

**THE REAL JESUS**  
**A Series on the Book of Mark**  
**“How to Approach Jesus”**  
**Mark 7:24-37**  
**New City Church of LA**  
**January 18, 2008**  
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**I. Vision of New City**

Welcome to New City. We are a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church. Share our vision.

**II. Introduction**

We are in a series on the Book of Mark called the REAL JESUS. I think a lot of people have problems with Jesus because they just don't know him. The church is supposed to represent Jesus to the world but the way we have represented him, it's terrible. We confuse people by the way we live, by the way we judge, by the way we are self-absorbed, by the way we discriminate. I completely understand why you have problems with Christianity. [Example of a great computer program—not used well—bad result--but when it is used well, great result] But, I hope you can see beyond us and see the real Jesus.

Some people have problems with Christianity because they disagree with its worldview. They are shopping for a spiritual system that agrees with their worldview. And they heard something about church's position on this and that they disagree with, and they walk away.

Sometimes, they've study what Jesus and his disciples taught. They are outright offended! In fact, there are passages that are outright offensive. How do you deal with those passages? We are going to look at one like that today.

Read Mark 7:1-23

This passage tells us: (1) how Jesus approaches us; and (2) how we approach Jesus.

### **III. First, how Jesus approaches us.**

He approaches us in different ways, and sometimes, it seems down right offensive.

Earlier in chapter 7, when the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law came from Jerusalem, the big wigs of the religious society came from Jerusalem, and ask him about why his disciples don't live according to the tradition of elder, Jesus said: "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites." Jesus called them hypocrites. I think if I was one of the religious leaders, I would be extremely offended. But, you say, ya, those were Pharisees; they were hypocrites. Couldn't he be a little gentler? Why so offensive?

After this, Jesus goes to Tyre, which is a Gentile area. The passage tells us that he didn't want anyone to know he was there; Jesus was seeking solitude. When a Gentile, a Syrian and a Phoenician woman came to Jesus and begged him to drive the demons out of her daughter, Jesus said: "First let the children eat all they want for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." This is a very difficult saying. Jesus says he came first to the Jews, the children. Then, after the redemptive work is accomplished, he commands his disciples to go to the gentiles. He says there is an order here. His primary work is with the Jews to fulfill the prophecies about him. But, there is no getting around the fact that Jesus is indirectly calling gentiles dogs, and therefore, her, a dog. We have to notice a couple of nuances. First, the word Jesus used for dogs is the word for a cute puppy—an affectionate puppy. You have to understand that they lived in a society where dogs were mostly strays and pretty wild living outside. But, here Jesus used the term of a cute puppy. And second, Jesus is speaking in a parable. As he did when he spoke in parables, Jesus said this to teach her something. Nonetheless, even though it was an affectionate term for puppies and even though it was a parable, Jesus called her a dog. That's offensive. If I was there, I would just probably have been extremely offended and walked away. Why was he so offensive?

But, Jesus wasn't always that offensive. Jesus walked from Tyre to Sidon and then to the region of Decapolis. All of these are Gentile regions and it would have taken them several months for this journey. It was a few hundred miles. In Decapolis, there was a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. He was essentially mute. Can you imagine a life of a mute person in an ancient society? He was probably made fun of, and

marginalized by people. Jesus is extremely sensitive. He doesn't even do the miracle in front of people. He doesn't want to create a spectacle. He takes him away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears, spit and touch the man's tongue, he looked up to the heaven, and with a deep sigh (a deep breathe like God's breathe that gave us life) said to him *Ephphatha*—Be Opened. And he was healed. Jesus was using a sign language or a physical language in the way that this person could feel and understand. Although a little weird, Jesus was considerate and gentle to this man. He was probably a Gentile as well since he was a resident of Decapolis, a Gentile city. Why wasn't Jesus more offensive to this man?

I think the key to understanding why Jesus approached each person the way he approached him or her is the needs of the individual. Jesus, in his wisdom and knowledge, knew that the deaf and mute person needed to be approached with sensitivity and touch. So, that's the way Jesus approached this man.

Jesus, in his wisdom and knowledge, knew that what the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law needed was the truth of their hypocrisy. They couldn't handle the truth, but Jesus gave them the truth straight-up without any packaging.

