

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

Mark 7:24-37

Key Verse: 7:29

“Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

In the previous passage Jesus rebuked the Jewish leaders based on Isaiah’s prophecy: **“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”** Jesus said that unwashed hands is not so serious, but an unclean heart defiles a person. How then can our hearts be cleansed? If we confess our sins and trust in the One who died for our sins, Jesus Christ our Lord, he cleanses us from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God! (1Jn 1:9; Heb 9:14)

In today’s passage Jesus retreats from Galilee to Gentile territory in Tyre and in the Decapolis. In these two places, Jesus heals two different people with very different problems. Let’s learn of Jesus, the merciful Messiah and the mighty Lord.

I. Jesus drives out a demon from a Gentile woman’s daughter (24-30)

Look at verse 24. **“Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.”** Jesus left Galilee and went to a Gentile city along the Mediterranean Sea (See MAP of Tyre & Sidon). Why did Jesus go here? It seems Jesus wanted to get away from his finger-pointing Jewish critics and spend quality time teaching his disciples. Jesus and his disciples also needed some rest and recovery from their exhausting ministry. The fact that Jesus did not want anyone to know he was there shows that he did not intend to do ministry there. Jesus’ disciples may have put a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door of the house or given strict instructions to say that Jesus was not available. But Jesus could not keep his presence secret. Why not? Because news of Jesus had spread beyond the borders of Galilee and Judea. People just couldn’t stop talking about Jesus. Though there was no newspaper or radio or television, news of Jesus was spreading by word of mouth from town to town and village to village, wherever people went. Even people in Tyre may have said: “Hey, did you hear about the Jewish rabbi Jesus of Nazareth? He is a great prophet and he heals the sick and the demon-possessed. He says the kingdom of God has come and many of the Jews believe he may be their promised Messiah-King.”

Though Jesus wanted to keep his presence in Tyre a secret, he could not. Verse 25-26 says, **“In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose**

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.” Note some details about this woman. She heard about Jesus and came to him on behalf of her little daughter who had an impure or evil spirit (the actual word in the original Greek is ‘unclean’ spirit). She was a Greek, not a Jewish woman. Then why did she come to Jesus? Why didn’t she go and pray to her Greek gods like Zeus or Apollo or Hermes? It is clear that she had faith in Jesus’ spiritual authority. According to Matthew’s gospel she called him, **“Lord, Son of David”** believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Jews. What is surprising is that though Jesus was Jewish she invaded Jesus’ Jewish ministry to grab a blessing from the Jewish Messiah. She had more faith than many of the Jews. And actually, she didn’t grab a blessing. She begged Jesus for mercy upon the awful condition of her daughter. The Bible says that **“she fell at his feet”** and **“begged Jesus”** to drive the demon out. She **“fell”** and she **“begged.”** These are humble postures and attitudes. She shows us the right attitude to come to Jesus. This is the same attitude that Jairus the synagogue ruler came to Jesus to heal his dying daughter (5:22-23). No one can demand anything from Jesus. No one deserves anything from him. He is holy and we are all unworthy of his grace and help.

We can learn from this woman to bring our desperate situation to Jesus. Sometimes we feel helpless in our situation. When people feel helpless, what do they do? Some turn to drugs or alcohol to forget about it. Some turn to petty pleasures or comforts. Some turn to psychics or other ‘gurus.’ The Lord does not want us to turn to idols or false gods in rebellion or despair. Jesus invites us to come to him. He calls in Mt 11:28, **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”** Jesus promised in John 6:37, **“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”** Earnest prayer is an expression of faith, of coming to Jesus.

One mother came to Jesus in desperate prayer, “Lord, do whatever it takes to humble and save my child!” She was even willing that her child be hospitalized to save the child’s soul. Are you willing to be hospitalized yourself to save someone’s soul? I confess that I am not so willing. St. Paul was even willing to give up his own salvation if he could to save his Jewish people. Moses too prayed that he would be blotted out of God’s book if his people were not to be forgiven of their sin (Ex 32:32).

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

Thus far in Mark's gospel, Jesus had chosen only Jewish disciples and confined his ministry of preaching and healing within borders that were mostly Jewish populated. The one clear exception was the healing of the Gerasene demoniac in the Decapolis on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Remember, with the pigs? Though the man wanted to keep following Jesus, Jesus would not let him but sent him home to tell how much the Lord had done for him. So he went and told in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him.

We have thought about the woman's right humble attitude in coming to Jesus. But it wasn't that simple a solution or quick a reply. The answer to her plea did not come yet. She had to pass a difficult test. Actually what Jesus said to her at first is quite shocking to our ears. He said in verse 27: **"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."** The woman begged for mercy and for deliverance from a demon. But Jesus talked about bread and children and dogs. Those who have a pet dog understand this analogy. Children sit at the table and dogs sit under the table. The people at the table eat first. The dogs don't get to sit at the table. I have a pet dog named "Mini" whom I got from Msn. Grace Jeon about a year ago. Whenever we eat at the table, she comes around hoping to get some food.

