

## **Jesus Christ: The God Who Astonishes Beyond Measure**

### **Mark 7:24-37**

**Introduction:** 1) I often say to our students at Southeastern Seminary that Jesus Christ is the greatest missionary who ever lived. And this is certainly true. He came the greatest distance, from heaven to earth, to bring the good news of salvation. He also made the greatest sacrifice, giving His life in the place of sinners that we might be reconciled to God. And yet in spite of the fact He had no jet planes to carry him around the world, no trains or cars to speed him across various countries, in His brief 3 years of earthly ministry He made time to travel to foreign soil to give us “a glimpse of Great Commission Christianity,” demonstrating beyond question that God’s kingdom knows no ethnic, racial, national or gender barriers. Indeed all who come to Him will find salvation from the One who “could not be hid” (v. 24), the One who does “all things well” (v. 37). 2) Mark packages 2 healing miracles that take place in pagan, Gentile territory. One is the healing of a demon-possessed little girl (7:24-30). The other is the healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment (7:31-37). Both demonstrate that God’s kingdom has come and Jesus is God’s man for all peoples. Contrary to religious and racial bigots, no one is so unclean that they cannot receive the blessing and the touch of Jesus Christ: the God who “astonishes beyond measure” (v. 37). It is easy to allow this beautiful text to naturally unfold in 2 movements that reveal once again the glory and goodness of the Son of God.

#### **I. Jesus is the Savior who cannot be hidden. 7:24-30**

Our Lord knew, as should we, that His Father had mapped out his life from beginning to end. It would involve days of happiness and joy. It would also entail times of trial and opposition, pressure and disappoint. Jesus has just engaged the Pharisees in a heated discussion over religion verses the gospel (7:1-23). Things are building to an inevitable

showdown that will result in his crucifixion. However, it is not yet the appointed time. And so Jesus leaves Galilee to get away from His enemies, spend some teaching time with his disciples, and to get a little R & R. However, he will be denied the latter and in the process teaches us some incredibly important spiritual truths about the heart of God.

### **1. Jesus cares for the nations and so should we. 7:24**

- Jesus heads north to the district of Phoenicia, what is today Lebanon, to the seaport city of Tyre, about 20 miles northwest of Capernaum. That he went there primarily to get away to rest is clear as the text says, “he entered a house and did not want anyone to know.” However, once again his presence is quickly discovered with Mark making the striking statement, “he could not be hidden.” This, of course, is not surprising, especially when we look back at Mark 3:8 where we see that a delegation from Tyre and Sidon had come down to see this Galilean miracle-worker. Further, the brilliant glory of the Son of God cannot be vanquished. He cannot be hid!
- It is clear then that Jesus was looking for a place to get away and rest. And yet, that he chose the region of Tyre and Sidon is missiologically significant. As best we can tell this is the only time Jesus ventured out beyond the borders of Israel. Further, Tyre and Sidon were inhabited by pagan Gentiles and the region had a very long history of opposition to Israel. This had been the home of Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31-32). Both Ezekiel (ch. 26) and Zechariah (ch.9) prophesied against her. James Edwards says “Tyre probably represented the most extreme expression of paganism, both actually and symbolically, that a Jew could expect to encounter” (p. 217). And yet Jesus goes there and graciously ministers. He

expands the scope and reach of the Messiah beyond what almost all of Israel expected. Unfortunately, too many Jews of that day continued to suffer from “the Jonah complex.” They could not imagine that God would extend His salvation beyond the borders of Israel. Jesus is about to turn all of that on its head. “From a socioreligious perspective, Jesus’ visit to Tyre universalizes the concept of Messiah in terms of geography, ethnicity, gender and religion in a way entirely unprecedented in Judaism.” (Edwards, *Ibid*). This Savior is not for just one nation, He is for all nations, and so should we be as well.

## **2. Jesus cares for the Jews and so should we. 7:25-27**

- Word gets out quickly that Jesus is in the house. “Immediately” a most unlikely individual shows up asking for his help, a woman whose “little daughter” is demon possessed (“had an unclean spirit”).
- Mark goes to some length to paint a portrait of this person. It is not flattering. She is 1) a woman; 2) a Gentile; 3) a Syrophenician by birth. In the parallel account in Matthew 15:22, she is called “a Canaanite woman.” This is her resume! A pagan, Gentile woman could not have been further from Paul called, “the common wealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12). No doubt she knew how “socially unacceptable” it was for her to approach a Jewish rabbi on any level. Look at who she is. Look at her pathetic little girl. And yet the text says she begged and the import of the verb is “she kept on begging” Jesus “to cast the demon out of her daughter.” She came boldly, humbly (“she fell down at his feet”), and she was persistent.

