

STONE HARBOR

P.O. Box 4049
Monterey CA, 93942
831.655.5800
www.stoneharborchurch.org
Pastor Johnny Potter

March 15, 2009

Knowing Jesus by Seeing Him with the Gentiles

Mark 7:24-37

INTRODUCTION

Reading of Scripture 7:24-37

Prayer for ears of congregation and mouth of the pastor.

This passage is rich in the power of God and at first reading I feel compelled to analyze it so that I can approach Jesus in such a way that I can tap into that power so that I can be so effective in my petitions that I can see them met by power of God.

But if we come to this passage and ask, “How do we pray effectively so as to get God to do what we want Him to do?” we have missed the point of the passage. It is possible to ask the wrong question of a Bible passage.

This is, of course, true about anything you are studying, and perhaps is easiest to see if we consider an example of a young man trying to get to know a young woman to see if she might be “the one.” Let’s say you know this young man and you’d love to see him get to know and then even get together with this young lady. Your young friend has come to you for your advice. He tells you a story about a date they were on and asks you to help him understand where he went wrong.

It happened like this. They were out to eat at a nice restaurant and the evening was going fine with safe and pleasant small talk. Then she opens up a little bit more and tells him about something close to her heart to see if it might be close to his heart as well and if they might connect on things she values as most meaningful. She spoke of a time she had visited an orphanage in Africa with a dental team and had taken great pleasure in helping the little children who would not have otherwise received that care. She even got teary eyed as she spoke of some of the kids by name. She spoke of the

great value and purpose in life she had felt in bringing help to the helpless kids of the 3rd world.

Then, your man friend explained how, as the conversation had continued, he told her he happened to have a tooth problem and how he asked her, 'Might you be able to save me a trip to the dentist and check out what's going in with one of my molars?'

Now, relationship coaches, what would you say to your young apprentice? How would you evaluate his question? Was it the right question to ask given his desire to get to know the girl better? For those of you who think it was a good question I'll just give it to you straight. That was a crummy question that totally missed the reason the young woman shared that story from her life.

Now let's talk about God. He is trying to establish a good and right relationship with you. Some of you may still be dating God. Not everything He says is intended to be put through the filter of, "I wonder how I can benefit from this?" As a matter of fact very little in Scripture is revealed so that we can maximize our own agenda. God is bigger than that. Fortunately what He is up to includes our good in a way-better way than we could ever want for ourselves. Paul says it like this:

Eph 3: Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

As we try to get to know God in His word, we can ask the wrong questions.

What are the **RIGHT** questions to ask of any Bible text?

- Two General Question
 - **What was God up to** through His sovereign involvement in this event in redemptive history?
 - **What was the human author up to**, i.e., what did God intend to communicate when He inspired the author to write this passage?
- In the passages before us today from Mark 7 where we are looking at a record of Jesus' action in the world, we could ask:
 - **What was Jesus up to** by going to these places, delivering and healing these people as He did?
 - **What was Mark's purpose** – inspired by the Holy Spirit – in telling this story to his original readers and to those who would read it later?

Admittedly, these are very broad questions. But hold these in mind to provide you with a solid handrail to keep in on the right path to discovering God's intention for including these passages in the Bible. You will want to ask more pointed questions of the text as well. And in formulating those questions you will be well served to first ask questions that deal with **the main point** of the author's logic, saving questions dealing with the supporting material for

secondary study. This is not to say that the supporting material is not valuable or true, it surely is. It is simply to acknowledge that we do not want to read into the text a teaching that the author did not intend advance as his main point.

Considering our passage, we can easily see that this was not a teaching on effective prayer. Jesus did teach on how we should pray in Mat 6:5-15, you can go there for a great starting point on Jesus direct teaching on prayer. Our passage, however, was a record of Jesus action in history. And Mark, speaking largely to a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, was telling the story of Jesus with a focus on communicating who He was. I get that not from any one passage by itself, but by reading the book in it's entirety. So in Mark 7 a good question might be: **What was Jesus up to** and what does that suggest about who He is? And **what was Mark's purpose** in including this particular story in his gospel?

With these questions in mind, let's look at the two stories before us this morning in a little more detail.

