

May 27, 2012 by Steve Brandon



# Helping the Helpless

## Mark 7:24-37

### 1. A Desperate Woman (verses 24-30)

### 2. A Deaf Man (verses 31-37)

Our text this morning is found in Mark, chapter 7, verses 24-37.

Mark 7:24-37

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. But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 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." But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. They \*brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they \*implored Him to lay His hand on him. 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; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He \*said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

As you read your Bible, one thing is very clear: God has a heart for helpless people. When you read through the Old Testament, there are constant references to orphans and the widows and the foreigners. Throughout the law, God is always protecting them and their rights. "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan" (Exodus 22:22). "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the foreigner by giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18).

God even instituted a way to supply for the less fortunate -- for those who have no land. He told His people, "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the foreigner, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 24:19). This is how God supplied for those less fortunate. They were to go and glean in the field for anything left by the harvesters. In this way, they did work. In this way, God provided for them.

Psalms 68:5 says this: "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation." God has a heart for helpless people: the orphan, the widow, the foreigner. You could easily extend this to the disabled, the poor, the homeless, the sinful.

Indeed, this is the gospel; God helping the helpless, God helping us when we could not help ourselves. Romans 5:6-8 tells us, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is the reason why Rock Valley Bible Church exists. We are people who were helpless. But, God, in His grace came and helped us. Jesus died for our sins. And by faith in Him, we have come to know freedom in the gospel.

This is the reason why we gather each Sunday. We reflect upon the significance of the gospel in our lives. The reason why we speak to others about Jesus is to see others come to know this same grace. Or, you might say it this way, "Rock Valley Bible Church exists to enjoy God's Grace and to extend God's Glory."

In our text this morning, we find Jesus encountering two people who are helpless. They have found themselves in unfortunate circumstances. One was a woman whose daughter was afflicted with an unclean spirit (verse 25). The other was a man who was deaf and spoke with difficulty (verse 32). And Jesus had compassion on both of them, because Jesus cares for the helpless. And in so doing, He gives us pictures, in some way, of how God in Christ has helped us.

Now, before we get into the text, I also want to mention that these two people were Gentiles. That is, they were outside of the commonwealth of Israel. As Ephesians 2 says, they were "strangers to the covenants of promise. They were 'separate from [the promises of the] Messiah, ... having no hope and without God in the world' (Eph. 2:12). The promise of the Old Covenant wasn't given to them. Rather, the promises were given to the people of Israel.

And yet, Jesus demonstrated His mercy toward these people. What a contrast from the first half of the chapter, which we looked at last week.

In the first half of the chapter, we read about the Pharisees, who received the covenants of promise, who had the hope of the Messiah, who had the Scriptures and the knowledge about God; and yet, they were far from God, because they focused their attention upon the traditions of men rather than the commandments of God (verses 6-7).

And now, Jesus goes to those who are outside the covenant, who are helpless. He has compassion upon them. And Jesus heals their diseases. The scene is set for us in verse 24, ...

Mark 7:24

Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. ...

Tyre is northwest of the region of Galilee, along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean, some 30 miles (or so) from Galilee. But, more importantly, it is outside of the Jewish sector. Tyre was a Gentile city, known for their wickedness (Matthew 11:22). In Jesus' day, they were on par with Sodom and Gomorrah of old (Matt. 11:20-24). The Jews in these parts were in the minority at best.

Verse 24 brings up a hint as to why Jesus had traveled to Tyre. "And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it." Jesus was seeking a bit of rest from the crowds, secluded away from them for a time. Often in Mark, we see large crowds pressing in on Jesus.

Mark 3:7-9

Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him;

Mark 5:22

When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore.

Mark 6:30-32

The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them.

Mark 6:53-56

When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.

Here we are in Mark 7 with a similar thing. Jesus and His disciples were seeking a bit of seclusion from the demands of the ministry. Jesus "wanted no one to know [that He was in town]." But, with 13 Jewish men walking into this town, it was difficult to keep His visit as secret. "He could not escape notice" (verse 24).

This gives you a bit of an idea of how far the news of Jesus had spread. His name was known far and wide even in pagan lands. Jesus was known for His healing powers. Those who had heard of Him in Galilee had travelled home to tell others of this wonder-working man (Mark 3:8).

And it's right here that we meet the first helpless person in our text: We meet, ...

1. A Desperate Woman (verses 24-30)

Now, here's the good news for us this morning. God loves desperate people. The Scripture says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34).

