

Introduction

Heading to Kansas with a plan, only to have it interrupted with unexpected events

1. Our passage today is a bit like this:
2. On a small scale, Jesus sets out to place away from the crowds in search of rest, only to be interrupted with more calls for healing
3. On a larger scale Jesus's bigger plan is interrupted as well:
  - a. Jesus states in our passage today that He was sent to Earth for one purpose and that purpose specifically involved Israel
  - b. However, that plan gets interrupted by people from outside Israel who are seeking His help

A. Jesus visits gentile territory (READ 7:24)

1. We learn in Mark 7:24 that Jesus left the borders of Israel and traveled into **"the region of Tyre"**
  - a. This was gentile territory about 20 miles northwest of Israel along the Mediterranean Sea
  - b. This is the only time the Gospels record Jesus traveling outside of Israel
  - c. Most Jews wouldn't associate with Gentile because they believed them to be unclean (we see this reflected in Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-11:18)
  - d. So, for Jesus to go to gentile territory at this point in His earthly ministry would have been offensive to not only the Jewish religious leaders, but Jews as a whole
  - e. That might be why Mark includes this episode right after Jesus's confrontation with the Pharisees and Scribes over defilement
  - f. Mark also includes it here as a form of encouragement to the primary audience of his gospel—gentiles (revealing that Jesus was not only Messiah to the Jews but Savior to the gentiles as well)
2. At first glance, it appears that Jesus may have been trying to get away from the constant crush of the crowds for a little R&R: **"And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice."** (24b)
3. However, as we will see in a moment, there was a much more significant purpose for going to the region

B. Jesus casts a demon out of a gentile woman's daughter (7:25-30)

NOTE: you might want to keep one finger in Mark 7 and the other in Matthew 15 because we will be jumping between the two

1. Upon learning of Jesus' arrival, a woman comes to Him in desperation (READ 25-26):
  - a. This is remarkable on two fronts:
    - 1) First, she is a gentile, and as already noted Jews and gentiles didn't often associated with one another: **"gentile, of the Syrophenician race"** (26)—or as Matthew says, a descendent of the Canaanites

- 2) Second, she's a woman and for a woman to approach someone of Jesus's notoriety and stature would have been unacceptable (remember how the woman who touched his cloak tried to do it without notice?)
- b. However, she is desperate because her **"little daughter"** is possessed by an unclean spirit--If we turn to Matthew 15:22-25 we get a more detailed picture of the depth to her desperation
  - 1) Matthew describes her daughter as being severely or **"cruelly demon-possessed"** which brings to mind a similarly demon possessed boy in Luke 9:38-42 (READ)
  - 2) Matthew writes that she was crying out to Jesus and begging for help, **"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David"** (Matthew 15:22)
  - 3) Jesus's disciples were so annoyed at her constant pleas that they begged Him to send her away (Matthew 15:23): **"And His disciples came and implored Him, saying 'Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.'" (the language suggests she was following them and continually shouting at them from behind)**
  - 4) Even when Jesus seemingly ignores her pleas, she collapses at His feet and begs Him, **"Lord, help me!"** (Matthew 15:25)
2. At first, Jesus appears to be not only uninterested in helping her, but somewhat callous to her plight (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.'"**
  - a. Matthew writes that at first Jesus didn't even respond: **"But He did not answer her a word"** (Matthew 15:22)
  - b. Then, when He does respond, He seemingly rejects her appeals based on the fact that she is a gentile (Matthew 15:24): **"But He answered and said, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'"**
  - c. This seems harsh but it must be understood in light of the process or unfolding of God's redemptive plan:
    - 1) God's redemptive plan for mankind revolves completely around Israel
    - 2) At every step of the process, He works with Israel to accomplish that plan:
      - a) He began with Abraham and the promise of raising up a great nation through whom He would bless all the nations
      - b) He promised Israel a Messiah who would save not just Israel but all people
      - c) He then sent that Messiah—Jesus—to Israel, not to the world but to Israel, to seek and to save them first
      - d) And ultimately from this, salvation is offered to the rest of the world as Gentiles are grafted into Israel as Paul states so eloquently in Romans 11
      - e) This is why Jesus specifically says, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"**:
        - He is referring to His earthly ministry and reflects the fact that at this time in God's redemptive plan Jesus was focused specifically on Israel
        - It does not indicate that He wasn't interested in the salvation of Gentiles
  - d. This is reflected in the parable Jesus uses to further address the woman (RE-READ Mark 7:27):
    - 1) He pictures a table at which the family is gathered for dinner
    - 2) One key to understanding this parable properly is in recognizing the word **"first"**:
      - a) Jesus says that the children should be fed "first" (the children represent Israel)

