

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
May 17, 2009
Series: On Your Mark!

“Why?”
Mark 7:24-37

I received a “B” and went to my professor and I said, *“Can you please reconsider? It is really important to me that I get an “A” in this class.”* The professor responded, *“No, the requirements are clear, and your paper was late. I’m sorry there is nothing I can do about it.”* The class was weightlifting 101, a one-credit class I was taking for fun my senior year at the University of Arizona. I had forgotten to bring my paper to class and therefore it was considered late. And the reason this was of any significance is that I was trying to build up my GPA so I could meet the minimum GPA requirements for certain interviews in the job placement office. For example, I really wanted to interview for Proctor and Gamble but my GPA was just below their cut-off. It all came down to this one-hour weightlifting class. If I received an A, I could interview with them – *but if I received a B - I would not.*

Having my B in hand I next went to the placement office and said, *“My GPA is really, really close – do you think I could still interview with P&G.”* “No, I’m sorry, but the rules are clear, and if we make an exception for you, we will have to make an exception for everyone.” One late paper, in one class and the doors of opportunity were shut to me. My dream of working for Proctor and Gamble evaporated. Who knows how my life might have changed, if I had gotten that A?

The title of my sermon today is “why?” Why wouldn’t my weightlifting prof give me an A? Because of something called a syllabus. Why wasn’t I able to interview with Proctor and Gamble? Because my grades were good but not quite good enough. I didn’t meet the

standards – I missed the mark. I fell short of...the...law. And sometimes we bring that type of mentality into our relationship with God: “God will you please have compassion on me? Can I have an interview with you?” And we imagine him saying: “Sorry, but you are a little late, aren’t you? You have been good – but not good enough. You missed a quiet time today, didn’t you? You know all that bad stuff you did – it hasn’t balanced out yet. Keep working and maybe someday you will be spiritual enough.” I want you to consider: *Why should God have mercy on you, or I?* Two weeks ago we had the Pharisee’s answer – “Follow these rules and you will be pleasing to God. Purity before God is found in keeping the law.” But today, Jesus will have a different answer – a great, wonderful, freeing answer. He is not going to tell us with words but show us in action. Mark is the gospel of action.

Turn with me to Mark chapter 7, we are in verses 24-37 this morning. There are two stories in our text this morning and they are placed immediately following Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisee’s legalism because they continue to follow Jesus teaching that following man made rules has nothing at all to do with acquiring God’s love or mercy.

The Gentile Woman (24-30)

Look at the first story, beginning in verse 24: **Mark 7:24 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.** If you look at the map, you can see that Jesus is going from the Roman province of Galilee to the coastal city of Tyre. Tyre is the fourth largest city in modern day Lebanon, having about 120,000 people – it contains a major port and it a hub of tourism with beaches and hotels.

But when Mark's original audience heard Jesus was going to Tyre, eyebrows would have been raised because this is the land of the unclean Gentiles. Not only that, but Tyre was a notorious city of sin - like Las Vegas but worse. Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos and Zechariah all prophesied against the city and her sins. One commentator said: "Tyre represented the most extreme expression of paganism both actually and symbolically that a Jew could expect to encounter." But it gets worse - not only did Tyre contain unclean gentiles - but they were political enemies. Tyre was the infamous home of the evil Queen Jezebel and during the Maccabean Wars Tyre fought against the Jews. Josephus said the people of Tyre are "notoriously our bitterest enemies" (Ag, Ap. 1.13).

So this is where Jesus is going. Why? Here are three few possibilities. (1) It could be that he is looking to get away from conflict with the Pharisees for a while - they followed Him to Galilee but no respectable Pharisee would ever go to Tyre! (2) Or, it may be that Jesus is trying to just get away with his disciples to rest - you will recall all previous attempts at rest have been thwarted by the crowds. That is why Jesus doesn't want anyone to know where he is. (3) Another possibility is this is going to be an elder's retreat - time for Jesus to spend teaching his disciples. They have shown themselves in need of remedial training and Jesus sets time aside for them. Whatever the reason, his desire to be alone is again interrupted because his reputation has spread even into Gentile territory.

