

Mark 7

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a pure heart and true obedience to God, as opposed to outward piety and hypocrisy, and highlights the display of God's love towards those who have no right to the promises.

Scripture: Mark 7:6

Topics: "True Worship", "Faith and Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Mark 7, emphasizing Jesus' condemnation of the outward piety of the Pharisees, which he describes as hypocrisy that neglects the true commandments of God. He illustrates that true defilement comes from the heart, not from external actions, and highlights the importance of a pure heart in worship. Darby also shares the story of a Gentile woman whose faith transcends cultural barriers, demonstrating God's grace that reaches those in need regardless of their background. He concludes by reflecting on the healing of a deaf man, showcasing Jesus' compassion and the need for spiritual awakening among the people. The sermon calls for a genuine relationship with God that goes beyond mere rituals and traditions.

Transcript

This seventh chapter is full of the most interesting teaching. First, the Lord's judgment upon the outward piety of the heads of Judaism, which was altogether external and nothing less than hypocrisy, and which set aside the law of God. All these washings are despised by God; the Pharisees had set aside the commandment of God to keep their own tradition. Secondly, the Lord shews that that which comes out of a man's mouth defiles the man, because it arises from the heart; not that which enters into the man. Then having thus judged Israel and man, He shews forth in the most touching manner the sovereign grace of God which passes by every barrier to reach man's need: outside of all rights founded upon the promises, demanding only that the heart should recognise it in order that it may be entirely the pure grace of God in love which does the good; revealing itself as love when man is bad, and without any hope outside of this sovereign grace.

Outward things are easy to do; man likes to make his religion of them, for they do not need a pure heart; man likes to do them, and to exalt himself and to distinguish himself from others in doing them. By them man boasts of great piety before other men, and gains a great reputation for it; but he can be bad at the same time; these outward acts do not bring him into the presence of God who searches the heart. Man by these acts is religious without possessing holiness, and he finds that this just suits him. One does not find

Pharisees only in our Lord's time; they are to be found in all times. This system always attaches itself to the influence which a man exerts over another by means of a position outwardly holy; it is not the faith which possesses truth and grace for itself (which truth and grace came by Jesus Christ, and which produce holiness and communion with God who reveals Himself in them), but the official influence that a man uses to his own advantage, carelessly leaving on one side the will and the commandments of God. Thus it was amongst the Jews; they washed their hands, but not their hearts; they were very scrupulous about that which entered their mouth, and careless about that which came out of their heart.

Thus is man's religion always; he can observe such a religion as this, and deck himself with it as with a glory. But he cannot get real holiness in this way, and this is evident to the eyes of God, who sees all that goes on in the heart. True holiness shews itself in the practical walk; one may fail, but the soul sustained by grace only seeks the approbation of God; it has the consciousness of failure, and rejoices in God, for it is He who dwells in the soul, and keeps it humble. But the Pharisees and Sadducees amongst the Jews profited by their reputation and position to induce the pious to give many gifts to God, whom they represented. Thus duties towards parents were slighted, and God's law countermanded. They honoured God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. They drew near to Him with their mouth, but not with their heart; this was full of covetousness and iniquity. God refuses altogether this kind of honour. "In vain do they worship me," says the prophet Isaiah, and the Lord repeats it. God wants a pure heart sanctified by the Spirit and by the truth; and He wants a worship which is to be rendered in spirit and in truth: the Father seeketh such to worship Him. He wants grace, but the truth is required to be able to draw near to God, a heart where the divine life exists. All this human religion, outward, Pharisaical, priestly, is judged of the Lord once and for all times. God demands a pure heart and true obedience. Men put on this kind of religion, giving honour in it to antiquity and to the traditions of their ancestors, to which man's imagination attributes great value. All that is seen through the shades of antiquity is imposing enough; but with God it is a question of the heart, and it was the same then as it is now with us: we are before God, and He sees us just as we are. Man's actual state is the question.

