

Week 11: Mark 7:24-8:10: God's Heart for the World

Hook



Main Point: God's heart's desire is for all the nations of the world to be His children.

Q: Can you think of a job, sport or activity you were interested in at some point – but were disqualified because you didn't meet the requirements (such as age, height, skill or something else)?

Many things in life have requirements or limits – you have to be a certain age, height or have the right training or skills to take part. Here are some jobs and activities that have those kinds of requirements.

President of the United States of America

- Natural-born citizen: The individual must be a citizen from birth.
- At least 35 years old
- Resident for at least 14 years¹

Astronaut

- 20/20 vision (with the use of corrective lenses)²

Air Force Academy Recruit

- Must be between 4'10" and 6'8"³

Medical Doctor

- Undergraduate degree, medical school, and several years of residency

Equestrian

- Rider cannot weigh more than 20 percent of the horse's weight (horses typically weigh between 900 to 1,200 pounds, which requires the rider to weigh no more than 240 pounds).⁴

American Idol Contestant

- Must be between the ages of 15 and 29⁵

Transition: So many things in life come with limits – only certain people can take part. But God’s invitation is completely different. The only requirement to enter His kingdom is a relationship with Jesus. In this lesson, we’ll see how God’s heart – and our mission – is for the whole world.

RECAP: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies, or history books, they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark’s focus on Jesus’ action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lessons 2 through 4, we saw how every part of Jesus’ ministry pointed to His kingship as the Messiah Israel had been waiting for, but in a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world.

In lessons 5 through 7, we saw Jesus behaving differently than the typical religious leaders of His day and flipping their social systems upside down. Some people reacted positively to Him, and others reacted negatively, especially those who didn’t want their world turned upside down, because the status quo was working in their favor.

In lessons 8 through 10, Jesus performed three God-sized miracles that show He is not only sent from God – He is God. Most responded negatively to Him, misunderstanding who He was and what He was trying to teach them, even His disciples.

In this lesson, we’ll see how God’s heart, and our mission, is not just for the children of Israel but also for the whole world.

Week 11: Mark 7:24-8:10: God's Heart for the World

Book

Main Point: God's heart's desire is for all the nations of the world to be His children.

Mark 7:24–30 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus was sent *first* to the Jews, but His mission was for the whole world.

Q: How did Jesus initially react to the Syrophenician woman? Does this sound like Jesus?

Q: Why did He cast the demon from her daughter?

Q: What does this passage teach us about humbly requesting help from God?

Jesus went “away” to Tyre and Sidon – port cities on the Mediterranean Sea, just north of Israel. When Israel first entered the Promised Land (~1400 BC), Tyre and Sidon were part of the land given to the tribe of Asher, but Asher never took control of them. Instead of driving the Canaanites and their false gods out of the land, they let them stay. God's people ended up worshipping their false gods and were constantly at war with them (Judges 1:31; 10:6–16). But when David became king (1055 BC), the king of Tyre built a palace for him, and when Solomon built the temple (966 BC), he gave him all the wood and 120 talents of gold (1 Kings 5; 9:10–14). Queen Jezebel, the vilest queen in Israelite history, was the daughter of the king of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31). But the widow of Zarephath (in Sidon) took care of Elijah; the Lord provided food for her through the famine, and Elijah raised her son from the dead (1 Kings 17:8–24).

In the Old Testament prophets, Tyre and Sidon were prophesied to be overthrown, which they were, by Babylon (585–572 BC), Greece (322 BC), and Persia (359–338 BC). But by Jesus' day, both cities had become prosperous provinces of Rome. The Jews believed Tyre and Sidon would be punished in the Day of Judgment; Jesus told the Jews in Galilee that the Day of Judgment would be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon than for them (Luke 10:13–14)! Jesus said He had only been sent to the Jews (Matthew 15:24), but when crowds from Tyre and Sidon came to Him, He ministered to them (Mark 3:7–8).

