

“Dogs, Crumbs, & Faith”

Series: Jesus and His Gospel: Studies in Mark – Part 23

Mark 7:24-37

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Mark 7, Mark chapter 7.

I trust you had a great Thanksgiving with family and friends. I hope it served as a semicolon in the sentence that is your life – giving you a chance to catch your breath and reflect on all that there is in your life to give thanks to God for. We had the privilege of hosting 5 international students from WSU, and I only say that to encourage you to consider this ministry in the days and years to come. You don't have to host 5, you can host just 1. Even if you host only one it will definitely take you out of your comfort zone, which is a really good place to be as a follower of Jesus. I was struck by how easy it was to show these students the love of God in simple ways, and how interested they were in learning our culture and in learning about our family. One of the students we hosted happened to be a believer already – he even brought his Bible with him – and he talked with me during most of lunch about his faith in God and about his desire to be a witness to others – all the while the other 4 were listening in – it was wonderful! I would strongly encourage you to consider this ministry in the future – may we be lights full of love for our fellowman.

For in doing this we will be following in the footsteps of our Savior. This is what is happening in the life of Jesus in the book of Mark. He is the Love of God in the flesh. He is making known the mercy of God, the power of God, and the love of God in all of his words and acts. In the first 6 ½ chapters of the book Jesus is ministering mostly among the Jewish people. His ministry has put him at odds with the religious leaders of the day – the Pharisees and Scribes – and they are now out to seek a way to put him to death. Jesus is still wildly popular with the crowds at this point, but though they love to be around him, few of them have actually placed their complete faith in his message. Few have truly understood his teaching, and few would be so interested in him if it wasn't for his miraculous works. Mark 7 is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. In verses 1-23 he has clashed with the religious leaders over their adherence to the tradition of the elders. He has told them plainly that they cling to manmade traditions and have thereby rejected the Word of God. Most recently, in verse 19 he has made clear that the OT food restrictions are no longer valid because the Law has been fulfilled in Him. Needless to say, these paradigm shattering statements and actions have not made him very popular with the Jews committed to their idea of the Law. So, from verse 24 Jesus' strategy for ministry changes. Where before this point he was almost always in Galilee ministering among the common Jew, he will now find himself in mostly pagan or Gentile places. And so this morning we are going to look at two encounters that Jesus has with Gentile people. These two encounters are part of a string of three episodes that Mark records for us in succession, and each one gives us greater insight into the person and the

ministry of the Messiah. As Jesus departs with his 12 inner core of disciples and heads up into the Gentile and very pagan region of Tyre he is confronted by a woman with a great need. After this he goes to the Decapolis and is confronted by a crowd asking him to heal a deaf and mute man. These two incidents teach us about the nature of true faith. Let's start reading in verse 24.

Jesus finds himself in completely Gentile territory. He has intentionally left Galilee and headed to the region of one of Israel's most despised neighbors. Tyre and Sidon were the two main cities of the Syrophenician region. Israel has a long history with the people of this region. During the days of Elijah the king – King Ahab – married a Syrophenician by the name of Jezebel whose home town was Tyre. Tyre was also the seedbed of Baal worship, and this idolatry had only evolved and strengthened from the time of Elijah's day to the time of Jesus' day. The ten northern tribes had often been complicit in the worship of idols and this spiritual adultery eventually led to God's hand of judgment in 722BC when all 10 tribes were carried away into captivity, never to officially return. The Jews who did eventually settle in the northern part of the country – or Galilee as it is referred to in the Gospels – were a group of Jews who hated idolatry and religiously held to their idea of the Mosaic Law and Its demands upon them. Therefore, Tyre and Sidon only became more and more of a stench in the Jewish nostrils. They were also a political threat as they were friendly to the Romans, and so you can imagine, the region of Tyre and Sidon was a region where Jews never intentionally went.

