

Caring for the Rejected

(Mark 7:24-37)

First, a statement: prejudice and rejection are wrong! The rejected are to be reached out to and helped. The rejected are always cut off by society, excluded from walking in the midst of society. Why? Because society wraps its acceptable behavior around itself and secludes itself from those who are different. Society has little time to deal with those who differ, and sometimes even fears them, but this must not be. Society must allow its seclusion to be interrupted—face up to the differences and needs of the rejected; converse and discuss the differences with them; and then work to meet their needs. Note the steps that the rejected must take in order to receive help. The rejected woman approached Jesus humbly (v. 25); discussed her need with him (vv.26-28); persevered in asking for help (v, 28); confessed her humble status or need (v. 28); and then received help (vv. 29-30).

So, the **first** step in caring for the rejected is to take care of one's own body and spirit. Jesus desperately needed rest. He needed to be refreshed and renewed both

physically and spiritually. In this passage, he is seen deliberately withdrawing to the borders of Gentile country. He needed quiet and time to prepare both himself and his disciples for the end. The only place he could find freedom from the crowds and from his opponents was in the northern area, the area bordering Gentile territory. No Jew was likely to enter Gentile areas. It should be noted that this event foreshadowed the spread of the gospel worldwide and God's great desire for all barriers to be broken down.

There is a time to labor, and there is a time to seek rest and God's presence. Note: Jesus wanted to be alone. "He did not want anyone to know" (v. 24) where he was. Seeking rest and God's presence are essential if we are to serve in the power of God. Jesus' stay in Gentile country was apparently six-months long. Imagine the impact of being in God's presence on a spiritual retreat for much of a six-month period.

The **second** step to caring for the rejected is to allow interruption by them. The woman in this case had two strikes against her. Her first strike was that she had a

daughter with an evil spirit. In the ancient world when a family member had an evil spirit, the whole family was shunned, sometimes feared and ostracized. Both the daughter and mother knew rejection and the deep emotions of it. The mother's second strike was she was a Greek, a Syrophoenician or Canaanite by race. She was from one of the seven nations driven out of the land of Canaan in the Old Testament. They and the Jews were bitter enemies, ancestral enemies. They despised and hated each other. In approaching Jesus, she knew that she was coming to a Jew who was assumed to be her enemy.

But note a significant fact: Jesus let her come; he did not stop her. Others rejected her and her daughter, having nothing to do with them. She and her daughter stood alone in the world, rejected by all. Jesus needed rest and time alone with God, and the disciples objected to her. But Jesus allowed her to interrupt him. She stood alone in the world as rejected as a person could be, but Jesus received her. Which is what we are told in **Matthew**

11:28, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

The **third** step to caring for the rejected is to converse with them. Let me make note of **three** things. **First**, Jesus listened to the cry of the rejected. The rejected woman begged Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. The word “begged” is in the Greek imperfect tense which means she kept on begging and begging. And we can note that Jesus kept on listening and listening.

It is important to understand what was happening. The woman had only a limited concept of Jesus, of who he was. She had apparently heard that the Jews expected a Messiah, a son of the great King David who was to work miracles for them. And she had heard about Jesus, that he was delivering people from their sicknesses and healing them. But seeing Jesus only as a miracle worker and healer was an inadequate concept of him. It prohibited him from working. What the woman needed was to grow in her understanding of just who Jesus really was. How gracious is our Lord! He listened to the cry of

this rejected woman. He knew her heart, what was in it, every thought. He knew what she needed in order to be brought around to understanding his true Messiahship. So he began to lead her step-by-step to understand his Lordship and to confess her faith in a humble and worshipful spirit.

The **second thing** I want to make note of is that Jesus stressed the need for humility to the rejected. So, Jesus said **two** things to the woman—**two** things that are often thought to be harsh; therefore, what he said needs to be clearly understood. The **first** thing Jesus said was, “First let the children eat all they want” (v. 27). He was saying, “The Jews, the first children of God, must first be reached.” There was no rejection whatsoever in this statement to the woman. It was merely a statement of fact. Jesus had come primarily to the house of Israel while on earth. He had to concentrate his ministry if he was to achieve his purpose. But why make this statement to the woman? There were apparently **two reasons**. The **first reason** was the woman needed to learn persistence, humility, and trust. The **second reason**

was the woman needed to learn that there was only one true religion and one true Messiah.

