

Jesus travels further afield

Another slight turning-point comes in Jesus' ministry. Everything in Mark 1:14–7:23 has taken place in Galilee. But now Jesus begins to travel further afield. We shall find Jesus in Tyre (where He helps a Syrophenician woman, ^{□1} and the healing of a deaf man takes place in Decapolis^{□2}. We can see several reasons why Jesus should begin to travel more widely. Although He was not afraid of Herod^{□3} He wanted to avoid being arrested by Herod's men, and He told His disciples to be careful both about the Pharisees and about Herod ^{□4}. He was being careful and was taking steps to avoid His ministry coming to an end too soon.

^{□1} 7:24-30
^{□2} 7:31-37
^{□3} See Luke 12:32
^{□4} 8:15

• Two healing stories that stress faith

Also He needed to be somewhere where He was less well-known in order to give further teaching to His inner circle of disciples and followers.

The next two stories in one way or another, stress faith and the blessings of Jesus which come where there is faith.

From Gennesaret ^{□1} or (less likely) from the house of 7:17, Jesus goes to Tyre^{□2}, which was a Gentile area. He was going there in order to get some privacy^{□3} but soon someone who knew about Him was seeking Him out. Jesus' reputation had gone ahead of Him even into Tyre. A Syrophenician woman hears about Jesus and comes to ask that her demonised daughter should be delivered by Him^{□4}.

^{□1} 6:53
^{□1} 6:53, 7:24
^{□3} 7:24b
^{□4} 7:25-6

1. Jesus may delay his answer

1. **Jesus may delay His answer to our request.** In this case the woman receives a discouraging reply. *'Let the children be satisfied first'*^{□1} means 'I want to attend to the necessity of teaching my disciples; I am not yet sent to Gentiles. I will attend to them in some future time'.

^{□1} 7:27a

Then He says *'It is not fitting to take the bread of the children and throw it to little dogs'*^{□1}. This means, in effect, 'It would not be appropriate at this time for me to give blessings to a Gentile woman; I am only here at the moment to teach my disciples who are Jewish'.

^{□1} 7:27b

• At this time Jesus' ministry confined to Jews

Jesus uses a somewhat humorous but rather insulting picture. The woman is a Gentile, one of the 'little dogs' that are outside the family of God. The disciples are Jewish believers and so are specially 'children' in God's family. At the moment Jesus is only sent to Jews. His ministry to Gentiles will not take place until much later. It will take place through His apostles after His death and resurrection.

In this way Jesus gives a discouraging answer to the woman. He virtually says 'No' to her request.

• God likes us to have spiritual ambitions

Jesus can test our faith by being discouraging to us when we pray. He seems to say 'No', and this reveals whether we are serious about what we have asked and whether we shall lightly surrender our request. God likes us to have spiritual ambitions; He is pleased when there are good things which we eagerly desire from Him and which we will not lightly give up

2. Jesus is pleased with persistent prayer

2. **Jesus is pleased when we persist in prayer.** The Syrophenician woman does not accept Jesus' answer. She persists: *'Yes, Lord, but...'*^{□1}. She feels that His refusal is not His last word, and that His mercy is to be taken more seriously than the answer which He seems to be giving her. Jesus said elsewhere people ought always to pray and not lose heart^{□2}.

^{□1} 7:28
^{□2} Luke 18:1

3. Faith argues with God on the basis of His character

• Faith's appeal to God's mercy is rewarded

• Deaf man is healed in response to his friends' faith

• Miracles – demonstrate God's sovereignty,

• Are a foretaste of the resurrection body

• And may be taken as spiritual parables.

3. Faith argues with God on the basis of His character. Great faith always reasons with God. It may argue with God using His promises. Or (as here) it may argue with God on the basis of His character. 'Yes, Lord', she says, 'but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs'¹. It is an appeal to Jesus' mercy. Yes, she says, it is right for you to be responsible for your own children, the disciples. But when a father is looking after his children he has sufficient mercy to throw the dogs a crumb or two. I may be a dog but won't you show mercy to me and throw me a crumb? The woman was casting herself upon Jesus' mercy. And Jesus liked it. Faith holds on even when God seems to say 'No'. And faith clings to God's promises, God's mercy, God's power. Such faith is rewarded. As Jesus promises², the child is delivered³.

The healing of the deaf man of Decapolis also stresses faith and the blessings of Jesus which come where there is faith. Jesus travels past Sidon, and through Galilee but not through the areas where He had ministered before. He keeps travelling until He reaches the area of the Ten Cities or 'Decapolis' on the eastern side of the river Jordan. It is not in Galilee, the territory ruled by Herod¹.

While He is there a man who is deaf and has a serious speech difficulty is brought to Him¹.

The story is interesting because of the place it gives to faith. It might be asked: when a person is healed who must have faith? The answer is: anyone! Faith may be in the sick person, the friends of the sick person, or the person praying for healing. In this case it is the friends of the man who bring him to Jesus. Jesus takes him aside and ministers to him privately¹. At this point He does not want a lot of attention or publicity. Because it is difficult to communicate Jesus signals to the man that He intends to heal him. He signals that He intends to pierce the deaf ear, and to moisten and loosen the useless tongue². His looking up to heaven signals that He expects God to work in the man's life³. He wants to rouse expectation in the man himself. The double cure of ears and tongue immediately takes place⁴.

Again Jesus asks the man to keep the miracle secret¹ but again the secret is not kept and Jesus is admired and praised when the news of the healing gets known².

The miracles of Jesus are partly indications of what – within His sovereignty – can take place at any time. Jesus is still able to heal. At the same time they are foretastes of the resurrection body. A day will come when every faculty of the body will be perfectly restored, never to fail again. The miracles which tell of healed faculties may also be taken (as they are often taken in the gospels themselves) as spiritual parables. Every person needs to have every faculty alert to God. We need spiritual ears to hear. We need the 'eyes of our hearts' enlightened. And we need loosened tongues to praise our God.

1 7:28

2 7:29

3 7:29

1 7:31

1 7:32

1 7:33

2 7:33

3 7:34

4 7:35

1 7:36

2 7:37



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