This is precisely the contrast between the first half of Mark 7 and the second half of Mark 7. In the first half, Mark 7:1-23, we saw the proud Pharisees. And God opposed them. In the second half, Mark 7:24-37, we will see some humble people. And God gives them grace. And the obvious application will come straight to us. Learn from the humble. Learn from the heart of Jesus toward the humble.

In verse 25, we read of this desperate woman's predicament: Her little daughter had an unclean spirit. That is, her daughter was demon possessed (verse 29). I'm sure that, like any of you mothers here in this room would, she had done much to try to heal her daughter. Surely she had taken her to the doctors. Perhaps she had sought help from the pagan priests who lived near her region. Perhaps she had prayed to the idols. Perhaps she had even prayed to the One true God. I'm sure that she had pursued everything possible. And still, her daughter was sick.

And then, she heard that Jesus was in town. She had heard of the healing power of Jesus. And so, she sought Him out, knowing that He

could help her.

Mark 7:25

But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet.

Notice how desperate she was. At first hearing that Jesus was in town, she left to see him. "Immediately [she] came." Her quick response is indicative of her desperation. She is quick to try anything; anything that will help. We also see that she came and "fell at His feet." Again, this is an indication of her desperation. With all of her being, she begged that Jesus help her.

Her desperation continues in verse 26, ...

Mark 7:26

Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

The most literal translation of verse 26 is that she "kept asking Jesus." The verb is an imperfect, meaning continual action. She kept asking and asking and asking and asking. Parents, I trust that you know what this is about. Little children are known for their relentless asking again and again and again. At times, it can drive parents crazy.

From Matthew's account of the story, we know that her continual asking was driving the disciples nuts. They told Jesus, "Send her away, for she is shouting after us" (Matt. 15:23). But, Jesus wasn't bothered by her requests. He wasn't granting her requests. But, neither was He bothered by them.

Now, Jesus "was saying to her" -- again an imperfect tense -- as often as she was asking, ...

Mark 7:27

... "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

On one level, Jesus may have been pointing out what was going on in the house where Jesus was staying. There may have been a few dogs in the house, along with some children. Jesus may have said, "Look there, ... aren't the children being fed?" "Look there, ... aren't the dogs being neglected."

On another level, Jesus was living out this parable before her eyes. His priority wasn't her, but Jewish people in the house where Jesus was staying. Perhaps He was staying in a Jewish home. Perhaps there were only the disciples. But, He was ministering to their needs, while neglecting hers. That's the point of the first half of verse 26, "the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race." Jesus "was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). Jesus was not sent to the Gentiles. And so, Jesus was not helping here.

On a final level, this woman would have seen that Jesus talking about the dogs was a parable. "Do you see the children and the dogs over there? That's a living parable of what's happening to you." In effect, Jesus was calling this woman a "dog." And yet, ... we see the humility and faith of the woman shine through in verse 28, ...

Mark 7:28

But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs."

She said, "Yes, Lord. Yes. I know that I'm a dog. Yes. I know that I'm a Gentile. But, I also know that the dogs under the table get something! I would be happy with anything."

As most of you know, in the Brandon household, we are new to dogs. This Autumn, we purchased our first dog, appropriately named, "Autumn." Usually, Autumn is in her cage during dinner. But, last night, she was on the loose as we ate, scrounging around the table, waiting for anything to drop. Well, as her dog-luck would have it, one of our children spilled her orange juice on the table. Some of it began to leak through the crack in the table. Autumn was all over it, licking up the orange juice from off the floor. The amazing thing about Autumn is this: we didn't hear her complain at only getting the drops that fell from the table. No, she was well-content with any sorts of liquids that she was able to get.

So it is with this woman. She would be content with anything that the Lord Jesus would be willing to drop from the table. And Jesus did.

Now, verse 29, ...

Mark 7:29

And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

Her response was one of humility. Her response was one of faith. And Jesus recognized her response and healed her daughter at her request; "the demon has gone out of your daughter."

Verse 30 is also a demonstration of her faith, ...

Mark 7:30

And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

She left to see what Jesus had done for her. And, indeed, she saw her little girl restored to health. Such is the display of the omnipotence of Jesus. He knew where this woman lived. He healed this little girl from afar. He knew that she was doing fine.

Let's bring it to us. Let's learn from Jesus. Let's learn that He loves to grant the requests of desperate people who have no rights to claim.

Do you remember the parable of the widow and the judge? She was seeking legal protection (Luke 18:3). But, the judge was somehow prejudiced against her and refused to grant her justice (Luke 18:4). But, her constant and persistent asking for protection finally wore the judge down. He said, "Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out" (Luke 18:5). Let us learn from this judge (Luke 18:6). If an ungodly, unrighteous judge will grant justice to the defenseless one who persists in asking, ... will not God bring about justice for His elect? (Luke 18:7).

