

Jesus' Ministry in Tyre and Sidon/Decapolis – Part 1

Matthew 15:21-31; Mark 7:24-37

Jesus had just taught that no food was unclean, but next, it is recorded that He practiced His teaching by going into Gentile territory. We will study the casting out of a demon for a Gentile heroine of faith, read of a strange healing of a Gentile deaf and dumb man, see the reaction of the Gentiles to Jesus' healing of the masses, and then be amazed at the Feeding of the 4000. All of these to Gentiles, whom the Jews saw as unclean, but don't forget Jesus is the Savior of the world!

Healing of the Syrophenician Woman's Daughter

I. The Woman and the Need

“Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts (Lit. - region; district) of Tyre and Sidon (“and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.” Mark 7:24). ²²And, behold, a woman of Canaan (“a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation;” “heard of him,” Mark 7:25) came out of the same coasts, and cried (Lit. - wailed) unto him saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my (“young” Mark 7:25) daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” Matthew 15:21-22

“Tyre and Sidon” – This is the only time we find Jesus outside of Israel. He traveled about 40-50 miles from the Capernaum area to near these coastal cities of Phoenicia, a part of Syria at the time of Christ. Most believe He did not go into these towns, but He was outside Israel in the “region” of Tyre and Sidon.” They were wealthy, trade cities that had a long love-hate relationship with Israel. During David's reign, they were friendly; later, because of the competition of trade and shipping, they were happy when Israel was at war and overtaken. Keep in mind that these cities and area were Gentile.

“he could not be hid” – Jesus did not go to this area to have a public ministry but actually desired to get away from the crowds and the constant distraction of the Religious leadership that took up time and interfered with His ministry to the disciples. These hounds would not follow Him into Gentile lands. Jesus and the disciples needed rest, and Jesus desired to teach them more directly. Don't forget, Christ had gone over the Sea of Galilee to escape the crowds just days before and ended up with a mass of people who met Him on the other side and eventually needed dinner! (Feeding of the 5000) This was Jesus' life! He was a religious “celebrity,” some believed He was the Messiah, but most came for healing and out of curiosity. We are told He went into a house. Edersheim, the converted Rabbi who wrote a classic book on the life of Christ, believed that Jesus would have entered a Jewish home, and I would agree. There was a line Jesus admitted was there: He came to the Jews first, and salvation was of them first. With that said Jesus would and could not “hide” His blessings from this area. You cannot “hide” the Light of the world.

“a woman of Canaan”/“a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation” – Matthew and Mark's writing style and focus are highlighted again in this event of Jesus. **Matthew** will center on this unnamed woman's relationship with Israel based on her birth heritage. She was a Canaanite woman, going back to the time of Joshua, some 1400 years. It's like saying I was of Scandinavian Viking descent! We would ask, how can you know that, and who cares!? Well, the Jews cared about heritage, and the point was this woman's lineage was not a friend to the Jews but an enemy that should have been annihilated. But Matthew is about to show Jesus' mercy and her amazing faith despite her heritage! **Mark** will tell us about her nationality and political background. We are told she was

Greek, which means she probably spoke Greek and had the religion and philosophy of the Greeks. She was also, Syrophenician by birth, or was from Tyre and Sidon. This pedigree given by both Gospel writers was not painted in complimentary form but was setting up the amazing interaction between her and Jesus!

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David.”—This plea would have been very significant and curious to the Jewish ear, so Matthew recorded her exact words. This Gentile woman had previous knowledge of Jesus. Somehow, she had heard about Jesus, and that some believed He was the awaited Jewish Messiah. The term “son of David” was a Jewish term for the Messiah, reflecting on the promise to David that his son would one day sit on His throne forever.

II. The Reactions and the Reason

“But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. ²⁴But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matthew 15:23-24

Jesus: We find that Jesus was deliberately silent. He didn’t answer her a word. All the crying, calling, and wailing, Jesus seemed to ignore it all! This was definitely not like Christ's normal reaction to needs! He usually was quickly compassionate and attentive, but this time, nothing! Why? Most Bible teachers believe it was how she addressed Jesus. She called Him “Son of David.” This woman had no right to call Him that; she was not Jewish. Jesus was not playing games or trying to frustrate her but 1) drawing out and growing this Gentile woman’s faith and 2) teaching a wonderful principle of faith and God’s grace to all people. In our study of Jesus, we have found that if an individual of any race or religion turned to Him in faith, that person would find Him sufficient to meet all needs. Jesus desired to teach the disciples about the kingdom. Here will be a wonderful visual lesson for about kingdom followers!

