

## A Peculiar Miracle in a Foreign Land Matthew 15:29-31, Mark 7:31-37

Before we paused last week and analyzed the Allah of the Quran against the God of the Bible, we had just witnessed Jesus commend the faith of the Syrophenician woman. Her faith showed she understood that there was more than enough of Jesus, the Bread of Life, to feed not only the Jewish nation, but all the nations of the entire world. And in the events that followed, there are some powerful lessons for us to discover. Let's go ahead and look at what the book of Matthew records, [Matthew 15:29-31](#).

Ok, at first glance these verses just sound like typical Jesus activity, right? Sitting down in a remote place, large crowds of people seeking Him out- Him healing and teaching. Matthew isn't very specific about where along the Sea of Galilee Jesus was doing this big healing fest. Remember Jesus had done something like this previously in Capernaum, Simon Peter's hometown and Jesus's home base. Although Matthew doesn't specify the location where Jesus was at this time, the parallel passage in Mark lets us know where Jesus was geographically, which will give us a little more insight into the significance of what is happening here in this passage. Turn with me over to [Mark 7:31](#). So, directly after the encounter with the Syrophenician woman, verse 31 says...

Now does anyone remember who Jesus encountered during His first visit to the region of Decapolis? The Gerasene Demoniac, the man known as "Legion" from Mark 5. Remember that after Jesus cast away the demons out of that man's life, he wanted to join Jesus and the disciples, but Jesus replied to him *"Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."* And the following verse in Mark 5 told us that *"he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him."* ([Mark 5:19-20](#)) So, this passage in Matthew that we started with this morning, is a big deal. Jesus is doing a healing fest in non-Jewish territory, immediately after He told the Syrophenician woman that the Jewish children were to eat of the bread first. Not only is this significant in that Jesus is now doing a great work among non-Jews, but this region of Decapolis is an area in which He previously was asked to leave, an area where He previously sent out a single missionary, healed from demonic possession, that had only 1 day of experience with Jesus.

What a beautiful tribute to the lives of the Syrophenician woman and the Gerasenes man! Because the Syrophenician woman didn't let Jesus offend her, because of her humility, her recognition of who He was, her persistence, her wrestling with and pursuing after Jesus, because of her steadfast, undoubting belief that Jesus was good- not only did she benefit from His goodness, but a whole other non-Jewish people group were able to experience His goodness as well! I had mentioned that Jesus wanted to do this work anyway, giving several scriptures that show He was sent not only to the Jews but to all the nations of the world, but it seems as if His encounter with the Syrophenician woman was a tipping point in which she was somehow allowed just a little say so in persuading Jesus to jump deeper into His work among non-Jews. I admit that I don't understand exactly how prayer works. I know that God is sovereign and that nothing can come against His will or stop Him from doing that which He wants to do, yet somehow, we are also given a voice in some matters concerning God's work. Jesus Himself had just recently told the disciples to ask "*the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.*" ([Matt. 9:38](#)) Jesus also had recently told the disciples to pray that God's Kingdom would come and that God's will would be done on earth. ([Matt. 6:10](#))

It seems as if God wants to do things and is perfectly capable of doing those things on His own, but He wants us to somehow join Him in His work of doing those things. So, I think that is what happened with the Syrophenician woman. Her conversation with Jesus affirmed the thing that Jesus already wanted to do, and the result was that Jesus then did the thing that He wanted to do- the very thing that the woman had asked Him to do. And that work multiplied- Jesus healed not only the woman's daughter, but immediately began healing others who, like the woman, were outside of the Jewish race- "unclean" and "undeserving" of God's great work.