262 But what are these poor hearts in their natural state? This is the second question the Lord takes up. He has already torn the veil of the hypocrisy by which the Pharisees and priests tried to conceal the impurity of their hearts, and to turn to their own account the external piety which they taught; the motives of their hearts are manifested, and the efforts which they make to cover the impurity and avarice of their heart appear; their hypocrisy is manifest. The Lord does not only rend the veil of hypocrisy, but discovers also that which the heart produces. This is what God does; He searches our hearts and manifests them, and then reveals His own. This is the uncovering not merely of the hearts of the Pharisees, but of the hearts of all men; that which goes out of the mouth defiles the man, because it proceeds from the heart. What a picture! The product of the human heart consists of malice, corruption, envy, . . . in a word, of nothing but vices.

263 Was the Lord wanting in benevolence or love toward man? His coming is the proof of God's love. Did He wish to hide the good that might be found in man? Was He the only one capable of discovering the evil? Could He wish to slander the being He had come to bless, to save, and to whom He would give a place with Himself? Impossible: this could not be. But instead, knowing man's heart, He was obliged to say the truth. It was love which discloses the utter perversity of the human heart, in order that man may not remain in this state. It is indeed better that it should be disclosed now in the presence of grace than in the day of judgment, when all that is manifested will be punished, and man condemned.

Observe also that, when practical holiness and obedience are no longer to be found in the life of the leaders, a religion founded by God becomes the power of sin and of hypocrisy, and tends always to pervert the mind, to destroy the conscience and uprightness in all; because that which is looked upon as God's authority encourages hypocrisy and iniquity, and also tends to produce unbelief, because men see that religion attaches itself to that which even the natural conscience condemns. Oh how sad a story is that of the human heart and of the church of God, such as men have made it! Observe also the influence of the corrupt religious authority to blind men and to destroy spiritual intelligence. What can be clearer than that which the Lord says? But the natural conscience does not recognise the truth that it is not that which entereth into a man's mouth that defileth the man, but that which comes out of it, for it proceeds from the heart. The thing is simple enough.

The disciples do not understand, and ask for an explanation of it; their natural intelligence had been blinded by the tradition of the elders. The manner of reasoning acquired by the authority of the latter had spoilt their understanding. And indeed, do we not find many who believe that that which entereth into a man's mouth defileth him? And yet they are sincere souls; and not only so, they believe also that to eat a certain kind of food one day defiles, and that another day it does not: and this because of the tradition of the elders. This really is what the disciples did substantially; and the Lord reproves them, saying, "Are ye so without understanding also?" Here we see the judgment of the Lord against many things which keep many souls in bondage, and sincere souls even, like those of the disciples.

264 But let us turn to the precious display of God's love in the words of the Lord to the poor woman. We find that all the privileges of the Jews are recognised first; but we find also the truth of God which rises far above such privileges to manifest grace and love wherever a need may be found; not indeed where there is a right to the promises, but towards an accursed race, towards a woman from a country notorious for its hardened state. God manifested Himself in rising above all the barriers that man's iniquity and the exclusive system of Judaism had set up, even the system which He had Himself established, which was shewn to be abolished by the rejection of Christ.

The Lord goes into the borders of Tyre and Sidon; He wishes to be quiet, but goodness joined with power are too rare in the world to remain unnoticed; and the need felt awakens the soul and makes it clear-sighted. A poor woman had a daughter subject to the power of an unclean spirit; feeling her own wretchedness and believing in Jesus' power, she goes to seek Him. The weight of misery that oppressed her made her hope in His goodness. The Lord keeps to the promises made by God to the Jews, and in His answer puts forward the rights of God's people; He could not take the children's bread and give it to the dogs. Observe that the woman herself was of the accursed race; if we look at the ways of God in the midst of Israel, there was not a single promise for her; and she had no right belonging to her in common with the people of God. According to the Jews and the legal economy, she was nothing more than a dog: but present needs were there, and the power of God, always employed as it is for His own good purposes, was there too, and this inspires her confidence.

It is always thus; need and faith in the goodness and power of the Lord give perseverance, as in the case of those who carried the paralytic man when the crowd pressed around Jesus. But there is something in the woman's heart besides confidence which grace had produced there. She recognises the rights of the Jews as God's people; she owns that she is but a dog with regard to them; but she insists upon her demand, because she feels that, even though she be but a dog, the grace of God is sufficient for those who had no rights. "Even the dogs," she says, "eat of the children's crumbs"; she recognises what she is, but also what God is. She believes in His love towards those who have neither rights nor promises; and in

the manifestation of God in Jesus outside of and above all dispensations. God is good, and the fact of being in misery is a claim with Him: could Christ say, "No, God is not good as thou dost suppose?" He could not say this: it would not have been the truth.