- Jesus' response is one of the most shocking and controversial statements He ever made. With our 21<sup>st</sup> century, western ears our breath is taken away and our heart momentarily stops. Verse 27, "And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." At first glance this sounds like a massive insult unworthy of our Lord. Yes, Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs, dirty, unclean scavengers completely unworthy and incapable of salvation. Is this what Jesus meant? Not at all. Several observations are helpful if we will just dig a little deeper into the text. First, the very words of Jesus are something of a parable not a direct statement. Second, the word for dogs is a word that corresponds to our word "puppies." He is not talking about a street scavenger but a household pet which the parable makes clear. Third, there is the crucial work "first". Jesus was, I believe, testing the woman's faith by saying I must first minister to Israel before I minister to Gentiles. There is a priority that I must and will honor. Paul said the same thing in Romans 1:16 which says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Our Lord had and has a deep love for Jewish people. He wept bitterly over her unbelief and rejection of Him as her Messiah (Matt 23:37). And, I am convinced in spite of her unbelief, He still loves her and cares for her. Yes! God is not through with the Jew! Paul in Romans 11:25-29 makes this crystal clear when he writes, "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;  
 “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” As regards  
 the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they  
 are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God  
 are irrevocable.” God cares for the Jews and so should we.

### **3. Jesus cares for the individual and so should we.     7:28-30**

- It would have been easy for this woman to walk away in bitter disappointment and sorrow. And yet she fires back with a “burst of boldness!” Why? Because as Tim Keller says, “There are cowards, there are regular people, there are heroes, and then there are parents. Parents are not really on the spectrum from cowardice to courage, because if your child is in jeopardy, you simply do what it takes to save her .... You don’t think twice; you do what it takes” (Keller, *King’s Cross*, 86). With wit, courage and faith, the woman responded. She did not take offense. She did not question the accuracy of Jesus’ words. She simply and humbly carries his analogy one step further. “Yes Lord” (don’t miss that!), I am a dog. I am nothing. I have nothing. I bring nothing. I have no right at the family table but...even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs” (v. 28). Wow! What insight! What humility! What faith! Mark simply states, “for this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” Matthew 15:28 says, “Then Jesus answered her, ‘O Woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’” Jesus commends her from what He calls “mega faith.” Verse 30 records the wonderful conclusion to the matter, “And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.”

- What a magnificent picture of salvation we have in this story. Yes Lord, we are all dogs under the table with no rights whatsoever as a member of the family. I acknowledge I don't deserve a place at the table, but I believe there is enough even for me on the table! I know you have some for me. I don't deserve it, but I desperately need it. Just a few crumbs will be enough. That I believe. Then in amazing grace and mercy our Savior lifts us up, no longer a dog (sinner) but a child (saved), no longer under the table but now a member of the family at the table.
- Are you willing to see yourself as the dog you are that you might be transformed into the child you might become?! Your sin is greater than perhaps you realize but His grace is greater than you could ever imagine.

## **II. Jesus Is The Savior Who Does All Things Well.                      7:31-37**

The miracle we now encounter is found only in Mark's gospel. The parallel account in Matthew 15:29-31 says many came to Him and that He healed them all. Perhaps this particular miracle had special significance to Peter, the eyewitness source for much of Mark's gospel, because he saw a physical parallel and illustration of his spiritual experience. I can identify with that! It is the second episode in Jesus' Gentile mission. Mark records that leaving Tyre he went north to Sidon before turning southeast to the region of the Decapolis ("10 Cities"). All together this "horseshoe-shaped" journey would have constituted a 120 mile walk. It is an unusual course to be sure. It may have been taken to further avoid the Herodians and Pharisees who were after Him. It may also have been intended as an extension of his ministry to the disciples and also the Gentiles.

More dogs are to be fed from His table. Jesus turns away not one who comes to Him in faith.

