

Mark 7:24–37

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Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0:00] Again, our passage today is Mark 7, verse 24 through 37. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

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.

But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth.

And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 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.

But she answered him, yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And he said to her, for this statement you may go your way.

[1:00] The demon has left your daughter. And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone. Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis.

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. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears.

And after spitting, touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, Epaphtha, that is, be opened. And his ears were opened. His tongue was released.

And he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well.

He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. This is a brief prayer as we get underway.

[2:09] Father, we say with Apostle Peter, Where else, to whom else would we go? Only you have the words of eternal life. And so we come now to hear these words of eternal life.

Would you open our ears that we may hear the voice of the living God. Be my help. Be our help. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

As we get started this morning, I'd like you to consider a question with me. If Jesus could perform any miracle for you, what would you like?

If Jesus could perform any miracle for you, what would it be? Perhaps it's a health condition from which you long to be healed.

Maybe it's for a loved one battling a terminal illness or a physical infirmity. It may be the infertility you experience as your heart aches for a child.

[3:24] It may be the lifting of the darkness of one's soul. It may be the removal of stubborn anxiety or loneliness that puts you in a perpetual despair.

It may be the oppressive guilt that you cannot shake from a past action. Maybe it's a mound of financial strain that you can't come up from under.

It may be a marriage that is seemingly irreparable, bound together by a fraying thread. Maybe it's the salvation of a loved one, a child, an elderly parent.

But what would you have Jesus do for you? What miracle do you need?

How desperate are you for deliverance? This morning we come to a passage and there are two dire circumstances. Two individuals who need miracles.

[4:31] Two who are without hope. Two who will learn that Jesus delivers the desperate. Mark takes us from the shores of Galilee to the furthest north that we are aware of.

Jesus traveling. To the region of Tyre and Sidon. He is leaving Israel proper and crossing a distinct border into Gentile territory.

A place primarily comprised of non-Jews. Jesus and his disciples would be minorities. Foreigners. Out of place. In modern speak, they would set foot into the wrong neighborhood. We're not told why Jesus made the move north.

Perhaps he was fed up with the frequent confrontations with the religious leaders. Perhaps he just needed respite from or escape from all the crowds that constantly pressed in upon him.

[5 : 33] The text does give us a sense that he might have wanted to go to Gentile territory to further illustrate something to his disciples. To illustrate that uncleanness.

Hanging out with outsiders. Would not be a limiting factor for him and his kingdom. Jesus and his disciples had violated religious traditions as we saw last week.

That led to a dispute. They were doing what was considered unclean. It was a religious no-no. Now Jesus is going further to demonstrate that he would ignore these religious traditions.

You see, the Jewish leaders wouldn't cross these geographic boundaries for fear of people.

Particularly Gentiles. They were the wrong crowd. They were poor company to keep.

However, boundaries wouldn't inhibit Jesus. His kingdom wouldn't be constrained by geography or ethnic makeup. No, instead, Jesus would demonstrate and fulfill the promise from Genesis 12 that through him and in him, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

[6 : 45] His word and his works would be for all the world. You see, Jesus was the promised deliverer for the Jews. He was a Jewish Messiah. He was the hope for their nation.

But we can't be mistaken. He was never intended to only be for them. He was sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world. His power too big to be confined.

His mercy too great to be restricted. His love too vast to be limited. His mission was to be for the world. And it would extend beyond the borders of Israel.

As the prophet says, the Lord is great and shall be magnified beyond the border of Israel. And this morning, I want us to see just that.

The miracles of Jesus are for all the world. The miracles of Jesus are for all the world. I've tagged our time together. Everyone needs a miracle.

[7 : 47] Everyone needs a miracle. Our text splits cleanly in half. I've alliterated them because that's the only way I can think of them.

But we see a desperate mother and a deaf man. A desperate mother and a deaf man. The situation was grave beginning in verse 24.

The young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit. Once again, the topic of uncleanness or defilement emerges. It's not an uncleanness of heart, as we saw last week.

But now we witness a child enslaved to the uncleanness of hell. The text does not tell us how the evil spirit manifests itself.

But from previous episodes, we could probably deduce physical manifestations, convulsions, screaming, screeching, self-harm. We're all present.

[8 : 45] And here we find the love of a desperate mother prompts the recorded action. We're unsure how she heard of Jesus.

But as early as chapter 3, Mark has told us that word of Jesus has gotten around. Not only in Jerusalem proper, but all the surrounding regions.

People from Galilee and Judea. Jerusalem from Idumea, beyond the Jordan, around Tyre and Sidon. We're all coming to find him. Perhaps word had returned to the region of Tyre and Sidon. There is a man. He does miracles. He makes paralytics walk, stand and walk. Sicknesses flee at his voice.

