**Mark 7**

“Eyes on Jesus”

Last week Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for criticizing and condemning the disciples for eating with unwashed hands.

He called them Hypocrites:

 **Mark 7:6 “**He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“‘These people honor me with their lips,
    but their hearts are far from me.
**7**They worship me in vain;
    their teachings are merely human rules.’

We learned that *Condemnation* is from the devil “the accuser of the brethren” intended to tear us down and discourage our faith.

*Conviction* is from the Holy Spirit intended to build us up and encourage our faith.

He later went on to explain to His disciples;

**Mark 7:18-20** “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? **19**For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) **20**He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them.”

This is important on two levels

1. He is pointing out that eating the right foods, and staying ceremonially “clean” is no guarantee that what proceeds from your heart won’t be evil. The Pharisees were a perfect example of this, they ate only the prescribed “kosher” foods listed in the law (Lev. 11) and ate nothing considered “unclean” (Tre-if), They even ceremonially washed their hands before everything they did.

 HOWEVER out of their hearts came evil thoughts, condemnation, and accusation. Later they will plot on how to persecute and eventually *murder* Jesus, all while keeping the laws concerning what they eat and how they wash their hands.

1. The other thing we learn in this scripture, is that Mark tells us in verse 19 that “In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.” In other words, Kosher laws don’t apply to us as followers of Jesus.

*(I, personally eat Kosher for two reasons; as a life-long fast before the Lord, and to honor my Jewish Heritage. It’s not necessarily rabbinically Kosher, it’s simply Lev. 11 Kosher – no pork or shellfish).*

What’s interesting, is that many Bible teachers don’t look to *this* scripture to learn how the Kosher laws don’t apply, they look to a scripture in Acts 10 that ironically is *not* about easting kosher but about the fulfillment of the plan of God that “Gentiles will come to your light’ (Isa. 60:3), which is what Jesus is just about to show us in the very next verses.

*Jump ahead a few years later to Peter’s vision on the rooftop after Jesus had ascended:*

He was in the city of Joppa, at a house by the sea owned by someone named “Simon the Tanner” *[not to be confused with “Simon the Tan”, and “Simon the tannest”, he was somewhere in the middle]. : )*

Little did he know that a Gentile (*non-Jewish)* Italian guy named Cornelius, who was a centurion up the coast in Caesarea had been visited by an angel with a special message from God, that “a man named Simon Peter” would tell him what it is. (Remember, up until this point it is *only Jews* who have come to faith and are part of the church).

**Acts 10:9-18** “About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. **10**He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. **11**He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. **12**It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. **13**Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

**14**“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

**15**The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

**16**This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

**17**While Peter was *wondering about the meaning of the vision*, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. **18**They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.”

**19**While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. **20**So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

**21**Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

**22**The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” **23**Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

“The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. **24**The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. **25**As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. **26**But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

**27**While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. **28**He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. *But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean*. **29**So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection.”

At this point, Peter stopped wondering what his vision meant, he knew that it meant the gospel is now to be made available to non-Jews (Gentiles!

This is an extremely important scripture, not because of the Kosher diet laws as some people might think, but because it shows very clearly *the point* at which the doors were flung open and “Gentiles were coming to the light”. From that day on, more and more Gentiles came to faith. The plan of God was rolling out perfectly according to his will.

It’s important to know this as we go back to our chapter in Mark 7, because it will help us understand how Jesus reacted to a Gentile woman He was about to meet.

**Jesus Honors a Syrophoenician Woman’s Faith**

**Mark 7:24-30**

**24**Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre (a Gentile region). He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. **25**In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. **26**The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

**27**“First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

**28**“Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

**29**Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

**30**She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.”

This is a very puzzling exchange to many people:

* Was Jesus being rude to this woman?
* Was he mad at her for bothering him while he was trying to go about in secret?
* Was Jesus being uncompassionate about the woman’s poor little daughter?
* By calling her a “dog”, was he being racist and defamatory?

The answers are; No he was not being rude, nor was he mad, he showed great compassion to the little girl by delivering her from the demon, and the word “dog” was not defamatory or racist any more than the word “sheep” might have been, but did point out that there was a difference, between Gentiles and Jews at that time.

