

GREAT FAITH & GREAT GRACE

Mark 7:24-37

Well guys I am excited to be back in the book of Mark this morning, working our way through this powerful gospel. This morning I think the Word of God would have us consider an area in our lives that we're tempted to give up on. Maybe you've been praying for someone or about something for a while and tempted to quit or maybe you have quit. Maybe there's a special need or a problem that you or a friend or a family member has that is impossible to meet. And keep it in mind as we approach this chapter where a couple of other people find themselves in a similar situation. A situation where there's really no where to turn but up. We're going to study these situations and just start extracting so many good principles from them to apply to our own lives. We're in Mark 7:24-37, the rest of the chapter.

“Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And He was saying to her, “Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” But she answered and said to Him, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs.” And He said to her, “Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter.” And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hands on him. Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!” And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. They were utterly astonished, saying, “He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Last time we were in the book of Mark, Jesus had a run in with the Pharisees remember, the religious honchos of the day who walked around thinking they were better than everyone else. They thought they were right with God because they were literal descendants of Abraham and because they kept themselves clean externally. They had all sorts of religious ritual washings they did that went beyond what was even prescribed by the Law of Moses and it was a burdensome list of rituals they tried to place on everyone else.

And when they tried to criticize Jesus and His disciples for not keeping those traditions of the elders, Jesus explained to them what true spirituality was. True spirituality is more than religious externals. It's a matter of the heart before God. The Pharisees had misdiagnosed their problem – it wasn't external things that kept them from God, but internal things like the pride of self-righteousness. True spirituality is actually recognizing you aren't righteous and you need Christ's righteousness applied to you by putting all of your trust in Him. The first thing on the list in the Sermon on the Mount was “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” That whole sermon is aimed at teaching true spirituality in contrast to the Pharisees. They needed to see their sin problem and need of Christ and to give heed to the Word of God.

But with Jesus, the more He taught them truth, the more the Pharisees turned against Him. Opposition from the Jews was increasing and that's certainly part of the reason He leaves and goes away into this region northwest of Galilee called Phoenicia, or **the area of Tyre and Sidon** (Mt. 15:21), known today as Lebanon. Tyre and Sidon are two notable cities along the coast about 20 miles apart in Phoenicia and under the Roman conquest it became annexed with Syria, thus how we derive Syro-Phoenicia. You'll also want to note that Zarephath is located right between Tyre and Sidon.

The fact that Jesus goes to *this area* is no small detail. The fact that He goes to Syrophenicia *and* Decapolis in this text actually provides the main thrust of the passage and main theological gospel idea because these are **both Gentile areas (non-Jewish)**. These are areas where the religious Pharisees did not want go. So by Jesus going and ministering here, the whole gospel movement is informed by it. **The more the Jews are oppose Christ, the more He turns to the Gentiles.** It's an intentional move on Jesus' part. The encounters Jesus has are divinely arranged. Jesus is teaching His disciples that as the Jewish nation rejects Him and He takes the gospel to the Gentiles, so they are going to be rejected by the majority as well and are going to be taking the gospel of His death, burial and resurrection to the Gentiles – those who will believe in Him. That's played out in the book of Acts later. But let's study the first account here.

I. JESUS ENCOUNTERS A CASE OF DEMON-POSSESSION IN SYROPHOENICIA. (VV. 24-30)

And when Jesus arrives in Phoenicia, He's trying to lay a little low – “He wanted no one to know of it”. Someone had invited Him into their home – whose home it was we don't know – but we do know that at this point in Jesus' ministry He was having a hard time finding time to rest or even time to eat and just spend some quality time teaching His disciples. Jesus loved investing in His **faithful few**. It's amazing to think that He has 3 years to disciple, from scratch, these rugged men to reach the world with the gospel.

❖ Jesus is a fan of small group discipleship!