And devils are cast out. You can imagine words of hope for a desperate mother. Yet Jesus was inaccessible.

[9 : 47] What will a mother do? What will a desperate Gentile mother do to try to approach a Jewish teacher? Jewish teachers were off limits.

He was out of range for her. But now, he had come near. Mark wants us to know that though Jesus was near, there were still obstacles to be overcome.

Somehow, the woman had insider information. We know where Jesus is. Finding the whereabouts, she goes in search for him.

But Mark wants us to know that there were obstacles. She was a woman. Forbidden to approach Jewish leaders. She was a Gentile.

A Syrophoenician by birth. She resided in the region of Tyre and Sidon. A place that is often spoke of negatively in the scriptures. They had a troubled past with the Jews.

[10:47] According to the prophet Joel, those of Tyre and Sidon had enslaved the Jewish people. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in one of his works, describes Tyrians, or people of Tyre, as notoriously the bitterest of enemies for the Jews.

The desperate mother had a whole host of social reasons that prevented her from approaching Jesus. But the love of a mother, the desperation of a mother, makes timid people brave. And more so, the faith of the desperate will provide courage, even to the undeserving. And so she comes.

And she comes. And the text tells us she begs. Matthew 15, the parallel account I'll leave for you to do on your own time, has her pleading for mercy.

Her desperation, we find, is shockingly met by what appears as dismissal from the words of Jesus. He even kind of disses her with this remark.

[12:09] Let the children be fed first, for it's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. In one sense, Jesus' response is reasonable. At the dinner table, of course, the children ought to be prioritized.

Meals aren't prepared, only to be placed in front of dogs, even household dogs. Jesus' response is indicative of his priorities.

I've come for the children of Israel. I'm a Jewish Messiah, the promised one of an expectant nation, the provider and a source of a deprived people. My priority is Israel.

And in the language of the Bible, they are God's firstborn, God's children. We see it unfold in the rest of the Bible. The process of God's unfolding plan begins in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then the ends of the earth.

Even the Apostle Paul understood the order of operations. The gospel is the power of God, salvation for everyone who believes first to the Jew, and then to the Greek or to the Gentile.

[13:19] What Jesus is saying is you are an outsider. You are but a dog. It's a common derogatory term that Jews would use towards Gentiles.

And Jesus is not using, you know, I couldn't help but think of the modern slang, right? You're my dog. He's not using it in that way, the positive way, as a friend.

Or even in locker rooms, that that player is a dog, meaning they just work hard. I want him on my team. No, it's to be read negatively.

And our immediate minds go to, well, that's harsh. That's so harsh, Jesus. You can imagine the room must have been tense.

For the first time in Mark's gospel, we see a request for help made of Jesus.

[14:17] And it is met by his refusal. Her desperate plea is dismissed by Jesus.

But the desperate mother is not done. And what could only be understood or interpreted as this determined and persistent faith, she wittingly responds, But Jesus, yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table catch some of the crumbs.

The faith is not explicitly mentioned. It's implicit in her behavior and actions. She approaches Jesus because something inside of her believes that he can cast that demon out of her daughter.

This persistent faith will not back down, even though Jesus is reluctant. What she is saying is, Jesus, I concede.

You're right. I admit I may be just a dog. I'm a beggar. I'm an outsider. I'm undeserving. And I'm unworthy.

[15:27] I bring nothing. I'm born into the wrong place. And I live out of bounds. But I have no hope but you. And I will not take no for an answer.

I know you can do it, Jesus. I know who you are, Jesus. I know what you can do, Jesus. I know that you could feed 5,000, Jesus. I know there were 12 baskets of crumbs left over.

Just give me a crumb. And that is enough. Because crumbs from the table of Jesus are enough. Just a bit.

Just the scraps. Just the leftovers. Don't overlook me, Jesus. Please. And this woman dared to believe that Jesus could deliver her daughter.

Marvelous faith, Matthew would tell us. It's a remarkable scene. For it compares the desperate mom with the religious leaders and the disciples in the background.

[16:33] You see, the religious leaders had confronted and challenged Jesus. We're at odds with Jesus. The disciples, we learn, verse 18, they are confused and confounded by Jesus.

We don't get it, Jesus. But here, we see a desperate mom with confidence in Jesus. That he could cast out his daughter's condition.

The crumbs, Jesus, will be enough. And Mark records the result for us. It's a unique miracle in that it's performed at a distance.

You know, it's like a long-distance phone call, but a long-distance healing. Jesus did not need to be physically there to get rid of the demon. We find that she returns home and the demon is gone.

The desperate mother needed a miracle. She needed one to deal with the demon, the one who was inflicting her precious little girl. And what the text answers for us is the question that ought to have plagued us after last week.

