

INCLUDES Mark 7:24-37

Numbers don't lie. All roads lead to Rome. All's fair in love and war. Beauty and brains don't mix. Ignorance is bliss. Life is a bed of roses. Justice is blind. What do these statements have in common? They are not true, but we sometimes quote them as if they were statements of truth. All of us have been exposed to many such statements that we (more or less) accept and just having heard these ideas we sometimes limit ourselves and what we might be able to accomplish.

We could characterize such sayings and ideas as traditions that developed over many years. Sometimes these "traditions" come about in an effort to explain or make sense of anecdotal evidences. All cultures have their own traditions and they have "quotations" that explain the traditions. There were many religious ideas and sayings that the Jews quoted that had become like political (make that religious) "talking points" and Jesus encountered some of these as He was introducing a fresh way of understanding and interacting with God. Many of the things Jesus said and taught were thought to be scandalous by the Jews. Even some things that seem so obvious to us today such as "seeing God as our Father" was really hard for them to accept.

We can think of several examples of what Jesus did that conflicted with their traditions. Healing a person on the Sabbath was a big negative deal to the Jews. When Jesus had a meal with publicans and sinners that was a big deal. The fact that Jesus and His disciples did not fast on a regular basis was a big deal. When the disciples ate a meal without ceremoniously washing their hands, that was a big deal. In the early part of Chapter Seven, Mark recorded Jesus' commentary on what had been happening with the Jews for hundreds of years. He said "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition."

This same problem is alive and well among Christians today. There are a lot of ideas that all of us have learned (or maybe memorized) that we quote as absolute truths that do not pass the test of agreeing with the Scriptures.

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 a biological, earthly sense. He helped those who 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 non-Jewish area of Tyre and Sidon.

The Dejected – 7:24-30

²⁴ Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. ²⁵ But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." ²⁹ And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." ³⁰ And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left. Mark 7:24-30 (NASB95)

One of the stated reasons Jesus and His disciples went to that area was to find some time

of solitude. Many demands by many people can certainly take its 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 from admirers, 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.

The woman who came to Jesus was 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 had been able to solve: her daughter had a demon.

A parallel account of this incident is also found in Matthew's gospel. There we find some details that Mark did not mention. One detail was that Jesus had initially ignored her pleas for help. She was persistent and the disciples came up with a recommended solution to her persistence which was very distracting to them. They said, "Just send her away." When Jesus delayed responding to a request, there was usually a reason for the delay.

One likely purpose in the delay was to see how determined the woman's faith was. According to Matthew, she had been addressing Him as "Lord, Son of David." This was a title that was related to the Messiah that the Jews had been expecting. She obviously knew about this expectation even though she was not Jewish. Another reason for the delay in acting was to determine the reaction of the disciples to such a situation. The "send her away" solution was similar to the solution that the disciples first suggested before Jesus fed the multitudes with the five loaves and two fish. John Gill's Commentary says that in this case, the disciples were likely suggesting that Jesus grant her request and then send her away. Jesus' response to the disciples regarding that suggestion was a statement (according to Matthew) that "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

This response raises a question of "Was Jesus making a statement that reflected the religious traditions held by most of the Jews or was this a statement of truth?" Did Jesus come ONLY to the lost sheep of the house of Israel or did He, in fact, minister to others as well?

Sometimes 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 also think that what 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." What Jesus said was a typical Jewish argument. He may have stated it so that the disciples could see from the resulting outcome of the conversation that it was not a very sound argument. In the end, it is not our "origin" but our "faith" that pleases God.

The woman was not offended by the saying 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.

Could we make an argument that what Jesus actually did proved that the saying that "the

Messiah was to come only to the Jews” was simply a statement of traditions of men and not truth? In spite of what Jesus did, traditional ideas and concepts have a way of coming back again and again. Simon Peter was there when Jesus delivered the Gentile woman’s daughter from the evil spirit; however, he still had concerns about going to the home of Cornelius to share the good news with him and his household as we find in Acts chapter ten. Many of the Christian leaders had issues with the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles and this was years after Jesus had given the Great Commission where Jesus had told them to make disciples of all nations.

