

Preaching Through the Bible Chapter 15 Mark 7:24-37

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 Decapolis². We can see several reasons why Jesus should begin to travel more widely. Although He was not afraid of Herod³, He wanted to avoid being arrested by Herod's men; and He told His disciples to be careful about both the Pharisees and 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

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.

Two healing stories that stress faith

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

From Gennesaret¹ or (less likely) from the house of 7:17, Jesus goes to Tyre², which was a Gentile area. He was going there in order to get some privacy³, 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 if her demonised daughter could be delivered by Him⁴.

¹ 6:53

² 6:52, 7:24

³ 7:24b

⁴ 7:25–26

1. Jesus may delay His answer to our requests

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 at 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

¹ 7:28

lose heart^{Ⓜ2}.

Ⓜ2 Luke 18:1

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

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 promises^{Ⓜ2}, the child is delivered^{Ⓜ3}.

Ⓜ1 7:28

Faith’s appeal to God’s mercy is rewarded

Ⓜ2 7:29

Ⓜ3 7:30

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 Herod^{Ⓜ1}.

Ⓜ1 7:31

While He is there, a man who is deaf and has a serious speech difficulty is brought to Him^{Ⓜ1}.

Ⓜ1 7:32

Deaf man is healed in response to his friends’ faith

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 privately^{Ⓜ1}. 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 tongue^{Ⓜ2}. His looking up to heaven signals that He expects God to work in the man’s life^{Ⓜ3}. He wants to rouse expectation in the man himself. The double cure of ears and tongue immediately takes place^{Ⓜ4}.

Ⓜ1 7:33

Ⓜ2 7:33

Ⓜ3 7:34

Ⓜ4 7:35

Miracles – demonstrate God’s sovereignty

Again Jesus asks the man to keep the miracle secret^{Ⓜ1}, but again the secret is not kept and Jesus is admired and praised when the news of the healing spreads^{Ⓜ2}.

Ⓜ1 7:36

Ⓜ2 7:37

Miracles –are a foretaste of the resurrection body

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.

Miracles – and may be taken as spiritual parables

Study 15

The Power of Faith

Read Mark 7:24-37.

Read: **Preaching Through the Bible: Mark**, Chapter 15.

A. Jesus travels further afield

1. Jesus begins to travel m..... w.....
2. **True** or **false**?
 - a. He wanted to avoid being arrested by Herod.
 - b. Jesus was afraid of Herod's men.
 - c. He was being careful about His ministry coming to an end too soon.
 - d. He needed a *safe place* where He could give more teaching to His disciples.
 - e. The Decapolis is a region within Galilee.
 - f. The people of Tyre had never even heard of Jesus until He visited the city.
3. The accounts of the deaf man's healing and the Syrophonecian woman's daughter's deliverance both stress the blessings of Jesus that come when there is f.....

B. Jesus may delay His answers to our requests

1. At first the Syrophonecian woman received a d..... r..... from Jesus to her request.
2. At that time His priority was to teach His d.....
3. At that stage, ministry to Gentiles was something for the f.....
4. Jesus uses a h..... but rather i..... picture.
5. The image of '*little d.....*' is a contrast to '*ch.....*' and conveys the thought that the Gentiles are outside the f..... of God.
6. God's plan for the Gentiles to hear the gospel would not take place till much l.....

through the a..... after Jesus' d..... and r..... .

7. Jesus' discouraging response is to say, "n...." to her request.

8. True or false?

- a. Sometimes Jesus tests our faith.
- b. Jesus wants us to have spiritual ambitions.
- c. He is pleased when we do not give up our desires for good things.

C. Jesus is pleased with persistent prayer

- 1. The Syrophonecian woman believed in the m..... of Jesus.
- 2. Jesus wants people to pray and not l..... h.....

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

1. True or false?

- a. Arguing with God is always sinful.
 - b. People with faith may argue with God on the basis of His character.
 - c. People with faith may also argue with God on the basis of His promises.
 - d. The Syrophonecian woman thought it was unfair that Jesus should be giving priority to the Jews at that time.
 - e. The Syrophonecian woman complained vigorously to Jesus about comparing her to a *'little dog'*.
 - f. The Syrophonecian woman was appealing to Jesus' mercy.
 - g. Jesus changed His mind reluctantly.
2. The woman's d..... was d..... by Jesus.
3. The story of the man in the Decapolis region also illustrates the blessings that come from Jesus in response to f..... .
4. The man had difficulty with his s..... and his h..... .
5. Faith for healing may be:
- a. The faith of the s..... p..... .

- b. The faith of the f..... of the s..... p.....
 - c. The faith of the p..... pr.....
6. Jesus h..... the man pr..... and instructed him to keep the healing a s.....
 7. Again the s..... is n..... k.....
 8. The miracles of Jesus are examples of:
 - a. What God in His s..... can and st..... does at a..... t.....
 - b. Foretastes of the r..... b..... when all faculties will be restored.
 - c. Sp..... p..... In this case we all need to h..... God and have our t..... loosened to praise Him.

E. For further thought and discussion

1. In his letter, James warns his readers not to be unstable and double minded (*James 1:1-8*). Why do you think Jesus felt free to change His mind on His initial response to the Syrophonician woman’s request and how would you explain this to James?
2. If God were always to give us what we want at the first time of asking, what do you think the result would be?
3. Thinking about some of Jesus’ other miracles, which can be seen as spiritual parables and what is the message Jesus is giving?
4. To what group of people does the thought of the miracles of Jesus as foretastes of the resurrection body give special encouragement and comfort?

F. Notes

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