

**CALVARY BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH (PANDAN)**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
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**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 17
THE LIFE OF CHRIST**

INTRODUCTION

Jesus had been preaching and teaching in many areas, mainly in the region of Galilee. He had performed many miracles. The people looked only for their material welfare instead of understanding the more important spiritual teachings of Jesus. When they could not understand Jesus, many left Him. Opposition against Jesus was mounting. Jesus continued to extend His ministry to other regions. He then departed for Tyre and Sidon in Syro-Phoenicia which was in the north of Israel.

Jesus was well known to the people already. Wherever He went, multitudes followed and gathered around Him when they knew that He was present. In His dealings and encounters with the people, Jesus showed His character, power, mission, compassion and love for the people. In His ministry to the Syro-Phoenicia region, Jesus chided the Pharisees for their hypocritical piety and their useless holding on to the traditions of man. A lesson on great faith is again shown in His encounter with the Syro-Phoenician

woman. Jesus used various ways in healing people. Jesus taught the necessity to completely believe and trust Him for who He is. Jesus warned His hearers against being stubborn and unbelieving.

OUTLINE

1. Hypocritical Pharisaism Rebuked (Mark 7:1-23, Matthew 15:1-20)
2. Faith of the Syro-Phoenician Woman (Mark 7:24-30, Matthew 15:21-28)
3. Healing of the Deaf and Dumb Man (Mark 7:31-37, Matthew 15:29)
4. Feeding of the Four Thousand (Mark 8:1-9, Matthew 15:30-38)
5. Second Demand for a Sign (Matthew 15:39-16:4, Mark 8:10-13)

COMMENTARY

Hypocritical Pharisaism Rebuked

The opposition of the Pharisees and scribes against Jesus intensified. They came all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to launch their attack against Jesus. They found fault with Jesus by criticizing His disciples that they ate without washing their hands. The washing of hands before eating was a long-standing tradition of the Pharisees and all the Jews. They were holding on to the tradition of the elders. Before the

time of Jesus, the Jews had two great rival teachers of Jewish traditionalism, namely Hillel and Shammai. Although they disagreed with one another and other matters; on this matter of hand-washing before eating, they were in agreement. Even to touch a Gentile involved defilement, so, when they returned from the market-place, they had to have a complete washing or bath to cleanse themselves (J.W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*, 281).

The Pharisees and the scribes asked Jesus, “*Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?*” Jesus answered them by quoting what the prophet Isaiah prophesied of them that they were hypocrites – people who drew near to Jesus with their mouth, and honour Him with their lips, but their heart is far from Him. In other words, Jesus charged them for being hypocrites! Jesus cited an example how they broke the commandment of God. The fifth commandment in the Ten Commandments, which God gave to Moses, states that a person must honour his father and mother. But these Pharisees and scribes taught the people that whatever was due to their parents if they gave it to God as “Corban”, and did nothing more for their parents, they were free from the judgement of God. “Corban” (or also spelt Korban) was a term which meant a gift, money or service consecrated to God. Thus they had nullified the commandment of God with the tradition of men. To avoid

looking after their parents, the Pharisees would teach their children this tradition. A pact would be made between the Pharisee and the son and they would share in the “spoils” of their deception by saying the son cannot legitimately support his parents as he has devoted all to the LORD.

Jesus then emphatically declared to the multitude: “*Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand. Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: there is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are they that defileth the men.*” Jesus’ disciples reported to Him that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying of Jesus. Could it be that the disciples also were uneasy and thought that Jesus had gone too far? But Jesus turned to His disciples and answered them: “*Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*” The plant that Jesus was referring to is the plant of “mere human tradition.” These hypocritical Pharisees were so steep and stubborn in holding their man-made traditions that Jesus instructed His disciples not to bother them but to leave alone. Let them continue to be spiritually blind. This is a judicial judgement on the Pharisees and the scribes who had been blinded by the devil.

In the privacy of the house, the disciples asked Jesus to enlighten them concerning what He had just said. How the disciples were under the spell of the theology of the Pharisees that dulled their understanding of what Jesus had just declared. Jesus explained to them in the most down-to-earth terms. It is not the material foods that they ate that would defile the man. Defilement involves the spirit of man. Defilement comes from within the heart. Jesus gave a list of the things that would come out of the heart of a man that would defile him: *evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, false witness, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness* (unrestrained sexual instinct), *an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness* (lack of sense). These are the things that defile (corrupt, disgrace, dishonour) a man.

Faith of the Syro-Phoenician Woman

Realizing the stiff opposition from the Pharisees and the scribes, and the fact that every one of their confrontations with Jesus resulted in their humiliation and defeat, and that these men would stop at nothing to hurt, Jesus withdrew from the region of Tiberias, and went to the regions of Phoenicia, which is about thirty-five miles northwest. He went to the coastal cities of Phoenicia, Tyre and Sidon. Jesus wanted to withdraw Himself with His disciples from public eye for a time. But He could not be hid. Soon after Jesus came to the region, a Syro-Phoenician woman found out about His presence. She came from Syria-Phoenicia. She

found Jesus and fell at His feet pleading: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Chrysostom commented: "It is a piteous sight to see a woman crying with so much feeling, and that woman a mother, and praying for a daughter and that daughter so ill bested."

