



Includes

Jesus extends mercy to all people.

MARK 7:24-37

Most people have at least once experienced being excluded. Feeling like an outsider is an emotionally painful experience. Whatever the reason for being excluded, the incident typically stays in our minds for a lifetime. Yet the opposite—being included in a group or event—can be life-giving. In the same way, the memory of belonging can remain with us throughout life.

When have you most felt like an outsider?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

MARK 7:1–8:21

Once again, Jesus conflicted with the Jewish religious leaders. The presenting issue was ceremonial uncleanness, with the Pharisees and scribes criticizing Jesus for the behavior of His disciples. Jesus, however, addressed the issue as one of elevating human traditions and teachings over the Word of God. The hypocrisy of these religious leaders was driven by the reality that their hearts were far from the Lord and His revealed will. Jesus condemned their self-serving traditions, such as using religious devotion to exempt themselves from caring for parents.

The encounter with the Pharisees prompted Jesus to address the crowds and to assert that the external emphasis of the religious leaders did not address the origin of spiritual contamination. He advised them to focus their attention on the heart, from which all behaviors flow. The disciples demonstrated spiritual obtuseness at this teaching and Jesus gently rebuked their lack of understanding. Expanding on His message to the crowds, the Lord enumerated all types of sinful behavior as ultimately a spiritual malfunction of the heart. Much of the “vice list” mentioned by Jesus represented violations of the Ten Commandments.

The disciples’ spiritual dullness showed up again at Jesus’s feeding of the four thousand, a repeat of a previous miracle (Mark 6:30-43). The Pharisees approached Jesus again and demanded a sign from Him, but He refused to accommodate them. As Jesus and the disciples traveled to Bethsaida by boat, He warned them about the insidious influence of the Pharisees. No doubt this evil influence consisted of their invalidation of Scripture by their elevation of human traditions. The disciples misunderstood His reference to leaven, thinking He was speaking about literal bread (which they had forgotten to bring along for the trip), and demonstrated their own failure to remember Jesus’s mighty works.

- **Review Mark 7:24-37 and note the occurrences of the word “heart,” in either singular or plural form. Why is the human heart of importance when it comes the subject of including others, rather than excluding them?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE DEJECTED (MARK 7:24-30)

²⁴ He got up and departed from there to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, but he could not escape notice. ²⁵ Instead, immediately after hearing about him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she was asking him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, because it isn’t right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁸ But she replied to him, “Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹ Then he told her, “Because of this reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰ When she went back to her home, she found her child lying on the bed, and the demon was gone.

VERSES 24-26

After feeding a large crowd and confronting religious leaders, Jesus *entered a house and did not want anyone to know it*. At times Jesus sought to “get off the grid” and remain incognito. Yet on this trip to *the region of •Tyre*, He *could not escape notice*, perhaps due to His previous exposure to its citizens while in nearby Galilee (Mark 3:8).

People who have needs, especially regarding their children, will passionately seek help to alleviate the situation. There was *a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit*. She *came and fell at his feet*, asking Jesus to heal her daughter. No doubt she was desperate for help.

Mark describes the woman as *a Gentile, a •Syrophenician by birth*, which meant that she was born in the Syrian city of Phoenicia. Up to this point, Jesus had been ministering in regions dominated by Jews. Now a Gentile woman sought His help.

VERSES 27-28

There is no dancing around the fact that Jesus used the prevalent term for Gentiles, which was *dogs*. We may be startled by that, but it doesn’t deny His compassionate nature, nor affirm any prejudice on His part. The particular word used in the text for a dog was a diminutive form that could be translated as “puppies.”

Perhaps the key word in understanding the heart of Jesus here is the word *first*. His ministry was directed towards the Jewish people (Matt. 10:5). The apostle Paul later followed the same pattern of

Jesus (Rom. 1:16). Eventually, the mission of the gospel would be directed toward all people groups (Mark 13:10).

