, but the Pharisees had extravagantly expanded the list of such things beyond reason, which, they said, made a person spiritually or ceremonially unclean or defiled. In this *condition*, they would not permit such a person to take part in the public worship until he or she had performed certain rituals which (in their thinking) would remove the defilement.

The fact that the disciples had not ritually washed their hands may imply that Jesus taught them it was not necessary to do so. When Mark says "all the rest of the Jews" (verse three), he may only mean the Pharisees, etc. Perhaps most of the common people found these restrictions too difficult to follow. The law did not require this ritual washing, but their tradition did. And the Jewish leaders were so strict about this, that when Rabbi Akiba was in prison with barely enough water to stay alive, he used it for ritual washing. But Jesus was kicking their traditional beliefs, since what the disciples did would be taken as evidence of his beliefs.

Jesus answers their charge by challenging one of their flagrant violations of God's law. He says: *"You have a clever way of rejecting God's law in order to uphold your own teaching."* Their tradition allowed them to declare all their material possessions "Corban," and this then relieved them of any obligation to take care of their aged parents. This was a "legal fiction," because it did not mean that the possessions were actually turned over to religious use. They evidently kept these things, but said to their parents, "This is Corban to you." In this way they believed they were fulfilling the *letter* of the

law, while continuing to keep and use their worldly wealth for themselves. Jesus calls them “hypocrites,” which in Jewish thinking meant “godless.” The “many other things” would certainly include their restrictive Sabbath tradition (see Mark 2:23-28). A more important question, is : Does the church today fall into this same kind of trap in their thinking???

Where Does Sin Originate?

(Mark 7:14 -23)

14 Then Jesus called the crowd to him once more and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. 15 There is nothing that goes into a person from the outside which can make him unclean. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. [16 Listen, then, if you have ears to hear with!]”

17 When he left the crowd and went into the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 “You are no more intelligent than the others,” Jesus said to them. “Don’t you understand? Nothing that goes into a person from the outside can really make him unclean, 19 because it does not go into his heart but into his stomach and then goes on out of the body.” (In saying this Jesus declared that all foods are fit to be eaten.)

20 And he went on to say, “It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. 21 For from the inside, from a man’s heart, come the evil ideas which lead him to do immoral things, to rob, kill, 22 commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly -- 23 all these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean.”

The question involving tradition dealt with authority in religious matters. Now Jesus returns to the question of the things that make a person *unclean*. This was the issue which the Pharisees raised. Jesus calls the crowd to him, and gives a general principle which is universal in its application. The principle is stated in the form of a parable within the structure of *ritual law*. As verse 19 shows, Jesus is speaking about foods entering the body and being expelled, but this has a much wider spiritual application. The Law of Moses gave some restrictions on food, but *tradition* had evolved a complex system. These traditional laws caused serious problems in the early church (see Acts 10:9-15; Gal. 2:1-5; Rom. 14:1-12; Acts 15:19-21).

The disciples are puzzled by what Jesus has said. Jesus rebukes them and restates the “spirit” of the Law. Nothing that comes into the body from the outside can contaminate the *heart*. “Heart” here is used in the sense of the real person (the whole inner person of the individual and not simply the emotions; the part that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and reasons). Evil actions and evil words begin from evil ideas. Compare Matt. 7:15-20. The source of things that make a person unclean are *internal*. James writes: “But a person is tempted when he is drawn away and trapped by his own evil desire. Then his evil desire conceives and gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15).

Obviously, then, these external rites which the Jewish leaders were so proud of, “*have no real value in controlling physical passions*” (see Col. 2:20-23). By what Jesus said here, he rendered *obsolete* and *canceled* all such distinctions between clean and “unclean” foods, material objects, and people. None of the religious ritual in the world,

such as sacrifices, washing, fasting and penance, can in any way change the “color” of a person’s heart in God’s sight. Only the *one true sacrifice* which is the *Crucified Christ* (Heb. 10:9) promises God’s offer to *put men right with Himself*. Paul writes: “It was not because of any good deeds that we ourselves had done, but because of his own mercy that he saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us” (*by washing-of-regeneration-and-renewing of the Holy Ghost*) Titus 3:5. (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper cannot be classed in with purely external things. And physical actions can have spiritual results when the Lord is the source of authority for them. Look at C” (“color” of a person’s heart in God’s sight. Only the _ _ _ _ _

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27 But Jesus answered, "Let us feed the children first; it isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

28 "Sir," she answered, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's leftovers!"