It is clear that by "children" Jesus means the children of Israel and by "dogs" Jesus means the Gentiles, which would include this woman and her daughter. What Jesus said sounds racist on the surface. But we know Jesus was no racist. Then why did Jesus say this? Matthew's gospel can help us here to understand. Jesus first says to her, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel"** (Mt 15:24). It means that Jesus' mission was focused on the Jews. Even Paul when he went from town to town preaching went first to the Jews then to the Gentiles. God gave the Jews first dibs. The ministry to the Gentiles was postponed for Jesus' followers to engage in.

The woman must've recognized that Jesus was likening her to a pet dog at the dinner table. Children get to eat all they want first, before the dog gets fed. The dog gets fed if there is leftovers. As we know, one of the harshest insults is to call a woman a dog. It would be quite natural and expected for this woman to become offended, angry, call Jesus an insulting name about him being a man or a Jew and go storming off.

How did she react? Look at verse 28. **"Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."** In effect, Jesus was telling her it wasn't time for the Gentiles to be fed. But she couldn't wait. Her request was

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

urgent. She was not going to give up for her daughter's sake. With a stroke of genius she asked Jesus for a crumb of mercy. She accepted her identity as a dog. She acknowledged her unworthiness. Her humility led her to wisdom. Proverbs 11:2 says, **“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”** Her true humility was revealed. She didn't just appear to be humble in falling at Jesus' feet. She truly was humble, realizing she didn't deserve anything from Jesus. Lord, I don't deserve a thing, but please spare me a crumb of your mercy.

It was the attitude and response that Jesus was looking for. Then [Jesus] told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Mary Ann Thomson was a Philadelphia librarian and hymn writer in the 1890s. She started writing the hymn “O Zion Haste” while sitting up one night with one of her children who was sick with typhoid fever. She wrote these words: “Give of your sons to bear the message glorious; give of your daughters, speed them on their way. Pour out your soul for them in prayer victorious, till God shall bring a new and joyful day.” Many of you, like me, are parents. I want more than anything for my children to know and love and serve Jesus. Of course I hope they will not be unemployed or homeless. But more important than having a nice job, a nice home, a nice spouse and nice children is that they follow Christ, live with his mission, and become a blessing to others. May the Lord inspire and work in us to be—like this Greek woman—humble and earnest intercessors, for our relatives, friends, neighbors, workmates, schoolmates, and Bible students.

II. Jesus enables a deaf-mute man to hear and speak (31-37)

Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. Jesus had been here once before when he drove the demons out of a man into a herd of pigs. That man had gone out sharing his testimony of how Jesus saved him. There in the Decapolis, some people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

“Some people” cared about their friend who was deaf and mute. “Some people” are very important and precious in the work of God, even though their names are not remembered by many. “Some people” participate in the powerful work of God by bringing others to Jesus. Thank God for “some people” whom God works through.

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

Verses 33-35 tell us how Jesus treated this deaf-mute man: **“After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ (which means ‘Be opened!’). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.”**

What would it be like to be deaf and mute? Of course, a deaf person cannot speak well, for he cannot hear himself speaking. We don’t know how he had become deaf. It was not likely from his birth for he could speak somewhat. Perhaps a loud sound had damaged his ears or an ear infection and poor medicine had ruined his sense of hearing. I can only imagine what it would be like to be deaf and mute. Obviously, hearing and speaking are essential in communication with others. Perhaps missionaries who don’t speak the native language can relate better to the deaf and mute man. A deaf man today could not use the telephone or listen to the radio. Even television or movies without captions would be worthless. This man could not hear others talking, birds chirping, dogs barking, music playing, children singing or his mother calling him. Most people could not understand what he wanted to say, except a few people who understood sign language. Even if he could write everything he wanted to say, it would greatly slow and limit his communication to literate people. His daily life was silent, lonely and isolated.

Whoever has been blessed with the gift of hearing and speech must not take it for granted. We must thank God for the ability to hear and speak. Even more importantly, we must use our gift of hearing and speech for the glory of God. One who doesn’t use his ears or mouth for the glory of God is spiritually deaf or mute. One who cannot hear what God is saying through his word is spiritually deaf. Jesus often said, **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”** (4:9,23). Also, one who does not want to hear the word of God is spiritually deaf. One who proudly thinks he has heard it all before is spiritually deaf. The people of Athens in Apostle Paul’s day were like this. **When they heard Paul preaching some asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” They said to him, “You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” The Bible comments, “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas”** (Ac 17:18-21).

