



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Mark 7:24-37 Jesus honours a foreign woman's faith and heals a deaf and mute man (8 August)

Jesus has retreated into Gentile territory. Although he has not gone to take his mission there – the focus of his ministry is always on the people of Israel – here we have another foretaste of the time when the good news of God's salvation through Jesus will be taken to the whole world.

The Syrophenician woman, at first glance, is a most unlikely candidate for receiving blessing from Jesus: she is a foreigner (ie not a Jew), a woman, and the mother of a child possessed by a demon. Yet she receives attention and help from Jesus without bringing any contribution on her part. She brings no moral goodness, no law-keeping, no impressiveness. All she brings is her need. She simply believes, humbly and persistently, that even the crumbs of mercy from Jesus will provide the help she so desperately needs. And her simple faith is honoured by Jesus and the demon is gone.

Jesus' initial non-committal response to her is perhaps surprising and may seem somewhat curt. He gives three comparisons: bread/his message; children/the Jewish people; dogs/Gentiles. But Jesus is holding out hope that Gentiles will also become the recipients of God's grace (note 'first', v.27). Verses 29-30 help us to conclude that Jesus spoke as he did merely to test the woman's faith, and her response is both perceptive and persistent. Her faith has overcome the boundaries of ritual purity, gender and ethnicity (see Gal 3:28).

In another example of Gentile faith, Jesus takes the deaf and mute man aside so as not to make a spectacle of his healing. His deep sigh (v.34) perhaps expresses the tension between what the world had become in its hard-heartedness and physical weaknesses, and what God initially intended (see Rom 8:23, 26).

1. How does the woman's response indicate humility and persistence?
How might this guide the way we approach Jesus?
Read Luke 11:8, 18:1, Heb 6:15, 10:35f. Can you give examples of when you have persisted (or are now persisting) in prayer?
2. Jesus' words in v.27 seem designed to test for and evoke the very faith which is expressed in v.28. Is there a lesson here to help us in our witness to and conversation with people?

3. People brought the deaf and mute man to Jesus. How might we look to bring people to Jesus?
4. Mark goes into an unusual amount of detail in describing the healing of the deaf man (v.33-35). Why do you think he does this?
5. Faith is sometimes found where we least expect it. What does this imply for our evangelism?
6. How do these verses challenge our assumptions about the types of people we might expect to respond more readily to the gospel, as well as the types we might tend to shy away from?

Take five minutes musing on this picture and our bible reading and then share your thoughts.