[17:43] Who deals with uncleanness? I know it's in my heart, but who deals with that? Who deals with the schemes of the devil that come at me from all sides?

Who deals with that? If out of this heart comes, according to the text, evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

Who deals with that at heart? My heart. And your answer should be, well, not I. What can I do? I'm overrun.

I'm overtaken. I'm overwhelmed. So who deals with an unclean heart? Well, Jesus deals with it. He deals with the unclean heart.

He deals with the unclean spirit. He does what you and I cannot do. There are things in our lives that are simply demonic. You know, well, being you believe in that?

[18:57] Yeah, I believe in that because the Bible believes in it. And you can't do anything. But Jesus can. And he has made himself available to you and accessible to you if you just reach out and take hold of him.

It's astonishing to consider this episode. You see, I can't imagine. So Mark's writing this gospel. And he has to, it's usually understood that Peter is his primary source, the apostle Peter.

And I can imagine Peter's like, well, let me tell you this. Let me tell you this. Let me tell you this. And this happened. This happened. And Mark has to discern, well, what am I going to write? What am I going to leave behind? I don't have infinite funding because I have limited papyrus and, you know, whatnot.

What am I going to leave behind? Well, I imagine this. Peter saying to Mark, there was this one thing I could not forget.

And you better write this down. Jesus took us to Tyre and Sidon. I'd never been there before. Why would I go there?

[20:00] That's where all the Gentiles are. And we encountered this Syrophoenician Gentile woman. And the memory was that a desperate mother received deliverance for her daughter.

But you want to know what the embedded lesson was? Because the kingdom of God, the kingdom Jesus was establishing, didn't have borders.

There was no place he was unwilling to go. It crossed, the kingdom of Jesus will cross boundaries, particularly ethnic and social boundaries. The great surprise in this text is that even in places where you and I would consider out of bounds, vibrant and persistent faith can be found.

This is the nature of the kingdom of God. It expands to places to include different sorts of people.

See, we serve a Jesus that took his disciples to a region they would never venture, among a people that were religiously, socially, ethically different from them.

If Josephus' statement is true, the Tyrians were the most notorious enemies of the Jews. And what we find even here is the very enemies of Israel would benefit and experience the mighty works of God.

[21:18] Divine grace has no borders. And how do we apply that? What does it mean for us?

Well, it means for some, God will take you to places where the world will say, ah, that's not a good place to go. And those people over there, not worth your time.

Hey, those people are really different from us. I'm not sure you ought to do that. Why would you cross that street? Why would you go to that block?

Why would you reach out to that people or those people? Well, why? Because grace has no borders. And the grace of God in you will send you as a messenger to go to hard places. Because there are desperate mothers in need of good news. A desperate mother receives a miracle. The disciples of Jesus receive a message.

[22 : 28] The kingdom of God would consist of those from every tribe, tongue, nation, people. Those you want to keep out, Jesus wants to bring in.

The miracles of Jesus are for all the world. Well, Jesus departs from Tyre and Sidon. And verse 31 tells us he now goes out of his way to the Decapolis.

He travels north and takes the long way around to bring them to another heavy Gentile region. It's like going to New York from Chicago, but going Wisconsin, Michigan, all the way up and around to Boston into New York.

It's not the most efficient or direct. But the disciples would remember. You see, the Decapolis was a region that had 10 primary towns, hence the Decapolis.

At the time, it was known to be the Rome outside of Rome. It was under Roman rule, possessed significant Roman influence. And once again, the disciples would feel out of place.

[23 : 38] Once again, they were a minority among pagans, among unbelieving people. We've crossed the tracks again, they would have thought. The tracks that mom said to never cross.

The bad people are there. It's dangerous. It's forbidden. And it is into this region that Jesus ventures. His arrival, Jesus' arrival, is met by immediate need.

You see it in verse 32. Seemingly a group of community members has brought a deaf man with a speech impediment for Jesus to touch and heal. He needed a miracle.

We need to keep in mind that the deaf man could have never heard of Jesus. The mighty works he had accomplished, the kingdom he was establishing, he was deaf. He was entirely dependent on others bringing him to Jesus.

The text tells us Jesus takes him into a private setting, places his fingers into the man's ears, touches his tongue.

[24 : 40] And to dispel any notion that this was magic or sorcery, he looks up into heaven, acknowledging the source of his power. The Bible tells us the ears were unstopped.

The man hears. The speech impediment is corrected. And the man then speaks plainly. There is a great irony to this story. Jesus charges the witnesses and presumably the man himself to silence. The man who has never been able to hear, hears Jesus' voice and is told to say nothing. Silence to keep it all a secret. Now that you have the capacity to speak, don't speak of what happened. Well, no one could hold it in. I can't hold it in. Because they were astonished beyond measure. Their amazement is exceedingly great.

