

MARCH 22, 1992

JESUS MEETS NEEDS

If you or I needed help, then I or you would help each other because we know each other and we have a lot in common. It is not a difficult decision to make to help a friend, especially if it is in your power and ability to do so.

Several weeks ago a couple of strangers visited our church. These people were transients, passing through the area looking for work. Many of the transients are in the U S illegally, and I would not be too surprised if these two were in this country illegally. They came by the church looking for help. I don't know if they wanted a job or wanted a handout or maybe just wanted a place to stay. What should we do to help people that come to us and ask for help? Should it matter where they are from or if they are illegally in this country? Should it matter if they need a place to stay or just a good meal? Should it matter whether or not they can speak English or not? The help that we can give people and the way we give the help can and will depend on the factors just mentioned. However, the question of "should we help?" ought to be easy to answer. The answer should be "yes."

We've all heard that Jesus is the example that we should follow and this is true. We see from His ministry that most of it was among the Jews. These were His fellow countrymen and people with whom He had some common ground in an earthly sense. He helped those that came to Him. He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, taught them, forgave them, and performed other miracles. We see only a few incidents where Jesus encountered non-Jews and how He interacted with them. One incident that is pretty well known is the "woman at the well." Another is the case where Jesus left the area that was mostly Jewish and visited the mostly non-Jewish area of Tyre and Sidon.

MARK 7:24 Many demands by many people can take it toll on a person. We live in a time of high stress because of all the demands that come our way. When people learned that Jesus could heal and that He could cast out demons and that He taught as no one had ever taught before, then the people flocked to Him. On top of all that pressure the Jewish leaders were there in an adversarial role to challenge whatever they could. Jesus sensed the need from His humanity to get away to be refreshed by taking a respite from the realities of everyday stress. We might refer to His trip to Tyre and Sidon as a vacation or a holiday. People need to do that. We need a change of pace and a chance for some recreation (read that as REcreation). Even while He was trying to get away from the routine, someone found Him and they brought a problem to Him. A lesson to be learned is that there will be ministry opportunities for us even while we are on vacation.

MARK 7:25-30 Imagine, if you will, being on vacation at a nice resort area and while you are staying there, the President of the United States comes there for a vacation time. (This situation is not likely to happen, because of all the security problems involved with protecting the president from harm.) Can you imagine a mother whose son was in prison because of a false charge coming to visit the President to get him to grant a presidential pardon for her son? That would take a lot of spunk and/or desperation. The woman that came to Jesus was perhaps both spunky and desperate. She did not come demanding help but asking for help. She bowed down to show that she respected and revered Jesus. She had a problem that no one else could solve: her daughter had a demon.

Some many times we operate our lives based on sayings or adages. An example might be "Charity begins at home." Another would be, "God helps those who help themselves." You've heard, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." These adages are not always the truth of the matter. I would imagine that the words that Jesus expressed to the woman about not taking the children's food to feed the dogs was an adage of that day which carries the same message as "charity begins at

home."

Matthew tells us that Jesus stated at this time that He had come to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Home for Him was the nation of Israel and if charity was to begin at home, then the conventional wisdom of that day would have said that He should fix everything in Israel and make it perfect before He would turn His attention to any other area. I think that what Jesus was asking her was something like this, "In light of the conventional wisdom that 'the children must be fed before the pets are fed,' why should I help you?" We might ask the question today, "With all the people in this country that are out of work, why would we be sending aid to Russia? After all, charity begins at home."

The woman was not offended by the saying that Jesus quoted to her, but she picked up on the theme and countered that she was not asking for a whole lot of help, just some crumbs or "fall out" from the great work that Jesus was doing. Jesus was impressed with the faith that was so evident in her coming to Him and in her faithfulness in not just taking "No" for an answer. He granted her wish.

MARK 7:31-35 As Jesus started back the area where most of His ministry was carried out, He chose to go through an area that was mainly inhabited by Gentiles. The Decapolis area was a little out of His way, but He was perhaps demonstrating for us the importance of going out of our way to help those that are not "our kind of people."

We don't have to go half way around the world to find people that are different in their values, life-styles, the language they speak, the food they eat, or a variety of other things that we can readily see. Visit the Salvation Army or Hope Haven Mission some evening and you will find people that don't own their own home, or have a steady job, that may be struggling with a chemical abuse problems, some could be mentally impaired, or have a variety of other concerns that are "foreign" to you. There are opportunities to "go out of our way" that are just down the road from where we live.

The incident that Mark records about the man who could not hear nor speak properly points out the need for us to help others find Jesus as a Source of real help in their lives. This man's friends brought him to Jesus. We may not be able to relieve a friend of alcohol addiction or some other problem, but we can certainly bring that friend to Jesus Who can help.

Jesus has not gotten out of the business of helping people. He helps us and wants us to be agents to spread the word that He is the only way to real help for the real problems of life. As you recognize the help that you have received in your life, you will be able to tell others about it and in that way can share His love as you and Jesus go about together (sometimes out of your way) to meet the needs of a lost and dying world.