But here is Jesus, leading his 12 disciples there. We don't know exactly what he is doing there. He may be seeking some reprieve. He may be seeking solitude for the sake of rest. He may be seeking a quieter setting away from the Jewish crowds to be able to teach his disciples. He may be shrewdly avoiding the political machinations of the religious elite who are trying to kill him. Or it may be some combination of the above. I personally think that Jesus has mostly finished his ministry in Galilee. The people there have made their rejection of him clear. He is entering the last year of his ministry and therefore of his earthly life, and it is now time to invest every minute he can into his disciples. Over the next few chapters we will read of many private conversations with his disciples where he seeks to prepare them for his own death. And so, I think this excursion into Syrophenicia in chapter 7 is the beginning of that focus in Jesus' ministry. I think he is also avoiding the unbelieving crowds and the crafty Pharisees. It is not yet His time to lay down his life, and he is going to make sure it doesn't happen before it is time.

But there is also more going on in this excursion of Jesus into Gentile territory. He intends to teach his disciples about the true nature of faith, both their own faith and the faith of others.

And, so I want to point out three truths to you this morning about faith. Faith must have the right character and the right object and the right expectations.

I. Faith Must have the Right Character (The woman)

- a. In the woman who begs for Jesus' mercy to be lavished on her daughter we see the right character of faith. Mark's account doesn't explicitly say that the woman exhibited faith, though it is obvious in the text. But in the parallel in Matthew, Jesus comments that this woman has super abundant faith – great faith!

- b. Remember that this great faith is exhibited in the context of a Gentile woman who has no “right” to approach a Jewish teacher. But she had obviously heard of Jesus before this day. She had caught tale of his prolific healing ministry and his teaching with authority. She may even have been one of those in the great crowd that followed Jesus early on in his ministry. Mark tells us in chapter 3 that people from Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan and even from the region of – you guessed it – Tyre and Sidon – followed Jesus in those early days. Whether she had seen him before or not she heard he was in town and that was all it took. She raced to the home where he was staying and pleaded with him to heal her daughter. When Jesus responds to her request with a perplexing parable that would have thrown most of us into a defensive tizzy she responds with reasoned wit and continues to fight for mercy to be shown to her daughter. The woman had obviously seen or heard of Jesus’ power over the unclean spirits, and she is convinced that He can do something about the unclean spirit who is plaguing her daughter. But what kind of faith is it that doesn’t give up and that wins the merciful work of God? What is the character of saving faith? Well it is a faith fueled by desperation.
- c. Desperation
 - i. This woman’s faith is grounded in her total comprehension of just how bad the situation is. Her daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit. Most likely, since there is no husband or father mentioned, this woman is a widow or single mother of some sort. She is fighting this battle alone. And the battle with these epic spiritual lines drawn is an exhausting battle to be fighting by yourself. Perhaps she had tried all of the rituals and incantations and spell reversals her pagan religion had to offer her – and all without success. And so here she finds herself as desperate as can be – prostrate before a Jewish Rabbi seeking his help for her daughter.
 - ii. This partly explains her calm response to Jesus’ parable. So, she falls at his feet and pleads with him to heal her daughter. Matthew tells us that she repeatedly was asking him, to the point where the disciples were trying to get her thrown out of the house because they were getting annoyed with her. And finally Jesus answers her, but the answer is at best perplexing, and at worst offensive. He answers her with a parable. In other words, he doesn’t give her a straight yes or no, but rather he seeks to identify her situation through the use of a parable. He says to her in verse 27 – let the little children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs. Now, this is a true parable. So, when you finally had your thanksgiving table prepared and those of you who happen to have both small children and dogs in, or around, your home, it would not have been appropriate for you to make up your child’s plate filled with fresh baked bread and turkey and stuffing and mashed potatoes and gravy and green bean casserole and show it to your child and then go set it down before the dog. Worse yet, it would not have been okay for you to put it in front of your kids and then upon hearing the dog whining for

food take the half-eaten plate from your child and give it to the dog. That is not okay. And so Jesus answers her with this very true and very real to life parable.