Disciples: Again, we read of a need, and the disciples’ first thought is to send it away. Remember the feeding of the 5000? We will see the same pattern: they ask Jesus to send the need away, but instead, He does an amazing miracle. Looking at the Greek, the disciples repeatedly asked Jesus to send her away. When describing the disciples' conversation with Jesus, I even saw the English words “begged, pleaded, urged” Jesus to send her away! Evidently, this woman’s persistent crying, calling, and wailing had gotten to the disciples. The disciples’ sympathy level and faith were low, but their frustration and impatience were high! Looking carefully at the wording of Jesus’ reply, it seems they asked Jesus to answer her request and get rid of her.

Then we hear from Jesus, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This exchange between Jesus and the disciples is only found in Matthew. This lesson is recorded and directed to the Jewish heart – first to the “lost sheep.” In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus will use this same terminology when sending the twelve disciples on their first mission without Him. (“...Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”) Peter will preach this principle early in Acts. (Acts 3:25-26) Then Paul, in Acts 13:46. But, please realize, this conversation will also be heard and picked up by the woman! Jesus is teaching, “I came to the Jew first.” But He will also show the truth that He will also bless Gentiles! This is a Bible principle! Ps. 22:27-28; Isaiah 56:6-7; Matt. 12:18-21; 28:19

III. The Conversation and the Commendation

“Then came she and worshipped him (“and fell at his feet:” Mark 7:25), saying, Lord, help me. ²⁶But he answered and said, (“Let the children first be filled:” Mark 7:27) It is not meet (Lit. - good) to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs (Gk - family pets vs. wild dogs). ²⁷And she said, Truth (“Yes” Mark 7:28), Lord: yet the dogs (“under the table” Mark 7:28) eat of the (“children's” Mark 7:28) crumbs which fall from their masters' table. ²⁸Then Jesus answered and said unto her, (“For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.” Mark 7:29) O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (“And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.” Mark 7:30) ” Matthew 15:25-28

Jesus – “It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.” – This statement came after the woman fell worshipping at Jesus' feet and repeated her plea in reverence and desperation, “Lord, help me.” She dropped the Jewish phrase referring to Jesus as the “Son of David” and just called out to Him as Lord. She had no right to Him as the Jewish Messiah, but now she came throwing herself before the Lord of the universe. What a simple prayer of honest need. I'm afraid we've all said that very prayer! And with her new plea, Jesus responds. Jesus' answer to her was similar to what He had said to the disciples - Jews are blessed first. Let's talk about the word “dogs” found in this passage. Everything I studied discussed this word. The Jews very openly called Gentiles dogs, referring to the mangy, wild scavengers that roamed the streets of Palestine; it was an ugly, degrading name. But this “dog” is not that Greek word. It is actually the word used to describe small dogs Jews would have as house pets! Did you know Fido was Biblical!? Here, Jesus is giving a glimpse into a household where no parent would take food from the children and willingly give it to the little doggie under the table! Christ's blessings were to Israel, the children, the lost sheep, not to the Gentiles. And she understood!

This woman had a lot of things going against her: 1) Her race – Gentile, Canaanite 2) Her sex – women were seen as second rate at the time of Christ, of course not to Jesus but to her culture 3) The disciples – We already read, they wanted Jesus to send her away. 4) Satan – It was one of Satan's army that had taken possession of her dear little daughter. 5) Now Jesus' words – Even Jesus seemed to be against her

Woman – “Truth Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.” – But the first thing out of her mouth was agreement with Christ. “Yes, Lord,” and then in faith, she twisted His very comment and reminded Jesus that even the little pet doggies get the crumbs that fall from the table. She didn't ask for a loaf or a morsel but just a crumb, knowing that would be enough for her daughter's healing! Don't miss her understanding and her statement of faith; she really knew who Jesus was, for she had said the crumbs had fallen from “their master's table.” The children were Israel, and the pets were the Gentiles, but the master and father was Jesus Himself! Lord, I'm not asking to rob Israel, but in your goodness, treat me like a little pet dog and throw me a crumb, “Lord, help me!”

Commendation—Healing and Faith—And Jesus was amazed! Knowing the hearts of men, Jesus saw the hostility and hate of the Jewish Leaders, the curiosity and often greed of the masses, and the small, wavering faith of the disciples. But very seldom did He see such “great faith,” and that day, He saw it in the heart of this Canaanite, Gentile woman! Such faith had to be rewarded and displayed! Jesus rewarded her by removing the demon from her daughter at that very moment. When the woman returned home, her daughter was completely whole. Jesus answered her request. And her faith was displayed; we are still talking about her faith over 2000 years later.