I've said this more than once but that's something I'd love to see more of. You really feel like you're a part of something more than just “going to church on Sunday” when you get in a small group - church acquaintances become friends and best friends and disciples together. If you feel like church is still a little cold and unfamiliar and not family yet, get involved in a Bible study or small group. Come to the shootout at the Fisher's next Sunday afternoon. I also plan on starting a men's group soon and going through a study called, “Leaders in the Making.” I'd encourage all men young and old to come. Talk to me more about that for more information.

But because Jesus is so well-known by now, He can't escape the notice of a woman. And not just any woman. Verse 26 says, “Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race.” You'll want to take note of that to understand what is going on here. To begin with, **women** were looked down on by Jews; **Gentiles** also were looked down on by Jews; and **Canaanite (15:22) Syrophenicians** in particular, were looked down on by Jews. Syrophenicians, the historian Josephus said, bore the greatest ill-will toward Jews. They were a morally corrupt. They were denounced for idolatry. This is near the northern part of Israel where the idolatrous, Baal worshipping tribe of Dan was. Tyre's kind was actually used as an illustration of Satan (Ezek. 28).

But think about this: this is the area that Jesus told those of His hometown that Elijah ministered here, and not in Israel. If you remember, there was a famine in Israel and God sends Elijah to a widow in **Zarephath, located right here between Tyre and Sidon**, right where Jesus probably is. And Jesus said there were a lot of hungry widows in Israel, but God sent him to a widow in

Zarephath... and there were a lot of lepers in Israel but only Naaman *the Syrian* was cured. When Jesus said that, it made a lot of people mad. But it's about to happen all over again. The "sons of the kingdom" (Mt. 8:11-12) are rejecting the God of Israel again and now He's going to minister outside of Israel to a Gentile, Syrophenician woman just like in Elijah's day.

Think about this though: If anyone is undeserving of divine favor, it's this woman. She has several strikes against her. One man said if Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, this woman is a Gentile of Gentiles. If there was anyone in the world who should be alienated from God, a stranger to the covenants of promise, separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and without hope in the world – it's this woman – and she knows it. And that's why Jesus is merciful to her after this incredible exchange of words.

Let's look closer at **this most intriguing exchange between her and Jesus**: Matthew says she came to Him and began to cry out, "Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." Jesus' response? Matthew 15:23 says, "He did not answer her a word." He's as silent as a stone, Martin Luther said. The disciples tell Jesus to just send her away because she keeps shouting at us (Mt. 15:23)! She's becoming a nuisance to them. Still, she persists. Finally, He answers her, but denies her request. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." First she is **ignored**. Then she is **denied**. At this point, we're starting to question Jesus? "What is going on? Is He playing games? Where is my loving, compassionate Jesus?" What does she do? Give up? Walk away? Sulk in sorrow? No. It says, "She began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" But again, Jesus denies her request! He says, "It is not good to take the children's bread [children, meaning Jews] and throw it to the dogs [dogs, meaning Gentiles]" (Mt. 15:26).

To understand this you need to know that Jesus is speaking the language of the Jews in His day, referring to Gentiles as dogs. It was derogatory because most dogs were strays and scavengers. It reminds of when I lived in Santiago. There were stray dogs all over the city. They were filthy, usually scrawny things that lived on trash (dumpster dogs), except for the occasional man who fed them scraps from his market. Many of them wore matted fur. Many were mangled and limping or missing a limb from getting hit by a car in that busy city. That is what it's like to be a Gentile Syrophenician woman – an outcast dog. She knows she doesn't deserve anything.

But many commentators say that Jesus used a different word for dog than the normal Jew would have. Where they would have called her a scavenger dog, He used a lighter, more attractive word in her Greek language (*kynarion*) which is talking about a small house pet, or a puppy. It's almost like Jesus is feeding her clues to His coming kindness. And I think she is coming because she knows who this is! She call Him "Son of David" and "Lord" 3 times.