But Jesus did not answer one word. This was very unusual of Jesus. His disciples called Jesus to send her away. Jesus' reply to His disciples revealed His mission, which was to reach out to the Jews first and then through them to the Gentile world. This must be understood, even by the woman. However, the woman kept on begging Jesus, "Lord help me." Then Jesus said to her: "*Let the children **first** be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs (house dogs).*" The woman responded, "*Yes, truth, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs which fall from their master's table.*" On hearing these words, Jesus was moved and addressed her: "*O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*"

Some people criticized Jesus for being rude and thoughtless in His words to the woman. One should beware in criticizing Jesus, for Jesus knew what He was doing, why He was doing what He did, and how He would do. The Jews thought of themselves as God's children and of the Gentiles as "dogs". Jesus

wanted to teach the woman the real import of the title “Son of David,” by which she addressed Jesus. In other words, she believed in her heart that Jesus whom she had heard must be the Jewish Messiah. But she must learn that “salvation was from the Jews,” and the same time, Jesus was also the Lord of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Clearly Jesus was testing her faith and humility. The woman’s reply to the somewhat harsh words of Jesus indicates that there was hope for her. Jesus had said to her, “Let the children first be filled . . .” And so she accepted the treatment, and remarked that even the dogs would eat the crumbs that fell from the children’s table. Her indomitable faith, and the ray of hope she saw, her humility, and the absence of hatred towards Jesus for His seemingly harsh attitude, enabled her to realise her greatest desire. Jesus was moved with compassion. Jesus commended her great faith. Great faith and humility, and hope won her case. Jesus added that the devil had gone out of her daughter. In this encounter, Jesus revealed to us that He knew the human heart as no one knows and that He was a skilled teacher of His disciples. This miracle occurred immediately after the incident of the faithless Pharisee demonstrates contrast of the condition that existed in Israel. The supposedly most spiritual people in Israel had no faith and the Gentiles, like dogs in the eyes of the Jews, had the greatest faith. It is not nationality or colour of skin or language that keeps a person out of the kingdom

but the hardness of his own heart. Likewise, it is not the above that gets a person into the kingdom of Heaven but his faith in Jesus Christ. All can enter the Kingdom of Heaven if they will only come and believe.

Healing of the Deaf and Dumb Man

Jesus left the regions of Phoenecia and went on a north-easterly direction, He crossed the Jordan River and entered into Decapolis (Greek: *deca* = ten, *polis* = city), the territory of ten Greek cities. The exact location where Jesus healed the deaf and partially dumb man is not recorded. But it was somewhere on the eastern shore of the Lake of Galilee. The friends of the deaf and partially dumb man, having heard of Jesus laying His hands and healing many people, brought him to Jesus asking Him to heal him. There was already a multitude of people. Jesus took the deaf and partially dumb man aside. Jesus probably wanted to relate with him more privately and on a one to one basis, away from the noise of the crowds. Jesus then stuck his fingers into the ears of the man, and then He spat and moistened his hand and touched the man’s tongue, and looking up to heaven, Jesus sighed, and said to the man: “Ephphatha.” Mark translated the spoken word for his readers, meaning “be opened.”

Jesus could have healed the man by just speaking to the man and he would be healed. But Jesus must have a good reason for doing what He did here in healing the man. First, Jesus used

different ways in healing people. His methods of healing were varied. In this case if Jesus were to speak to the man, he could not hear Him. This was the reason for taking him aside, gesturing and taking such action to bring about the man's faith in Him involving the plucking of the ears with His fingers, the touching of his tongue, the looking up to heaven to convey prayer and to direct the man to the source of power of the healing, and the sigh as a symbol of prayer. This was NT "Braille." The outcome was instantaneous. The man immediately could hear and speak correctly. Jesus charged them not to publicize the miracle, but the more Jesus told them not to, the more they spread the good news, saying, "He hath done all things well." Indeed! When a person is being healed and touched by Jesus, there will be an instant change and benefit. Christians who have experienced this transformation and received the grace of God should tell others that Jesus is able to do all things well if they believe in Him openly.

Feeding of the Four Thousand

When news of the healing of the deaf and partially dumb man spread around many people flocked to Jesus. In a short time, there was a large crowd of people. Many brought their sick – the lame, blind, dumb, and maimed – to Jesus, and He healed them, so much so that they glorified the God of Israel. The crowd was with Jesus for three days. They now had no food. Jesus had compassion on them. They were hungry and sending them back to their homes

might cause them to faint on the way. Jesus' disciples remarked that it was impossible to feed so many people. How soon have they forgotten the first miracle of feeding the five thousand! The disciples had not learned who Jesus was. Jesus did not rebuke them instead He asked how much bread they had. They answered that they had seven loaves and a few little fishes.

