

TWO ASTOUNDING ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Mark 7:24-37

Intro: It is really impossible to know why the Spirit of God led the writers of the four Gospels, to choose the miracles that they chose to write about. Obviously the Holy Spirit did not ignore the purposes of the writers of these Gospels, so in ways beyond our understanding He worked through the purposes of the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to choose the miracles that they chose. We can be sure that God's will in the writing of the four Gospels, and in all of the other books of the Bible, has been fully done. So all of the books of the Bible are exactly as God intended for them to be!

But there is certainly one purpose behind all of the miracles that are recorded in Scripture: *they are designed to tell us more about the Lord Jesus Christ, to get us better acquainted with Him.* And that point is very, very important.

The first of these two miracles is found also in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 15, verses 21 through 28. Mark does not mention that the disciples were with Him when the Syrophenician came to Him, but Matthew does mention them. And what I have said about us needing to know the Lord Jesus better, the same is true of the disciples. You can see from Matthew's account that the disciples were irritated by the coming of a Gentile woman to the Lord, and they told the Lord to send her away. That was very different from the Lord's attitude, which shows that the disciples had a lot to learn.

Matthew does not mention the second miracle which Mark recorded, but he does mention that the Lord went from the area around Tyre and Sidon back to the sea of Galilee, and it is very likely that the man mark mentioned was one of the many that the Lord healed on that particular day. See Matthew 15:29-31. The distance from Tyre and Sidon to the Sea of Galilee is such that in those days it would have been impossible for both of these miracles to have taken place on the same day, or even on the second day after the first miracle was performed. There are many questions about these two miracles that we cannot answer, but we will be doing well to understand all that has been written. So let us look at the first miracle,

I. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN'S

DAUGHTER (Mark 7:24-30).

We have seen how the Lord had just come from a time of conflict with some of the scribes and Pharisees, exposing their ignorance and the way in which they were violating the Word of God. Then He had ministered to the people, giving them the truth about the defilement of sin. It is probable that those same scribes and Pharisees were listening in to what our Lord told the people. And so the Lord evidently felt it wise to get out of the Galilean area for a time to rest, and to keep from appearing to want to provoke the scribes and Pharisees into great opposition.

So He took His disciples to the Mediterranean coast for a relaxing time with them. Verse 24 tells us that our Lord didn't want anyone to know where they were.

But somehow this Syrophenician woman, so named because she was from the Phenician area of Syria. Her daughter "had an unclean spirit," which means that she was demon-possessed. Both were Greek, which means that they were Gentiles.

The Lord had specifically told His disciples, "Go not in the way of the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:5), and that may have been the reason that the disciples felt no responsibility to help her. But it is amazing how the Gospel finds its way into places where you would think that the message had never gone.

But notice our Lord's first words to her. See verse 27. This sounds rather hard and cruel, doesn't it? Jews felt that Gentiles were dogs, and most Gentiles felt the same way about the Jews. If you have been in the Middle East and seen the dogs which run the streets, you know that there could hardly be a greater insult than to call a person a dog.

However, let me back up for just a moment. Notice how she approached the Lord before she said what was on her heart. She came to Him "and fell at his feet." This expressed her total unworthiness to even come to the Lord. It was a picture of total self-denial. And the first part of verse 26 tells us why she felt that she had no right at all to come to the Lord. She was a woman. She was a Gentile, not Jewish. Where her husband was, if she had a husband – we don't know any of this. But she was so desperate to get help for her daughter that she came to the Lord Jesus to get Him to help her daughter as she knew He had helped so many others.

I think I can say without any concern that anyone would differ with me, that is, anyone among the people of God, that the Lord always tests our faith when we come to Him with our needs. And sometimes the testing time is long – days, weeks, even months, and years some times. She probably was not surprised to hear Him refer to her as a dog. Living that close to Israel she had probably heard it many times before. The Lord stated an obvious truth: you don't take the children's bread and give it to the dogs. I hate to think of what people might do to a parent who would take his children's food, and give it to some mongrel who was running in the streets all day every day just to find food. So that was His message to her.

Normally she might have been offended. Her daughter was demon-possessed. She probably had heard what He had done in delivering others who were in the same condition that her daughter was it, and she came in a strong hope that our Lord would drive the demon out of her daughter.

How would you have responded to the Lord? How did she respond?

Look at verse 28. (Read.) She was willing to take the place of a dog, and would be satisfied if the Lord would only give her the crumbs that fall on the floor when the children eat, which the dogs quickly eat.

At this point I want to go back to Matthew 15, and to verse 28, where Matthew tells us how the Lord responded to her at this point. Look at that verse and you will see that He said, "O woman, great is thy faith." Among other things, what did this mean? It means that even though this woman was a Gentile, she was a believer. You can't exercise faith unless you have faith, and you can't have true faith unless you have trusted in Christ for the salvation of your soul. Faith doesn't come from us; faith is a gift from God. This woman had been saved by faith, and here we see that she was living by faith.