Jesus tried to hide out in Tyre and Sidon, but He could not be hidden. His reputation had even spread this far, to the Gentile territories. The Gentile woman who came to Him was Syrophenician, a blend of Phoenicia (where Tyre and Sidon were) and Syria, a

larger region to the east. She reminds us of God's mission to the whole world, including Israel's enemies. She was a Gentile and a woman, so a Jewish man should not have talked to her. Also, her daughter's being possessed by a demon made them both outcasts, even in their Gentile city.

This is another story that is difficult to understand without cultural context. Reading it at face value sounds as though Jesus was being mean to this woman, calling her a dog. But understanding the cultural context reveals God's heart for the Gentiles and the outcast, for every human being on earth. Some Jewish people did call Gentiles dogs, but that's not what Jesus was doing. Jesus used a play on words to say the opposite – that she had value in God's kingdom.

Jesus was an honorable rabbi; for Him to even acknowledge her would have been shameful in their culture. But He didn't ignore or shame her. Instead, as with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), He engaged her in a deep (though brief) theological conversation. When He said it wasn't right to take the children's (Jews) bread and give it to dogs (Gentiles), He wasn't calling *her* a dog. The word He used wasn't the one Jews used to refer to Gentiles as dogs, it was the word for a *beloved* pet. He wasn't using a racial slur; He was using a play on words.⁶ He was challenging *the culture's* view of Jew and Gentile and testing to see how she would respond.

Jesus didn't believe Gentiles were dogs; He loves the Gentiles. Jesus spent His ministry reaching out to the marginalized, challenging the Jews' prejudices and their social system of honor, status and power. The only reason He even encountered this woman was because He had intentionally gone to Gentile territory (v. 24). Jesus wasn't being rude; He was using a metaphor to explain to her that He was sent *first* to the Jews (Romans 1:16).

The woman was not deterred. She understood what Jesus was saying and responded with wit and faith. Yes, dinner is prepared for the children, but the dogs eat the crumbs. She had the humility to accept whatever "crumbs" she could get and did not demand a place at the table, unlike the disciples, who argued over who was greatest.⁷ The disciples may have thought of her as a dog eating scraps under the table, but she would feast at the table with them in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus praised her for her faith and her humble thinking and healed her daughter instantly. His great power was shown again in the fact that He did this from afar. He didn't have to go anywhere near her; He just said the word.

Q: Where have you seen great faith in surprising people and places?

Q: How does this story challenge you to think differently about those our culture might consider “like dogs”? How would Jesus treat them?

Mark 7:31–37 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus opens the spiritual ears of those from any nation who have faith.

Q: What is different about this healing than the healing of the girl just before it?

Q: Why would Jesus ask the people not to tell anyone about His miracles?

Q: What is our responsibility today to tell people about Jesus?

Jesus left Tyre and Sidon and returned to Galilee, to the region of the Decapolis, which was a Gentile area comprising 10 Hellenistic cities in an area otherwise populated by Jews. He was still focused on the Gentiles. It was in the Decapolis that Jesus healed the man with the legion of demons and sent them into the pigs (Mark 5). After that healing, Jesus had told the man to go home and tell his people how much the Lord had done for him.

This was a big contrast to the times Jesus had told people to keep His miracles a secret, but here it was *because* it was in a Gentile area. In Jewish areas, people had misconceptions about who Messiah was and why He would come, so Jesus needed to control the spread of the message. But the Gentiles didn't have those misconceptions and would more easily accept Him for who he showed Himself to be in the moment without defaulting to their expectations. Also, He would want them to share the word of what the Lord had done because they didn't know “the Lord” – *Israel's* God. The Jews already knew their God was a God of miracles, the Lord over all creation, but the Gentiles needed to spread the news of the miracles far and wide so they would know this God was the one true God, the Lord over all creation.

Apparently, the man healed of the demons did a great job spreading the word, so when Jesus returned to the Decapolis, people knew who He was, and they brought to Him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, begging Him to lay hands on him and heal him. Like the Syrophoenician woman, they didn't just ask, they begged Jesus. These are two different words in the Greek; the woman's begging was a persistent asking, as if she asked many times. This begging for the deaf man was an urgent asking. Both convey a posture of humility. They didn't come to Jesus with a sense of entitlement but with a plea to please help their loved one.