Jesus commanded the people to sit on the ground. He took the seven loaves, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave them to His disciples and the disciples distributed the bread to the people. They had a few fishes and Jesus did the same, and the disciples gave them to the people. After they all had eaten to their fill, seven baskets full of leftovers were collected. There were about four thousand men, beside women and children. After the meal, Jesus sent them away.

Many of us may be astonished at the disciples' slowness of heart to believe in Jesus. They had seen Jesus perform so many signs and wonders. Not too long ago they had experienced and taken part in the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, and twelve baskets full of leftovers were collected. But let us not be too hasty to express our shock and surprise. Some of us are also slow of heart to believe that with Jesus nothing is impossible. In the face of insurmountable hindrances, some Christians just give up hope. Only a few would turn to Jesus and trust in Him to

carry them through. When they ask in faith and not doubt, they will experience the wonder working of the grace of God in their lives! Jesus once again patiently and painstakingly taught His disciples to know Him and to trust Him.

Second Demand for a Sign

Now Jesus took a boat across the lake and came to Dalmanatha on the west coast of the lake. The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Jesus to test and tempt Him. This was an interesting thing. The Pharisees and Sadducees were archenemies. Their theology was diametrical. The Sadducees did not believe in a bodily resurrection and their insistence upon observing the Law of Moses only caused a conflict with the Pharisees' acceptance of the Mosaic Law, the Prophets and the Writings, and the oral traditions of the rabbis. Pharisees and Sadducees would not mix. What made them come together was their common enemy, Jesus. They desired "a sign from heaven."

In addressing them, Jesus pointed that they could discern whether the weather on a particular day would be fair or foul by observing the sky. But they could not discern "the sign of the times". Many signs had been given: the fulfilment of Scriptures, the preaching and testimony of John the Baptist, the preaching, sign-miracles, and the life of Jesus. They failed to discern all these. Jesus sighed deeply when He saw their pride and stubbornness in opposing Him and their hypocrisy of religious zeal.

Jesus remarked: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." There was no point in giving them another sign because many signs had been done, and yet they could not discern.

They had asked Jesus twice in the past for a sign. The first one was at the beginning of His ministry. Jesus gave them a sign of His resurrection in enigmatical language (John 2:18-22). Another occasion Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah for them to puzzle over (Matthew 12:40-41): *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.* Jesus repeated again that the only sign that would be given was the sign of the prophet Jonah.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Many practical lessons can be learned in this lesson. We learn that our speech is the fruit of our heart. We should examine ourselves with the list of things given by our Lord Jesus Christ that defile and corrupt us. We are called to be holy as He is holy, and then let us not commit those things that corrupt us. It is not by refraining from eating meat on Fridays or becoming a vegetarian for religious reasons that will morally corrupt us. It is what comes out of our

mouth because what comes out from our mouth comes from our heart.

A lesson on great faith is exemplified by the Syro-Phoenician. She came to Jesus because she believed that Jesus could deliver her daughter from the bondage of the devil. She expressed her faith with great humility. This was coupled with a keen intelligence that bears out in her conversation with Jesus. She was quick to sense Jesus' compassion for her, seeing that Jesus offered her a chance. She showed persistent faith in Jesus. She would not let Jesus go.

In His dealings with people, Jesus is able to use different and appropriate ways to meet our needs. Our needs and problems are different from others. Jesus deals with us accordingly. He will do it well just as He had done for the deaf and dumb man.

His feeding of the four thousand once again demonstrated His power and deity. We must never be dull of learning to know and trust Jesus – the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour. Let us not disguise our hypocrisy by our religious zeal. There are many today who use the Scriptures to preach and teach others but they themselves do not practise them. These people verbally declare God's word but do not do the will of God – they hear but do not do God's will. We must examine ourselves so that we do not become like the Pharisees. Amen

**DAILY READING & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Mark 7:1-23, Matthew 15:1-20

TUESDAY: Mark 7:24-30, Matthew 15:21-28

WEDNESDAY: Mark 7:31-37, Matthew 15:29

THURSDAY: Mark 8:1-9, Matthew 15:30-38

FRIDAY: Matthew 15:39 - 16:4, Mark 8:10-12

Discussion Questions

1. How did Jesus answer the question of the Pharisees and scribes?

2. What example did Jesus mention when he said that the Pharisees and the scribes held on to the tradition of men rather than the commandment of God?

3. What was Jesus' view of uncleanness as opposed to that of the Pharisees?

4. In view of Jesus' statement that "whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him," is it all right to eat all types of food?

5. What was the attitude of the Syrophenician woman?

6. Why did Jesus answer the way He did to the woman?

7. What reasons can you see as to why Jesus healed the deaf and dumb man in the way that He did?

8. What was the reaction of the people of Decapolis towards Jesus?

9. What two character traits of Jesus stand out in this miracle?

10. What does His disciples' response tell us about their faith?

11. What was Jesus' response to the Pharisees and Sadducees' request for a sign from heaven?

12. How has this study encouraged and strengthened your faith?
