

OUR COMPASSIONATE SAVIOUR

Mark 7:24 – 8:10

Introduction:

Have any of you come here with a need in your life this morning? Is there a burden weighing you down or a hunger in your soul for something more than you have been experiencing? Do you sometimes wonder if the Lord sees your need or is able to do anything to meet that need?

In today's text, we find people around Jesus who have needs. These are people who are hurting. Life has not been easy and they have come to Jesus for help. They find him to be compassionate and responsive to their needs.

We are going to be looking at Mark 7:24 – 8:10 today. Here we find 3 significant miracles performed by Jesus that come together to show the compassion of Jesus to not only his own people—the Jews—but to others as well. They are the casting out of an unclean spirit, a deaf man healed and the feeding of the four thousand. I believe the key verse or phrase in this whole section is in 8:2, when Jesus says, **“I have compassion on the crowd...”** Jesus is our compassionate Savior.

Our Scripture passage today sees a significant shift in Jesus' ministry. We are already into the third year of his ministry, and his disciples are still struggling to understand who He really is and what it is that He has come to do.

Jesus has already made some forays into Gentile territory – the region of the Gerasenes and the Decapolis (ten towns) to the east and south of the Sea of Galilee were primarily Gentile. However, his ministry there was fairly brief and may still have been mostly to the Jewish people living in those areas. But today we see a change.

Jesus knew that eventually the message he had come to bring would be taken far beyond Israel and the descendants of Abraham, and perhaps he was preparing his disciples for that time. Whatever the reason, Jesus leaves the region around Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee in

order to take his ministry beyond the borders of Israel. *Read 7:24a and put up the map.*

- Point out Tyre and Sidon – the region of Phoenicia, in the area that is present-day Lebanon.
- It is stated so matter-of-fact, as though it was just a morning stroll over there, but in reality, this was like going to a foreign country.
- Show distance from Capernaum – several days' travel by foot – far from the crowds around the Sea of Galilee.
- This was predominantly Gentile country.

Read 7:24b – he was trying to move “under the radar” but he could not hide. I think there is a lesson in there for us. Wherever Jesus is present and active, word will get out. People will see and hear about it. When he is at work in us, people should see it in our lives.

There is another reason, however, why he could not hide there in the region of Tyre and Sidon. People there had known about him for some time. See 3:7-8 – At least a year earlier, word of Jesus and his miracles had spread far enough that people were traveling all the way from this region of Phoenicia to the area around the Sea of Galilee to see his miracles and find healing for themselves.

Well, let's look at these three miracles this morning, all of which took place in Gentile territories. We begin with...

A Woman's Desperate Plea

Read vv. 25-26 – a Syrophenician woman – Phoenicia was the region where she came from. It was in the Roman province of Syria – hence it was referred to as Syrophenicia to distinguish it from another province known as Lybophoenicia in North Africa. She was a Gentile, her daughter was troubled by an unclean spirit – how or why this would be is not made clear.

She is desperate, and Jesus' response to her is, at first, puzzling and a bit troubling. Matthew indicates that his initial response was to ignore her – let me read Matthew's account – *Matt. 15:22-25*.

His statement in v. 24 was made not to the woman but to the disciples as a reminder of the primacy of his mission.

What follows is an exchange between Jesus and the woman that seems almost rude, but I believe that it is all a part of preparing the disciples for their future ministry. Remember that throughout this three years of ministry, the most significant part of that ministry is teaching and preparing the twelve apostles for the ministry that lies ahead of them.

Read Mark 7:27 – follows on the heels of his comment to the disciples – his ministry was first and foremost to Israel – the Jews. Remember when Jesus sent the twelve out to preach and to heal. Matthew records that they were instructed, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

However, there is something here in Jesus statement that hints at the future expansion of that ministry. “Let the children be fed first...” The first call was for the Jews to accept and welcome their Messiah. Jesus was not sent to go to the Gentiles until the Jews had their chance first. He says, “I can’t take what is meant for them and give it to others.”

The woman’s response shows amazing insight and faith – *read it*. One preacher I sometimes follow preached a whole message on this incident, which he entitled, “*I’m Just Asking for the Crumbs.*” In it he said,

As Jesus speaks with this woman, He never slams the door of hope in her face. Jesus says, “**Let the children be fed first...**” That word “**first**” was exactly what this broken-hearted mother needed to hear! Jesus did not say, “**You cannot have what you are looking for!**” He said, “**I have come to the children of Israel. And, they must be fed first.**” She took that to mean that “**seconds**” were available.