Note that the woman didn't correct Jesus; she accepted the veracity of what He said. She merely pointed out that the priority expressed by Jesus didn't exclude blessing for the Gentiles. What is commendable about her is that she saw a possible expansion of the very work Jesus had come to perform. By referring to Jesus as **Lord**, she demonstrated faith in Him, and Matthew's account of this interaction affirms that (Matt. 15:28).


“We are to offer the hope of the gospel to every person.”

VERSES 29-30

Jesus told the woman that because of her response to Him, she could return home and find her daughter was healed. This would have no doubt been noted by Mark's original readers as indicative of how God had plans for the salvation of the Gentiles.

Though not Jewish, this woman lived in an area that was adjacent to Israel. It is hard to imagine she did not know about the religious rituals of the Jews and the rites of cleansing that were intrinsic to their practices. She would have known that she had no basis for approaching a rabbi such as Jesus. Yet she did anyway. Hers is not an example of assertion of rights and privileges. Rather, it is an example of someone coming to Jesus based not on worthiness but need. We see in her a combination of both boldness and humility. This is what the gospel does: it humbles us in our unfitness but exalts us in the love we receive from the Father.

The placement of this account of Jesus's healing of the woman's daughter was not accidental on the part of Mark. It follows the declaration by Jesus that all foods were spiritually clean (Mark 7:19). The point of this passage is that not only are all foods clean, but so are all groups of people. We are to offer the hope of the gospel to every person, including social outcasts.

 **Why might a person's social status get in the way of them hearing about Jesus?**

- What areas do you avoid because of the types of people who live there? How can you become intentional about offering the hope of the gospel to them?
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BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible atlas and Bible dictionary to locate and learn about places mentioned in Scripture.

Find the locations of Tyre and the Decapolis in a Bible atlas. (Tip: Check the atlas index or search on the internet.) Then use a Bible dictionary to learn more about these locations. What significant facts lead to a deeper understanding of Mark 7:24-35?

THE DEAF (MARK 7:31-35)

³¹ Again, leaving the region of Tyre, he went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had difficulty speaking and begged Jesus to lay his hand on him. ³³ So he took him away from the crowd in private. After putting his fingers in the man's ears and spitting, he touched his tongue. ³⁴ Looking up to heaven, he sighed deeply and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!"). ³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak clearly.

VERSE 31

The route Jesus took after *leaving the region of Tyre* was somewhat meandering. (One commentator compares it to a trip from New York City to Chicago by way of Boston!) Since the Lord's purpose was to avoid the crowds, His circuitous path may have been a strategic move to allow Him to spend time with His disciples. As had been the case and would continue to be so, their understanding of His mission remained cloudy.

We should consider the purpose of Mark in showing Jesus traveling through non-Jewish areas. Literally, **Decapolis** means “ten cities” and may have represented a stronghold of Greek influence and culture. Every faith community contends with the human tendency to become inwardly focused and exclusive. This portrayal of Jesus forging into places that Judaism considered off-limits is corrective against that tendency. His example leads us toward becoming appropriately inclusive as God would desire.

“Every faith community contends with the human tendency to become inwardly focused and exclusive.”

VERSES 32-33

Evidently, the local people discovered Jesus’s presence in their area and **brought to him a deaf man who had difficulty speaking**. Perhaps His reputation as a miracle worker had spread through the area because of the testimony of the man from Gadara whom Jesus had restored (5:20). In any case, they **begged Jesus to lay his hand on him**. Physical touch had been a part of several previous healings by the Lord (1:31,41; 6:5). In some cases, those healed had probably not been touched by another human being in a long time.

Jesus ushered the deaf man **away from the crowd in private**. Jesus had no interest in putting on a show for the crowd. Publicity and fanfare made no substantive contribution to His ultimate mission of dying for the sins of the world. It may have been that Jesus’s personal concern for the deaf man prompted his removal from the crowd. For his entire lifetime this man had probably been made a spectacle. It is not inconceivable that Jesus’s actions stemmed from His sensitivity to this man’s painful experience. He provided individual care to a man with physical challenges.