Believers' Application:

I want to conclude this event by considering her great faith, what Jesus taught from her example, and how we should respond.

- 1) **Her faith in Christ influenced all aspects of her life!** Jesus commented on this woman's faith, but what other character traits did she display that are worthy of comment?

Wisdom – her ability to take Jesus' words and share truth back to Him

Humility – Jesus' silence, His first comment to the disciples, and then about the food going to the children, these things didn't stop her. She was willing to endure these seemingly disrespectful actions humbly.

Meekness – She realized she had no rights before Jesus that day. She stood before Him solely seeking the goodness of His character.

Patience – All the begging, crying, wailing, disciples' unfavorable stares and comments, and Jesus' silence didn't deter her. She kept asking!

Perseverance – She had a request that would not be denied! Her resolution for healing of her little daughter was so great that she would not stop until she received it!

All of these traits were a product of her faith! She knew Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David, Lord of all, and with Him, all things were possible, including the release of her daughter from Satan's hold. Her faith in Christ influenced all aspects of her life!

- 2.) **God desires to display and build the faith of His followers** - In my study, much was made of Jesus' early silence to her. I read that it was because she addressed Him as "Son of David," a Jewish Messianic term that didn't pertain to her. I believe this is true, but I wonder if the greatest result of Christ first ignoring her was how her faith in the person of Jesus was both **displayed and strengthened!** Matthew Henry, the 18th-century preacher, said this, "He heard her and was pleased with her, though He did not immediately give her the answer she expected. Sometimes God seems not to regard His people's prayers, like a man asleep, but it is to prove and to improve their faith, and to make His after-appearances for them the more glorious to Himself and the more welcome to them." MH p. 1468. Yes, how much more wonderful was Jesus' answer to her request because she had to wait for it. A long-anticipated answer to prayer is certainly sweet!
- 3.) **Don't hesitate to keep on asking your requests** – This Gentile woman kept on asking! Nothing would stop her. Like her, we should all be at Christ's feet, begging for our needs! The salvation of a loved one, the spiritual needs of our children, our relationship with our spouse, friends, or our churches. Instead of worrying and anxious, we should pray and beg. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." The word supplications has the idea of specific petitions, pleading, and even begging God for them! So don't hesitate to keep asking!
- 4.) **The time of the Gentiles had not yet come** – At the time of Christ, the universal aspect of the Abrahamic covenant had not come to be. Though God never rejected the sincere faith of a Gentile throughout the Old Testament, the opening of God's blessings to Gentiles was not fully known. (OT Gentiles blessed by God (Rahab, a Canaanite at the time of Joshua, Ruth, Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar) During Jesus' ministry, we find Him referring to the "great faith" of two Gentiles. This woman and the

Roman Centurion of Matthew 8/luke 7. Both of these individuals had their requests granted, but it is interesting to note that both healings were done from afar. But remember, the Gentiles were far off until Calvary. Eph. 2:11-14 Because of the season we are in, I want to read Simeon's words from Luke 2. He was the old man from the temple who held baby Jesus in his arms and said, "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Luke 2:30-32

JW Shepard, in his book The Christ of the Gospels, concluded this event of Jesus by writing, "The poor mother had brought her trouble to Jesus and through humility, persistent prayer, devoted love, a great faith, and keen intelligence, secured the physical cure of her little daughter, and what was a far greater blessing – her own salvation and one of the highest places among the heroines of faith in all times." p. 288

Let's end with Romans 15:8-13, where we read Paul's Old Testament lesson to the Gentiles, calling them to rejoice for God's compassion toward them.

Healing of the Deaf and Dumb Man

I. The Man and the Need Only Mark records this miracle.

"And again, departing from the coasts (Lit. - region, district) of Tyre and Sidon, he came ("nigh" Matthew 15:29) unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. ("and went up into a mountain, and sat down there." Matthew 15:29) ³²And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech (Gk - begged) him to put his hand upon him."
Mark 7:31-32

The Journey—Jesus left the area of Tyre and Sidon and traveled approximately 20 miles through the rugged land north of the Sea of Galilee to the region of Decapolis. This district was a league of ten cities populated by both Jews and Gentiles. It stretched from Damascus in the north to Philadelphia in the south. The Romans allowed them to have their own army, currency, and government. This was a wealthy area due to the east and west trade routes traveling toward Egypt and Africa. The cities became an oasis for supplies, rest, and trade for the great caravans.

