

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**  
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**August 20, 2023**  
**The Healing Power of Jesus**  
**Mark 7:24-37**

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Twenty-five years ago, I preached every night for over a week at a small church in South Texas. The pastor hadn't been a pastor very long and I was only 20 years old. But, in spite of us newbies, God showed up. Every day, the pastor and I would meet with a group of deacons to pray for the services. Every night, God would do a powerful work.

One day that week, a young church member reached out to the pastor. He had been experiencing a renewal of his faith. He had also been experiencing an ear infection that wouldn't go away. So, he asked to be part of our prayer meeting before the following night's service so that he could be anointed with oil and ask God to heal his ear.

So, we gathered in the room with the deacons and placed the young man in the center of the circle. But no one knew what to do next because none of us had ever anointed anyone with oil. So, the pastor proceeded to take out a bottle of olive oil and pour some into a small container beside the young man. He said, "I really don't know what to do, but I figure if we are going to anoint someone with oil, we should anoint the part that's hurting." I immediately thought of a dozen medical conditions where that logic would break down. I didn't go to seminary, but I know that much. But he was the pastor. So, one by one, each man stepped forward, dipped his finger in the container of oil, then plunged his finger into the young man's ear. By the time it was my turn, this poor guy's ear was so full of oil, we would have needed a Ford F-150 dipstick to get an accurate reading. Seriously though, it was weird and awkward for everyone in the room, including the guy who kept getting jabbed in his infected ear.

The next night, I heard someone ask if his ear was better. He said something like, "Huh? I can't quite hear with all the oil in my ear." I really don't remember exactly what he said, and I had to leave town before I got the full report.

So, why would I tell that story? Two reasons:

- First, I've been waiting 25 years to tell that story and our text is the only place in the Bible where it fits.
- Second, Jesus did things that were even more awkward than what we did to that young man in South Texas. Sometimes, you're left scratching your head and wondering, "Why would He do it like that?"

And, as we read the next passage of Scripture in our study of the book of Mark, I think you'll see what I mean:

**Mark 7:24–37**

***<sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." <sup>29</sup> And he said to her, "For this***

***statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.”*** <sup>30</sup> ***And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.*** <sup>31</sup> ***Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.*** <sup>32</sup> ***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.*** <sup>33</sup> ***And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.*** <sup>34</sup> ***And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”*** <sup>35</sup> ***And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*** <sup>36</sup> ***And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.*** <sup>37</sup> ***And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”***

So, I hope you see what I was talking about earlier. Not just about the ear thing, but about the way these encounters feel weird and awkward.

In the first story, you find a desperate mother begging Jesus to help her demon-possessed daughter. And Jesus gives her what feels like a wild response. He basically calls her a dog and tells her to let the children eat first.

In the second story, a deaf man with a speech impediment is brought to Jesus. The people begged Jesus to lay His hand on him. But Jesus goes way beyond putting His hand on the dude’s shoulder. He sticks both fingers in his ears and then spits and touches his tongue. I don’t know how you define awkward, but that’s about the top of Mount Awkward in my book.

So, what’s going on here? Let me show you a couple of things that are easy to overlook.

***24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon.***

The first words of our text are, “And from there.” From where? From the confrontation Jesus just had with the religious leaders of the Jews who were upset that Jesus allowed His disciples to eat without doing their traditional hand-washing ritual. The Jewish leaders said people were unclean and unacceptable to God if they didn’t do specific handwashing rituals. And they didn’t think Jesus should be around people they thought were unclean. Jesus shut them down by saying people aren’t unclean before God because their hands are dirty. We are unclean because of the sin that’s in our hearts. And, until that’s taken care of, no amount of external religion will do us a lick of good.

Then, what does Jesus do next? In the first verse of our text, He goes straight to the region of Tyre and Sidon, two Gentile cities outside of Israel that were notoriously evil places. In Luke 10:13, Jesus uses Tyre and Sidon as the poster children for wicked, unrepentant cities. For the people who read this 2,000 years ago, it would be like us hearing that a pastor left a church service to go hang out on the Vegas strip.

Now, look at verse 31 - ***Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.***

Where does Jesus go next? He heads to the Decapolis, another region occupied by Gentiles that was about 120 miles from Tyre and Sidon.

So, get this, Jesus leaves the confrontation about Him hanging out with supposedly unclean people. Then, He goes 120 miles out of His way to heal two Gentile people. In case you don’t know, the Jews considered Gentiles to be completely and entirely unclean. So, Jesus being around Gentiles from sin city would be 1000 times more offensive to the religious Jews than not washing your hands. Yet, that’s the first place Jesus goes after His confrontation with the religious leaders. He heads

straight out of Israel toward unclean, sinful places filled with unclean, sinful people so He can show mercy to people there. He's extending His mercy beyond the Jews to other people in this world.