It had to be announced and proclaimed. Listen to what Jesus did. He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute to speak.

[25 : 55] Once again, he does the impossible. He performs a miracle. He delivers even the deaf and enables the silent to speak. You see, for the Gentiles, those residents of the Decapolis, this was astonishing.

But for the Jews, they should have expected this. They should have anticipated this. The Messiah, the promised one, is supposed to do such things.

Isaiah foretold that when God comes to save his people, this is exactly what will happen according to chapter 35 of Isaiah. There will be the unstopping of deaf ears.

There will be the singing of the mute. And as this is being fulfilled, we are shown a surprise. The singing would not only come from the temple courts of Jerusalem.

It would not only come from the synagogues in Judea. Not only be constrained to the shores of the Galilee. No, but the songs would even come from the Decapolis.

[27 : 05] The proclamation would not only come from the Jew, but now it would come from the Gentile. He has done all things well.

The deaf man needed a miracle. Then it came at the hands of Jesus. He was the promised one fulfilling the anticipation of the entire Old Testament and establishing his kingdom.

But this miracle will further illustrate a reality for the disciples and ultimately for us. What it illustrates is this.

Entrance into the kingdom of God requires a miracle. It is possible to have ears, but not hear.

It is possible to have eyes, but not see as we'll see next week. It is possible to have a heart that doesn't receive and understand who Jesus is and what he does, according to chapter 8, verse 18. [28:21] At this point, the disciples have not quite grasped the kingdom. You see, being with Jesus does not guarantee entrance into his kingdom.

Seeing all these mighty works as they have seen and listening to all his messages does not guarantee one a spot in his kingdom. For entering his kingdom requires a miracle.

This physical healing of the deaf man and the healing of the blind man next week are indicative of what needs to happen spiritually in our very own lives.

These miracles are physical pictures of what must take place spiritually for each one of us. It takes a miracle to enter the kingdom of God.

Therefore, everyone needs a miracle. You may remember the apostle Peter.

[29:27] Jesus poses him a question in Matthew. It's gospel. Peter, hey, who do people say that I am? He says, well, some say Elijah. Some say the prophets. Some say these people.

And then Jesus looks to him and says, well, Peter, who do you say that I am? He says, well, you're the Christ, the son of the living God. And do you remember Jesus' response to him?

He said, blessed are you, Simon, for flesh and blood didn't show this to you, but my father was in heaven.

In other words, acknowledging Jesus as the Christ and the savior of sinners requires more than a physical experience or a human revelation.

It demands a miracle. A miracle we all need. To be born again is a miracle. To have one's ears unblocked and to hear the call of Jesus is a miracle.

[30:30] To have the veil removed from your eyes and to see the beauty of a savior bleeding for you is a miracle. To have your heart softened and tender toward the will of God and submitted to the spirit of God requires a miracle.

It's the miracle everyone needs. It's the miracle every Christian has experienced. It's the greatest miracle you can experience. It surpasses the restoration of physical sight.

It exceeds the hearing of the deaf. It outdoes the lame or the infirm leaping because they're all temporal. But the miracle of new life, the great miracle of forgiveness of one's sins, the experience of being born again, the securing of everlasting life, the joy in knowing God as father, that is the great miracle that everyone needs.

We need it as Christians repeatedly. Unstop my ears. I'm reading about this.

I'm scrolling through this. I'm told this. And all these voices are speaking to me. Lord, unstop my ears. Help me to hear your voice. Read your word. Sit with your spirit.

[31:44] And I know there are others in this room. You need this miracle in this moment.

My prayer is perhaps you've never felt that. That in the kindness of God, may the words of this man be the words of Christ calling out to you and unstopping your ears.

May you be desirous of this miracle. I need to hear. I want to see. Who will excise this heart that is unclean for me?

May you experience the mighty work of Jesus in these closing moments. And may you know the miracle of Jesus to impart new life.

This miracle of salvation is for you. But not only you. But for all the world. Father, we thank you.

[33:10] For the mighty works of Jesus. We're not confined to the pages of the Bible. We're a region. We're a region embedded in the Middle East.

But the miracles and the mighty works of God are demonstrated in all the world. As you summon your people through your word. May you unstop the ears of many.

May you open the eyes of many. May you transform the hearts of many. May you. That they would behold. The miracle of new life. That Christ gives.

Help us to be those. Who are not fearful. Of taking this word to all the world. But brave and courageous. Like this desperate mother.

On behalf of all those around us. May we plea. That you would save. Friends. Loved ones. Family.

[34:18] We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.