

# The Gospel of Mark

## Part 25

the **Syrophonician Woman**  
and the **Deaf-Mute Man**

# TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a "transforming church". We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Since "Talking Points, Walking Points" is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to "dive deep" too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled "Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time", are perfect for private reflection.

## Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?  
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why?**
- From the following verses, what are the roots of the observation that "salvation is first from and for the Jews"?  
Genesis 12:1–3  
Galatians 3:6–9  
Romans 3:1–2 & 9:4–5
- What do you think—is the salvation of Gentiles an afterthought, a "Plan B"? Why or why not?
- Read Ephesians 2:11–22, and then consider these questions:  
Do the divisions in humanity sound trivial and temporary, or profound and permanent (v. 11-12)?  
According to v. 13-16 what has now been accomplished?  
According to v. 17-18, what is the path to salvation for Jews? for Gentiles? What do you conclude?  
What is the significance of "no longer" in v. 19?  
In v. 20-21, how many foundations are there? How many cornerstones? How many buildings?  
Who dwells in that one building (see v. 22)?
- How does Revelation 7:9–12 describe the scene in heaven?

# Sermon Summary

In today's text, Mark places an important question before us: "How should we approach someone like Jesus?" Today we have the accounts of how two very different people approached Jesus. Today we learn **how** we should approach Jesus and **why we can** approach Him that way.

**1. How we should approach Jesus** This Syrophenician woman knew that in Jewish eyes she lacked the credentials required to approach Jesus. After all, she was a Gentile, not a Jew. She was a pagan, not a God-worshiper. She was a woman and not a man. For all of these cultural and religious reasons, she knew that she ought not approach Jesus—but she did it anyway! That is what you do when you are desperate. She approached Jesus boldly, but humbly. She fell down at Jesus' feet, and began to beg for His help. She was persistent, annoyingly so. As we are going to see, this was a good quality about her! She was so persistent that the disciples begged Jesus to send her away, but she wouldn't take "no" for an answer. We understand the boldness of a desperate parent.

This is a controversial passage for modern readers—Jesus called a woman a "dog"!—but we must not water it down. It's important that we take it in full force because only then will we understand the humility with which we must come to Christ. Why did he call her a "dog", and what do we learn from all this? First of all it's important to realize that this is not a man-woman thing, but a Jew-Gentile thing (Matthew 15:24). Proclaiming the gospel to the Jews was a priority for Jesus but this woman's need was urgent, and she was unwilling to wait her turn. The fact that Jesus had refused to send her away as his disciples requested must have encouraged her to persevere in her requests for help. God has a plan for both Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 28:19), but it is to the Jew first (Romans 1:16 & 2:9-10). The Jews are God's chosen people, through whom came the prophets, the Scriptures and Messiah Jesus who is the Savior of the world. Jesus refers to the Jews as "children" and the Gentiles as "dogs". There are two words for dog in New Testament Greek. One refers to a wild dog—the kind that roam the streets. When this word is applied to people, it's always derogatory (Philippians 3:2).

But that is not what Jesus calls this Gentile woman. He used the word which refers to a small domesticated dog, a house pet—a puppy. In her reply to Jesus she referred to her daughter and herself with that same softer term, showing that she didn't take it in a hostile or contemptuous manner. This was not a brush-off—and she wouldn't take "no" for an answer: "Yes, Lord, but puppies eat from that table too. I'm here for my portion." She doesn't get all huffy. She doesn't stand on her rights. She doesn't say, "Who do you think you are? How dare you deny me. It's my right!" Essentially, she says, "Okay, I admit that I don't deserve a place at the table. That's fine. But there's more than enough on that table for everyone in the world, and I really need my portion right now." She is wrestling with Jesus in a most respectful way. "Okay, so the gospel goes to the Gentiles later. That's fine. All I want is a sneak preview! I just want a little taste of your blessing now." She is not saying, "You owe me; I deserve this!" She is contending for a blessing that she knows she is not owed. She is contending for grace! This is right-less assertiveness. She's not saying, "Give me what I deserve", but rather "On the basis of your goodness, mercy and grace, give me what I don't deserve—but please, give it to me now!"

She maintains the same distinction between "children" and "dogs" as Jesus did, but with one slight change. In v. 27 Jesus used the Greek word which refers to biological children, but in her response (v. 28) she used a more inclusive term which includes servants, not just children. She understood that the mercies of God would one day extend beyond ethnic Israel. In fact, she's banking on it! Her hope is founded on faith! In saying, "First let the children eat all they want" simply establishes a priority of mission; it does not exclude others. She accepts the terms by which Jesus addresses her, and yet contends with the Living God! She is in effect a female Jacob, who like him said, "I will not let you go until you bless me!" She understands the gospel: we are more wicked than we ever dare imagine and more loved and accepted than we ever dare to hope! Here is a woman who is not too proud to accept what the gospel says about her unworthiness. Had she proudly said to Jesus, "How dare you speak to me this way, I deserve better," you never would have heard of her. We can't stand before God on our own dignity. We can't appeal to our rights. God owes us nothing. This woman humbly accepted her inadequacy, but she didn't allow that fact to crush her.

**2. Why we can approach Jesus this way** "Next Jesus meets a man with an ear problem and a tongue problem—but Jesus has a solution for both! (v. 33-35) In none of his previous miracles did Jesus go through such an elaborate ritual as with this man. Jesus identified emotionally with him, taking him away from the crowd. All of his life he'd been a spectacle; teased since childhood. Jesus pulls him away from all of that. Jesus understood the pain this man's infirmity had brought him over the years, and Jesus expressed it to his heavenly Father with a deep moan. Jesus knew that healing this man would ultimately require his own death (Isaiah 35:3–6). Jesus came to bear divine vengeance for us on the cross. On the cross, Jesus—the ultimate Child of God—was cast away from the table without so much as a crumb so that all who look to Him humbly in faith can eat at God's table. Jesus had to become a "dog" so that we puppies could become sons and daughters at the table. For this man's tongue to be loosed, Jesus had to become the Lamb of God who remained mute before his shearers. Understanding what Jesus has done for us at the cross will give you that dogged persistence to say, "Lord, I'm not leaving until you bless me." One look at the cross will give you all the assertiveness you need! Not an assertiveness based on your rights or your goodness, but an assertiveness based on Jesus' goodness and grace.

## Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

**"Five Question Bible Study"** (see below) *is useful for studying any topic.*  
*Let's use it to explore Jesus' invitation to "come to him"...*

**Monday**—Why can we not deserve heaven? Read Isaiah 64:6; Galatians 2:16 & Luke 17:10.

**Tuesday**—What must we do with our achievements? Read Philippians 3:1-11.

**Wednesday**—What is the only way to God? Read Hebrews 10:19–23 & John 14:6.

**Thursday**—What had to be accomplished in order for us to be saved? Read Colossians 2:8–15.

**Friday**—To whom were we enslaved? To whom are we now enslaved? Read Romans 6:17–19.

**Saturday**—What do we confess, believe, and therefore experience? Read Romans 10:9–11.

### Five Question Bible Study

Bible Text: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]