I. Jesus is the one with power over DEMONS.

Mark 7:24-30: A long-distance deliverance of a little Gentile girl

- **Explanation of a confusing and distracting saying**

Read vv. 26-27

That Jesus would see a little sick girl as a dog is offensive to us. Could Jesus really be as mean spirited as this sounds? Was Jesus just another hard nosed leader type stuck on His mission and being rude to people, stepping on them as He made His way towards His goals? That would be out of character for the one who left heaven and took on human form to shoulder our sins and redeem us to God at great personal cost. So, why the harsh sounding words that some could even label demeaning and showing a lack of respect?

Two possible pictures

1. Dogs=Gentiles, and children=Israelites
2. Dogs=dogs as in a household setting, and children = children in same setting.

I believe Jesus words are intended to invoke the picture of a family dining with some household dogs under the table. This is easy for me to picture as it is the exact scene at my dinner table. At this point in redemptive history God is pictured as the father at the table and the children are the Jews. The woman accepts Jesus likeness to her as a dog under the dinning room table; a dog that the head of the family would surely allow to eat the crumbs that fell to the floor.

We will see that the distinction is not so much between Jews as better/superior people than the Gentiles; but between those God has called Jesus to minister to as the primary focus of His earthly ministry, and those who would receive His ministry later. "Let the children be satisfied first...", "First" implies a second. But, more on that later.

For now, let's not be distracted by the "dog talk." Suffice it to note that the humble woman did not take offense at Jesus words, but solved the dilemma her request presented Him with by putting forward the option that Jesus' ministry to the children could continue in it's priority position – they could keep eating dinner – and her need could be met simply by the crumbs that fell from the table while the children ate.

Indeed, she was right, all it took was apparently the unspoken word of Jesus and the demon was gone. When she got home, v. 30b says, "...she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

- Prayer Sidebar

Note how the woman dealt with Jesus so that she 'caused' Him to deliver.

(v. 29 - Jesus: "Because of this answer...")

- She didn't let cultural social norms stop her – A non-Jewish woman falling at the feet of a Jewish religious leader would not have been a socially acceptable demonstration.
- She "fell at his feet" – humility and submission
- She "kept asking" and She did not take the first "No" as Jesus final answer – persistence
- She acknowledged her need
- She recognized Jesus' ability
- She did not take offense but allowed herself to be seen as a dog under the family table in need of the crumbs – dependent
- I find much exemplary and commendable in the woman's dealing wither Jesus.

Trans. -- But how we can get God to do what we want Him to is not the main point of the passage...Ask instead, what is Jesus up to in the event... what is Mark up to in the telling of the event?

- Comments of the First Event

1. This passage makes a clear demonstration of Jesus power and authority over demons and thus over the spiritual forces of darkness that are opposed to God.
 - a. He has already demonstrated this power and authority several times before. Even in Mark we have seen Jesus give the boot to "many" demons (1:34), a whole legion of them in Mark 5. He

had given the 12 authority over them on their short term mission trip in chapter 6.

- b. By repetition, Jesus appears to be driving home the importance of the fact that He has authority over these creatures. Who is Jesus and what is He up to? He is the one with demonstrated power over demons. As light vanquishes darkness, when Jesus comes, demons go!
2. It is also clear that this was Jesus own decision to go into Gentile territory. He was not captured or coerced by Roman soldier and taken there against His will. Jesus chose to go into Gentile territory.
3. Additionally, the person delivered from the demon was the little daughter of a **Gentile** woman. **A non-Jewish person**. Mark mentions that Jesus had traveled into the region of Tyre (24), that the mother of the afflicted was a “Gentile” (26), and specifically a Gentile of the “Syrophoenician race” (26). *Jesus exercised His dominion over the evil spirits not only in the land and for the good of the Jews, but also in the land and for the good of the Gentiles!
4. Remembering to look at the big picture of what God is up to, we are correct to see Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the seed of the serpent – the protoevangelium found in Gen 3:15.
5. We are also correct to see that it is God and those to whom He delegates such power, who have authority over the demons. Others who deal with demons do so at their own peril. Remember the story in Acts 19

Miracles at Ephesus

¹¹God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,
¹²so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.
¹³But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Dangerous to play with demons when God is not working through you.