This is what Jesus was doing. He was waiting on the woman to ask and ask and ask and ask. Finally, He granted her request. God is righteous and loves to hear our cries. And God looks to the humble. Let us also learn from the woman.

Do you remember the parable Jesus told of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray? (Luke 18:10). The Pharisee offered up a prayer filled with self-righteousness. "God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12). The tax collector, on the other hand, wasn't even willing to lift his eyes to heaven. Instead, he beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). Commenting on these two men, Jesus said that only one of them went down to his house justified, and it wasn't the Pharisee. It was the humble sinner.

So likewise in our text before us in Mark's gospel. This woman was willing to be called a dog if it meant getting the scraps from the table. She knew that she was outside the Covenant with no promises to claim. She was simply longing for anything that the Lord was able to give.

Let us come with a similar heart before the Lord, confessing our sin, longing for Him to work, pleading for Christ to help us. But, realize this -- as those who have been grafted into the olive tree by faith (Romans 11:17), we now have access to the promises. "But now in Christ Jesus [we] who were formerly far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). We "are no longer strangers and aliens, but [we] are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household" (Eph. 2:19).

We are not like this woman. The promises of the Messiah have come to us! This is the marvels of the gospel, that believing Gentiles "are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6). We aren't dogs. We are children. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God" (1 John 3:1). As God's children, we have access to God.

So, if this woman came begging even for the scraps of the table, will you come to the Lord as a child of the house?

We have seen A Desperate Woman (verses 24-30). Let's now focus our attention upon ...

## 2. A Deaf Man (verses 31-37)

Again, we begin with a verse telling us a bit about geography and where Jesus was when he encountered this man. We read, ...

Mark 7:31

Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.

What's interesting about this verse is that Sidon is north of Tyre. And both of them are north of the Sea of Galilee. The Decapolis, on the other hand, is along the southeastern portion of the Sea of Galilee. So, Jesus didn't head straight for the Decapolis. Instead, He headed north, through Sidon and took a big loop around the countryside, until coming southeast to the Decapolis.

It's not such a strange thing when you realize the purpose of Jesus. He's seeking to avoid the crowds (7:24). He's seeking to minister in smaller settings. Do you remember when Jesus first began His healing ministry, "the whole city had gathered at the door" (1:33). So, Jesus left and went away to a secluded place and was praying there (1:35). When Peter finally found Him, he said, "Everyone is looking for You" (1:37). Jesus told Him, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for" (1:38).

I think that this explains what Jesus is doing. He is avoiding the Galilean area, where He had just had some major conflict with the Pharisees. He is ministering in surrounding regions.

He finally comes to "the region of Decapolis." "Decapolis" literally means, "ten cities." As I mentioned before, it is along the southeastern portion of the Sea of Galilee. It was a largely Gentile area with a few Jews living there. This wasn't the first time that Jesus had ever come to this region. When Jesus cast the legion of demons out of the man and into the herd of swine, He was in the Decapolis. Do you remember how frightened the city became when they saw this wild, and out-of-control man "clothed and sitting in his right mind"? (5:15). They were so frightened of Jesus, that they "implored Him to leave their region" (5:17). The man who was healed wanted to follow after Jesus, but Jesus told him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you" (5:19). Mark 5:20 says this, "And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed."

Here, we see Jesus returning to this region after a few months, perhaps a year. And this man had done a great job at spreading the word, because there is a crowd around Jesus (verse 33). In verse 32 we read of what happened when Jesus first came into the city, ...

Mark 7:32

They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him.

This man was deaf -- he couldn't hear. This man was dumb -- he couldn't speak. And they were eager to see Jesus heal this man.

How different this is than when Jesus was with the Pharisees. When the Pharisees brought people to Jesus, it was to test Him. "Will He heal on the Sabbath?" Remember the man with the withered hand? (Mark 3:1-6). They weren't interested in the healing. They were interested in taking Jesus down.

But, this was different. This was like when the four friends dug a hole in the ceiling and dropped the paralytic in front of Jesus, requesting that he might be healed (Mark 2:1-12). This is why this deaf and dumb man was placed before Jesus. And then, Jesus does a tender thing:

Mark 7:33

Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself,

When Jesus dealt with the woman whose daughter was demon possessed, He merely said the word (Matt. 8:8) and her daughter was healed. But, in this case, Jesus takes some personal, one-on-one time with this man. Why? Certainly Jesus could have healed with a word. I believe that Jesus did so to demonstrate His care and compassion for this individual. Once by themselves, Jesus ...