The Deaf – 7:31-35

³¹ Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came He through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. ³² They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him. ³³ Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; ³⁴ and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!” ³⁵ And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. Mark 7:31–35 (NASB95)

As Jesus started back to the area where most of His ministry was carried out, He took an indirect route that first led them north toward Sidon. That was certainly a region that was mainly inhabited by Gentiles. From Sidon, they traveled east and then south to the Decapolis area which was on the east side of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. This route 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 who are not “our kind of people.”

We don’t have to go half way around the world to find people who are different in their values, lifestyles, 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 chemical abuse problems, some could be mentally impaired, or have a variety of other concerns that are “foreign” to us. 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 from alcohol or drug addiction or some other problem, but we can certainly bring that friend to Jesus Who can help.

Again, we need to emphasize that Jesus and His disciples were ministering in a non-Jewish area. The ten cities that made up the Decapolis area were said to be patterned after Rome and were likely more “Gentile” in their life outlook than those living in Tyre and Sidon. When Jesus delivered the woman’s daughter from the demon in her life, He did so by long distance and simply declared that the deed was done.

We notice a contrast in the approach Jesus took with the man who could not hear nor speak plainly. Instead of just speaking to the problem, Jesus took the man away from the crowd and did some things that still have scholars trying to understand the purpose of the actions. We need to keep in mind that Jesus was always teaching and one of the lessons we might learn from comparing the various ways Jesus approached people’s needs is that we need to be open to using whatever is needed for a particular situation and not think that a particular “ritual” is needed when we are calling upon God to intervene in people’s lives. When we start focusing on a ritual rather than the reality, then we are beginning to develop “traditions of men” that can cause us to lose sight of the truth of the Scriptures.

In this particular situation Jesus saw a need to have uninterrupted communication with

the man who would not be distracted by the crowd in that area. Because the man could not hear, he was likely constantly “looking around” and it would be difficult for him to focus on Jesus was going to do to help him. We are not told if the source of the deafness and speech problems was physical or spiritual. In “New Testament Word Pictures” Robertson assumed that it was a demonic problem and deliverance was needed rather than a physical impairment that needed healing. There is no mention of the man’s faith, but we can safely assume that his friends had faith in that they brought him to Jesus. It is somewhat easier to think about divine help having impact on a spiritual problem rather than on physical problems. Mark presented a variety of situations that gave clear evidence that Jesus had the solution to humanity’s problems regardless of the source.

The unusual actions of Jesus putting his fingers in his ears, spitting, and touching his tongue may have simply been Jesus communicating with the man in “sign language.” Most people writing on this incident imagine that Jesus put his fingers in the ears of the man. We could certainly make an argument that touching the ears of the man would be a way for Jesus to show empathy for him and that might also be an act that would help the faith of the man being healed.

If the actions of Jesus were intended to communicate to the deaf man what about to happen, then Jesus would have simply pointed to His own ears which would let the man know that Jesus was going to help his hearing problem. Jesus’s action in spitting could simply indicate that something was going to be removed from the man that would allow him to hear. By touching His tongue, Jesus was indicating that the man would then be able to speak plainly when the hearing problem was removed.

Still in the mode of communicating with “sign language,” Jesus then looked upward for a brief time and this was done to tell the man that He (Jesus) was praying for him. By doing a deep sigh, Jesus was indicating that what He was doing for the man had been completed. It seems evident that at that point the man could hear because Jesus then spoke in audible words to the man and said “be opened.”

The Dumbfounded – 7:36-37

³⁶ And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. ³⁷ They were utterly astonished, saying, “He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” Mark 7:36–37 (NASB95)

There could be several reasons Jesus did not want this healing miracle spread around by the man who was healed or those who saw what happened. People were caught up with and fascinated by the miracles and they were overlooking the message of the Kingdom. Jesus was also setting an example for His followers and disciple for them to not seek fame or notoriety from their ministry to people as they would share the gospel message of salvation. Jesus was still 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.