In fact, when Jesus says, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," it's like she doesn't even acknowledge the negative part of His statement. Where we would see only a "no" in Jesus' response, she sees a possibility, because **if there's a first, then that means there must be a second!** She says, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." Don't you love that? Her persistence and wit is amazing! We all know what she's talking about. Dogs are like vacuum cleaners under the table in some houses, who get to eat what the children drop before the meal is even over. What insight!

I think she understands things about God's Gentile program that most Jews in her day don't. Maybe she knows that in the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12:3 that it said that God would bless all nations through him. Maybe she knows that Elijah once ministered here to a widow and she's thinking, "*Hey, I can't help but notice you're here too!*" She's a step ahead of Paul right now, knowing that salvation is of the Jews first *and then* to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16).

This may not be the best illustration to use, but it reminds me of a popular movie scene where this dorky guy asks this gal what his chances are of her and him going on a date. She says, "Not good." And he says, "Not good, like 1 out of 100?" She says, "More like 1 out of a million..." And there's a pause.. but then he says, "So you're tellin' me there's a chance!" That's what this woman is saying – "if there's food and there's children, there's going to be crumbs!" She doesn't deny that God's program is a "Jew first" program and that they have a special place in God's program, nor did she want to usurp it.ⁱ All she wants is a few crumbs. A few blessings to overflow from that.

It's amazing how she can take the smallest encouragement and hang on to it. If there's a first, there can be a second! If there's food and children, that means there will be crumbs! Let's take a principle home from that for those darkest times in life – maybe you're in one right now and you feel like God has ignored you or denied you and your faith is being tested and tried. Sometimes all you need to get you through that day or that week is to latch on to the smallest encouragement – and you hang on to it until it's a fulfilled promise.

❖ **Hang on to the smallest encouragement until it is a fulfilled promise.**

I've said this more than once but when sometimes you've got to be like Jacob when He wrestled with God, saying, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." That's what this woman is doing. "I know You are God and I know You are good and I will not stop pursuing You. I don't care if you grant my request now or later or never, I'm not going to stop."

And sometimes, I want to be honest, that is EXACTLY what God is looking for because that's faith to keep persistent even when we're not getting the answer we want or when we want it. And Jesus hasn't been showing it, but I think **He's been taken by her faith this whole time**. It was a test of genuine faith. This kind of persistent faith has absolutely ravished His heart. The whole time she's been displaying her persistent faith, Charles Spurgeon said it's like diamond in His eyes that flashes with each turn. He couldn't resist her any longer because...

❖ **Nothing that pleases God more than the one who has humble and persistent faith Him. To Him, that's Great Faith.**

Matthew 15:28 tells us Jesus said, "O woman, **your faith is great**". Jesus was not cold and cruel and dismissive to this woman. *He wanted her to trap Him*. He wanted her to come to Him like this and show His disciples, and to show us, the Church, throughout the centuries and eternity, **what a genuine and persistent faith looks like from a Gentile woman**. He wants her to be aware of her faith and for us to be aware of what faith is. **She is a model of great faith for us and His silence** was a silence of love because it created an opportunity for God-glorifying faith to be on display.ⁱⁱ

There's so much to learn from this about **what real faith is, what happens in prayer, and what happens in God's program!**

Faith

Most of us, I'm afraid, would have stormed away after being ignored. If not then after being denied once or even twice. We would be mad He called us dogs. We don't like to be called what we are – sinners who deserve nothing but judgement and who are totally unworthy of grace. If I was her,

I'm afraid I would have walked away to sulk in my **negativity** and **spirit of entitlement, thinking that God is obligated to answer my request**. Sadly, the name it and claim it preachers today promote that idea by acting like God is a vending machine or a genie where if you put a dollar in and name your blessing and claim it, voila! He'll give it! But He's under no obligation to do anything for us. And He's not a lucky rabbit's foot either where if you just come with wishful thinking or a cold prayer of incantation, that He'll give you what you ask for... No. He's a person. And He is looking for real faith in Him that seeks more than His hand – it seeks His face.