Mark 7:33-34

... put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He \*said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!"

Picture the scene. Jesus is face to face with the man. Jesus places one finger into his left ear. Jesus places the other finger into his right ear. And then he spit, presumably upon His own hand, and touched this man's tongue. Jesus thereby identifies the problem with this man. His ears are a problem. His tongue is a problem. Then, Jesus lifted His gaze to heaven. He sighed a deep sigh. He said a single word, "Ephphatha!" -- "Be opened!"

Mark 7:35

And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.

Two miracles took place that day. Instantly, this man could hear! Instantly, this man would speak! These things would bring him back into the fold of society.

If you can't hear and if you can't speak, it's difficult to mingle with others. I have caught a glimpse of this every time that I have travelled to Nepal. With those who spoke English, I was able to socialize. But, with those who were only Nepalese speakers, it was much more difficult. It's not that I didn't want to spend time with them. It's not that I didn't like these people. But, there is only so much that you can do without communicating. But, if you can communicate, your life is changed!

This past week, I emailed a dear friend of mine, who was born deaf. Some of you know him, as he was involved with the church in the early days. He had some hearing in his ears, but not much. He could make out low frequencies, but he couldn't hear high frequencies at all. Hearing aids never really helped him, because they amplify all frequencies, which ended up distorting the sound in his ear. He learned to adapt. He learned to read lips. He paid attention to a bunch of non-verbal cues. So, when I spoke with him, I would look straight into his face and speak with a low voice, and we could communicate.

Anyway, ten years ago, he received a cochlear implant (a bionic ear), which has enabled him to hear! And so, in my email, I told my friend that I was preaching on this passage and asked him for any thoughts on his experiences from receiving a bionic ear. He sent me a link to a video that I want to show you, because it helps us to see the emotion that surely filled this man. Had we been there with Jesus, this is something similar to what we may have seen. [\[1\]](#)

My friend writes,

"That is a dramatic video of someone who received a middle-ear implant (similar to a cochlear implant [that I received] but it boosts the sound before it gets to the cochlea instead of replacing the cochlea). ...

Not everyone has an immediate reaction like in the video. Some certainly do, but most patients who have as profound a loss for as long as I had it, end up struggling with the implant for the first few months and years. Even so, I immediately I began to hear things I didn't hear before, and of course did not recognize what they were. For example, birds chirping, car engines, and keyboard keys being pressed. The sounds are overwhelming at first, but you grow used to them over time and the brain learns how to process them. Now, 10 years after being implanted, in quiet environments, I can understand anyone's voice and sometimes I do not even need to see their face to speech-read. I love being able to hear my kids talk which I would not be able to do otherwise. I also am grateful to be able to listen to MacArthur sermons. Although I can always read the sermon transcripts, being able to listen and understand the sermon brings it to life in ways not possible

with the transcript alone."

What has taken my friend 10 years to learn was done instantly in the case of this man whom Jesus healed. Such was the power of Jesus. He could open ears. He could loose tongues. This was exactly what the prophets had foretold would take place in the days of the Messiah:

Isaiah 35:5-6

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened  
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.  
Then the lame will leap like a deer,  
And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.

Indeed, the Messiah had come! The people were truly excited! And then, we see Jesus giving that strange command (verse 36).

Mark 7:36

And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it.

This wasn't the first time Jesus said this. After raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, "And he gave them strict orders that no one should know about this." (Mark 5:43). After cleansing the leper, Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." (Mark 1:44). But, that didn't work so well, because, "But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere." (Mark 1:45).

I'm not sure why Jesus didn't want news about Him to spread in the Decapolis, especially as this was different than what Jesus told the demoniac in Mark 5:19: "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."

Some of it might have to do with His desire to keep His preaching priorities. With the crowds comes the expectation of the working of miracles, which inhibits His preaching. Some of his commanding silence might have to do with His humility. Jesus didn't want to be known as power-seeking miracle-worker. Some of his commanding silence might have to do with His call to preach. The more that His fame was spread as a miracle-worker, the more the message of repentance would be lessened. Some of his commanding silence might have to do with His ultimate aim -- to give His life a ransom for many (10:45). Too much popularity may hinder His upcoming passion.

I don't know. All I know is this. You can't silence good news. When God has impacted your life, nobody is going to be able to shut you up. You will want others to hear of what God has done for you.

The crowds surrounding Jesus are the fruit of the demoniac who single-handedly evangelized the entire region. This is the best evangelism training that anyone can have. Let God impact your life, and you won't be able to be silent! Verse 37 tells us what they were saying, ...

Mark 7:37

They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 27, 2012 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsOo3jzkhYA>