

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 7:24-37

Topic

Jesus heals a deaf man
with a speech impediment using His spit

Title

"Let's Spit This One Out"

Introduction

Her real name is Tardar Sauce, but you know her as Grumpy Cat.

Her owner says that her permanently grumpy-looking face is due to the combination of an underbite and feline dwarfism. Grumpy Cat's popularity originated from a picture posted to the social news website *Reddit* in 2012. It was made into an image with grumpy captions, like:

- "What doesn't kill you will hopefully try again."
- "Zombies eat brains. Most of you have nothing to worry about,"
and,
- "If stupidity was an illness, you'd be dead by now."

"The Official Grumpy Cat" page on Facebook has over 8 million likes. Grumpy Cat has appeared on *Today*, *Good Morning America*, the *CBS Evening News*, *Anderson Live*, *VH1's Big Morning Buzz Live*, *The Soup*, and *American Idol*. She appeared in a television commercial for Honey Nut Cheerios. She also appeared on a season finale of *The Bachelorette*, and was a special guest on an edition of *WWE Monday Night Raw*.

The word 'grumpy' came to mind as I read the verses we will be talking about today. On the surface, Jesus seems a little grumpy:

- In the first episode, a woman comes to Jesus to ask Him to deliver her daughter from a demon. Jesus first ignores her, then calls her a "little dog."
- In the next episode, He heals a deaf mute by spitting, either on the ground or, maybe, onto His own fingers, then touching the man's tongue.

Was it a case of Grumpy Savior? After all, this chapter started with Jesus and His disciples trying to get some much needed rest. We all know how exhaustion can alter our moods.

No; Jesus was not grumpy. Tired, yes, but never did He act out of character.

Quite the opposite - we will see His words and actions communicate God's great love for all those who are hurting.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Never Think That You Are Beyond The Lord's Help, and #2 Always Know That You Are On The Lord's Heart.

#1 Never Think That You Are Beyond The Lord's Help

(v24-30)

There's something we need to remember if we are going to understand how Jesus treats the woman in this passage.

While the Gospel would eventually reach the whole world, it is evident from the Scriptures that the Jewish nation would be the initial recipient of that message. In his account of Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman, Matthew recorded that Jesus said: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). When Jesus sent out the twelve apostles, He told them: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6).

Just before Jesus ascended to Heaven after His resurrection, He informed the apostles: "... you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The sequence of places where the apostles would witness give the order in which the Gospel would be preached - to the Jews first, and then the Gentiles.

In addition, the apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome, stated: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (1:16).

God's intent was that the nation of Israel would accept their Messiah, receive the Spirit, and turn-around and evangelize the whole world.

With that in mind, let's start, in verse twenty-four.

Mar 7:24 From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden.

Jesus was still seeking rest, for Himself and His disciples. Tyre and Sidon were outside of the borders of Israel, definitely Gentile territory. This is the only time, at least that is recorded for us, that Jesus was outside of Israel. He had encountered Gentiles before, but never outside of the Promised Land.

It seemed a good place for a group of Jews to be left alone to lay low for a while.

Try as He might, however, to keep His presence a secret, "He could not be hidden."

That's one of those phrases you can take out of a verse and write a book about. For example, we could look back on the many efforts, throughout human history, to thwart the Gospel in an attempt to keep Jesus hidden. We could cite, in relatively recent history, Communist China. Closed to the West for decades, no one knew what was going on with Christians. When China was again opened-up to the West, we discovered a vibrant underground church movement, comprised of millions of born-again Chinese.

The diabolical Chinese communist party could not keep Jesus hidden.

Mar 7:25 For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet.

Jesus could not be hidden, and word of His presence spread, but only this one mother sought Him out. I can't help but wonder what Jesus might have done if more of the locals came to Him.

It's the same today. We're not hiding Jesus; but the majority of the population in our town isn't seeking Him out - and that includes too many believers.

Yes, God is omnipresent; you don't have to be with other saints to experience Him. But Jesus is depicted, in the Revelation, as walking in the midst of gathered believers. He attends our meetings in a special way that we should not so easily dismissed.

