

How Does Jesus Treat the Outsider and the Hopeless?

Mark Devotional #14

Mark 7:24-37

24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. 25 But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." 30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

- Mark 7:24-37, ESV

Jesus is known as the "friend of sinners," which was intended as an insult against Him. (see *Matthew 11:19 & Luke 7:34*) Yesterday, we explored how Jesus ran into conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem over the issue of human traditions. Another reason why Jesus was rejected and despised by the leadership in Israel was because He did not choose to bless the "right kind" of people.

In today's passage, we see Jesus with an outsider and with a hopeless man. We see the power, wisdom and compassion of Jesus on full display. First a Gentile woman, a non-Jew outsider, has a demon-possessed daughter who needs deliverance. At first Jesus' response to her seems cold, unfeeling, even harsh. But He was actually drawing out her humility and faith for public display and commendation. He was teaching His disciples that humility and faith are more important than ethnicity.

Then, we see Jesus in the area of the Decapolis, a heavily Gentile-influenced area in the north of Israel. Here, He encounters a man who is deaf and mute, a difficult combination that was considered impossible to heal. Whereas Jesus had cast the demon from the Gentile woman's daughter from a distance, here Jesus gets very hands-on with this man. He takes him aside privately, puts His fingers in the man's ears, spits, touches his tongue and says, "Ephphatha! (Be opened!)"

Jesus could have healed this man from a distance or with a word, but He did not. Jesus almost never healed people in the same way. He was as unpredictable as He was powerful, which made Him dangerous, impossible to either predict or control. But Jesus' power is matched only by His compassion. He healed the deaf and mute man completely, enabling him to hear and speak plainly.

Jesus welcomes the neediest among us - those who have been hurt, rejected, cast out, left alone, and have lost hope. Jesus reaches out in different ways, through different means. He calls people to life, to forgiveness, to healing, to restoration and reconciliation with God. And today, He most often does so through His people, who speak His word and pray for the lost, the outcast, the hopeless.