

## He Does All Well

Westview Church | Mark 7:24-37 | Pastor Brett Toney | November 22, 2020

### Learning to Disdain

Last Sunday, Pastor Haakon helpfully drew the comparison of the intrinsic disdain first century Jews had for those who did not keep the cleanliness traditions to the disdain for someone labelled a racist in our day. Another illustration we discussed was about someone who coughs or sneezes. I sneeze into my mask at Menards, and I feel like I've gotta announce to everyone around me, "I just had a tickle in my nose!" Or I've heard people talk about how they watch a show from years ago and can't help but start freaking out because the actors aren't wearing a mask or being six feet apart. We've been conditioned to look disdainfully on anyone who exhibits any kind of illness. It is this kind of disdain Jesus intentionally moves to overcome as he continues to make known the nature of the kingdom of God.

In our passage this morning, we've got two of three displays in a row of Jesus intentionally engaging non-Jews, engaging Gentiles or Greeks as they are called. He is the *Jewish Messiah*. "What benefit would those unclean Gentiles have with *our Messiah*?" That would've been the mindset. Yet as Jesus has time and again moved in compassion to restore and heal those of Jewish heritage, so here he moves in compassion to restore and heal those of Gentile heritage. Regardless of your ethnicity or skin color, you experience suffering in this fallen world. And Jesus is making plain that he is mighty to restore *all* that is broken, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of skin color.

## **Dogs & Demons (v.24-30)**

So, Jesus is on the move again, travelling quite a distance—over thirty miles as the crow flies to get on foot from Galilee to Tyre on the Mediterranean coast. Verse 24 tells us he was trying to go incognito, perhaps to lay low after the crowds have been growing or in the aftermath of his confrontation with the Pharisees. Yet, as is often the case, Jesus is doing more than just a single objective. He could've gone out in the wilderness, yet he travels to Tyre.

But Tyre? Why go *there*? This city, with Sidon, are major cities in Lebanon ... also known as *not-Israel*. These twin cities are pagan centers of trade that the prophets of the Old Testament regularly declared judgment against. Jesus uses them as an illustration of how bad judgment will be for refusing him; "It will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you" (Matthew 11:21). "It's gonna be bad for them, and how much worse for you who reject me!" Jesus is saying.

Yet while seeking an undisclosed location, he is found out. The multi-faceted description in v.26 of this mother is intended to heighten our disdain. Not only a woman, but a Gentile. And not any Gentile but a Syrophenician. And not only that but by birth! She's positively contagious! Stay clear!! Yet here she is at Jesus' feet pleading with him to heal her daughter. We don't know exactly what was happening with this girl. A naturalistic reading of having an "unclean spirit" may say she had a mental health issue. Perhaps, yet the interplay of the physical and spiritual is not so easily separated. This girl is

suffering, and Jesus says a demon is involved. In your own suffering, beware of either over-spiritualizing it—seeing a demon behind every illness or hardship—and de-spiritualizing it—explaining everything away in understandable, controllable physical causes.

Jesus' response to the mother's request is a bit odd. He offers this brief parable. Will she have ears to hear? The parables Jesus has spoken to Jewish audiences have largely fell on deaf ears. In short, Jesus initially declines her request, stating the priority of the Jewish people—the children—to receive the gospel of the kingdom. Or as Paul would later put it in Romans 1:16, "To the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Gentiles, like little house dogs, are not the priority when dinner is served. This mother understands Jesus' parable and responds cleverly. The abundance given to the children flows over to the pets. The abundance of the kingdom is enough for Gentiles also.

We know Jesus perceives her faith, recognizes her understanding, and acts accordingly. Look carefully at what he says in response. Verse 29, "On account of this word, go. The demon has left your daughter." Because of what she said, the demon is gone before Jesus replies. The demon has already been dispatched before Jesus opens his mouth. Behold the divine authority of the Messiah who only wills something be done, and it is accomplished. He doesn't go to the girl. He doesn't lift a finger. He doesn't say a word.

And this for a Gentile. I don't know that any of us here are of Jewish heritage. We are this woman. Like her, we were "separated from Christ,

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13). The very power at work in this girl and in this mom is at this very moment at work in you who believe.

Kids, are you following along with me? Did you hear what happened in this story? A little girl, maybe your age, was hurting. Her mom believed Jesus is who he says he is, and she was made well. When you're hurting, you can know that when you believe in Jesus, he cares for you and wants to help you. That's why he came at Christmas, to undo all that is sad. He doesn't necessarily make everything better right away, but he cares for you like he cared for this little girl.

### **Deaf & Dumb (v.31-37)**

Moving on from Tyre, Jesus goes through Sidon on a roundabout trip to another Gentile area he's been before, the Decapolis. It's not long before a man who can't hear or speak is brought to Jesus. Perhaps his reputation has spread through the testimony of the man Jesus healed in Mark 5. And here we have another odd exchange as Jesus takes this Gentile aside, sticks his fingers in his ears and touches his tongue. In doing so, Jesus is demonstrating his care for this man, disregarding the crowd. Like he touched the leper in Mark 1, he moves in compassion for this man. He touches his ears and tongue—and apparently spits—to communicate to this man that he isn't merely going to bless him but heal him. And groaning in sorrow over the effect of sin on this world, he

commands the ear drums and vocal cords to work. And they obey their creator. And like the leper, this man is more than ready to proclaim all that Jesus has done for him.

Truly, Jesus has done all things well, as the onlookers testify. The words that Mark puts in their mouth are more than what they merely say, "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." I think Mark intends for us to hear in this the words of Isaiah. The prophet anticipated a day when God would come.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. 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 (Isaiah 35:4-6).

The words of Isaiah are being fulfilled as God comes to heal the deaf and put a song in the mouths of the mute.

Isaiah not only foretold of the day when God would come and open the ears of the deaf and unbind the tongue of the mute, but he also anticipated that God would receive into his covenant people those of any nation, tribe, people, or language. Truly God's house would be a house of prayer for all peoples (cf. Isaiah 56:7). Your ethnicity or skin color is not your main source of identity. Your identity comes from being an image bearer of God that responds in one of two ways to the gospel of the kingdom: repent and believe or persist in rebellion and reject Jesus. Your identity, the central defining thing about you is who you say Jesus is. Jew or Gentile, healed or broken, man or woman, well or afflicted. It does not matter. Jesus overcomes all sinful disdain to rescue you

from the greatest peril of your soul. And such compassionate mercy is yours even now just as much and more so than it was for this mom and this man.

### **The Lord's Table**

That is what we are reminded of when we come to the Table. His grace is sufficiently fresh for this week. His mercy is renewed for the challenges ahead.

We eat of the abundance of the kingdom that is enough even for us.