What else did the Lord say? He said, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt. 15:28). Mark's account is that the Lord said, "For this saying, go thy way; the devil (demon) is gone out of thy daughter" (Mark 7:29). Now the daughter wasn't there. There was no way to test that the Lord's words were true. But, since the Lord said that the demon was gone out of her daughter, she believed Him, and what she got home she found it just as the Lord had said. See Mark 7:30. The demon was gone, and the daughter was on a bed, evidently resting after her terrible ordeal. The

demons don't give up easily.

Now what we have here is a wonderful lesson on prayer. If you were printing the prayers of the Bible in a different color from black or red, the words of this mother would have to be printed in that color. Prayer is talking to the Lord, and that is exactly what she was doing. But notice how she approached the Lord – in deep humility, but with perseverance, and in faith. And we learn from this woman's prayer that you and I can talk to the Lord about somebody who isn't even there, and He knows where that person is, what the need is, and that He only has to speak the word, and the prayer is answered. The Lord is delighted when we come to Him, and He was delighted when this Gentile lady came to Him. But He wants us to come in faith. Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God.

We don't know how far away this daughter was – probably not far. But she could have been on the other side of the world, and the result would have been the same. Do you pray for people that you never see, and possibly never have seen, and maybe never will see? Keep it up. Distance is no problem to the Lord. This miracle is full of lessons about the Lord, how to approach Him, and what to expect from Him. Don't miss what the Lord wants you to see.

But let us move on quickly to the second miracle in this chapter.

II. THE HEALING OF THE DEAF MAN WHO HAD TROUBLE SPEAKING (Mark 7:31-37).

As I said before, this miracle was probably one of the many that Matthew referred to in Matthew 15:29-31.

This miracle was performed back by the Sea of Galilee. This deaf man did not come “on his own”; Mark said that “they bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech. He didn't ask the Lord to help him and heal him of his handicaps. “They” brought him, and “they” besought the Lord to put His hand upon him so as to make him able to hear and speak.

We don't know anything about the spiritual condition of the afflicted man, nor do we know anything about those who brought him to the Lord. As far as the passage is concerned it is safe to say that none of these

people knew the Lord. They knew that the Lord could heal this man because they had seen Him healing others, as Matthew said in chapter 15, verse 30, people who were “lame, blind, dumb, maimed.” People just brought the afflicted, laid them at the feet of the Lord, and He healed them. But those who brought this man (and he was able to walk) specifically asked the Lord “to put His hand upon him,” i.e., upon the deaf and dumb man.

So what did the Lord do? The first thing that the Lord did was to take this man out and away from the crowd. So it is clear that the Lord was not healing people so as to make a spectacular demonstration of His power.

Next the Lord put a ginger in each of the man’s ears. But nothing happened yet. Then the Lord moistened a finger, and then touched the man’s tongue. Still nothing changed. Then the Lord looked up to heaven as though He was praying. Still there was no change. Then the Lord “sighed.” Although the Lord healed many people, He never got use to the terrible effects of sin upon the human race, marring as it did the beauties and the glory of God’s original creation. It was painful to the Lord to see all that He saw, as He looked upon the tragedies caused by sin, basically sickness and death. That word “sighed” probably should be placed alongside of those words in John 11:35, “Jesus wept.” And how He sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane when He asked the Father that if it were possible that cup might pass from Him. But it could not pass, and He knew it. Will you remember these words, that our Lord “sighed.” He made our ears to hear His Word. He made our tongues to speak His praise. He made our eyes to see His glory. He made our hands to do His will. He made our feet to walk in His way. But over those deaf and dumb and blind and crippled our Lord, “sighed.” We probably will never fully know what it meant to walk in this world which had been so perfectly good in the beginning, and even then had become so terribly bad. The Lord was “stirred to sympathy by the sight of human suffering” (Gould, Ezra, ICCommentary on Mark, p.139). And still there was no change.

Then the Lord spoke. How thankful we should be for the Word of the Lord. What did He say? “Eph-pha-tha,” in Aramaic, *Be opened!* AND THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED! See verse 35. One word from the Lord Jesus Christ, and the deaf man heard, and he spoke clearly.

As I read those words, the words of Revelation 21:1-5 came to my mind. Let me read them for you. The beloved Apostle John, that aged saint, and

the lone survivor of all of the apostles, was speaking:

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new . And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful (Rev. 21:1-5).

I will say one thing about prayer from this miracle as I close. Did you notice that there is nothing said in this miracle about faith, nothing to indicate that this man who was deaf and dumb, nor anything about those who brought him to the Lord, to indicate that any of them knew the Lord? Can we still call what these men said to the Lord, beseeching Him to put His hand upon the deaf and dumb man, prayer – even though there is no evidence that any of them knew the Lord? I believe we can call it prayer. The Lord is not committed to answer the prayers of unbelievers, but sometimes He does, as He answered the prayer of Cornelius in Acts 10. What a gracious and merciful Savior we have!

We are not seeing miracles today like the people saw them when the Lord was here on earth. But God has the same power that He always has had. And He is moved by the same compassion. The things that are impossible for us, are not impossible to the Lord. He wants us to come to Him, to cast all of our care upon Him, knowing that he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that ask or think. But we leave the outcome in His hands.

Concl: The transformation that took place in the bodies of those whom the Lord healed when He was here on earth were all symbolic of the transformation that takes place in human lives when we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and of that coming day when He makes all things new. Are you ready for it?