And I believe that gives us the big idea for this morning.

**Big Idea: Jesus came to Extend His Mercy to the People of this World.**

Jesus came to this earth on a mission of mercy that would be available to the people of every tribe and tongue and nation.

Listen to the way Paul says this in *Romans 15*...

*8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised [the nation of Israel] to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

Jesus came to be a servant to the nation of Israel. But His ultimate purpose was bigger than just Israel. Jesus came so that people of all the nations – Jews and Gentiles – would have reason to glorify God for His mercy through Jesus.

That's what the global mission of Jesus is all about...Being part of God's great plan to show the nations His mercy so those who receive Jesus will give Him glory! That's why we are sending the Hodges to Malawi and will be sending a missionary team to join them later this year. That's why we are sending teams to Nicaragua and Guatemala and, Lord willing, to our other partners around the world. We want to be part of what God is doing to display the glory of Christ's mercy to the ends of the earth.

And at the same time, we are the ends of the earth. Jesus came to bring His healing mercy to you.

- Jesus came to give mercy through His death on the cross so you could be forgiven of your sin.
- Jesus came to give mercy through His resurrection so that He could raise you up to a new kind of life.
- Jesus came to give mercy by sending His Spirit to live in you and enable His power to flow through you.
- Jesus came to give mercy by enabling you to be adopted into God's family...to have heaven as your home and a future filled with hope.
- Jesus came on a mission of mercy to the people of the nations. And all the nations should rejoice to the glory of God...including the people in this room. Perhaps your heart aches for those mercy-given things to be true about you...

But you will not receive the mercy of Jesus unless you turn to Jesus for mercy. Everyone won't experience the fullness of Christ's mercy. Certainly, there is a way that everyone on earth is experiencing mercy from God whether they know it or not. You aren't immediately killed the moment you first sin.

But there is a saving, restoring, healing mercy that everyone doesn't receive and experience. Think Pharisees. The sad reality is that most people will live and die and reject the deep mercy Jesus came to bring.

And that's where the two stories in our text give us powerful insight into receiving the mercy of Jesus. They are vivid pictures of what it looks like to come to Jesus in a way that receives His mercy.

So, in the time we have left, I want to show you two things we see in both these stories that illustrate the kind of heart that will experience the mercy of Jesus in a way that glories in Him.

1. The Mercy of Jesus is Experienced by People who Hope only in Jesus.

***<sup>25</sup> But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.***

This woman comes to Jesus, and she falls down at His feet. She begs Him to do what only He can do. Listen to the account of this from the book of Matthew...

*Matthew 15:22-25*

*<sup>22</sup> And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."*

The disciples start begging Jesus to send her away. Why? Because she is relentless. She won't leave the feet of Jesus. She is convinced Jesus is her only hope for the kind of powerful mercy that can heal her child.

You see a similar thing in the second story with the deaf and mute man. Look at verse 32:

***<sup>32</sup> 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.***

They beg Jesus. Just like the desperate mother, they know that Jesus is their only hope for the kind of powerful mercy that can heal their friend. And, since they come to Jesus as their only hope for mercy, guess what they receive? The powerful mercy of Jesus! He works in their lives in a way that only He can.

So, are you hoping in Jesus alone to give you the kind of powerful mercy that you need?

- What about your hope for forgiveness of sin and acceptance with God? Is the mercy of Jesus given to you by His death at the cross your only hope or are you getting hope from your good works, your church attendance, your baptism, your confirmation?
- What about your hope for life-change and transformation? Is the mercy of Jesus given to you by His indwelling Spirit and resurrection power your only hope or are you getting hope from your self-discipline or the latest self-help plan?
- What about your hope for meaning and satisfaction? Is the mercy of Jesus that makes you a new creation with a new identity your only hope or are you getting hope from what others think about you or the things of this world or your work or net worth?

What would it look like for you if, in your brokenness and pain, in your battle with sin, in your search for meaning and transformation, you turned to Jesus in faith and said, "Jesus, I need your powerful mercy (fill in the blank). You're my only hope and I'm trusting in you."

The mercy of Jesus is experienced by people who hope only in Jesus and put no confidence in themselves or any other thing. It's Jesus, only Jesus.

## 2. The Mercy of Jesus is Experienced by People who are Humble before Jesus.

### **Mark 7:27-30**

***<sup>27</sup> 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."<sup>28</sup> But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."<sup>29</sup> And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."<sup>30</sup> And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.***

This is one of the more troubling statements that Jesus makes in the gospel. Why would He talk like this to a hurting mom who is desperate for His help?