**1) Jesus hears our cries for help.                      7:31-35**

- Mark tells us a man is brought to Jesus who was 1) deaf and 2) had a speech impediment. Apparently he had not been deaf all his life, but now he could not hear and could “hardly talk” (*NIV*). Like the Syrophonecian woman, the man’s friends were persistent in begging Jesus to lay his hand on him. That they did not specifically ask for healing may indicate all they were asking for was our Lord’s blessing. That they would receive and much, much more.
- Verse 33 Jesus takes the man aside in privacy. His attention is personal and compassionate. Entering the man’s world our Lord uses “sign language” he could understand (read vv. 33-34). Sinclair Ferguson summarizes well what our Lord is doing,

The man could not hear Jesus and he was also incapable of verbal communication. So Jesus ‘spoke’ to him in the language he could understand—sign-language---. The fingers placed in his ears and then removed meant, “I am going to remove the blockage in your hearing.” The spitting and the touching of the man’s tongue meant, “I am going to remove the blockage in your mouth.” The glance up to heaven meant, “It is God alone who is able to do this for you.” Jesus wanted the man to understand that it was not magic but God’s grace that healed him (*Let’s Study Mark*, 114).

As Jesus looked up to heaven He did 2 things (v. 34). First, He sighed. I believe this display of emotion, something we do not often see in Mark, is an expression of our Lord’s love and compassion for this man and also His great grief over the Fall of man and the terrible consequences of sin. It is the sigh of God over a broken creation. Second, He looked to heaven and said most likely

in Aramaic, “Ephphatha,” that is “Be opened.” As is characteristic of Mark, the result is given in simple, straight-forward language in verse 35, “And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.” The language of the original text is quite vivid and descriptive, “and were opened his ears, and immediately were loosened the bond (chains) of his tongue.” Like a prisoner bound in chains, Jesus broke the fetters of his captivity and set him free.

2) **Jesus deserves our praise for all He does.**      **7:36-37**

- One can only imagine the first words of clear speech uttered by this man. No doubt he was praising and glorifying God. Jesus charged him and his friends not to spread the news (v. 36), “but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.” *The Message* paraphrases it this way, “Jesus urged them to keep it quiet, but they talked it up all the more, beside themselves with excitement.” We cannot condone their disobedience but we certainly can understand their response. I imagine we all would have responded in exactly the same way.
- Mark concludes in verse 37 by recording, “they were astonished beyond measure,” saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” This verse has deep theological significance. “He has done everything well (good)” echoes Creation and God’s work in Genesis 1-2. “He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak” recalls the words of Isaiah who wrote that when the Messiah comes, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the



tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:5-6). Again James Edwards captures the great significance of this when he writes,

The allusion of Isaiah 35 is of supreme significance for Mark’s presentation of Jesus, not only because the restoration of speech signals the eschatological arrival of the Day of the Lord but also because the desert wastelands of *Lebanon* (Isa 35:2) will receive the joy of God. The regions of Tyre and Sidon are, of course, precisely the Lebanon of Isaiah 35. Jesus’ healing...in the Decapolis becomes the firstfruit of the fulfillment of Isa 35:10, that Gentile Lebanon will join “the ransom of the Lord [and] enter Zion with singing”! Salvation thus comes to the Gentile world in Jesus, who is God’s eschatological redeemer from Zion. As we have noted before, the only categories adequate for Mark to describe the person and work of Jesus are ultimately the categories of God. Once again, as in the story of the Syrophonecian woman (7:24-30), salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). (pgs. 224-25).

Thus we see the “grand redemptive storyline” in a miracle put on display. Creation (“He does all things well [good]”) → Fall (“A deaf man because of sin”) → Redemption (The miracle of healing) → Restoration (God’s kingdom has arrived). Oh, there is so much here we need to see. There is so much here we need to “zealously proclaim.”

**Conclusion:** There is a beautiful hymn written by Charles Wesley, brother of John, both of whom were used by God in the “First Great Awakening.” It wonderfully captures the heart of this text. It wonderfully captures, as well, our joyful response. “Hear” the words of stanza’s 1, 4 and 5.

1) O for a thousand tongues to sing

My great Redeemer’s praise

The glories of my God and King

The triumphs of His grace!

4) Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb,

Your loosened tongues employ,  
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come;  
And leap, ye lame, for joy!  
5) My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honours of Thy Name.

Jesus is the God who cannot be hid. He is the Lord who does all things well.