

Teaching Plan EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: April 7, 2019

Lesson Title: "Includes"

Lesson Passage: Mark 7:25-37

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Bible scholars agree that the first six verses in our Lesson Passage are difficult to interpret, for they seem to imply that Jesus was un-willing to extend his ministry of healing and exorcism to Gentiles.

But perhaps this passage is meant to convey subtle, but profound, truths about Jesus' ministry to the world. So, this teaching plan will give detailed attention to this seeming inconsistency in the gospel narrative. The Bible passage then follows Jesus back to Jewish territory, where he healed a man who was deaf.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Comment on the significance of the geographical locations in the lesson passage. (2) Explain Jesus' reference to "dogs" in his initial response to the Syro-Phoenician woman.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Read Mark 7:24. Then, using a map of Palestine in New Testament times, comment on the apparent reason Jesus "went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon": These Phoenician cities were a good distance from Galilee in both miles and culture. Historically, they were antagonistic toward Israel. So, why did Jesus go to this remote territory? Mark gives us a clue in 7:24 when he tells us that Jesus wanted to keep his whereabouts a secret. He wanted to retreat from the crowds that had been surrounding him in Galilee. (Refer to Mk. 1:28; 3:9-10; 3:19b-20; 4:1, 36; 5:21, 24.) But even here, in Gentile territory, he could not escape his reputation as a healer; for, even as he tried to keep his identity a secret, a Syrian woman came to him, desperately seeking help for her sick daughter (Mk. 7:25-26).

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Comment on the common belief in demon-possession in that day:

It was widely believed in both Gentile and Jewish cultures that a variety of symptoms (memory failure, convulsions, epileptic seizures, fainting) could be attributed to a demon (i.e., an unclean spirit) within a person. The little daughter mentioned in vv. 25-26 apparently was afflicted by one or more of these symptoms. The only known cure was to have the demon driven out by an exorcist (read v. 26).

2. Explain why this is considered to be one of the most difficult passages in the Gospels: (1) Jesus' response to the woman's plea for help seems to imply that he was unwilling to extend his ministry of healing to Gentiles, in keeping with the common attitude of the Jews toward non-Jews. (2) This interpretation is strengthened by the replication of this incident in Matthew 15:21-27, where, at first, Jesus does not even answer the woman's plea, and the disciples want to "send her away" (Mt. 15:23). (3) The difficulty is increased when Jesus uses the term

"dogs" (v. 27), a common disparaging Jewish reference to Gentiles. (4) What makes this story particularly bizarre is the account in Mk. 7:31-37 in which Jesus unhesitatingly heals a man he encounters in Gentile territory.

3. Suggest this possible interpretation of the story in Mark 7:25-30: (1) The response of Jesus in v. 27 might have been a playful reference to the well-known prejudice of the Jews against non-Jews, based on a familiar practice of little children at the dinner table, who would drop a few crumbs for little dogs under the table. (NOTE: The Greek word translated "dogs" is a diminutive, which could be translated "puppies.") So, possibly, Jesus was saying facetiously, "You know, the children (Jews) must be fed before the puppies (Gentiles) are fed. (2) The response of the woman (v. 28) lends itself to this interpretation, for it was equally light-hearted: "Yes, Lord, but even the little dogs under the table get some of the crumbs" (v. 28). (3) Evidently impressed by her witty reply, Jesus assured her that her daughter had been healed (7:29), and this was confirmed when she returned to her home and found her daughter well (v. 30). (4)

4. Comment on the healing account in Mark 7:31-37: (1) "And they brought to Him" a deaf man and a speech impediment" (v. 32) tells us that his neighbors had an unselfish concern for this handicapped neighbor. They did not leave him to bear his burdens alone. (2) Jesus "took him aside" (v. 33) and healed him in private, rather than making a public spectacle of his healing power. (3) The people could not resist "telling the good news" of the man's healing. Although Jesus commanded the people not to tell about the restoration of the man's hearing and speech, they couldn't resist sharing the good news because "they were astonished beyond measure" (vv. 36-37). They had seen God at work in Jesus Christ. (Quote the hymn, "Go forth and tell! O church of God, awake! God's saving news to all the nations take; proclaim Christ Jesus, Saviour, Lord, and King, that all the world his worthy praise may sing.")

CLOSING THE LESSON

The Gentile woman in our lesson passage was not steeped in Jewish lore, but she had three very laudable personal qualities: **First, her faith in Jesus was persistent.** Like Jacob in Gen. 32:26, she wouldn't let go without his blessing. **Second, she was humble.** She said, in effect, "I'm not asking for a seat at the table, just the crumbs." **Third, she took Jesus at his word** when he assured her that the demon had left her daughter (vv. 29-30).

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