Mark 7:25 But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. And so this woman comes, falls at Jesus' feet and begs over and over and over, "Please help my little girl - she is possessed by a demon. Please help her. Please." **And Jesus comes to a point of decision.** A theological tension. Will he have mercy and compassion on her in the same way he has had compassion on the

Jews? Why would he have compassion on such a person? The type of person she is, we find described in verse 26:

Mark 7:26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. Why should a Jewish Rabbi turn his attention to a begging woman, which was highly inappropriate? And not just a woman, but a Greek-speaking Gentile, half Syrian and half Phoenician and a Canaanite (according to Matthew). She is the wrong gender, the wrong political party, the wrong nationality and the wrong religion. It reminds me a little bit of the Disney movie Aladdin. Where Aladdin – the peasant is finally stripped of all his disguises and comes before the great Sultan. He has fallen in love with princess Jasmine but the law that says that a princess cannot marry a peasant. The only reason Aladdin has a happy ending is because the Sultan changes the law and removes the barrier. We have the sense in our study through Mark – the law is changing as well; from Jesus’ declaration that all foods are not clean. Purity is not found in law or ritual. Times are changing. Maybe this Jewish man can help this Gentile woman. Maybe she is worthy of God’s mercy. Then verse 27 bursts the bubble.

Mark 7:27 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.” **Whoa! What is going on here?** These words are offensive to us and we can hardly believe that our Jesus would say such a thing. The basic concept is easy enough: Jesus is teaching the priority of Israel. It was God’s plan to take Abraham and to work through Him and his descendants first – and then through them, the blessing would go to all the nations of the world. But why call her a dog? The Jews referred to the Gentiles derogatorily as “dogs.” It was an insult. I once worked on a grievance for a year and a half because some employees put up a poster of some cute dogs

and wrote female employee names under each dog. It led to two terminations and several reprimands. To call someone a dog is and has been offensive to the extreme. Some commentators try to salvage the story by saying that “The dog reference here is meant to be positive – Dogs are friendly, dogs are loyal. Also, the type of dog here (in the Greek) is a small housedog – not a wild scavenger.” And while it is true that the reference is to a house dog – a pet - everything about this still oozes insult. David Garland writes, “He dismisses her appeal out of hand with a sharp insult” (Garland, 288). So what are we to make of this?

Here is something I would like for you to consider. When I teach preaching at the seminary, we tell our students to remember that when it comes to communication – the actual content the words you speak account for 7% of communication. Facial expressions are 55% and tone of voice is 38%. And I just wonder if this is one of the places where we are missing more information than we have. I think it is very possible that Jesus is saying this with a smile on his lips, or with a wink or even a laugh or touch of sarcasm. Like a professor playing devil’s advocate in order to draw out the right answer. We assume Jesus is speaking with a stern tone of voice. But maybe he is playing the Pharisees to tease out an answer. My friend Brad Banks says that maybe it is like if Jesus came to America in the 1950’s and went to a segregated southern town and said, “You know that God only loves the white people, don’t you?” No of course not! Jesus may be *highlighting the way things are to set up the revelation for how things are going to be*. I think that is a very real possibility.