29 So Jesus said to her, "For such an answer you may go home; the demon has gone out of your daughter!"

30 She went back home and found her child lying on the bed; the demon had indeed gone out of her.

The fact that Jesus confined his ministry to the Jewish people almost completely, may seem strange. He declared: "I have been sent only to those lost sheep, the people of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). In sending out the Twelve, Jesus said, "do not go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan towns" (Matt. 10:5). Yet the lesson of the previous section would seem to cancel the dogma of "Jewish parochialism." Evidently Jesus was intent on calling the Jewish Nation to *renewal* (compare Matt. 23:37). In this account of a woman's faith, we see something of the universal nature of Christ's upcoming *sacrificial death* (and compare what James says in Acts 15:12-18). The real meaning is found in the words of this conversation. This woman is a Gentile (not part-Jewish as were the Samaritans), born in Phoenicia in Syria. She recognizes Jesus (which shows his fame even in other places) and comes pleading with him to help her daughter. Matthew gives some additional detail, and shows Jesus at first ignoring the woman. After his response to the disciples' statement, she comes and falls at his feet, begging "Help me, sir!" Jesus seems to give her a harsh refusal. "Let us first feed the children. It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Now, dogs were not "man's best friend" at that time and place. They thought of them as we think of vultures. Jews called Gentiles "dogs" to insult them. But certainly as Jesus says this, the expression on his face and the tone of his voice make the words gently ironic. He uses a word which means "little dogs" which were allowed in the house. She answers: "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's leftovers!" (The housedogs ate the leftovers even while the meal was in progress.) If Jesus had been trying to lead the woman to express faith, her response was immediate. She admits the priority of the Jews in being fed first, but she claimed the blessing of the "leftovers!" She has given the correct answer, and it is because of this, Jesus says, that the demon has gone out of her daughter. Matthew tells us, "And at that very moment her daughter was healed" (Matt. 15:28). This healing took place at a distance (compare Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:46-53). There must be deep meaning in the fact that Jesus arranged things in such a way for this woman (and others) to show her depth and faith.

Of course this did not solve the problem of Jew and Gentile. In giving the "Great Commission" for his church, Jesus sent them to everyone -- Jew first, then Gentile (Greek). But it would seem that the church today has mostly forgotten the part about the

“Jew.” Both Jews and Gentiles are to be put right with God through the *one true sacrifice* which is the Crucified Christ!!!

Jesus heals a deaf-mute

(Mark 7:31-37)

31 Jesus then left the neighborhood of Tyre and went on through Sidon to Lake Galilee, going by way of the territory of the Ten Towns. 32 Some people brought him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and begged Jesus to place his hand on him. 33 So Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd, put his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. 34 Then Jesus looked up to heaven, gave a deep groan, and said to the man, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up!"

35 At once the man's ears were opened, his tongue was set loose, and he began to talk without any trouble. 36 Then Jesus ordered them all not to speak of it to anyone; but the more he ordered them, the more they told it. 37 And all who heard were completely amazed. "How well he does everything!" they exclaimed. "He even makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak!"

Jesus takes the most roundabout way to go from Tyre to Lake Galilee. If you will look at a map, he first went north to Sidon, then southeast across the Jordan River, then a wide sweep down to the territory of the Ten Towns (Decapolis), and on to Lake Galilee. This would be at least 150 miles, and may have been to escape the crowds. However he may have ministered to the people as he passed through.

