

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/31/04 Brad Brandt

Mark 7:24-37 "What Jesus Thinks of People Not Like Us"*

Main Idea: In Mark 7:24-37 we find two stories that reveal what Jesus thinks about people who aren't like us. In both stories Jesus is interacting with people in Gentile territory.

I. Jesus ministered to a needy woman in Gentile territory (24-30).

A. A woman asked Jesus to help her daughter (24-26).

1. She was an outsider.
2. She was a woman.
3. She had a daughter under demonic control.

B. Jesus declined (27).

1. It's God's plan that the Jews eat first.
2. It's not God's plan that the Jews eat alone.

C. The woman didn't give up (28).

1. She exhibited humility.
2. She exhibited an understanding of God's Word.
3. She exhibited faith.

D. Jesus granted her request (29-30).

1. We see His pleasure with faith.
2. We see His grace.
3. We see the authority of His Word.

II. Jesus ministered to a needy man in Gentile territory (31-37).

A. The people brought a man with physical problems to Jesus (31-32).

B. Jesus healed the man (33-35).

1. Sometimes the Lord works in strange ways.
2. Then as always, the Lord wants us to trust Him.

C. The people drew conclusions about Jesus (36-37).

1. He is good.
2. He is great.

The Bottom Line: People not like us are...*just like us* in the eyes of Jesus.

1. We are all sinners.
2. We need what He alone can give.

The facts don't lie. They dress differently. They eat different food than we do. They wear their hair differently. They choose different kinds of entertainment. They have different attitudes towards politics, towards the military, towards in the institution of the family, and certainly towards religion. In short, they are *different*. Not a little different. A *whole bunch* different.

By the way, who I am describing? You say, "It sounds like a person over forty talking about Generation X." No doubt there are differences there. Someone else might be thinking, "You must have in mind the way people in the north think about people in the south." There are differences there, too. "It sounds like a Republican talking about a Democrat, or visa versa." Maybe.

Actually, I have in mind something else. I am talking about how a first century Jew would have viewed the *Gentiles*. To the Jews, the Gentiles were the outsiders, the unclean, and in the minds of some, the enemy. In the minds of all Jews, the Gentiles were considered to be people *not like us*.

How do you view and then treat people who *aren't like you*? Visit the average church on a Sunday morning

and what will you find? People attending church will be people who are *just like them*. Look at the demographics. White people have their churches. Black people have their churches. Hispanics have their churches. Those who have money worship in one building, those who don't gather across town. I realize I'm over-generalizing, but the statistics would indicate we (people who identify ourselves as followers of Christ) don't think much of (or at least we don't think much about) people who are different from us.

Perhaps a better question is, how *should* we look at those who aren't like us? To answer that as Christians, we of course need to address the more fundamental issue of how Christ viewed outsiders. Which brings us to Mark 7.

In Mark 7 we find the only recorded instance of Jesus leaving the land of Israel. In Mark 7 we find two stories that show Jesus interacting with people in Gentile territory.

In Mark 7:24-37, we discover what Jesus thinks about people who aren't like us. You may be surprised at what you're about to see. The implications are tremendous.

I. Jesus ministered to a needy woman in Gentile territory (24-30).

We're nearing the middle point of Mark's biographical account of the life of Jesus. Time wise, we have entered the final year of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. As far as the outline of Mark's book, we've moved into the "withdrawal section," for having ministered to the multitudes in Galilee Jesus is now seeking to withdraw from the public limelight.

The first words of verse 24 emphasize this transition. "He left that place." Jesus left the Capernaum area in Galilee. Why? For two basic reasons. One, for safety reasons. The Pharisees and scribes are hounding Him and seeking to trap Him (see verse 1). The Lord wasn't afraid, for sure, but it wasn't time yet to submit Himself to their deadly intent. The other reason for withdrawing was so He could spend more time with the Twelve. That was His agenda, to invest in twelve men who would in turn carry on His ministry after His return to heaven.

And where did Jesus go to get away from the Jewish crowds? To Gentile territory. Verse 24—"Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre." It's about forty miles from Capernaum to Tyre. Culturally, it's light years away.