265 This is great faith, faith which recognises our own wretchedness, that we have right to nothing; but faith which believes in the love of God clearly revealed in Jesus, without any promise, yet fully revealed. God cannot deny Himself and say, "No I am not love." We have no right to expect the exercise of this love towards us, but we can be sure that coming to Christ, impelled by our wants, we shall find perfect goodness, love that heals us, and the healing itself. Let us remember that true need perseveres because it cannot do without the aid of the power which was manifested in Christ; nor without the salvation which He has brought; nor is there salvation without the help which is to be found in Him for our weakness. And that which is in God is the source of our hope and of our faith; and if asked how we know what is in God's heart, we can answer, "It is revealed perfectly in Christ." Who put it into God's heart to send His own Son to save us? Who put it into the Son's heart to come and suffer everything for us? Not man. God's heart is its source. We believe in this love, and in the value of that which Christ has done and accomplished upon the cross, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Besides He does all things well, He makes both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.

The grace of God was fully shewn towards the poor woman, who had no right to any blessing, nor to any promise; she was a daughter of the accursed Canaan; but faith reaches even to the heart of God manifested in Jesus, and in like manner the eye of God reaches to the bottom of man's heart. Thus God's heart and man's heart meet, in the consciousness that man is altogether bad, that he has not a single right; indeed he owns truly this state, and in it gives himself up to the perfect goodness of God. But the Jewish people, who pretended to possess righteousness and right to the promises, is set on one side; and, as to the old covenant, is shut out from God's favour. Only Jesus opens the eyes and the ears of the remnant brought to Him in faith. And it was not only the Jewish people which was to be set aside (and as to the first covenant for ever), but man also was set aside on the ground of righteousness, which is the principle of the first covenant.

266 Then the Lord leaves again the borders of Tyre and Sidon and returns to the country of Galilee; where He found Himself in the midst of the people of Israel. But, as we have said, He was virtually rejected by the people. Jesus has the consciousness that the beloved people is lost, and all that He does is to expect its ruin. They bring to Him a man who was deaf with an impediment in his speech, and beseech Him to put His hand upon him to heal him. Then Jesus takes the man and leads him aside from the crowd: and then puts His fingers in his ears, and, having spit, touches his tongue. Then He looks toward heaven: power is always present in Him, but sorrow oppresses His heart, because the people were really deaf to the voice of the Good Shepherd; their tongue was tied and incapable of praising God. The Lord's sighs are the expression of this feeling; inasmuch as the state of the poor man represented the state of the beloved people. Nevertheless they were happy in that the love of Him whose counsels never change rested, in spite of all, upon them. And indeed the Lord was there, and worked according to this love and these sighs; He looked up to heaven, the source of love and of power, and never grew weary until the people in favour of whom He exercised this power, would no longer support His presence. It is true they would not have been able to put Him to death, if He had not given Himself up of His own free will, but the time would come in which He would give Himself up to accomplish redemption; and until that moment arrive, He shews Himself always as the God of goodness towards the afflicted, and for all people's need.

In verse 33 we see that He separates Himself from the mass of the people in healing the deaf man. In chapter 8:23, we have the same thing; He leads the blind man out of the town, but He heals him; only there the state of His disciples is shewn. It is touching to see this look that the Lord gives toward heaven, and the sigh of His heart as He sees the people deaf to God's voice, and incapable of blessing His name; and to see the Lord's heart for hardened men, and how this heart was in harmony with the heaven which He always manifested. There He found the certainty of this love that man rejected; and rested in the same feelings that reign in heaven, and of which He was the expression upon this ungrateful earth. The Lord's power shewed itself the very moment; the ears were opened, and the tongue was loosed. The people could not hold their peace, but published everywhere that which Jesus had done, saying, "He hath done all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." The Lord's work opens the ears, and gives cause to humble hearts to praise God, and to recognize His love. But alas! how many remain deaf to the voice of God's love! "They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not listen to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely."

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