Jesus, in his wisdom and knowledge, knew that what the Syrophenican woman needed was a scandalous parable. What he said was offensive (and I don't want to water that down), but I think he was intentionally scandalous because that's what she needed to respond the way she did and learn the most important thing a person can learn: how to approach God. I am going to be talking about this in detail in my second point. But, for now, I want you to understand why Jesus did what he did. It's impossible that Jesus was a racist against Gentiles. When we read Jesus in context of the whole Book of Mark, he was a man who went after the marginalized, even if they were Gentiles. This was not the first time Jesus came to Decapolis. Remember the demonized person named Legion who used to hurt himself because he was in so much pain? Jesus, when he was most in demand, when he was the busiest, went over to Decapolis and healed this demon possessed Gentile, and afterwards, he came back to where he started afterwards. In the journey, they hit a storm and nearly got killed in the lake. He did all this for one Gentile demon possessed man. Do you think Jesus was prejudice against Gentiles? No. He loved them. Then, why did he say what he said? He must have intentionally been

offensive because he knew that was what she needed to understand one of the greatest mysteries of the Kingdom of God. I'll talk about that in my second point.

Do you feel that God is offensive at times? Do you feel that Jesus is offensive at times? Sometimes, God takes you aside and touches you and heals you exactly the way you need to be touched and healed. Sometimes, God challenges the absolutely the most fundamental part of who you are. You feel like you can't change who you are. This woman couldn't change the fact that she was a Gentile. You feel like you don't need this. You want to walk away, but I am here to tell you that maybe God is intentionally scandalous to you because he is trying to get your attention. He is trying to teach you something. If you turn against him because of something you read in the Bible don't agree with you, or something you've seen in the church don't agree with you, you may be missing the greatest mystery of God.

[Share about how the issue of homosexuality is offensive to some]

### **III. Let's go to the second point: What do we learn from this passage about how to approach Jesus?**

The Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law approached Jesus with a pre-existing paradigms and framework and they expected Jesus to fit into their paradigms. "Why aren't you following the tradition of elders?" We often do that when we approach Jesus. I'll follow you if you are liberal enough, if you are conservative enough, if you are cool enough, if you are politically correct enough, if you agree with me enough. If you agree with me enough. Who is God here? Are you looking for someone to help get what you want or are you looking for God?

But, there is another way.

The Syrophenician woman discovered the way.

Even though she was a gentile, she knew she had no credential to approach a Jewish rabbi—woman, gentile, --she is disqualified to approach. She was on the wrong side of moral, sexual, religious—but she didn't care; nothing can stop her. She won't take no for an answer. Why was she so bold?

The initial boldness is not surprising. Why? She was a parent whose daughter is sick. If your child is about to go off a cliff, she is willing to break all barriers.

But, her second response is amazing. After Jesus offends her, she comes right back and says, puppies eat too. This is astounding. Jesus has told her a parable and gave her a challenge and an offer. She says, I am not supposed to be at the table and I am unworthy and I accept it—she doesn't say how dare you call me on this—but there is more than enough on the table for everyone and I want some. She is contending with Jesus. She's will not take no for an answer. If I am a little early, make me a teaser trailer of the coming movie. I want mine now.

In western cultures, we don't have anything like this kind of assertiveness. We only know how to contend for our rights. This is right-less assertiveness. She is coming to God and completely accepts her unworthiness. I am coming not based on what I deserve based on *my* goodness; but give me what I don't deserve based on *your* goodness. Jesus turns to her and says: wonderful answer.

One commentator calls her the first person to ever understand a parable of Jesus. Some commentators call her a female Jacob. In the OT, Jacob is scared to face his brother because he cheated him many years ago; so, right before he faces him again, he wrestles with the angle of God. He contends with God not based on what he has done and what he deserves, but based on the goodness of God.

On the one hand, she is not too proud to go forward. She humbles herself completely. She doesn't assert her rights. She doesn't say "forget this; I am getting out of here." I don't have to take this. She does not think of herself too high to get offended by Jesus. And on the other hand, she is not too discouraged to go forward. She continues to persist. She has neither superiority complex or an inferiority complex.

She understood the truths of the gospel: that we cannot stand based on our works, our goodness, or our rights. But that we need to contend with God to help us based on who he is, not what we have done.

This is the most important thing for us to know. We do not come to God based on our good works or our rights, but based on God's character—his mercy, grace, and love. We have a right to justice, but we don't have a right to mercy, grace and love. And that's what we need in our lives.

And what kind of God is this? He is the Great I Am come down here. He came from up there to down here to share his love with us. Then, he went down to the cross and became like a stray dog, worse than a dog, so that we can contend with God.

How do you come to God?

-Based on what you think and whether Jesus fit into your framework, worldview and paradigm?

-Based on what you have done: if you have been good, you feel like you can really come to God and ask for his blessings. And if you have not been so good, you feel like you can't come to God and ask for his blessings. Is how much you expect from God determined by how much rights you have, how many chips you earned, how many merit badges you earned?

-Or based on what he has done for you?