And you think about the Gerasenes man, an extremely dark and evil man who had an encounter with Jesus and within 24 hours he was sent out to proclaim Jesus's greatness and goodness. He faithfully obeyed, even though his desire was to remain with Jesus and the others and go with them wherever they were going in the boat. Had he been granted His own desire, and left with Jesus in the boat, perhaps the hearts of the people in Decapolis would have remained hardened, and this miracle fest Jesus was performing there would have never happened. Because of this man's surrender to Jesus's will, because of His admittance that

God had a bigger and better plan, through his testimony perhaps the whole region was softened to Jesus and was able to experience His blessing. I'm sure in the moment the man didn't see that this healing event and community acceptance of Jesus would be the result of his obedience. I'm sure there in the moment he was thinking about how embarrassing it would be to go back to the city and proclaim the greatness of the man who had just caused the death of thousands of pigs, the very livelihood of the people of that region. *"No guys, he's a spiritual bondage slayer, not a pig slayer! I know I sound crazy, and I used to be crazy, running around unclothed and cutting myself- but you have to believe me, I am not crazy- Jesus has done an amazingly great thing for me!"* Despite his fears, he went back to his people and declared Jesus's greatness, and perhaps this encounter with Jesus and the now softened people of Decapolis was a result of the Gerasenes man's obedience to Jesus.

In the case of the Syrophenician woman and the Gerasenes man we get to see the beautiful influence and impact that these two rather insignificant and unlikely people made for the Kingdom of God. We also get to see Jesus's Kingdom parables come to life as His Kingdom is beginning to grow into a beautiful tree from the beginnings of a small mustard seed ([Matt. 13:31-32](#)) and His Kingdom spreading as yeast through bread dough. ([Matt 13:33](#)) I want us each to see that we often may not realize the great impact we perhaps have in our persistent, tenacious pursuit and wrestling with the Lord. You never know what is happening in the heavens as a result of your consistent prayer. Know also that you might not ever see (in this life) the great impact that may result as you perform one little act of obedience, even as that act of obedience might be contrary to your will and desires.

Let's keep reading from Mark's account, [Mark 7:32-37](#). The passage from the book of Matthew generalized what Jesus was doing in this area, giving us a bird's eye view, but this passage in Mark focuses in close and details out for us one specific healing that Jesus worked among the Decapolis people. Perhaps this was the first of the healing miracles that the book of Matthew had generalized, and as a result of the people talking about this particular healing, more and more came to be healed, or perhaps this miracle was one that particularly stood out to the disciples and/or the author Mark. In either case, it is definitely a miracle that seems a little unconventional in its occurrence. Jesus doesn't just say "be healed," or give the man a command to follow in order to be healed, rather Jesus puts into

action a whole series of steps that lead up to the man being healed of his deafness and muteness. [Verse 33](#) lets us know that Jesus wanted to be alone with the man, perhaps in order to keep the crowd's focus on His teaching and not the physical aspect of His miracles, or perhaps being away from the crowd would somehow magnify to the man the significance of Jesus's work, or maybe it was so the man wouldn't be so overwhelmed by what Jesus was about to do. While we don't know the exact motivation, it does appear that obtaining privacy was step number 1 in this healing miracle.

The 2nd step is that Jesus puts His fingers into the man's ears. 3rd step: Jesus spits. 4<sup>th</sup> step: Now the way the original Greek is worded, it's really unclear what exactly is involved in this 4th step. Some translations say Jesus spit and then touched the man's tongue, other translations say he spit and then put the spit on the man's tongue, and others say He spit on His own fingers and then touched the man's tongue. The truth is, the original wording doesn't convey to us exactly what this looked like- either way though, I must admit it's a little strange. In [verse 34](#) we have the 5<sup>th</sup> step: Jesus looks up to heaven. 6<sup>th</sup> step: Jesus sighs. 7<sup>th</sup> and final step: Jesus calls out "Ephphatha!" using the Aramaic language of the land in order to complete His healing miracle.

We don't know exactly the significance of each of these steps, but there had to have been specific reasons behind Jesus choosing to heal in this way. There was something about this process that brought God more glory and showed more love towards the man than if Jesus had chosen to heal him through some other way. I guess if you think about it, it wouldn't have made much sense for Jesus to have given a deaf man a verbal command to follow- the man wouldn't have heard and understood. With many of Jesus's miracles there often seems to have been some sort of testing, some sort of calling the person to a deeper level of belief and trust in Jesus before the miracle was performed. With this man being unable to hear, and unable to carry on a conversation with Jesus, increasing this man's faith, belief, and trust in Jesus had to be accomplished through some other means than through a conversation or command to follow. And perhaps that's exactly what Jesus was doing through sticking His fingers in the man's ears. I sure would be a little nervous allowing a stranger to stick his fingers in my ears. And I would have completely lost my nerve if that stranger attempted to touch my tongue with his spit. I'd say this man showed incredible faith and trust, putting Himself completely under the control of Jesus. Perhaps in this method Jesus was prompting faith and