Writing to the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul assumed they would meet often, saying things like, "whenever you come together" (First Corinthians 14:26). It was in those meetings that God the Holy Spirit ministered through each saint as they exercised their gift or gifts for the building-up of the others.

Then there is the powerful, and direct, exhortation, from the writer to the Hebrews, which says,

Heb 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

We are here; we believe, at least for today, that we ought to gather with other believers, to meet with Jesus, and to be used by Him to minister to one another. *It's encouraging.*

Mar 7:26 The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

"Greek" in this context means she was a Gentile, which is a word to describe all non-Jews. More specifically, she was a Phoenecian, from the region of Syria.

She was not a convert to Judaism, but was a straight-up pagan. She was definitely not the kind of person Jesus was sent to as Messiah.

"Kept asking" indicates Jesus was ignoring her request. Here is where people start getting stumbled, suggesting Jesus was harsh in His dealings with her. Let's wait to have an opinion until we see this play out.

BTW: Whatever you are going through, or will go through, avoid any bad opinion of God and wait for it to play-out. It may not finally play-out until after you go to be with the Lord. God is not, after all, on our timetable. It's therefore always advisable to default to what you know about God - that He is merciful, forgiving, gracious, powerful but also patient. It's what faith does - believing what you know to be true despite what you are going through - because you do not see all the threads pulled together.

We've been pointing-out, every time we encounter a demon in the Gospel of Mark, that demonic possession was at a fever-pitch when Jesus was on the earth. There was an invasion of demons, as a strategy of Satan's to oppose the ministry of the Son of God. Not so much before He came, if the Old Testament is any indication.

We're also suggesting that we see far less demon possession today because Jesus is ascended, and Satan has so many other, more effective, strategies for robbing, killing, and destroying.

Mar 7:27 But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Taken at face value, this might sound harsh. It's not; in fact, it's very tender.

A key word, overlooked on account of all the concern about the reference to "little dogs," is the word, "first." It would have ignited hope in the woman's heart. "First" is not a word of refusal. Jesus wasn't saying "No," but He was saying "Wait."

I said earlier that Jesus was sent to the Jews "first." The Gospel was also for the Gentiles - for all non-Jews, but in God's timing.

Jesus put the woman's request in the context of a household. The characters He introduced were "the children," and "the little dogs."

- "The children" are the children of Israel, the Jews, the nation of Israel.
- "The little dogs" are Gentiles - all non-Jews.

I've always read that Jews might sometimes derogatorily refer to Gentiles as "dogs." There is far less proof of that than is necessary to form a conclusion. While it's clear Jews kept separate from Gentiles, we should not accuse them of slandering them without sufficient evidence; that would be a form of anti-Semitism.

There is a word for "dogs" that describes the mongrel dogs, with no owners, that prowled the streets; mangy, vicious, rabid creatures that you'd throw stones at, or scare off with sticks.

Jesus used the word, "little dogs," which means *pets*. Far from the despicable creatures called dogs, these were beloved pets, so much so that they were in the house, romping with the children.

Mar 7:28 And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."

Johnny Carson had quite a few mannerisms, and bits, that are now legendary in the world of comedy. In his nightly monologue, he would frequently say, "It was so cold," then pause. It was a cue to the audience to shout out, "How cold was it?," after which he would deliver the punch line.

Jesus' words to this woman begged a response. He gave her an opening to say what needed to be said, so He could then deliver the spiritual punch line.

She understood what Jesus was saying. In this answer the woman was letting Jesus know that she understood His mission as Messiah to the Jews. But she also understood His ultimate mission to both Jews and Gentiles as the Savior of the world.

She didn't take offense, and say, "Who You callin' a dog?" No, she humbled herself, and threw herself upon the mercy of God.

Nonbelievers, especially, get too easily offended by the sayings of Jesus, and of the Bible in general. The Bible declares every human being a sinner. Jesus upheld that description by preaching repentance. It offends people, who think they are more good than they are bad.

We ought rather to agree with God, because the person who understands they are a sinner will seek a Savior, and find there is only one - Jesus.