- iii. Now, if it is you and I in that room, we are ready to go on this one. We can feel the self-defensive nerves all bunching up in our chest ready to inform our mouths all of the nasty ways to declare our own rights. All people are created equal after all. Who are you calling a dog? I'm not a dog, and I don't need your healing! We would have stormed out of that room with a rant so large that no one would have known what hit them. But that is not what this woman does.
- iv. By the way, I don't think Jesus was being needlessly offensive here, nor do I think he used careless and hurtful words. I will explain this more in a minute, but he was simply describing the truth about where they were at in the progression of God's saving work. The children of Israel were to receive the bread first, and their meal wasn't done yet.
- v. But the woman, out of desperation and humility does not get defensive and storm off. Rather, she lets Jesus' parable define her and she responds within the context of the parable by saying to Jesus, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." This is a desperate faith. A desperate faith is a faith that allows God to define us instead of us getting to define God. You see, an arrogant and self-focused faith defines God according to what it thinks and needs and then it demands of God what it wants. That is not what this woman does. She understands that Jesus as the Lord of all gets to determine who she is and the terms upon which she will be able to receive his mercy. She is desperate because she is totally out of options and hope. Jesus is her last chance, therefore she is willing to be defined within his paradigm instead of trying to change his paradigm.
- vi. As David Garland says in his commentary "No one likes being called hypocrites, an evil generation, brood of vipers, whitewashed tombs, foxes, or dogs. Our pride kicks in and keeps us from ever asking for help again. We will turn to gods of our own making who will not offend us, because we convince ourselves that we are special and truly worthy of God's grace and help. Only when we are truly desperate are we willing to do anything it takes, including humbling ourselves, to find God's help."¹
- vii. That is this woman – desperate and humble – willing to entrust herself to Jesus' paradigm so that she might find help on his terms.

d. Humility

- i. This woman's faith is not only born in desperation, but it is carried along by humility. This woman has no business being before the Son of God. She has no right to appear before a Jewish teacher. She should not have even been let in the door, at least according to the tradition of the elders. In

¹ David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, pg. 294.

verses 25-26 there is a building case against this woman. First – she is a woman, which meant she held a lower social status in the Jewish culture of the day. Not only that, but she is a woman who has an unclean spirit possessing her daughter. So she is ceremonially unclean by the very nature of what she is dealing with at home. She is not just an unclean woman, but she is a Gentile woman, and she is a Gentile of the worst kind – she is a Syrophenician by birth. Matthew tells us that she was a Canaanite. In other words, she was of the Gentile clan that was destined for destruction by God, but whom the children of Israel never fully got rid of. She was part of a cursed people, living in a land filled with idolatry and putrid rejection of the one True God. And yet, here she is falling at the feet of Jesus.

- ii. In other words, it is like she is applying for a computer engineering job and her resume says that she has never worked on a computer before, and that she tends to destroy all electrical things that she works with, and she cannot keep a job for longer than a day because her anger overwhelms her and she lashes out at others. On top of this spectacular resume is a cover letter that says – I am not qualified for this job and probably will never do it well, but I appeal to your kindness – please hire me! It is an impossible situation.
- iii. Her desperation drives her to Jesus and her humility keeps her there. She knows who she is. She knows that she has no rights before the Son of God. Her theology is pretty good so far. She knows he is the Lord. She knows that he is the Son of David. In other words, she is convinced Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. And so, when Jesus' parable likens her to a dog begging for food she does not storm off in a huff, but rather in humble faith she receives Jesus' description as true. She sees that she is like a dog begging for food and she understands that the Jewish Messiah is on Earth primarily for the Jews – to save His own people, but she also knows that dogs eat crumbs when they fall from the table. And so she responds by reminding Jesus that even dogs can receive the blessing of a meal at the same time the children are eating because the kids will drop food and the dogs devour it under the table. As Tim Keller says – this is rightless assertiveness. In other words, she has no rights and yet she asserts herself before the Lord and persists in her request. She is not here saying to Jesus – Lord, I deserve for you to heal my daughter because I am so good. No – she is here agreeing with Jesus – I have no right to be here, and I do not deserve what I know you can do. I am not asking for you to give this healing to my daughter based on my goodness, but rather based on your goodness. I am here asking you to give me what I don't deserve because you are a good God.²