Tyre and Sidon (another city, twenty-six miles further) were cities of Phoenicia, which was part of Syria. It was a coastal region next to the Mediterranean Sea (the Phoenician sailors are famous as the men who first navigated by following the stars). They had their own kings in Phoenicia, their own coins, and their own gods.

It's noteworthy that these two Phoenician cities were supposed to be part of Israel. When Joshua partitioned out the land, the tribe of Asher was allocated the land "as far as Sidon the Great...and to the fortified city of Tyre" (Josh 19:28-29). Unfortunately, they never were able to take over the area. Plug that thought into this trip Jesus is taking. Barclay observes, "He [Jesus] was not so much coming amongst strangers as entering his inheritance."

Mark continues in verse 24, "He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret." Again, one of Jesus' reasons for leaving was to get away from the crowds so He could invest uninterrupted time with His disciples. But word about Him spread even to this Gentile turf. Of the many people who discovered His arrival, Mark tells the story of one particular person, a story involving four scenes.

A. Scene #1: A woman asked Jesus to help her daughter (24-26). Verse 25—"In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet."

Those final words indicate desperation—"she *fell* at his feet." And for good reason. Her daughter, the text specifies her *little* daughter, was under the control of an evil spirit.

Before us is a concerned parent. It's not the first parent we've seen come to Jesus with a child in need (remember Jairus in chapter 5?). But there is something different about this parent, some factors (three to be precise) that make this situation quite unique.

1. *She was an outsider.* Verse 26—"The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia." The term "Greek" means she was a non-Jew, a Gentile. She's not from Greece (by nationality she was a Syro-Phoenician), but she probably did speak Greek (which indicates Jesus spoke Greek, too, for as we'll see He talked with her). In his parallel account Matthew identifies her as "a Canaanite woman."

Let this sink in. This person is an outsider. Jesus is a Jew. She's not. She doesn't bring sacrifices to the temple in Jerusalem. She doesn't keep the Jewish holy days. She eats unkosher foods. She dresses differently than Jews do.

Matthew indicates that when the woman first asked for help, Jesus didn't even answer her, not a word. Matthew also says the disciples wanted Jesus to send her away, probably so He (and they) could get some rest. When the Lord did speak it was to the disciples and His words seemed to indicate He would have no part of her request. Matthew 15:24—"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

2. *She was a woman.* "She begged Jesus..." the text states. That's strike 2. Not only is she a Gentile, but she's a woman living in a world where women had no rights. For a woman to approach a man was highly suspect.

By the way, there are thirty-five recorded miracles in the Gospels. Four directly involve women.

3. *She had a daughter under demonic control.* "She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter." How did it happen that a demon came and enslaved this young child in the first place? A teen today can open himself or herself up to demonic activity by listening to music that glorifies evil, violence, and sex. But this is a little girl. How did she fall prey to demonic control? We're not told. The situation certainly didn't speak well of the mother, however. The fact that her child is demon-possessed doesn't put her in good standing for any mother-of-the-year award.

So she comes to ask Jesus for help. Matthew's account makes it clear this wasn't a one time request. "Send her away," the disciples said, "for she *keeps crying out* after us (Matt 15:23)."

B. Scene #2: Jesus declined (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 their dogs.'"

What's Jesus doing? He almost sounds rude. That's part of the problem. We don't know how He *sounded*. All we have are the written words, but certainly His tone of voice affected how this woman took what He said.

For instance, I could say to you, "You old rascal" (with a smile and a warm intonation), or I could say, "You old rascal" (with a frown and a harsh tone). The meaning would be very different, even though the words were the same.

The Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs. It wasn't a compliment, either. It's noteworthy that Jesus used a less derogative term, one we might translate "doggies," or "pet puppies."

But the fact remains, at face value Jesus' words seem evasive, even harsh. Why not help someone if you can? That's how we tend to think. "If I've got a need, and you've got the means to help me, you owe me

what I'm asking."

Thursday was Trick-or-treat night. Towards the end a group of three children came to our door. I noticed they looked pretty normally clothed, so I asked one of them, "What's your costume?" He replied, "I'm not wearing one. I just wanted some extra candy."

That's how many people view God. They don't want to wear the robe of Jesus' righteousness, but they still think they have a right to God's "goods." My friends, the Lord doesn't "owe" anyone anything. He's gracious, for sure, and He showers us with blessings every day (sunshine, food, air, life itself). Our problem is that we tend to think we deserve His blessings. We don't.