Only Mark gives us this miracle. Alford says the miracle is important because it clearly distinguishes between the cases of demon possession and those who are merely diseased or deformed. Perhaps someone might think it more difficult to deal with a purely physical illness. Some have thought the man might be a Gentile (since this was in the territory east of Lake Galilee), but Jesus' use of Aramaic ("Ephphatha," Mark's vivid description preserves the original word used) seems strong evidence that he was Jewish. The man is deaf and "could hardly speak." Nothing is said about this being due to an evil spirit.

Jesus puts his fingers in the deaf ears, and touched the mute tongue. Johnson thinks Jesus did this to produce faith in the man. Also remember the man was deaf, and Jesus is indicating in "sign language" what He intends to do. The "deep groan" (more than a sigh) may be part of the "looking up to heaven" to show the source of the healing, and perhaps in prayer (compare Rom. 8:26; John 11:41-42); or as Farrar thinks, expressing sympathy for the millions who will never hear and never speak. Mark tells us: "*at once*" the man was able to hear and to speak. Notice Jesus orders *the people* (implying there were some who saw him do this) not to speak about the miracle to others. Jesus didn't try to impress people, nor did he try to honor himself. He was walking the road to the cross! Another question: Was this incident unique, or did Jesus work this way at other times??? No one can say for sure, but Jesus did many things which are not recorded for us (see John 20:30).

The key to this miracle lies in what the people there were saying. "How well he does everything! He even causes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." Compare Isaiah 35:5-6: "*The blind will be able to see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap and dance, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy.*" This was a prophecy of the

coming *new age* of salvation, and so miracles such as these were a *sign* of the coming Kingdom. (Compare the language in Heb. 9:26; 1 Cor 10:11.) God was acting in history to set the whole world free!!! And so it becomes even more important to learn *who this is* who brings the signs of the age of the Messiah!!!

Also, there is something ironic in the fact that those who saw this miracle could not be silenced -- while we who have been told to spread the Good News to everyone everywhere, are tempted to refuse to speak.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 6:45 - 7:37)

1. Why the urgency in sending the disciples over the lake to Bethsaida?
2. Was there some special reason why Jesus wanted to be alone with God in prayer? Compare John 6:15.
3. When Jesus reached them on the water, how far and how long had they rowed?
4. Why doesn't Mark tell about Peter walking on the water also?
5. How appropriate were the words which Jesus spoke to reassure them?
6. When and why did the wind die down?
7. What is meant by "ritually unclean" or "defiled" hands?
8. Does verse three mean that every Jewish person followed the tradition (teaching of the ancestors)?
9. Wasn't it unkind for Jesus to call these men hypocrites? Compare Matt. 15:12-14.
10. In what sense had the Pharisees honored God with their words?
11. Why does Jesus say, "It is no use for them to worship me" (verse seven)? What kind of worship does God reject?

12. Is Jesus saying that they love man-made rules better than they love God's laws? Why?
13. Compare the idea of "ritually unclean" (defiled) as Jesus uses it in verse 15, with what the Pharisees say in verse five.
14. Jesus says, "Nothing that goes into a person" (verse 18). How much is included in the "nothing"? What about poisons, pollution, etc.?
15. The figure changes from food to ideas. Explain this.
16. Did Jesus expect the crowd to understand what he was saying?
17. Was Jesus canceling the Jewish dietary laws by that he said in verses 18-19? Explain.
18. Read Roman 14 and show how "love fulfills the law."
19. Discuss the twelve things which Jesus says make a person "unclean."
20. What could have been the purpose for Jesus wanting to stay hidden (verse 24)?
21. Give three facts about the woman who came to Jesus.
22. Who are the "children" in verse 27, and who are the "dogs"?
23. Explain the "leftovers" ("crumbs") in verse 28. What is she saying?

24. Was there ever any period of convalescence in the healings of Jesus?
25. Read Matt. 15:29-31 and compare it with the healing of the deaf-mute.
26. Show how Jesus adapted his words and actions to the one to be healed.
27. What did the deaf-mute think when Jesus “looked up to heaven”?
28. Why does Mark preserve the Aramaic word which Jesus spoke?
29. Did the deaf-mute *hear* the word “Ephphatha”? Why?
30. Who said, “How well he does everything”?