Paul warned in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, **“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to**

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

myths.” Today so many people please their itching ears for many hours through television, music and the internet. Consider this: how many hours daily or weekly do you watch TV, listen to the radio or an MP3, or surf or chat on the internet? Now compare: how many hours do I spend in God’s word and prayer? God is speaking to us through his word. Can we hear him? Are we listening?

Cain was spiritually deaf. When Cain was angry, God tried to counsel him. The LORD said to Cain, **“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it”** (Ge 4:6-7). But Cain did not listen to God’s counsel and warning. He listened to his anger and became a miserable soul as a murderer and restless wanderer. King Saul was spiritually deaf. God ordered him to fight the Amalekites and totally destroy them. Saul thought he had a better idea: to spare their king and the best of their sheep and cattle. When Saul listened to his own idea, rather than God’s command, God rejected him as king. One who does not listen to God’s word and obey it is spiritually deaf.

What does it mean to be spiritually mute? To be spiritually mute is to not speak up for God and the truth when we have opportunity or obligation to do so. In our country we have the freedom of speech. We can share our faith in Christ without any threat of being arrested. This is not true in communist or Muslim nations. Even though we have this freedom of speech, in our human nature we are much more comfortable to speak about what is politically correct, like sports or the weather, since these are not offensive to people. Fear of rejection can rob a man of speech and make him silent.

Remember Peter on the night of Jesus’ arrest? He was spiritually mute. He could not speak up for Jesus. Rather he lied, saying he didn’t even know Jesus. Later, after Jesus’ resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Christ, they were threatened by those in authority not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter replied, **“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”** (Ac 4:19-20). Spiritually mute Peter became a bold and joyful preacher of the gospel of Christ. Later he wrote, **“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God”** (1Pe 4:11). He also wrote, **“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander”** (1Pe 3:15-16).

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

Some spiritual mutes are very talkative to gossip and criticize. Paul wrote, **“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”** (Eph 4:29). If we only talk about worldly things, then we are spiritually mute. If we have no idea what to say or pray, we are spiritually mute. When we come to Jesus and receive the word of God. Then we know what to say and how to pray. We can speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and plant faith and love for God in others.

How did Jesus help this man? Look at verses 33-34. **“After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ (which means, ‘Be opened!’).”** Jesus first took the deaf-mute man away from the crowd. In this way, Jesus showed personal attention and love to this man. He drew him away from the hustle and bustle of the crowd. Next, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then Jesus’ spit and touched the man’s tongue. Perhaps Jesus did these things since they were very visible and the man could not hear. Jesus wanted the man to know what he was doing and to plant faith in him. Jesus looked up to heaven, showing his reliance on God, and said with a deep sigh, “Ephphatha!” (which in Aramaic means, “Be opened!”). Though the man could not hear, he could surely read Jesus’ lips, especially the word, “Ephphatha!”

What happened? At Jesus’ words, “Be opened!”, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. **At the beginning of creation God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light** (Ge 1:3). When Jesus commanded, “Be opened!”, the man’s ears were opened, just as Jesus commanded and willed it. When Jesus said to Jairus’ 12-year old daughter, who was lying dead on her bed, **“Little girl, I say to you, get up!”**, **immediately the girl stood up and walked around** (5:41). When Jesus said to the stormy sea, “Quiet! Be still!”, the wind died down and it was completely calm (4:39). There is almighty power in the word of Jesus. Jesus’ word is the living and active word of God. Jesus’ word can heal and save us.

Through Jesus’ loving touch and powerful word, the man could hear and speak plainly. Then a whole new world opened up to this man; he had a rich new life full of sounds and the ability to communicate his thoughts. Now he could speak and sing praises to God. He could pray audibly. And he could testify to the wonderful grace of Jesus. This is how we must use our mouths for the glory of God. Jesus can open our spiritual ears. We must come to Jesus and receive his healing touch and living word. Jesus can loosen our tongues to speak praises to

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH OF THE GENTILES

God. When we have the word of God and the Holy Spirit in us, we can speak the living word of God. We can know what to pray. We can testify to others of Jesus' saving grace, love and power.

At the end of this short story, Jesus commanded the people there not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. They were spiritually deaf since they acted like they didn't hear Jesus. Isn't it hard to keep good news a secret? People were overwhelmed with amazement. **“He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”** Their words echoed the words of the prophet Isaiah, written 700 years earlier: **“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy”** (Isa 35:5-6).

In conclusion, these two passages have shown us that Jesus is not only the promised Messiah for the Jews. He is also merciful and mighty to help and to heal the Gentiles, that is, the rest of the world. Jesus is the merciful Messiah who accepted the humble plea of a mother for her tormented daughter. Jesus is the mighty Lord who can give hearing to the deaf and speech to the mute. Jesus is the giver of abundant life. Let's come to Jesus in prayer for ourselves and for others to be delivered from sin and the devil. Let's come to Jesus in prayer for ourselves and others to have our ears opened to the word of God and our tongues loosened to speak it.