trust in the man, but perhaps He was also communicating to him tenderly in a tactile way- walking Him through the healing process in a way that he could understand: *“First here’s your ears- they need My touch, and then there’s the problem with your tongue, I’ll fix that too with part of My own essence.”* It was almost a primitive sign language that Jesus was utilizing in order to converse with the man.

And through Jesus looking up to Heaven, perhaps He was conveying where the healing was coming from, where the source of power originated. Jesus Himself depended on the Father for His work. Commentator Alexander Maclaren stated that Jesus’s heavenward look was not the renewal of interrupted fellowship between He and the Father, but rather Jesus fixing Himself where He always stood, grasping anew the hand that He always held, before He did the deed of power.

Some have suggested that Jesus sighed out of pity and love for the man, in a sense grieving over the pain and suffering that sin entering the world had brought about. I think perhaps it was a sigh of relief, resulting from resting in the moment of His Father’s work as He gazed toward Heaven. And finally, after each of these steps, Jesus said to the man *“Be opened!”* and the man’s ears were opened so that he might hear, and simultaneously his tongue was freed, so that he might speak clearly.

This moment of Jesus looking up to Heaven gives a great example for us. There might be certain responsibilities we each carry, certain steps we each need to take in order to see God’s work accomplished, but ultimately, when it comes down to accomplishing His work, we have to pause and look to Heaven and rely on the power of the Almighty to do that work. In a way, we’ve been invited to participate with God in His work, but the source is Him, we have nothing within ourselves that can make anything of true value happen. May we each make a consistent habit of looking to him, breathing out and back in deeply... and then open our mouths to speak the heavenly ordained words that this world needs to hear.

I’ve attempted to give some reasons behind why Jesus perhaps healed this man through this specific process, but the reality is we just don’t really know why He healed this man in this peculiar way- we can only speculate. Isn’t that often how it

is with God's work? Frequently it's a process, with several steps of trust and waiting on Him, and so much of that process we don't always understand. Be assured though that there *is* reason behind what He is doing- you may see that reasoning on the other side of the process, or it might not be until Heaven that you can fully understand why you went through certain steps and events in life as He has been refining and healing you.

Our dads and kids Jiu-Jitsu program on Monday nights has encouraged us as fathers to trust the process. Dads have been reminded to stay consistent yet patient, realizing that the kids aren't going to nail each technique 100%. But through repetition and continued encouragement and instruction, over time, the kids will end up learning the techniques. I find even myself being challenged to trust the process as I am continuing to learn the grappling techniques in the adult class. So often I want to give up, being weary from getting beat up by guys bigger, better, faster, stronger, and more experienced than me. Fortunately, there have been little glimpses of hope that appear every so often that allow me to see how indeed I am slowly progressing and getting better. So, I remain consistent and patient, trusting the process. It's the same in parenting. We as parents want good results from our kids immediately- from birth we want them to quickly learn to obey us, to be kind and respectful, to make good choices- but often kids take time to learn, and parents have to again, trust the process- staying consistent and patient, knowing that the consistency and patience will in time produce the desired result.

Each of our experiences with the Lord are unique. The way in which He is refining me may be completely different than the way in which He is refining you. And even within your own personal experience there have been different ways in which the Lord has worked in your life. Sometimes the Lord has worked in this *certain way*, and then the next time you encounter a similar situation, you expect Him to work in that same *certain way*, but He doesn't- He ends up doing something completely different and unexpected. Sometimes He speaks a word and the result takes place immediately, and at other times He... sticks His fingers in your ears, does some spitting, some sighing, and meanwhile you're thinking- what on earth is He doing? Trust the process. Trust that He is good, and has reasons behind His movements. Jesus was comfortable with the step by step process of healing in this passage, and may we be just as comfortable as we

continue in doing good, step by step, knowing that the reward will come in due time.