What are we to make of Jesus' response? He communicated two realities here.

1. It's God's plan that the Jews eat first. "First let the children eat all they want." Jesus doesn't deny that the woman is in need, nor that He could help her. It's just a matter of timing. "*First*, let the children eat." Who are the children? He's talking about the children of Israel, the Jews.

Two thousand years before this the Lord chose a man named Abraham and entered into a covenant relationship with him. He gave him a son of promise, Isaac, and twelve grandsons, the children of Jacob. Through that elect family He formed a chosen nation, Israel, the nation through which He would bring redemption and hope to the world. Don't miss this. God chose to work through Israel to bring salvation to all peoples.

That was God's plan, to bring salvation to Israel first, then to the world. Paul mentions this in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: *first for the Jew*, then for the Gentile."

The fact is that at this time in God's unfolding plan of redemption (that's the spring of A.D. 29), a Gentile woman did not have the same claim on God's blessings as did a Jewish woman. That would change after the cross, after Jesus established the new covenant, for sure, but not yet. Cole explains, "Unless she was prepared to approach the Jewish Messiah in the knowledge that she was still a Gentile, outside the old covenant, then her day of healing had not yet come. After the cross, when the 'dividing wall' had been broken down, it would be another world (Eph. 2:14), with Jew and Gentile made one in Christ."

When Jesus sent out the Twelve to preach, just a few months before, He gave this charge (Matt 10:5-6), "*Do not go among the Gentiles* or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." Why not go to the Gentiles? Is it because God doesn't love Gentiles? No. It has to do with the timing of His plan. Jesus said it's God's plan that the Jews eat first. Here's reality #2...

2. It's not God's plan that the Jews eat alone. "First let the children eat," He said. In God's plan the Jews were to eat first, yes, but that doesn't mean God intended for them to eat alone. They were to be "a light to the nations," according to Isaiah. "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed," God told Abraham (Gen 22:18).

Because of what Christ did at the cross, all racial barriers have been broken down. Anyone can come to God through Him. But that's the point. Jesus hadn't done "it" yet. The cross was still months away.

C. Scene #3: The woman didn't give up (28). "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Three traits mark this unnamed woman.

1. She exhibited humility. She didn't defend herself—"Well, I'm as good as anybody else, Jew or not Jew." She didn't argue about "rights" and "fairness." She simply accepted the facts and this included accepting her position as an outsider. She was an outsider, a person who did not deserve the children's bread. But she

didn't ask for the bread, just a few crumbs would be fine.

She seems to know something most of us miss, that God's mercy is so great that even a total outsider can share in it, if she's willing to humble herself.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Jesus taught (Matt 5:3).

2. *She exhibited an understanding of God's Word.* What right does she, a Gentile, to ask for help from a Jewish Messiah? No right, not if He is simply a Jewish Messiah. But she didn't look at Him as a Jewish Messiah. She saw Him to be what He is indeed, a Jew who is *the* Messiah, the Messiah for all people.

It's the promise of the Old Testament that in Abraham, and consequently in *Israel*, all nations would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). Apparently, this woman knew and claimed this promise. Yes, God extended His grace to Israel first, but not to Israel alone. Read the Old Testament and you'll find mention of Rahab, Ruth, Namaan, and the Ninevites. What do they have in common? They were non-Jews, *Gentiles*, who experienced God's gracious help. Apparently, this woman had at least some understanding of God's Word.

3. *She exhibited faith.* She has a need, but she believes the Lord has the authority to make a difference. In fact, she calls him "Lord," not just the Lord of the Jews but *her* Lord as well.

"Even the dogs eat the children's crumbs, Lord," she said. "You are so great that even a crumb will do for me!" That's faith.

D. Scene #4: Jesus granted her request (29-30). In so doing He revealed three things about Himself.

1. *We see His pleasure with faith.* Verse 29—"Then he told her, 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.'" Why did He respond favorably this time? "*For such a reply*," He said. The reply from her lips revealed the faith in her heart. And the faith in her heart thrilled the Lord.

Hebrews 11:6 states, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." That's exactly what this woman of faith did, *earnestly seek Him*.