Real faith that is **penitent** – it knows it's not worthy. It's **reverent**, calling Him Lord. It's **persistent**, in pursuit of Him. And it's **dependent** on Him – not turning away to anything or anyone but Him. **Real faith has an object and the object is Christ**. Our faith is only as good as the object our faith is in. This woman is a model of faith.

In relation to Prayer

This incident also shows us what can happen in prayer when we have needs. Have you ever thought about this? That **maybe sometimes God waits because He loves to see persistent faith in us? He is looking for the faith that persists in prayer about a particular need**. And that shouldn't be hard Spurgeon said, if we remember how long God waited on us! But **persistent prayer is a key to answered prayer**. According to Matthew 7, we are to keep on seeking and asking and knocking (with the right motives) until the giver of good gifts opens the door (Matt. 7:7). What do you do when someone won't quit knocking on the door? You get up and answer them. What do you do when a child won't quit bothering you with a question? You answer them. And we have permission to bother God.

❖ **You have permission to bother God with your need.**

In Luke 18, Jesus shared a parable about a widow that won't quit bothering a judge and the judge basically says, "Alright, alright. I'll grant you your request because otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out." And God is more righteous than that judge. The point is that we have permission to persist in prayer and to bother God with any petition.

But notice that His answer to our prayer isn't because we deserve it. *It's because we know we don't*. A prayer of faith is **confident** to come before God and present a request to God because of who God is, but it **not arrogant**. The answer comes unearned, in humility, and not in a spirit of entitlement. And I don't what personal need you have today, for you or for someone close to you like this woman, but don't give up praying.

❖ **Persistent prayer is powerful prayer.**

As a church body right now, we have a corporate need. We are looking to grow our worship team and looking at least for a worship leader who will lead us in the most natural thing we were created to do – worship. We have the opportunity right now to apply persistent prayer and see God answer it as a church body. **Would you commit yourself to praying about that? For God's worship leader, who will edify and encourage the church?** Wiersbe said, "Great faith is faith that takes God at is Word and will not let go until God meets the need."ⁱⁱⁱ

And one other thing about prayer: Thank God for your mother who prays for you. As one man said, "Hopeless and desperate as her case appeared, she had a praying mother. And where there is a praying mother, there is hope." God bless our praying mothers.

God's Program

Along with faith and prayer, this passage teaches us about God's program. His program with Israel is a primary focus at this time but like this woman knew,

- ❖ **His ministry to Israel is not an end in itself but a means by which to reach the entire world.**^{iv}

God chose one man, Abraham, so that through His descendants, they would be a shining light, a city on a hill to all nations. And even though someone might not live in Israel by a Jewish synagogue or in Jerusalem near the Temple, they were not beyond God's reach. No distance is too far for an infinite God to reach someone. No one is so far away that He can't reach them. We see that by the way He heals her daughter. He doesn't even go to her house or anything. He casts out the demon from a distance. It was the same thing with the other Gentile, Roman Centurion's servant He healed – from a distance. **Both healings from a distance reveals a greater spiritual lesson that in Christ, the distance, or the barrier, between Jew and Gentile is broken down.** Paul says in Ephesians 2, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

What we are seeing here is not just Jesus lollygagging to Phoenicia and Decapolis for a few weeks. **This is a theological lesson for these disciples who will be taking the gospel to the entire world. And it is positively reaffirmed by what Jesus does next.** We'll briefly touch on this account.

II. **JESUS ENCOUNTERS A DEAF-MUTE MAN IN DECAPOLIS. (VV. 31-37)**

Decapolis, remember, was clear on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The last time He was here, he freed a man possessed by a legion of demons and where all the pigs were that drowned. After that incident, the people freaked out and asked Jesus to leave. He honored that decision. But now the man's testimony has gotten around and they're ready to receive Him. **It's a powerful testimony about how a changed life can change people around you.**

- ❖ **Changed lives can change minds about Christ.**

But we also see how Jesus knew what He was doing a long time ago in coming here. Now, Matthew points out that all He has to do is sit down on a high hill and wait for the crowds to gather. And they brought to Him the lame, the crippled, the blind, the mute, and many others and laid them at His feet and He healed them. Everyone marveled as people were restored and these Gentiles, Matthew says, "glorified the God of Israel."