² Timothy Keller, *King's Cross*, pg. 88-89

- iv. This is the nature of saving faith! It humbly accepts God's description of my own evil and sinfulness, and then it boldly asserts a plea for mercy based on the goodness of God. We are all in need of a Savior. This woman's plight puts on display that it was not just the lost sheep of Israel who needed a Savior. It wasn't just the Israelites who were oppressed by demons. It was people of all races and nationalities. Because regardless of skin color and heritage and family tree – we all share one thing in common. We are all sinners who have boldly rejected the God of Heaven and rebelled against Him. We have a universal need of a Savior, and Jesus is that Savior!
- v. So the acceptance of Jesus to save us from our sins can be prevented by an unwillingness to allow him to define how bad we really are. It can be prevented by a shallow self-defensiveness that doesn't see our sin problem as being as destructive as it is. So, saving faith in Jesus is born of a desperation that understands the complete destitution of personal sin. Without this we will not receive mercy. But acceptance of Jesus can also be prevented by a false humility that refuses to plead with God for mercy because it somehow is convinced that God can't possibly save someone who is so terrible. This is not humble faith, but a lack of true faith in God. It is an overestimation of myself and an underestimation of God. Authentic faith in God is convinced of a total lack of goodness in the individual and a super-abundance of goodness in God. This propels them to seek mercy from God. That is what is happening with the Syrophenician woman. She is compelled by her own lack of goodness – desperation – and she is carried along by humble faith allowing God to define her – and she seeks for mercy because of the absolute goodness of Jesus.
- e. Persistence
 - i. And in this we see the persistence of her faith. Being ever so convinced of his goodness, she refuses to stop asking for his mercy even when others are telling her to be quiet. She even refuses to stop asking when Jesus' initial response doesn't look so favorable. She takes Jesus at His word and believes that His mercy will overflow to her as she persistently asks. And so, empty of her own right to ask for mercy, she casts herself completely on a God whom she is convinced is abounding in mercy for sinners just like her.
- f. Therefore, Show Rightless Assertiveness
 - i. And so, we must also show this rightless assertiveness. We must also recognize our desperation and we must humbly and persistently seek the mercy of God – based not on our goodness, but based solely on His goodness. It is this kind of faith that Jesus loves to meet with abundant mercy. A faith that makes little of us and much of God. A faith that claims no rights other than the goodness of God's own character.

- ii. This is true for saving faith – so friend, if you are here this morning and you have never come to Jesus Christ in faith to save you from your sin – I say to you from the example of this woman – come to him today with rightless assertiveness. Cry out to God for mercy so that based on his character and his work he might save you from your sin.
- iii. This is also true of sanctifying faith. We must ever be established and built up in our faith. We are, as Christians, on a journey of faith in following Jesus in this life. And the same desperate, humble, and persistent character of saving faith should only increase as we grow in our sanctification. As we grow in Christ we should only recognize all the more that we are unworthy of his mercy and grace, and the only reason we ever receive it is because of His goodness, not ours. This changes the nature of our appeal to the Lord for mercy. We are not seeking His mercy based on our goodness – this is a hopeless and groundless venture. We must seek his mercy and grace based on His goodness secured for us in Jesus Christ. This rightless assertiveness should mark the life of the believer. So, authentic faith should be born in desperation and carried along by humility and persistent in pursuing mercy. Faith must also have the right object.