Well, before I explain some of what is going on, I want you to know in advance that I don't think I can remove every way this could have been offensive to this woman. Matthew's account is helpful here, because he includes something Mark leaves out.

### **Matthew 15:24**

***<sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."***

This is just another way of saying what we read earlier in Romans. Jesus was sent to serve the Jewish people during His earthly ministry. So, He isn't being calloused here, even though it might feel like it. Jesus is saying that the primary audience for His earthly ministry was the Jewish people.

Another thing to know is that there were two different words for dogs in Jesus' day. One word described the filthy dogs on the street who were a complete nuisance. The other word described a dog that was kept as a family pet. Jesus uses that word for a family pet when He talks about giving the children's food to the dogs. I think He's making an illustration. There wasn't dog food in ancient Israel. So, when the family sat down to eat, the kids got the food first and the dogs might be fed from the leftovers. So, Jesus is being clear about the order of His ministry. His first mission was to the children of the house of Israel and, after that, the ministry of the gospel would spread to the nations.

But there were plenty of other ways Jesus could have said that. Why would He reference a dog (even if it was a family pet)? I believe He is also testing her heart. She just asked Him for mercy, and by very definition mercy is something we don't deserve. When you get your paycheck, you probably don't think that's an act of mercy from your employer unless you didn't do your job and they paid you anyway. If you deserve something or are rightfully entitled to something, it's no longer mercy. So, how does she respond?

***Mark 7:28 - She says, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."***

She doesn't get offended. She makes no demands. She doesn't feel entitled. She knows she doesn't deserve mercy. And that's what the humility that receives mercy looks like. The mercy of Jesus is extended to humble people who know they don't deserve mercy.

### Listen to *James 4:6*

***But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."***

God gives abundant grace and mercy to people who bow humbly before Jesus and admit that they don't deserve anything but hell. He gives grace to the humble. But God opposes the proud. Can you imagine having God opposed to you? With all of His power and might and righteous judgment?

That's what happens to those who refuse to humble themselves before Jesus as Lord. God opposes the proud.

That's exactly the dynamic Mark is laying out in chapter 7. The proud Pharisees who resist Jesus and try to get their way are resisted by Jesus. But humble people, like the woman who isn't offended when Jesus compares her to a dog begging for food at the table, those people get mercy and grace when they turn to Jesus.

So, where might there be pride in your heart today? Where might you think you deserve mercy and grace? Where might you feel entitled to the blessings and gifts of God? Do you live with an attitude of gratitude or an expectation that comes from entitlement?

The mercy of Jesus is experienced by people who are humble before Jesus and know they don't deserve mercy. But that's not the only picture we get of the kind of humility that receives the mercy of Jesus.

### **Mark 7:32-35**

**<sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” <sup>35</sup> And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.**

This man is deaf and has a speech impediment. And he comes before Jesus to be healed. Now, we don't know how much he understood about what was going on. What we do know is that Jesus took him aside privately. That means the man had to humbly follow Jesus. Then, he had to just stand there while Jesus stuck His fingers into his ears...pressing in on his place of greatest weakness and vulnerability. Just think about that. This guy is letting Jesus do this. He just stands there in front of Jesus. Essentially, he is saying with his actions because he literally cannot say with his words, “Jesus, do whatever you want to do.”

I imagine the guy thinking, “Man, how long is He going to keep His fingers in my ears? I really hope this does the trick.” But, when Jesus takes His fingers out, the guy still can't hear. And Jesus hasn't even done the most awkward thing, yet.

Jesus spits...and the context makes it seem like He spits on His fingers. And, then what does He do? He touches the man's tongue. Hold on. You realize what that means, right? It means the guy has to open his mouth and stick out His tongue and let Jesus touch it with spit on His fingers...and he has to do it right after the last thing Jesus did didn't seem to work.

And there are countless theories about why Jesus would do it this way. Time won't permit us to go down those roads but feel free to research that on your own. The thing I want us to see is that this man yields to Jesus, even when Jesus does what we wouldn't expect Him to do, even when Jesus asks him to do what we would never naturally want to do.

And that's what humility before Jesus looks like. It looks like laying our lives down before Jesus and saying, “Jesus, show me what you want me to do, and I'll do it by your power that I trust You will give me in your mercy...” Humility before Jesus says, “Jesus, I don't need to understand you, but I'm willing to trust you.”

Jesus resists the proud, but He pours out abundant mercy for people who bow humbly before Him like that.

So, how do you need to bow in humility before Jesus today?

- Savior and Lord?
- Place of Obedience?
- The unexpected thing that Jesus has done or allowed?

Jesus came to extend His mercy to the people of this world. And His mercy is received by those who hope only in Him as Savior and bow humbly before Him as Lord.