2. *We see His grace.* "The demon has left your daughter." He gave her what she requested. Because she deserved it? No, she's still as undeserving as before. She's still a Gentle, an outsider. He helped her because He is gracious, and that's what grace does.

3. *We see the authority of His Word.* Verse 30—"She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone." All He needed to do was say the word and the impossible was done. Go, the demon is gone. She went home, and the demon was gone. The child was resting in her bed. Oh, the unique power of Jesus! When He speaks, things happen.

How should we look at people who aren't like us? Let's probe that question further by investigating a second account. The first involved a Gentile woman. In the second...

II. Jesus ministered to a needy man in Gentile territory (31-37).

Verse 31—"Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis." That's interesting. The Lord left Tyre and headed north another twenty-five miles and then headed back south. He went to the Decapolis region [the term means 'ten cities'], on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. The Decapolis is the area where the Lord healed the Gerasene demoniac back in chapter 5. For our consideration the important thing to note is that Jesus left one Gentile

region but headed for another.

Matthew's account (15:29) says that Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down, after which great crowds came to Him bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others. Of the four gospel accounts, only Mark tells us the following story about one particular handicapped person.

A. The people brought a man with physical problems to Jesus (31-32). Verse 32—"There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man."

The man couldn't hear a sound and could barely talk. Mark uses the Greek term *mogilalos* to depict his condition, translated "could hardly talk" in the NIV. It's the only time this word appears in the New Testament. It's found only once in the LXX (the Greek translation of the OT), in an important messianic prophecy in Isaiah 35:5-6, "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..." That's what Jesus is about to do, give another clear sign that He's the Messiah.

Mark specifically says the friends begged Jesus to *place His hand* on the man. Did they think, based on reports of other miracles, that Jesus used some kind of magical technique to heal, one involving his hands? If so, that may explain part of the reason why Jesus took such a strange approach with this man, as we'll soon see.

We received an unusual call at the church last week. A woman said a relative was having pregnancy complications and was losing blood. She said there's a verse in the Bible that when read by a man causes bleeding to stop. She wanted to know if I would read that verse over the phone for her. "What's the verse?" I asked. She mentioned some reference in Ezekiel. "You want me to what?" I said. "If the man reads the verse it will make the bleeding stop." "God didn't give us the Bible to be a good luck charm, nor to use for incantations." "But it works," she insisted. "I've seen it work before." "Sorry, but I won't do it." She hung up.

Healing isn't tied to some technique. "Put your hand on the man," the friends begged Jesus. He healed the man, but He intentionally used a very different approach than they probably anticipated.

B. Jesus healed the man (33-35). Verses 33—"After he took him aside, away from the crowd..." It was an act of faith by his friends that the deaf man ended up before Jesus, but Jesus wants him to respond, so he takes him aside and begins to work with him in private.

Notice exactly how the Lord did the healing in verses 33-34, "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!')."

You're probably wondering, "Why did Jesus use such a strange method with this man?" I wondered that at first, but then I started pondering the man's condition. What's his problem? He *can't hear*. His sense of hearing doesn't work. What can he do? He can feel, taste, and see. With that in mind, Jesus' actions make perfect sense.

Here's a man who can't hear so the Lord does several things that suit his condition. First, He took him aside. Barclay comments, "Deaf folk are always a little embarrassed. In some ways it is more embarrassing to be deaf than it is to be blind. A deaf person knows he cannot hear; and when someone in a crowd shouts at him and tries to make him hear, in his excitement he becomes all the more helpless."

Next He touched his ears and spit on his tongue, both acts revealing what He intended to do, to restore his blocked ears and tied tongue.

Then He looked up to heaven, thus making it clear for the deaf man where the healing power was coming from.

After this came the deep sigh. Granted, the man couldn't hear the groaning sound, but he could see the effect of it in Jesus' eyes. The sigh indicated the Lord's burden for this man. It grieves the Creator to see the horrid effects of sin's curse on people. He *groaned* (it's the same word used in connection with prayer in Rom. 8:23). The sigh also indicates, perhaps, the severity of the battle with the satanic forces that enslaved this man.