II. Faith Must have the Right Object (Jesus, the Savior)

- a. These two accounts of Jesus' interactions with Gentiles makes this clear. Jesus' nature is put on display in the text in a way to make known that true faith has Jesus, the Savior as its object. In other words our faith is not to be steadied upon our own faith, or our own religious effort, or our own goodness. Rather, the only appropriate object of faith is God. When we gaze upon the character of Jesus in the text, we are all the more convinced that he is the proper object of faith. So, we see Jesus as the Lord of glory in verses 24-25.
- b. The Lord of Glory – vs. 24-26
 - i. In verse 24 specifically – the glory of Jesus cannot be hidden. As he brings the Kingdom of God near through his very presence on Earth – his glory spills over onto the normal scenes of everyday life, and people take notice. So, the woman had heard about Jesus, and now she hears he is in her town. The glory of Jesus had preceded his physical presence. He had built a reputation and it was a glory-filled reputation. He was a man who had authority over unclean spirits and over disease and death. There is no one else like Jesus, and this woman obviously knows that. There is no other object upon which she can fix her faith. There is no other object worthy of her faith. And so here she casts her faith completely and entirely upon the Lord of Glory – Jesus of Nazareth. Your faith must have the right object – the Lord of glory.
- c. The Lord of Super-Abundant Mercy – vs. 24, 27-28b, 31
 - i. He is also the Lord of Super-Abundant mercy. So, step back from the details of the passage for a minute and take a big picture look at what is

going on here. Jesus has ventured outside of national Israel and he has gone to some of Israel's most hated neighbors.

- ii. This is reminiscent of Elijah in 1 Kings 17 treading on the territory of Jezebel to help a widow and her son. Yes, Elijah was God's prophet to God's people, but God directed him in the time of great need to go and pour out abundant blessing upon a Gentile widow in Jezebel's own backyard, rather than to a Jewish widow. This incident in Mark 7 is also reminiscent of God's command to Jonah to go to Nineveh. The Ninevites were the most hated of Israel's enemies at the time and Jonah didn't want to go and preach to them the message of repentance because he was afraid God would indeed show them mercy if they repented. And indeed, after a detour in the belly of a fish, Jonah finally does obey God, and what does God do – shows super-abundant mercy on a people who least deserved it. God shows through the ministry of OT prophets, and now The Prophet, that his work of mercy and grace is to come through His chosen people to be profited from by all peoples – even Israel's worst and most hated enemies. God intends to honor the promise that through the seed of Abraham all the world will be blessed. He is a God of super-abundant mercy. He is not the God of a limited mercy that is only for one people group or one nation. He is not content to be one nation's God, he is intent on being the God of all peoples as he lavishes out mercy upon mercy on all of Adam's race.
 - iii. Therefore, what better object upon which to place our entire faith? What God shows mercy like this God? What God lavishes out super-abundant mercy on all people who humbly seek it? What God then is worthy of our faith? Only the God of Heaven. Only Jesus of Nazareth.
- d. The Lord of the Impossible – vs. 32, 37
- i. He is also the Lord of the Impossible. We see this primarily in the interaction with the crowd in the Decapolis region. After a long and circuitous journey from Tyre up through Sidon and over East and finally south, avoiding all Jewish territory, Jesus turns up in the mostly Gentile region of the Decapolis which is on the Southeastern part of the Sea of Galilee. The people of the Decapolis recognize Jesus and bring him a deaf and mute man.
 - ii. These people had heard of Jesus from the amazing work he did on the demoniac, and they had seen his great works when he healed many in their region – even by them just touching the hem of his garment back in chapter 6. Now, they bring him a case that seems impossible to them – a deaf and a mute man. It is almost as if they were trying to give Jesus the hardest case possible to egg him on to greater expressions of his power. After the man is healed their response seems to prove this theory. They are greatly astonished and can't stop talking about what Jesus has done. He once again proves himself to be the Lord of the Impossible. Situations and diseases and unclean spirits that normal man could do nothing about

found their waterloo in Jesus. No expression of sin's horrific consequence was too difficult for Jesus to deal with, not even a deaf and mute man. He is the Lord of the Impossible, and therefore He is the only appropriate object of our faith. Put your trust in no other.