Mar 7:29 Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

This could be translated, "go your way; for with the blessing of this word, the devil is gone out of your daughter." Using that translation, the words, "this saying," refer to the word Jesus spoke, and not to her answer.

It's clear she had faith, and that she answered profoundly. But we don't want to give the impression that there are any hoops to jump through in order to be saved. Jesus' encounter with this woman had far-reaching theological importance; it wasn't typical.

Truth is, when a person first comes to Jesus Christ, they know very little. But that's OK, because you don't need to be able to pass a spiritual test in order to throw yourself on the mercy of God.

The daughter was immediately delivered, exorcized from a distance. Again, it's important we point out that Jesus was not bound to any method of casting out demons.

Today, we need to not be bound to our own ideas of what must take place in order for God to act. We tend to think this way more than we suppose.

In the end, the Syro-Phoenecian woman's example to us is faith coupled with humility which trusts Jesus to act according to His Word.

Some of you are thinking, "Why isn't Jesus answering my prayer?" "If He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, why am I still struggling? Still suffering?"

I believe that set of concerns to be the biggest stumbling-block nonbelievers have when considering the claims of Jesus Christ. And it is a huge problem for Christians.

The answer lies in understanding the times in which we live. Jesus came to the Jews first - but He was rejected. He did not stay on the earth to establish and rule His kingdom. He ascended into Heaven, promising to come again.

In the mean time, in the in-between age in which we live, His power and glory are being revealed not through multitudes of healings and other such miracles. No, instead He has told us that His power and glory are revealed in our weaknesses.

We still need faith coupled with humility which trusts Jesus to act according to His Word. But, most of the time, what we receive from Him is grace sufficient for the predicament we are in.

C.S. Lewis once said, "We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be."

You are never beyond the Lord's help. You just need to recognize the kind of help He is giving you. Most often it is His strength to go through the trial; it is taking a walk with Him through the valley of the shadow of death.

#2 Always Know That You Are On The Lord's Heart

(v31-37)

It was the spit that was watched around the country.

In the mini-series, *Roots*, Missy Anne's carriage stops at the Moore plantation, and Missy Anne demands a cup of water from Kizzy. An aged Missy Anne does not recognize Kizzy until Kizzy reveals her identity to her. In the past, Missy Anne had not stopped Kizzy from being sold to a cruel, abusive plantation owner. Missy Anne pretends not to know Kizzy, who turns her back and angrily spits in the cup of water she then gives to Missy Anne to drink.

Jesus is going to spit as part of His healing of a deaf mute. Gross or grace? Let's see.

Mar 7:31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.

"Decapolis" was the name given to an area involving ten cities. It's similar to us using the phrase Tri-Cities or Tri-State to refer to three cities or states.

The Lord was back in Jewish territory. How much rest He and His boys got remains an unanswered question.

Mar 7:32 Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him.

It's hard to formulate a complete diagnosis. He was deaf, for sure; but just exactly what his "speech impediment" was, we don't know. Some suggest that, since he was deaf, it impeded his speaking. After all, if you can't hear yourself, it's difficult to form words.

Others suggest he may have suffered from a physical condition, e.g., tongue-tie.

His friends did the talking, begging Jesus to "put His hand on Him."

Obviously they wanted the man healed, but they asked in a way that suited their own understanding. They didn't ask Jesus to heal him, but to "put His hand on him."

Do we ever ask Jesus for help, but sort of phrase it as if we want it a certain way? Sure; it's all too common.

Jesus had no specific method for performing healings - or any other miracles. He might put His hand on a person; He might not. Nobody puts Jesus in a box.

Well, we try to; but we shouldn't. "Have Thine own way, Lord," ought to permeate our prayers.

Mar 7:33 And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.

Mar 7:34 Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

This guy's friends had done the talking, but now Jesus takes him aside, away from everyone, to have a conversation with him. It immediately validates him as a person, showing him that Jesus cares for him personally.