Of course all by itself casting out demons may not prove that the exorcist is God or even His agent. Mat 7:21ff records...

²¹"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²²"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Added together with all that Jesus did and taught, it is one more convincing indication that He is the King of the Kingdom of God, the Redeemer with ultimate authority over all things. Jesus was asserting His dominion over His kingdom and kicking out the rebels as He toured His kingdom.

Enough said on that story for now. Let's look at the next one.

II. Jesus is the one with power to HEAL.

Mark 7:31-37: An up-close healing of a grown Gentile man

- Prayer Sidebar
 - Note how the people from Decapolis dealt with Jesus that got Him to heal the deaf mute.
 - They brought the deaf/mute to Jesus
 - They "implored" or "begged" Him to lay His hand on him.
 - Note Jesus Healing Technique in v. 33
 - Jesus did not argue
 - He took Him away from the public
 - Got him off by himself
 - He put His fingers into his ears
 - He spit (apparently on His own fingers)
 - He touched His tongue with the saliva
 - He looked to heaven and let out a deep sigh
 - He said, "Ephphatha," Be Opened

No Formulas

Jesus chose to heal in so many different ways that it defies our making a formula based on His techniques. If we had looked at the first story we would have concluded that when we intercede we must do it humbly, with polite submission. If we look at this passage as a how-to on prayer we would say we just need to implore Jesus telling Him what we want Him to do. The real commonality between the two stories is the persistence of the intercessor. Interesting that Jesus elsewhere directly teaches us to be persistent in our prayers. See Luke 11:1-13.

The truth is, as we have seen, neither passage was intended to be a teaching on prayer. We're off on a wild goose chase if we ask: How do I get God to do what I want Him to do for me, like these guys did? Better, given Mark's overall theme and God's overall inspiration of the Bible, to ask of this passage, what is Jesus up to in healing this man in this place in this way?

Let's look a little bit more at this story of Jesus healing.

- Explanation of the Second Event:
 - Comment on OT background
 - Is 35:5-6 – Speaking of a time when God would redeem His people by sending a Messiah.
5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
And ***the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.*** 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, And ***the tongue of the mute will shout for joy*** For waters will break forth in the wilderness
And streams in the Arabah. (NIV: Desert)

This passage indicates God will come to give hearing to the deaf and even a joyful shout from the one who could not speak before. William Lane points out that "The fulfillment of this prophecy was expected in the Days of the Messiah in the exegetical tradition of the rabbis."

Once again the focus is on Jesus coming in a way that the OT had said the Messiah would come. He would open the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.

- Completeness of the Healing
 - V. 35c -- "...and he began speaking plainly."
- Joyful Conclusion

The people who witnessed the event were compelled by the miracle played out in front of their own eyes to make a joyous general conclusion. William Lane again says, "The choral exclamation of the crowd is the response of faith which recognizes in all the works of Jesus the promised intervention of God."

Listen again to this "response of faith"

37 They were utterly astonished, saying,
"He has done all things well;
He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

We see in these two events that Jesus directs His divine power to people for their good, delivering a little girl from a demon and healing a grown man from a sickness. **What was Jesus revealing about who He was and what He was up to by this going to the Gentiles with delivering and healing power?**

Our third point and our main point of focus is that...

III. Jesus is the one who PAVED THE WAY for Gentiles to receive God's mercy

A. Jesus was "Sent" to the Jews

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Mt 15:24

B. Yet, He Went to the Gentiles Too

I think it is best to see this as a matter of priority and focus – Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that was to be His mission and focus for His life and ministry on earth; but in these incursions into predominantly Gentile areas He laid the groundwork for the greater reach of the gospel that His disciples would preach in the future.

Jesus sphere of dominion, the realm of His authority, was greater than the footprint of the Israelite people. He went beyond Israel to the Gentiles. And He did not just vacation there, but He exerted His dominion. He was saying, I'm not just the king of the Jews, I'm the King of the Kingdom of God which extends to all creation!

Impact on Mark's Gentile readers of Jesus going to the Gentiles regions must have included a tremendous sense of hope -- **Hope** that God is for **them** as well as for the Jewish people. This hope proves to be right on target...