Jesus did not touch the Syrophoenician woman's daughter to heal her; He wasn't anywhere near her. But in this story, He used very intentional touch that was highly

symbolic of the man's need. They asked Jesus to lay hands on him, and He did. He put His fingers in the man's ears, then, after spitting, touched his tongue. This wasn't necessary to heal him; we just saw that Jesus could have done it with just a word. But it was a very intimate moment. Jesus had pulled Him aside from the crowd to do this privately.

It was also a symbolic moment for the disciples who would have been watching. When Jesus healed the man, He looked up to heaven, sighed, and said, "Be opened." The word "sighed" is not just a sigh; it's a deep groan, as when you are in intense distress or pain. It's such an intense groan that it's the word Paul used for the "groans" of childbirth (2 Corinthians 5:2). Jesus' deep groan expressed both His pain that this man was not whole the way he would be in God's kingdom as well as His pain at the spiritual deafness of His people, even those closest to Him. Jesus had just asked His disciples, "Do you not understand?" (7:18). In the next chapter again, He will ask it again (8:17). Jesus' asking this man's physical ears to be opened was also a plea for His disciples' spiritual ears to be opened.

Jesus pulled the man aside to do this miracle privately, and this time He asked them not to tell anyone, even though it was a Gentile area. But the more He told them not to, the more they proclaimed it. This word "proclaim" was used of the town crier, going through the streets, proclaiming the news so that everyone could hear. It's the way John the Baptist proclaimed repentance in the wilderness, the way Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom, the way Jesus told the disciples to proclaim the Good News (Mark 1:3–4, 14, 39; 6:12). Their behavior shows us that when you truly understand that the Gospel is Good News, you can't help but proclaim it everywhere you go!

Q: In what ways do you struggle to understand what God is trying to teach you? How can your ears be opened and your mind/heart come to understand?

Q: What is holding you back from proclaiming the Gospel with this kind of passion? How can you practically overcome that obstacle?

Mark 8:1–10 [Read]

Talking Point 3: People of faith from every nation are welcome to feast at God's table together.

Q: How is this story like the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6)? How is it different?

Q: Why might the leftover pieces be significant after what Jesus said about crumbs earlier?

Q: How does this passage encourage you to trust in God's abundance?

This story is much like the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6, but with some different details that point to this story's being the "Gentile version" of the same miracle:

- Again, they were in a "desolate place," and Jesus provided for their hunger as God did in the wilderness. But this time the crowds had been with Him for three days, not just one.
- Again, Jesus was moved with compassion for the people.
- Again, they had some bread and fish, but this time they had more food (seven loaves instead of five) and fewer people (4,000 instead of 5,000 plus women/children).
- Again, the disciples seemed to think in physical instead of supernatural terms. Even though they had seen Jesus feed 5,000 people just two chapters before, they still asked where they would get enough bread to feed all the people in such a desolate place.
- Again, Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks.
- Again, Jesus supplied more than enough, but this time seven baskets were left over instead of 12.

These details point to a difference between this same miracle being performed for Jews and for Gentiles. Feeding the 5,000 happened in a Jewish region, and 12 baskets of leftovers were collected, symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel. *This* miracle took place in a Gentile region, and seven baskets were leftover, symbolic of the seven Gentile nations of the Canaanites in the land before the conquest (Deuteronomy 7:1–2; Acts 13:19). Seven is also the number of completion or wholeness. Jesus performed this same miracle twice, once for the Jews and once for the Gentiles, showing that the kingdom of God is for all nations.⁸

This reiterates the point Jesus made in the earlier story, with the Syrophenician woman who was willing to take whatever scraps fell from the table of the kingdom of God. Keener writes that "figuratively in this context, the leftovers symbolize that plenty of 'the children's bread' remains for other seekers."⁹ Jesus came to the children of Israel *first*, but the plan was always for the whole world to be blessed through them (Genesis 12:3). Those "crumbs" are not really crumbs at all, but baskets full for every nation. In the kingdom of God, there is no such thing as people who can only eat the scraps that fall from the table. All are welcome at God's table (Matthew 22:2–14). Kings and prophets will sit next to lepers and notorious women. And there is no scarcity in the kingdom of God; it is a feast. God has more than enough to serve everyone to their fullest and have even more left over (Ephesians 3:20).