- e. The Lord Who Does All Things Well – vs. 37
 - i. The reality that Jesus is the Lord of the Impossible, leads to the declaration by the crowd that indeed he has done all things well. Jesus had told the crowd to be silent about the healing. He didn't want them to go around spreading the news. Mostly this is because Jesus did not come primarily as a miracle worker, but as a Messiah Savior whose character was proved through miraculous works. These people didn't understand Jesus that way, and therefore they are not good mouthpieces for him, and so he tells them to stop.
 - ii. And yet, because the glory of God has broken through the curtain of humanity people cannot be silent about it. They are so overwhelmed by the outstanding character of Jesus and His works. They are astonished beyond measure and proclaim that he has done all things well. The more he charged them the more zealously they proclaimed it. These words describing Jesus as doing all things well are reminiscent of the words describing God's creative work in Genesis 1 and 2. God's work there was all very good. Here, the Son proves to be that very God in that all that he does on the face of His Creation is just as good as all of the works he did in making His creation. Jesus is the Lord who does all things well. Every way in which he redeems mankind from the curse and effect of sin and restores them to God – all of it is good – yea, very good! Therefore, Jesus is the proper and only reasonable object of faith.
 - iii. And having the proper object of your faith makes all the difference. Suppose I told you to meet me in the Family Center after the service this morning because I was going to hand out \$10,000 to every family as an early Christmas present. You would certainly think it was some kind of joke because you know there is no way I could come up with that kind of money. But you would probably show up just to see how I was going to weasel my way out of it. But what if Bill Gates showed up in our service this morning and told us all that he was going to give out \$10k to all of our families after the morning service. Your interest would be peaked and you would definitely show up because the person making the offer has the ability to keep it. You see the object of your faith makes all the difference in your faith. Jesus is an entirely capable and able Savior because he is the Lord of Glory, the Lord of Super-Abundant mercy, the Lord of the Impossible, and the Lord who does all things well.
- f. Therefore, Fix Your Eyes on Jesus
 - i. Therefore, there is no other option. Fix your eyes on Jesus – the author and finisher of your faith. He alone is worthy to save you, and He alone is worthy of your ever increasing faith as you seek to follow Him in the

context of real life. Christian, see the Jesus in the text. He is not just the Lord of the impossible when it comes to your eternal salvation. I know you believe that. He is also the Lord of the Impossible when it comes to that anger you are harboring, or that sin you are coddling, or that disease that drags you low, or that circumstance you cannot rightly handle. Jesus is the only proper object of your faith. Cast yourself upon him. Fix your eyes upon His ways and His doings. Find your hope, find your way, find the truth, find it all in Jesus alone! Where does your exercise of faith need to be refocused on Christ?

III. Faith Must have the Right Expectations (The Disciples & The Crowd)

- a. Authentic faith must have the right character and the right object, and it must also have the right expectations. The disciples had been told a number of times already to listen carefully and pay attention to what Jesus was saying. He had taught them often about who He was as the Messiah, and yet they so often missed it. They were still dull of hearing. But it was not just the disciples who were lacking understanding. It was also the great crowds that followed Jesus. They loved Jesus for his miraculous works, and they were awed by his wonderful doings among men, but they were ignorant of his true character and his true intentions. As Jesus leads these 12 men into Tyre and Sidon and then down to the Decapolis, I think Jesus is teaching them through test cases and object lessons what he intends to be as a Savior. In other words, He is seeking to change their expectations. He is seeking to rightly inform them about who he intends to be as the Messiah and Savior.
- b. He Intends to be the Savior of all Peoples through the Jewish People
 - i. God's plan of salvation is to bring grace to all peoples through the Jewish people. But the Jewish people had believed that they were the end of salvation – not the means. They thought they were the cul-de-sac, not the street. Jesus is here teaching his own disciples this crucial lesson about the Gospel they will be entrusted with. It is not just a message of salvation for one people. Jesus is not here on Earth simply to save Jews through political overthrow and military might. Jesus is here on Earth to set in unstoppable motion His plan to save some from every tribe, tongue, and nation by rescuing them from their sin. And he intends on using His people, the Jewish people, to bring that salvation to the nations.
 - ii. That is what is going on in Jesus' interaction with the Syrophenician woman. When Jesus says to her to let the little children be fed first because it is not right to take their food and cast it to the dogs. That is what he is referring to. His plan is to make himself known to His people and to bring salvation to the Jews first and then to bring this salvation to the Gentiles through the Jews. His statement is not meant to be offensive, and I am convinced that Jesus knew this woman had a strong faith and he knew that he could say things like this to her and she would respond the way she did. He seized the opportunity so as to make known to his disciples that the Jews were not the end all of the Gospel, but Jesus