She was a Greek from a proud pagan society. She had been and probably was a worshipper of false gods; thereby she was undeserving of being heard by the true Messiah, the only living and true God of the universe. She had recognized Jesus as the Son of David, as the miracle worker of the Jews who was delivering them from their diseases. But she needed to recognize something else: that he was the only Messiah and the only hope for all people. No other religion, nor other gods could do anything for her or for anyone else. He alone was her hope. He alone was to be the Lord and Master whom she was to worship. She had to learn the same lesson that the Samaritan woman at the well had to learn: salvation is of the Jews.

The **second** thing Jesus said was, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs (v. 27). These words can be interpreted as harsh except for one thing: Jesus never spoke harshly or rejected anyone who came to him with a desperate need and had the

potential of trusting him as Lord. So, whatever happened, we know the words were not meant to be words of harshness or rejection. What then, did they mean? Again, Jesus had to move the woman forward in faith and in understanding who he was: the Lord and Master of everyone's life, not just of the Jews. He was not just the Son of David. He had to teach her that salvation was of the Jews, and that he was that salvation—the Master of all lives, He was telling her that “it was not right to take the bread of the gospel that belonged to the true worshippers of God and give it to the *dogs*, that is the heathen.”

The woman was a Greek; she was of a proud people with a rich heritage, but the Greeks despised the Jews. She was a worshipper of false gods, a heathen, an outsider, a sinner; and he was the Messiah, the Master of all lives. Was she willing to humble herself, surrendering to him as the Master of her life?

The **third** thing to make note of when conversing with the rejected is that Jesus led the rejected woman to persist and believe. Incisively and with great spiritual

insight, he saw and confessed that she was nothing spiritually: she was a dog. However, being a dog of the family, she had the right to eat the crumbs that fell from his table. Note: the woman now called Jesus Lord and now worshipped him as Lord. She called him “Lord” before, but now she did one additional thing: she worshipped him as Lord. Which is what it says in **Philippians 2:11**, “For, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The **fourth** step to caring for the rejected is to meet their needs. Jesus answered her prayer. He cast the demon out of her daughter. One thing rises above all others in the experience of this mother. She believed Jesus could meet her need, and she would not let him go until he met her need. Her belief was so strong that she would not quit despite being met with silence, irritations, opposition, apparent rebuff, and being told that she was undeserving. There is no way to say it except, “Woman you have great faith.”

Imagine this also. She believed Jesus’ power could overcome space and time. Her daughter was back home!

What enormous faith! But note a crucial point. Her faith in Jesus' power, as great as it was, was not enough. Her faith was not what caused Jesus to answer her prayer.

What caused Jesus to answer her prayer was her personal humility (or surrender) and her worship of him as Lord. Jesus answers the prayer and exercises his power in behalf of those who (1) surrender or humble themselves to him and (2) worship him as Lord. Which is what is says in **John 14:14**, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis (Ten Cities). There a deaf and dumb man was brought to him by some people who begged Jesus to "place his hand" on the man (v. 32). It must be miserable not being able to hear what others wanted or to express what you want. Jesus took the man away from the crowd, partly to perform a more private healing and partly because of the unusual method he used. He put his fingers into the man's ears and then applied his spit on the man's tongue (v. 33). Jesus would employ

different methods—for it was not the method but the Man that really mattered. Here Jesus did not talk to the man since he was deaf. Rather he used a method that the man could perceive clearly, that would give him confidence in being healed. Jesus turned his eyes to heaven and with a deep sigh commanded, “Be opened” (v. 34).

The man’s ears were opened and he could now hear. His tongue was loosened. The miracle was **two** things. **First**, it was proof that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God himself. And **second**, it was a demonstration of tender consideration for the needs and feelings of others—a strong lesson for every believer.

Again, Jesus is careful not to publicize this event—because his time to die had not yet come. But “overwhelmed with amazement,” the people could not keep what they saw to themselves. It was too amazing not to share. They spoke highly of Jesus in **verse 37**, “He has done everything well.”

What **lessons** can we learn from the Scripture reading? The fact that Jesus reached out to this Gentile woman

fundamentally shows that Jesus cares for the broken, the sick, the outsider, and the sinner. He wants us to increase our faith in his saving help. This also shows that God's love and mercy shows no bounds. Sometimes God keeps us waiting so as to deepen our faith. And with the touch of his hand, Jesus cures a man of his deafness and speech impediment and gives him a whole new life. This story reminds us of how much of an impact Christ can have on our lives. We may not even realize the tiny blessings that he sends us each day or the little miracles that he works in our lives.

Please bow you heads as I pray.

Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and inflame my heart with love and compassion. Make me attentive to the needs of others that I may show them kindness and care. Make me an instrument of your mercy and peace, that I may help others find healing and wholeness in you. In Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen.**