But Mark only mentions this one man that Jesus healed because it's an extraordinary healing in the He did it and Mark wants **to reveal to his original Roman audience just how tender and compassionate and personal Jesus is – even with the Gentiles!**

Remember, He could've healed this man without laying a hand on him. But what He does is so personal and has so much contact that it's almost uncomfortable to us. First, He takes this deaf and mute man aside from the crowd to focus on him alone. And being deaf and mute, they say, is worse than being blind because at least the blind can communicate – they don't experience the social pain experienced by the deaf. Imagine how much you would miss music if you couldn't hear or listening to God's Word preached. But then Jesus puts His fingers in his ears, communicating like **sign language that He's going to heal** this man's hearing. And then takes them out, and after spitting, touched the man's tongue with His saliva, signifying He's going to loosen this man's tongue.

And then He looks up to heaven and sighs (probably a sigh of grief about the degrading effects of sin in this world and of compassion) and says, "Be opened!" And his ears were opened immediately

and the impediment of his speech removed, and he began speaking plainly. He hears perfectly – better than most of us who have had hearing loss. You know what I think we need to take away from this?

❖ **Jesus’s compassionate grace is a model for us to reach the world.**

If we’re going to reach our world for Christ, we’ve got to literally reach out. Listen to people. Talk to people. Share Christ with them. Do life with them. Help them with things they need help with.

Decapolis’ response to Christ teaches us that just because someone isn’t willing to receive Christ immediately doesn’t mean they won’t in the future. So don’t give up or walk away forever. Because someday that coworker or friend or family member that you shared Christ with, is going to go through a hard time and they’ll need to be comforted. And they’re not going to go to their atheistic friends for comfort – atheism a comfortless and purposeless religious idea. They’ll come to you. And you can show them Christ. And He will open their ears to the Word of God and open their mouth to speak His Word as well. They too will realize, that “He does all things well.”

And you know, that’s one of the things I think we’ll say when we get to heaven. Looking back, even on the sufferings and entropy of this world, and I’ve had people rebuff me for saying this years ago, but I’m not afraid to say it – We will look back and say, “He did all things well. The One who knows all things and all possibilities knew what He was doing the whole time.”

❖ **God does all things well, so let your miseries push you to Him.**

That’s one of the reasons for suffering. We wouldn’t look for Him or see our need of something more if we were a bunch of spoiled brats who always got what we wanted. Miseries come with free will, and they create opportunities for God to reveal who He is – merciful and gracious. Ed will be talking more about that on Tuesday night.

Lastly, Jesus was at a point in His ministry where He didn’t need any more public-miracle attention and so He asked the man to be quiet about what happened. People were coming only for miracles and it hindered Him from being able to minister in the city. Second, He wanted people to focus on the message He was proclaiming and the teaching. That command to be quiet about what Christ has done though is not for us, but for those then and there. It is kind of funny though, he went and told everyone! We, however, are told to take the good news of Christ to the world – but we tend to hide it and not tell anyone! Let’s start changing that and working on that because the greatest miracle is the salvation by grace through faith. Share Christ with at least 1 of your coworkers or friends this week. Invite them to church, invite them to the shootout, to a Bible study, etc.

If you haven’t trusted Christ, you can do so today, right where you are. That’s what communion is all about. It’s all about what Jesus did for you. How He shed His blood and died, giving up His body, taking our place on the cross. Communion is here to remind us that we are completely dependent on Him for salvation because of what He did. And for us to examine ourselves and walk in light of that salvation.

ⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), 110.

ⁱⁱ Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 169.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wiersbe, 111.

^{iv} John MacArthur, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/41-34/food-from-the-masters-table>, accessed 8 October 2020.