intended for them to be the means of the Gospel. But for them to be the means of the Gospel they had to have right expectations of their faith in this Jesus. In other words, they had to be taught what it would mean to truly follow Him and carry his message. In the recognition of great faith in the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus is showing his 12 disciples that faith exists outside of Israel. Jesus intends to be the Savior of some from all peoples and he intends to use the Jewish people to turn their world upside down with that message. The Gospel must come to the Jew first, but then it will go to the Gentile.

- c. He Intends to open ears and loosen tongues in the saving of All Peoples
 - i. Jesus also intends to open ears and loosen tongues in the saving of all peoples. This is what we see in the deaf and mute man in the region of Decapolis.
 - ii. The opening of the man's ears and the loosing of his tongue is symbolic of God's work in salvation in general, we understand, are changed by what we understand, and our tongues are propelled to give confession of belief (Rom. 10:9-10). This physical healing is a symbol of a greater spiritual reality. Just like this man was blessed to understand and blessed to speak, so the work of Jesus to save people will be like this. He will give them ears to hear and tongues to confess.
 - iii. Specifically in this passage this is symbolic of the 12 apostles. These men needed to be given ears to hear and tongues to speak. Up to this point in Jesus' mission it seems as though they don't yet have fully opened ears, and therefore they are not yet good witnesses for Jesus. It seems that they are especially deficient in understanding that Jesus intends to be the Savior of all nationalities and races, not just the Jews. The word used for "speech impediment" in verse 32 is not used anywhere else in the NT, and the only other place it is used in all of Scripture is in Isaiah 35. In that passage Isaiah is recounting the judgment of God that is going to fall on all nations, including Israel, because of their idolatrous sinfulness. But then in chapter 35 the focus changes to the coming day of the Messiah when he will intervene in the course of human history and accomplish all kinds of miraculous works – among which will be the loosing of the mute's tongue. It is especially instructive then that Jesus here heals a Gentile's mute tongue. He is intending to show his own disciples that he intends to be the Savior of all people – even the most despised of peoples.
- d. Therefore, Have Your Faith Shaped by Right Expectations
 - i. Therefore, we must learn this lesson too. We must have a faith that is shaped by right expectations. You can have faith in Jesus that is expecting him to do things that he never intends to do. Hence, our faith must be shaped by what he intends to do. Israel's faith in Jesus during his earthly ministry was mostly a vain faith because they were expecting Jesus to do and be something Jesus never intended to do or be, and Jesus gets to determine his mission and his work – our faith in him does not. Israel

thought they were the end all of God's saving work through the Messiah. But Jesus is making clear that they were only the beginning. They were the means to a more glorious end – some from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people to be redeemed by the blood of the Sacrificial Lamb.

- ii. As the Church we have a tendency to think this way as well. We have a tendency to think of ourselves as a pool rather than as a channel. We tend to sit back and rejoice in all that God has saved us from. We tend to look down our noses at the vile expressions of human depravity that abound in our culture. We tend to cloister ourselves together only with other believers because we want to remain unstained. But this is not what Jesus intended our faith in Him to look like. We are not the end all, but the means to the end. Your salvation and your sanctification are to propel you more and more to be a mouthpiece for God as He seeks and saves those who are still lost and dying in this world. So, rather than cast judgment on the looters and vandalizers in Ferguson, MO – maybe we should remember that it was for those kind of people for whom Jesus died. Maybe we should be heartbroken over the destruction that sin causes in our world, and maybe we should pray for the peace that only the Gospel can bring. We should have a faith that is rightly shaped in its expectations, and that then entrusts itself to God based on those expectations.

Let's pray!