Matthew tells us Jesus "went up into a mountain, and sat down there." This may be a very strong hint to a teaching time among this mixed crowd, though we don't find those words. We know Christ had spent some days in Sychar after the visit with the woman at the well. So, it seems Jesus had taught non-Jews before. But we do find it told to us that Jesus ministered to needs. Keep in mind that Christ did not come to this area to have a great public ministry; He had come unto "his own."

The Need – We are hearing of one deaf and speechless man who was brought to Jesus by others. It is believed that, like most deaf folks, this man's speech would have been naturally impaired because of his inability to hear. He might have been able to communicate, but his speech was unclear. In verse 35, "string of his tongue was loosed," had to do with whatever inhibited his speech more than an actual physical issue.

II. Actions and the Reason

“And he took him aside from the multitude, and put (Gk - thrust) his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; ³⁴And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha (Pronounced – F-atha) (Aramaic direct word), that is, Be opened (Lit. - ”Be released” “Be thou unbarred”). ³⁵And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.” Mark 6:34-35

Jesus’ Healing Technic – Mark was the Gospel writer who loved concise action, and this passage certainly is a good example. Let’s list the actions of Jesus within this healing: 1) Jesus took the man aside from the crowd 2) Jesus, with pressure, put His fingers in the man’s ears 3) Jesus spit and touched his tongue 4) Jesus looked to heaven and “sighed” 5) Jesus said, “Ephphatha” These actions of Jesus were unprecedented. We don’t hear of this type of conduct in another healing.

Reason for Jesus’ Healing Technic – So this was a perfect, tailored-fit miracle for a deaf man who never heard of Jesus before. Never heard of Christ’s miracles, His teachings, His mercy, never heard of the blind seeing or of other deaf being able to be made hearers! This man was brought to Jesus with a clean slate concerning Jesus, little or no knowledge about Him, but 1) Jesus took the deaf man away from the crowds to give him a private, focused lesson about His person and power! 2) With Jesus’ fingers in his ears, the man would know it was Jesus’s power that made way for the sounds to be heard; 3) with Christ’s action of spitting and touching the man’s tongue, Christ gave a very visual sign that it was His power that gave the ability to speak – not ability to learn to speak, but he could speak – a miracle on top of a miracle! 4) Jesus looked to heaven and sighed, acknowledging it was the God of Heaven who was at work! 5) and then the command of the Creator, our Creator, “Ephphatha, “Be Opened!” These actions were not cures but visual signs for a man who only knew signs, not words; these were signs of Christ’s power and person – God in the flesh, Emmanuel, God with us!

III. Command and Disregard

“And he charged (Lit. - commanded/warned) them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published (Lit. - widely proclaimed) it;” Mark 7:36 The Greek words in this passage are powerful. Jesus kept telling the people not to tell anyone about this healing, but the more He told them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it!

Believers’ Application: Like everything Jesus did, it was out of love and mercy, tailored fit for every specific person to build or showcase faith! How He spoke to the Woman and the Well – slowly bringing her to the understanding of her need; healing of the woman with the issue of blood – His compassion for her miserable illness and bringing to light her great faith; feeding of the 5000 – to feed the masses and bring them great evidence of His person; on and on we could go – In everything Jesus did, it was designed perfectly to bring God glory! (John 17:4) And – that is how He still works. (Romans 8:28 “And we know, that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”) 1 Peter 1:3-7

Healing of the Multitudes

I. The Multitude and the Needs And what resulted from the “so much the more a great deal” of publishing the news of the deaf and dumb man being healed? The masses came!

“And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:” Matthew 15:30

Now, let's review why Jesus and the disciples came to this area – rest and the opportunity to have private teaching time! But you can't hide the Light of the World! Great masses of people came to Jesus again and again; Jesus, in love and mercy, healed all that came!

II. The Multitudes' Reaction

“Insomuch that the multitude wondered, (“beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.” Mark 7:37) when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.” Matthew 15:31

This passage is an example of our weak English language compared with the colorful, emotional, action-packed Greek language! See the many words to explain the people's astonishment and amazement! The center thought of the masses, “He hath done all things well!”

Here, these Gentiles, “they” (v. 31), saw Christ's works and recognized the great “crumbs” being offered to them by God! And they glorified Him! It wasn't their pagan gods they honored, not idols of their own making, but they clearly understood that Jesus was doing the work of Israel's God!

Believers Application:

Jesus had not abandoned Israel, but you can't hide the Light of the World. Our passage tells us that Jesus did all things well, and it is comforting to know that He still does all things well! Take time and reflect on the notable happenings of your life, both good and bad, and thank God that He still does “all things well!” James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” 1 Thess. 5:16-18 “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything (every circumstance), give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

HW #12