What we see here is Jesus, being so moved by the woman’s faith that he changed his immediate plans, to hide in a Gentile area so that He can bring deliverance to this woman’s daughter.

On a larger scale we see the plan of God unfolding here and the faith of Gentiles being rewarded by Jesus, long before Peter’s vision on the rooftop ion Joppa.

Remember, as we read the gospels that *Jesus hadn’t died on the cross* yet, so ‘Justification by Faith’ had not yet been implemented, but that did not mean that Jesus himself could not extend God’s grace, heal whomever he wanted and even forgive sins.

It was not often, but on certain occasions, *like this one* Jesus extended healing or grace to non-Jews (The woman at the well John 4, The Roman centurion in Matt 8, The deaf man in Mark 7). Jesus himself was very fond of examples in the Hebrew Scriptures where God extended mercy to non-Jews (example: The Widow of Zarephath, Naaman the Syrian)

The plan of God is, and has always been, for ALL PEOPLE, Jews and Gentiles to experience the fullness of God. In the situation with this woman in Mark 7, he was moved by her faith and decided to extend grace simply because of that.

Was it in Jesus’ plans?, not necessarily.

Was it God’s will? Obviously yes.

*[ example, wife baking cookies, and my kids ask to eat some of the cookie dough]*

*Was it in her plans that they come and eat the cookie dough?, probably not.*

*Did she allow it after they asked [repeatedly]. Yes!*

This shows us some very interesting things about God, His will, our faith and prayer.

“God’s will is constant, our will is variable.”

His eternal will for mankind and the universe will definatley be accomplished.

As much as it relates to us, and our participation in it, is based on our willingness and our faith.

Our faith can *open up* opportunities for God’s will to be accomplished in our lives.

Our lack of faith can prohibit that.

We just read in the last chapter that Jesus was *not able* to do more miracles in his hometown of Nazareth because of their lack of faith. He wanted to, but could not.

**Mark 6:5-6 “**He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.”

We need to ask, pray and have faith in order to see God’s hand at work in our lives. That includes something as *monumental as Salvation*, to something as *trivial as daily bread*.

**James 4:3** “You have not, because you ask not…”

**James 1:6** “But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt…”

The good news/ bad news for us:

1. Good news – When we ask God in faith (trust), we are creating space for his will to be accomplished, in our life.
2. Bad News – When we do not have faith (trust) in Him, we could be prohibiting Him from doing special things in our lives. (similar to those in his hometown of Nazareth)

I encourage all of you to *ask & pray*, *believe God* and *have faith*,

just like the Syrophoenician Woman (or me with the cookie dough).

You may find that God will respond to your request and offer you an unexpected blessing because you asked and because of your faith.

As we prepare for communion, I want us to look at another way we can short-circuit God’s blessing in our lives: Unforgiveness.

Communion is all about celebrating the greatest act of Forgiveness in history “The body and blood of Jesus on the cross”.

Celebrating it with unforgiveness is what Paul calls in *1st Cor. 11 “taking it in an unworthy manner”.*

**Hebrews 12:14 “**Pursue peace with all *people,* and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: **15**looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

This can only be accomplished if we are willing to do pray as Jesus taught us to pray “Forgive us our sins as we forgive others”.

That includes those in our present as well as those in our past.

That includes those who have offended us directly, and even those who’ve offended us indirectly.

Whether it’s friends, strangers, family, exes, teachers, mothers, fathers, grandfathers or even the founding fathers, or historical figures… there is no place for bitterness or unforgiveness. (There are other feelings you can have, but bitterness and unforgiveness are not from God.)

Whether it’s a personal, general, or even generational offense. The key to God’s blessing and peace in every situation is *forgiveness.*

While Jesus was suffering excruciating pain during his crucifixion, and offering His *body and blood* that we remember each time we take communion. He spoke the words *“Father, Forgive them, they know not what they do”.*

No greater love, no more profound example of forgiveness.

This needs to be the posture of our heart as we take communion to celebrate that same forgiveness.

# # #