Q: How can we open our tables and our homes to people who are different from us, especially the "least of these"? How can we have the heart of Jesus for others?

Q: Jew/Gentile is not the only distinction our culture today. What similar divisions do we have? How can we reach across to love another despite those things that separate us?

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Took

Main Point: God's heart's desire is for all the nations of the world to be His children.

The invitation to salvation is open to the nations! Teacher, lead your LifeGroup in a time of prayer over these ministries, whose aim is to reach the nations.

- Pray that the Lord would continue to expand *PowerPoint Ministries*, as it reaches more than 2.5 million viewers per month, more than 1,000 radio stations, and touches the entire globe.
- Ask that the Lord would continue to expand the international LifeGroup ministry at Prestonwood; these groups include Farsi LifeGroup, Portuguese LifeGroup, Chinese LifeGroup, Heart of Africa LifeGroup, Japanese LifeGroup, ESL LifeGroup, and many Español groups.
- Finally, pray over the Operation Christmas Child boxes. If you have boxes in your room, consider asking group members to each hold one as you pray. Ask that the children would feel seen and loved, that the Gospel would be clearly communicated at the distribution events. Teacher, consider playing an Operation Christmas child testimonial video such as this one (<https://www.samaritanspurse.org/article/the-power-of-a-shoebox-packed-with-love-and-prayer/>)

CHALLENGES

THINK: How can you show compassion for others the way Jesus did? How can you develop a deeper sense of empathy, to see when other people are hurting or struggling or need love and care? Reflect on the world around you, your community, where you live, work, learn, and play. Where are the people who are hurting, misunderstood, or marginalized? Who seems invisible to the rest of the world? How can you reach out to them in love and meet their needs? What steps can you take this week to cross a boundary (cultural, social, or relational) to share the love of Christ with someone?

PRAY for God to search your heart and show you anywhere where your love is not pure, where your heart is hardened, or where your ears and eyes are closed. Pray for God to show you those around you who need love and care. Ask Him to give you His eyes to see the need around you and His heart of compassion for those in need. Ask Him to grow empathy, humility and loving kindness in you.

ACT: Open your table. In Jesus' culture, inviting someone to share a meal was a way of showing him or her honor, but in every culture, sharing a meal is one of the best ways to connect with people. This week, invite someone who is different from you to share a meal with you. If you can't bring people into your home, meet them out somewhere; it doesn't have to be *your* table at *your* house. Hospitality isn't about the place; it's about the attitude of your heart. Spend time getting to know them, building relationship, finding out what their needs are, and learning how you can serve them.

¹<https://www.usa.gov/presidents#:~:text=Requirements%20to%20be%20eligible%20to,president%20of%20the%20United%20States>

² <https://www.goodeyes.com/lasik/7-professionals-need-lasik/#:~:text=Astronauts,eye%20condition%20that%20causes%20nearsightedness>.

³<https://www.academyadmissions.com/requirements/medical/standards/#:~:text=Height%20and%20Weight,determine%20your%20percent%20body%20fat>.

⁴ <https://shopus.parelli.com/blogs/savvystation/how-much-does-a-horse-weigh#:~:text=Many%20factors%20impact%20a%20horse's,can%20weigh%20over%201%2C800%20pounds>.

⁵ https://www.tvinsider.com/1184943/american-idol-age-limit-oldest-youngest-winners/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁶ Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1965).

⁷ Amy-Jill Levine, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History," *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, Vol 14* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 1980).

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 1999).