Jesus invented a spiritual sign language for the occasion:

- Jesus "put His fingers in his ears," signifying He was going to open his closed ears.
- Skip the spitting for a moment, and next we see that Jesus "touched his tongue," signifying He was also going to give him the ability to speak.
- "Looking up to Heaven" signified the true source of the healing.
- Skip the sighing for a moment, and next Jesus says, "Be opened," which are the first words this man had ever heard - validating everything Jesus said He would do.

Jesus *signed* the healing, and I think that's pretty cool.

We might say that Jesus met this guy right where he was at. The Gospel is a universal message, adaptable to any culture, and any time in history. God meets folks where they are at - without watering-down the message.

OK, so what about the spitting? I don't know, but let me suggest something for your consideration that I think both fits the context, and portrays Jesus in a tender, compassionate light.

What if the man's speech impediment were tongue-tie?
According to the Mayo Clinic,

Tongue-tie (*ankyloglossia*) is a condition present at birth that restricts the tongue's range of motion. With tongue-tie, an unusually short, thick or tight band of tissue tethers the bottom of the tongue's tip to the floor of the mouth. A person who has tongue-tie might have difficulty sticking out his or her tongue. Tongue-tie can also affect the way a child eats, speaks and swallows, as well as interfere with breast-feeding.

Another website, dedicated to tongue-tie, mentioned the following:

Salivary profusion due to inadequate coordination of swallowing during speech becomes both visually and auditorily obvious.

That is a nice way of saying you will drool and spit.

Why would Jesus spit? If this man suffered from tongue-tie, and had "salivary profusion," at that moment, spitting was a way of saying, "I identify with you." It was a way of letting the man know that Jesus was touched by his infirmities.

Maybe you don't think healing him from tongue-tie is a big miracle. That's OK; there are a slew of other, more serious, conditions that can cause increased saliva.

I'm trying to show how what seems a little gross to us is really grace. Besides - He took the guy aside, privately, before He spit.

This line of reasoning fits with the other word we skipped, where it describes Jesus by saying, "He sighed." It's a word that means a deep, unutterable groaning in Jesus' spirit. It's a perfect word to let us know how deeply Jesus cared for this man.

Jesus had never met him before... But He had created him in his mother's womb. His life of spitting and suffering were not unknown, nor overlooked, by the Lord. He carried this guy on His heart and, when they were one-on-one, Jesus sighed, signifying His own reaction to the sufferings of the human race.

The Lord knows **you**; He formed **you**. He knows your tears; in fact, He has them saved, in a special bottle, in Heaven.

When Jesus sees your suffering, there's a sigh within Him. How can He not cry for you, even as He wept for Lazarus, and at the coming destruction of Jerusalem?

It's not quite time for Him to return to the earth. There is a time of trouble coming first, preceding His Second Coming, to reach out one last time to the lost.

But make no mistake: He is coming, and when He does, we will be coming with Him, having previously been resurrected from the dead or raptured while yet alive.

And then there will be no more tears for us, or Him. All our *sighs* will be *shouts* of great joy.

[Mar 7:35](#) Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

One, two, three; just like that. No therapy to learn speech patterns, or to recognize sounds. Complete wholeness.

We ought to strive for excellence in serving the Lord. His works are excellent, and He is our example.

That doesn't mean we need the very best of everything - only that we make the best of everything we've got. While God will use whatever we offer Him, we should strive for excellence.

One of the ways Christians are portrayed are as builders - as spiritual builders. Most of us have some contact with builders - with contractors. Do we want to hire one who just gets the job done? Or one whose work is excellent?

How much more should we build for the Lord.

Mar 7:36 Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it.

I know it's wrong to say this, but I can't blame these guys. *Of course you're going to tell people.*

Jesus' frequent instruction to folks He'd healed, to keep quiet, highlight that He believed His primary ministry to be preaching and teaching - not miracles.

Mar 7:37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

These were among the specific signs that the Messiah would perform, to give evidence to His identity. There could be no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was the One who was long ago promised in the Scriptures.

You're never beyond the Lord's help; you're ever on the Lord's heart. Stand, in His all-sufficient grace, and rejoice in Him always.