She was looking for the crumbs, the leftovers. *Discuss the term “dogs” and the woman’s response:*

- The word refers to a small dog, a puppy, that sits under the table at a meal, waiting for a morsel of food, or some crumbs, to fall or to be tossed down to it.
- The woman did not protest to being compared to a puppy, but responded in kind – “*But, even the dogs are sometimes treated to a morsel from the table. All I am asking for is a crumb.*” She wasn’t asking for everything, just for a puppy’s portion.

What was Jesus’ response – *read it*. Matthew puts it a different way. He records it, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And the result was that the child was instantly released from the control of the demon and was completely healed.

At first glance, Jesus does not seem all that compassionate in this situation. He seems harsh in his response to this desperate woman. But when you look closer at the way that he dealt with this woman, it becomes clear that He looked far beyond her immediate need. She came with a concern for her daughter. Jesus came with compassion for her soul.

She left with a new, fresh and deeper faith. Even though she was a foreigner, she had a profound meeting with the compassionate Saviour that, I believe, changed her life.

Well, we really need to keep going...

A Man’s Despairing Condition

A second miracle by our compassionate Saviour... *read v. 31*. At first glance, that sounds simple, but look at the map – *show His probable route and where the Decapolis is located*. The Decapolis was ten cities and this too was in Gentile country.

This was a long trek. After the next incident—feeding the four thousand in chapter 8—we read that they got into a boat and crossed the lake to the district of Dalmanutha, which is the area around Magdala, or Magada, on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, near the modern city of Tiberias – *show it on the map*.

Many scholars suggest that this entire tour through the Gentile regions may have taken as long as 8 months, even though we only have 3 incidents recorded during these travels. But let’s look at the text:

- “They” brought to him a man—deaf and speech impaired—and begged him to lay his hand on him – another desperate plea for help from the Saviour.
- *Read vv. 33-34* – Note Jesus’ compassion – He immediately took him away privately, so as not to draw attention or to embarrass the man with what he was about to do.

- His sigh shows us the sorrow Jesus felt about his condition.
- One simple word – Ephphatha – Be opened – immediately he was able to hear and his speech was clear.

Read vv. 36-37 – As we saw earlier, he could not hide. Word spread quickly and Matthew tells us that “...great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.” (Matthew 15:30-31) These were Gentiles east of the Sea, who were glorifying the God of Israel, because of what they saw happening at the hands of Jesus.

Well, I want to look at one more miracle this morning...

A Crowd’s Distressing Hunger

Jesus and his disciples are still in the hills east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. *Read 8:1-9* – just a few comments.

- Many similarities with the previous miracle of the loaves and fish: desolate location; great crowd; just a few loaves and fish; he involved the disciples in the miracle; everyone was satisfied; there was an abundance left over—more than they started with.
- The disciples seemed to have forgotten the previous miracle – granted, it is many months later...

The key thing I want you to notice in this passage is Jesus’ comment in vv. 2-3 – compassion. It is easy to be like the disciples in the previous situation – “Send them away, we can’t take care of them.” But here, Jesus said, “I can’t send them away, they might faint on the way.” He felt compassion for their distressing situation.

Conclusion

A compassionate Saviour - this is the thought on which I want to land today. This is where these incidents all dovetail together. Jesus had compassion for people who were hurting: a woman whose daughter was tormented by an evil spirit; a man whose life was desperate because of his deafness and inability to talk and be understood; a crowd of

people, hungry and tired, in need of nourishment and sustenance. He took the time for each one because he cared, he had compassion for them and wanted to help.

We are told in 1 Peter 5:7 to “...cast all your cares upon him, for he cares for you.” He is a compassionate Saviour, the one who meets us in our need, to reach out a helping hand and lift us up.

What is it that you need today? What sort of struggles are you going through?

- Are you staring at an impossible situation wondering how it will turn out? Look to Jesus; He is the Savior who cares!
- Are your mountains high and your valleys deep today? Does your heart break under the load it carries? Go to Jesus; He is the Savior who cares!
- Are you lost and in need of a Savior? Do you understand that the only way you will ever be saved is to come to the Lord Jesus by faith? Go to Jesus; He is the compassionate Savior who will forgive and cleanse and make your life new again!
- Whatever your need, whatever the Lord has spoken to your heart about today, Jesus is the compassionate Savior who wants to meet your need!