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.*” The woman stays with the imagery and makes a profound theological point. “Yes, Lord, I understand the priority of God’s working with his chosen people, Israel, but we are all in the house!” Even the dogs under the table get some

benefit of the meal.” In our house our black lab Maestro – he is like a canine vacuum cleaner cleaning up the remnants of dinner our children leave on the floor. And sometimes he gets more than crumbs as the kids see if he will eat their broccoli or carrots. She is a remarkable woman, who is able to hold her own in debate with Christ. [Mark 7:29](#) And He said to her, “Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter.” [Mark 7:30](#) And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left. What we have illustrated for us in this story - is the beginning of the shift to include Gentiles together with Jews in God’s blessing. Paul said: [Rom. 9:25](#) “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ And her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’” Like this woman! [Rom. 10:12](#) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him. The Gentiles woman cries out for her daughter and finds mercy. **Why? Because whoever comes to Jesus humbly, by faith will find God’s mercy and grace.** Bernard of Clairvaux said: “It is the possession of a joyful and genuine humility that alone enables us to receive grace”.

We are reminded this morning that if you come to God humbly by faith – he will not ask for your spiritual GPA. There in the kind eyes of Jesus you will find mercy and compassion and love. He will not reject anyone who comes to Him in faith.

Healing the Deaf Man (31-37)

Jesus now moves to another Gentile area where we have the second story: [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. Jesus takes the northern loop around the top of the

Sea of Galilee and ends up in the region of Decapolis – a region of 10 cities to the East of Galilee.

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. Like the paralyzed man in chapter two this man is brought by the faith of his friends. He has two problems. He is deaf, and most likely a related matter, he has difficulty with his speech. Mark 7:33 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; Jesus is really trying to avoid a public spectacle – he does not desire the forming of any greater crowds than already exist. So he takes the man off to the side, he puts his fingers in his ears, then spits and touches the man’s tongue with his spit. Jesus touches the ears and tongue, not only symbolically but compassionately. The man was ritually unclean and would have rarely felt a human touch on him. Mark 7:34 and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!” Mark 7:35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. 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. 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.” In every way, this becomes like the miracles we have seen before. Jesus prays. The man is healed. Jesus calls them to secrecy, but his fame grows more and more. His role as Messiah is cemented further.

But Mark puts in one important detail here – **that Jesus sighs deeply**. He groaned from within his spirit. Why? Because Jesus is emotionally moved by this poor man. He is saddened that his perfect creation has been marred by sin and its consequences. It was not

meant to be that way – People were not suppose to go deaf, or not be able to speak. Children were not meant to die young. Young women were not meant to contract brain cancer. Wars were no His idea – but sin has devastated Jesus’ once perfect world, and he sighs – deeply. Perhaps thinking in his mind of that time which is coming when there will be no more sin, no more tears, no more disease or pain.

The man’s ailments represent here not just a physical disability, but a spiritual disability that sin has brought. The prophet Isaiah wrote: [Is. 6:9](#) And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’ [Is. 6:10](#) “Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim.” But with the coming of the Messiah – all that would change: [Is. 35:5](#) Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. [Is. 35:6](#) Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness.

Conclusion:

Why does God give mercy to the Gentile woman? Because she comes to Him humbly, by faith. Why does God give mercy to the deaf man? Because his mercy is motivated out of His compassion. What do both stories have in common? The little girl and the man are brought to Jesus by loved ones. Neither would have come to Christ except they were brought, by faith, by others. And our lesson is that whether you are brought to Christ by other, or come on your own two feet, if you come humbly by faith – you will find Jesus’ compassion to be sweet and his mercy to be refreshing.

I didn't get that "A" in weightlifting – and in protest I have not lifted a weight since then. I am embittered again them 😊. But when I was in 7th grade I found myself having to take Home Economics. I doubt they still make 7th graders take home economics in school. We had to learn to sew and to cook. A 7th grade boy and home ec is a little like a Jew in Gentile territory. But the teacher I had – and I do not remember her name – she took an interest in me – she showed me mercy and compassion. I remember she called me "Craigory" and no matter how poor my efforts, she would say, "That is a good looking pecan pie – nice job! That pillow you made will really be soft!" I have no idea what grade I got in that class, but I remember that it was a class of joy and grace, and from my junior high years, I remember that class the most clearly. May our church be a place of grace of mercy as we bring people to Christ and as we represent Christ in this community.