- b) It would be improper to take the children's food and feed the dogs first (the dogs represent the gentiles):
    - A word of caution here regarding the dog analogy
    - Jews regarded the gentiles as unclean and often referred to them as dogs
    - However, the word used by Jesus here refers to the family pet rather than the mangy mutts that roamed the streets that Jews often associated with gentiles
    - It is unlikely that Jesus was using dog in a disparaging way
  - c) In the same way, it is only proper for Jesus to focus on Israel first since God's redemptive plan revolves first around Israel, then the Gentiles:
    - Romans 1:16: **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."**
    - Romans 2:9-10: **"There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."**
3. The woman's response reveals a remarkable faith (READ Mark 7:29-30):
- a. First off, we have to recognize how clever her response is (29): **"But she answered and \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs."**
  - b. It's not clear from the text whether or not the woman fully understood the point Jesus was making through the parable, or the theological significance of her answer
  - c. However, I suspect that she did to some degree because according to Matthew Jesus attributes her answer to her remarkable faith (Matthew 15:28): **"Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.""**
  - d. Jesus also said that it was because of this answer that her daughter was healed of the demon (Mark 7:29-30): **"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."**

C. Jesus heals a gentile man who is deaf and mute (7:31-37)
---

1. The second event revolves around the healing of a gentile man who is both deaf and partially mute (READ 31-35)
2. While Mark seems to focus on the faith of the gentile woman in the event above, here he focuses on the response of the gentile crowds
3. Mark only mentioned one healing here, but Matthew indicates that large crowds came to Jesus to be healed (READ Matthew 15:29-30)
4. While the Jewish crowds were always amazed at the works Jesus performed, the response of the gentiles as recorded by both Matthew and Mark seems more dramatically expressed (in the words of R.T. France)
  - a. The more Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about the miracle healings, the more they proclaimed it
  - b. They were not only astonished by Jesus but it says they enthusiastically approved of Him (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.""**
  - c. According to Matthew, they not only marveled but **"glorified the God of Israel"** (Matthew 15:29)—did you get that? These are gentiles, Canaanite gentiles, glorifying the God of Israel!

Conclusion
------------

What can we learn from these two events:

1. First, we are reminded that God's redemptive plan for all of mankind runs through Israel:
  - a. That was revealed to Abraham in God's promise to him
  - b. Israel was the primary focus of Jesus's earthly ministry
  - c. God's plan was to evangelize the gentiles through the Church after the resurrection and these two events are simply a foreshadowing of that
  - d. However, as we've seen here, that didn't stop Jesus from honoring the faith of anyone who approached Him—Jew or Gentile
2. Second, I believe the Phoenician woman here can teach us something about tenacious (or persistent) faith:
  - a. Sometimes when we pray we don't get an answer right away
  - b. She didn't get deterred when Jesus seemingly ignored her
  - c. She didn't get deterred when the disciples tried to get Jesus to send her away
  - d. She didn't even get deterred when Jesus seemingly rejected her plea
  - e. Rather, she persisted in her faith and this is the kind of faith that both honors Jesus and gets rewarded by Him