

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 8-30-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Mark 7:24-37

<sup>24</sup>From there Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, <sup>25</sup>but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. <sup>26</sup>Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup>He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>28</sup>But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” <sup>29</sup>Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” <sup>30</sup>So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup>Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup>They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup>He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup>Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” <sup>35</sup>And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup>Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup>They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

**<sup>24</sup>From there Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, <sup>25</sup>but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. <sup>26</sup>Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.**

This story follows Jesus’ argument with the Scribes and Pharisees about ritual defilement. Now, as if to sharpen the point he made there about that which comes from within a person rather than that which comes from outside a person causing defilement, Jesus enters into Gentiles territory. Tyre is along the Mediterranean sea in modern-day Lebanon. It is a good 100 miles from Jerusalem as the crow flies; about 35 miles from Capernaum where Jesus has spent much of the Gospel of Mark thus far. Tyre was in the region of Phoenicia, a heavily Gentile area. It is unclear why Jesus left Capernaum for Phoenicia. The text implies that he went for a respite or escape: “He did not want anyone to know he was there.” Where better to go to escape from Jewish crowds than a Gentile city 35 miles away? His fame preceded him, however. This woman, a native of the region and a non-Jew, finds Jesus, prostrates herself before him, and begs for his help in exorcising a demon that has gripped her daughter. We have already seen Jesus’ mastery over unclean spirits and demons in Mark’s gospel. Here, however, the possessed person is not present, but is at the mother’s home. Also, the possessed person is an outsider; a gentile, not a member of “the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24).

**<sup>27</sup>He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>28</sup>But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” <sup>29</sup>Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” <sup>30</sup>So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.**

This portion of the gospel text is the most troubling to us today. Jesus reacts more harshly than we would expect to the woman’s request. Rather than merely telling her “no” or sending her away, Jesus seems to insult or rebuke the woman for her request. Then (as now) it was not polite to refer to someone as a dog. Although Jesus’ use of the term “first” implies that there may in fact be a place and a time for Gentile inclusion in the ministry of Jesus, his use of dogs to describe gentiles in contrast to his use of children to describe Jews offends and troubles us. The woman, however, does not seem troubled by it. She accepts his premise as true, essentially saying, “Yeah, I may be dog, but the dogs get the leftovers. So you still need to help me.” Ironically, the woman shows true recognition of the Old Testament concept of the special nature of the people of Israel. Remember, God blessed Abraham and his offspring to make them a blessing to all nations. The woman is merely insisting Jesus make good on this promise that not only will

Israel be blessed, but that all the world shall be blessed through Israel. Further, in bowing down before Jesus and by insisting that her request is akin to mere crumbs from the table (in light of Jesus' tremendous power, her request is a small matter for him to do for her), she shows more knowledge and faith than the religious leaders in the previous story. Here, an outsider in a foreign land shows more awareness of the kingdom of God than Jesus' enlightened Jewish opponents who had come up from Jerusalem to see his ministry in Capernaum. For this, Jesus grants her request, healing the little girl at a distance.

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Just as quickly as Jesus left the region of Galilee for Tyre, he returns. Perhaps his sole purpose in coming was to have this interaction with the woman and her daughter. In any case, Jesus apparently took a roundabout route back to Galilee—he went by way of Sidon some 20 miles north of Tyre in order to eventually turn southeast and head back to Galilee. Again, his circuitous route may have been intentional in order to give him the opportunity to meet and heal this deaf man with a speech impediment.

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This healing is in sharp contrast to the one mentioned above. That one was done (presumably) publicly and at a distance. This one is done in private and in very intimate terms. The man is touched, probed, and rubbed with spittle. Jesus groans (or sighs deeply, depending on the way we translate this word). Another contrast is that this man is apparently Jewish, since Jesus speaks to him in Aramaic, the everyday language of the Jewish people of that region, telling him to “be opened.”

**<sup>36</sup>Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup>They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”**

Jesus' command to tell no one about this healing is a continuation of a theme that runs throughout the gospel—the so-called “Messianic secret” which culminates in an ironic and unexpected failure of the women to go and tell at the empty tomb. This command is almost humorous because how else would the man be able to demonstrate that he is healed without talking? Everyone who knew him would know he was cured simply by speaking. Why, then, does Jesus command him to be silent? The crowd's assertion that Jesus has “done everything well” is reminiscent of the goodness of creation described in Genesis: “And it was indeed very good.” The crowds recognize the divine messianic significance of Jesus' work here.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. Do Jesus' words to the woman trouble you? Why do you think he chose this harsh language?**
- 2. Why do you think Jesus sighed or groaned when healing the man?**
- 3. Why do you think Jesus commanded the people to be silent about his deeds of power?**