C. Jesus (later) Expressly Sent His Disciples to the Jews AND the Gentiles

- Jesus was called to minister, first, to the Jewish people, as we have seen.
Mat 15:24
- And Jesus even, at first, perpetuated this "Israel only" focus in His disciples by sending them only to the Jews:

Matthew 10:5-7 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; ⁶but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

But our passage records Jesus saying,

Mark 7:27b "Let the children be satisfied **first**,

And as we have seen, "**first**" – opens the door for second.

In Luke 10 we have the sending out of the 70. In that account Jesus' disciples are not restricted to go to the Jews only, but to "to every city and place where He Himself was going to come." This may have included Gentile cities? Certainly we see an expansion of Jesus' target for His redemptive work in:

1. Mat 28:19b – "...make disciples of **all the nations**..."
2. Acts 1:8b – "...you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to **the remotest part of the earth.**"

Paul also Affirms the Jew-first-then-Gentile progression of the Gospel.

Romans 1:16 -- ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

D. Effectively Jesus "went" to all people

- Through small incursions into non-Jewish territory like this, and
 - Through the gospel preached by His disciples, and
 - Through the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling every believer
- Touching closest to home of course is the wonderful truth that ...

E. He "comes" to you and me

- through the gospel preached by His disciples and
- through the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling every believer AND
- through the Bible, the written word of God

You may have not in the past and possibly even now you may not feel like you could be one of God's chosen people. Here Jesus demonstrates that He has not come only for the lost sheep of Israel but for you too.

1 John 3:1a -- See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are ...

Romans 11 speaks of Gentiles as being like wild olive branches grafted in to the rich root of the olive tree of the people of God.

Romans 10:12 -- For there is no distinction between **Jew** and **Greek**; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;

[Galatians 3:28](#) -- There is neither **Jew** nor **Greek**, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Jesus has come to you and to me. We did not deserve Him by some birth-right or earned-right of our own goodness. We can rightly see ourselves the little dogs under the table of a generous Family, dependent on the crumbs fall to the floor. We can rightly see ourselves as the deaf and mute in desperate need of the Lord's touch. We can most assuredly see Jesus as the one who has come and in His rightful authority and mercifully fed us with His own body, the bread of life, and touched our dead ears allowing us to hear the truth that He is God's provision for bridging the distance that has separated us from God. We can now use our loosened tongues to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

[1 Peter 2:9](#) But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of **Him who** has **called** you out of **darkness** into His marvelous light;

Conclusion

Remember the socially challenged young man who asked the wrong question of the girl he was hoping to develop a relationship with? Well, in my story, she dumped him. We are just like that young man, often putting our foot in our mouth by asking the wrong question.

Fortunately God is longsuffering and hasn't dumped us for asking questions that show our selfish motives. But He does want us to approach Him so that we can manipulate Him for what we think of as our good, but rather so that we can know Him in an intimate way – so that we might have communion with Him.

The passages we have studied this morning join the chorus of others all indicating that Jesus is God's promised Messiah. He is "the One" your soul longs to be close to. He is the One. Don't ask Him the wrong questions.

Because most of us know that, what do we do with it? Yes pastor, I know that. So what?

Well if we just know this truth we are no better positioned than the devil who also knows this (Jas 2). It is all about knowing but knowing in the intimate relational sense. God came to us in Christ so that we might be the redeemed of the Lord and have redeemed communion with Him.

How is that communion going? Are we exercising Cain like worship – half hearted and self-serving; or are we bringing to Him the first-fruits of our labors as Able did? (Genesis 4)

Let's move towards God in our lives lived as worship.

Let's worship by remembering God.

Let's worship by recognizing and remembering Jesus as the Son of God and the one who came into hostile territory to rescue us who had been downed behind enemy lines

Let's worship by remembering that God wants a good and close relationship with us – a relationship like that between a father and a son. Indeed He is our heavenly Father and we are His adopted sons.

Let's worship by being who God has recreated us to be

Let's worship out of the overflow of the Spirit who indwells us

Let's worship by our obedience to His commands, chief amongst them His command to love Him and our neighbors

Let's worship God all week long starting now with a prayer and a song.