Finally, Jesus uttered a word, just one, a simple word that the man could easily have lip-read: "Ephphatha!" It's Aramaic and means, "Be opened!" And although the man didn't hear Jesus speak that word, the effect of it was that he could hear!

Verse 35—"At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened [I love the picturesque rendering of the KJV, "the string of his tongue was loosed"]and he began to speak plainly."

Even a casual reader of the gospels can't miss it. Jesus didn't heal people in the same way. Sometimes He merely spoke. Sometimes He used a touch. Sometimes He used a substance like mud. Sometimes He healed in phases (the blind man in 8:22). The Lord didn't take a cookie-cutter approach (like the modern "hearers" do so often, with a trademark "bop" on the forehead, etc). Jesus saw people as individuals and when He healed them He used the method that best suited the special need of that person. Yes, the Lord deals with people one by one.

Sometimes we say, "When God made so-and-so he 'broke the mold.'" The fact is, He breaks the mold *every time* He makes a person. No two people are the same, not in His eyes for sure.

What can we glean from this miracle? I see two lessons here.

1. *Sometimes the Lord works in strange ways.* You say, "I still don't get the part about Jesus putting spittle on the man's tongue." It's not the only time the Lord used His spit in His miracles. Later in Mark 8:23, He put spit in a blind man's eyes to restore his sight. In John 9:6, the Lord spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and put it in a blind man's eyes. Then He told the blind man to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man did as told and received his sight.

"But it seems so strange," you respond. That may well be the point.

If the Lord wants to touch your tongue with His saliva, or put mud in your eyes, or do anything else that seems strange to you, will you let Him? If you have leprosy and He tells you to go dip in the Jordan River—as he did with Naaman—will you obey Him?

The fact is, the Lord can and often does many things to us that don't make sense, not to our limited perspective. What does He have in mind?

2. *Then as always, the Lord wants us to trust Him.* Will you *trust* Him and submit your life to Him? That is the question. Will you say today:

"Lord, if You want to put Your finger in my ear and touch my tongue with Your spittle, You must have good reason. Have your way with me."

Or to make it more personal, "Lord, if You want me to enter into a time of physical affliction," or, "If you want to take my loved one home to be with You," or "If you want me to lose my job," or "If you want me to leave the security of a job I've had for years in order to serve You more effectively in a brand new field," or if the Lord chooses to work in any other way that doesn't make sense, will you say, "You are Lord, and You are

good. May Your will be done. I trust You."?

Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His Word,

Just to rest upon His promise, just to know Thus saith the Lord.

As a result of this miracle...

C. The people drew conclusions about Jesus (36-37). Verses 36—"Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it."

Jesus wasn't interested in being known merely as a miracle-worker. He'd come to save sinners—that's why He eventually died for them on the cross—not simply patch up their lives.

How ironic! It was in this same region, the Decapolis, that Jesus healed the Gadarene demoniac (back in chapter 5), but that time the crowd was afraid and wanted to get rid of Jesus. This time Jesus tells the crowd to keep quiet, but they talk all the more.

Verse 37—"People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"

Here were the conclusions they came to about Jesus, two of them.

1. *He is good.* "He does everything well," they said. That's the same assessment God Himself made after completing His creative work in Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

This is what Jesus does, my friend. He brings beauty back to God's creation. He restores what man's sin has turned ugly.

Is your life a mess? Look to Him. He does all things well! He is good.

2. *He is great.* Great enough to make the deaf hear and the mute speak? Yes. Great enough to take care of whatever problem you may have? Yes. He is great. After all, if He could create the world in the first place, He surely can take the broken pieces of our lives and make something beautiful once again, all for His honor.

What's amazing is that as great as He is—and there's none greater—He willingly entered this world as a servant. He came to die as a substitute for sinners, to set them free, to give them eternal life. Having died, He conquered death and lives today to give everlasting life to all who will repent and receive Him.

What's the Lord's assessment of people who aren't like us?

The Bottom Line: People not like us are...*just like us* in the eyes of Jesus.

The two stories we've seen today make that perfectly clear. Jesus isn't just a Savior for the Jews, but for all people. It doesn't matter which side of the tracks you were born on. Though we may look different on the outside, we're just alike in the two ways that matter most.

1. *We are all sinners.*

2. *We need what He alone can give.*