In a combination of actions, Jesus touched **the man’s ears** and his **tongue**. These areas represented his deafness and muteness and symbolized the opening of his ears and the loosening of his tongue. These actions were enumerated in Isaiah, who prophesied that the Messiah would unstop deaf ears and cause the mute to sing for joy (Isa. 35:5-6).

VERSES 34-35

Jesus lifted His eyes **up to heaven** and **sighed deeply**. These two actions represented keen realities about what was about to take place. First, in looking heavenward, Jesus demonstrated His reliance on the power of God working through Him. Secondly, the sigh revealed the underlying

spiritual fight behind every miracle of healing. In doing battle with the power of evil, Jesus sought divine aid in the conflict.

Speaking an Aramaic word (**•Ephphatha!**), Jesus commanded the man's ears to **be opened. Immediately** both of the afflictions under which this man suffered were healed—first **his ears** and then **his tongue**.

○ What can believers do to effectively minister to individuals with physical challenges?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. (See Genesis 1:27-27; Revelation 7:9-10.)

THE DUMBFOUNDED (MARK 7:36-37)

³⁶ He ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them, the more they proclaimed it. ³⁷ They were extremely astonished and said, “He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

VERSE 36

After performing such a great miracle of healing and restoration before the gathered crowd, Jesus then did a strange thing and **ordered them to tell no one**. (See also Mark 1:40-44.) This seems contrary to both the human tendency to talk about amazing events and the command of the Lord to share the gospel with all people (16:15). How then are we to understand this prohibition issued by Jesus?

All the things the crowds were wowed by—giving sight to the blind, opening the ears of the deaf, loosening the tongues of the mute, releasing the afflicted, casting out evil spirits, and raising the dead—were but pointers to what was to come—the death and resurrection of Jesus. Since at this point that still lay in the future, the signs and wonders performed by Jesus couldn't truly be understood at that time.

We too get the proverbial cart before the horse. We focus on the benefits of a relationship with Christ to enlist others in the Christian experience without always fully appreciating the basis for those blessings. Like the crowds of people with whom He dealt, we err in seeing Jesus only as a means to an end rather than as the end of all things. In a similar way, we sometimes try to use Jesus for our own agendas rather than submitting to His.

The challenge for believers is to maintain the tension between the blessings the Lord gives us because of His salvation and the salvation itself—between what they are and what it cost Jesus to provide them for us. Yes, we should remember with joy and cherish all the benefits He has provided to us in redemption but not at the expense of focusing on His mission of saving all those who believe in Him.

“We err in seeing Jesus only as a means to an end rather than as the end of all things.”

The more he ordered them to tell no one, the more zealously **they proclaimed it**. Even though He had just opened the ears of a deaf man, Jesus’s direct command was not heard by the crowd. Sometimes it seems that whatever the Lord tells us to do, we do the exact opposite.

VERSE 37

The response of the crowd was that they were **extremely astonished**. The works they saw Jesus perform were beyond expectation. In the expression, **He has done everything well**, a predominately Gentile audience echoed the words of Genesis 1:31 and the affirmation that all of God’s work is good. Even these pagan multitudes recognized the benevolent activity of God in His Son Jesus Christ. What was truly astonishing, however, was that the work of renewal promised by Isaiah 35 occurred outside the geographical boundaries of the nation of Israel.

 **How can we balance an appreciation for Jesus’s incredible works while maintaining a focus on His mission as Savior?**

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should offer the hope of Jesus to social outcasts.
- + Believers must show individual care to people with physical challenges.
- + Believers must remain focused on the redemption provided to all through Jesus alone.

Discuss specific ways your group can demonstrate the mercy of Jesus to all people. What obstacles must be overcome to include outsiders and those with physical disabilities in your group?

Where do you see God at work among people considered “non-religious”? How could you be a part of what He is doing with them?

PRAYER NEEDS
