

When Jesus Crosses the Borders

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 March 2022

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] The book of Mark chapter 7 and beginning to read at verse 24. Mark chapter 7 verse 24. Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet.

The woman was a Greek born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. First, let the children eat all they want, he told her, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs. Lord, she replied, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. Then he told her, for such a reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter. She went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon gone. Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.

There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, which means be opened. At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone, but the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. He has done everything well, they said. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. During those days, another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion for these people.

They have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way because some of them have come a long distance. His disciple answered, But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?

How many loaves do you have? Jesus asked. Seven, they replied. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well. He gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterwards, the disciples picked up seven baskets of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand were present. After he sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha. This is the word of the Lord.

[3 : 2 4] Thank you for reading that for us, Ruth. You can find a sermon outline, if you find that helpful, inside the notice sheet to see how we're breaking down what we're looking at together. But if you could keep your Bibles open, that would be really helpful. So we're looking at Mark chapter 7, page 1010, in those Bibles in the chairs in front of you. But it's great to have that to hand as we look at that together. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray.

The words of Jesus, whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning, and we know that we need your help to hear well. Give us ears able to hear, minds that can understand, and hearts that are willing to respond rightly to you. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're in a series in Mark's Gospel at the moment. And a good thing about working through a book of the Bible chapter by chapter is that it leaves you asking the right questions at the right moments. And the question we're asking as we come to the events this morning, if we've been reading Mark or looking at Mark, is this question. It's, is there anyone at all who can be made right with God? Or if we want to use Jesus' language, it would be, is there anyone who can become part of the kingdom of God? When we meet Jesus in Mark's Gospel, we find that clearly he is this undercover king with amazing power from God. And his message since chapter 1 of the Gospel has been, the time has come, the kingdom of heaven has drawn near, repent and believe the good news.

In other words, in Jesus' coming as God's king, the long-awaited kingdom of God has arrived. And now is the time to get on board with it, to become one of God's people, enjoying the blessing of knowing God, of being in a relationship with him. Now for centuries, God has promised this moment. God spoke through messengers, through these prophets, explaining, promising that there was going to be a great rescue by God. And that this king, when you come to him, the blessings of knowing God start straight away. But the real focus is on what this king will bring about in the future. That he's going to rescue everyone who turns to him by putting this whole world right, by fixing it, so that we can be with him in a perfect world forever. And Jesus is demonstrating that now, in his coming, the king is here. So who is going to be part of that new kingdom? Who's going to get on board with God's new community? Well, what about the people who are closest to Jesus? His home crowd? Well, we met them at the start of chapter 6, just back a page, just back a page, and it didn't go well. So in chapter 6, verse 6, we hear that Jesus was amazed by them. But it's chapter 6, verse 6, it says he was amazed at their lack of faith. So then he sends people out to proclaim the message. What about the ruling classes? The people who are living for pleasure and power? Well, they see that it's time to turn back to God. Well, we heard about John the

Baptist, the greatest preacher for generations, and how King Herod knew when he heard John the Baptist. He knew that John was a holy man. He knew that he was righteous. He even protected him for a time, and he liked to listen to him. But the bottom line is, Herod didn't want to change, and so he wouldn't respond. He wouldn't turn back to God. And eventually, he had John the Baptist beheaded, and John's followers had to come and take the body and put it in a tomb. So is it going to be just the small band of Jesus' followers who are rescued by God, the ones who are seeing more of him, who are hearing more of him, and keeping up with him? Well, we then saw Jesus feed a crowd miraculously, and we saw him walk on water in front of the disciples to show that he is God.

And then look with me at verse 51 of chapter 6. Verse 51, it says, Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed.

[7 : 54] And then verse 52, For they had not understood about the loaves, their hearts were hardened. Their hearts were hardened. And then last week, we saw the religious people in the beginning of Mark chapter 6, the Pharisees, the people who had the Bibles, who were religious moralists, and they wouldn't turn to Jesus either. And he tells us why in chapter 7, verse 6. He says, These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain. Their teachings are merely human rules. So they have a heart problem that means that although they have these traditions in their religion that mean that they look right on the outside, their hearts are far from God.

So what we're seeing is religious moralists won't turn to Jesus. They've got a heart problem. The secular hedonists won't turn to Jesus. They don't want to change. And even the disciples themselves have a heart problem as well. Chapter 6, verse 52. So look at what Jesus says next week to them. I know we're moving around a bit, but I'll just read it for us. It's in verse 17 of chapter 7, that he turns to his disciples. And in verse 18, he says, Are you so dull?

Sorry, I'm looking at, go on to chapter, he says that there. And then in chapter 8, verse 17, he says to them, Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see?

And ears but fail to hear? And then in verse 21, he says, Do you still not understand? So we're left with this question building up in our minds. Can anyone be saved? Can anyone be part of God's kingdom?

And you can see that's a vital question for us today, because we look all around us, and we see people not interested in Jesus. And we might think to ourselves, if this is really true, why do so many people just think nothing of Jesus? And for ourselves, maybe there's this very uncomfortable thought that we might have come to church this morning, thinking, I'm weighing up Jesus.

[10:03] I'm weighing him up. But when we come to this bit of Mark's gospel, we realize there's nothing that we need to weigh up about Jesus. But we might need to weigh up our own response, and think, is there something wrong with us, rather than something wrong with him? Are we, spiritually speaking, on the outside, and we can't get home to God? And it's a vital question when we think about the mission of the church. You know, we're spending this week with event, we've had guest events, we're trying to reach out to people, and we're saying, find life that lasts. It's closer than you think. But if people's eyes don't see God, and their ears are closed to hearing about him, and their hearts are far away from him, are we wasting our energy? So that's the backdrop to what we see in these scenes this morning, where we find Jesus crossing borders. In verse 24, he heads away from the promised land, out from the region where people knew their Bibles, away from the people who worshipped God.

These were pagan lands, and that opens the way for our first point. We find a helpless woman who shows great faith. A helpless woman who shows great faith. So we get introduced to her in chapter 7, verse 25. We hear this, as soon as she heard about him, about Jesus, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. So already this woman epitomizes everything right about responding to Jesus. Her faith is an urgent faith. Did you see that?

There's no delay. There's no thinking, well, I'll try something else first. And that's a model for us that Mark commends throughout the gospel, that the best time to respond to Jesus and run to him is today. Today is the best day to turn to Jesus. It's a dependent faith that she shows.

She falls at Jesus' feet. She's not trying to impress him. She's not trying to bring anything to him. She recognizes his authority, and she's appealing for mercy. She's ready to receive from him like a child.

And what makes this all the more astonishing is what we hear next about this woman. Look at verse 26. The woman was a Greek born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. So this is a woman further away from God than anyone we've seen so far in Mark's gospel.

[12 : 39] She's far from God geographically in where she's from and where she lives. And she's far from God culturally and ethnically. She's not from the right home or the right background. She wouldn't have spoken the right language. She's far from God religiously. She would have spent her upbringing worshipping gods that were in temples, pagan gods, fashioned out of wood and stone. But here she is depending on Jesus. And it's a humble faith. And the words Jesus says to her next bring that out, her humility. We might find those words jarring, what Jesus says next, but we shouldn't do.

Because what Jesus is doing here is not to insult the woman, but it's to teach the disciples watching that their whole framework for understanding who's on the inside with God and who's on the outside needs to change. So he uses this Israelite framework in verse 27 about the Jewish people who had the Bible and the promises of God and how they thought of Gentiles of the nations. He says verse 27 to the woman, first let the children eat all they want, for it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs. And it's a bit like saying you shouldn't put the cart before the horse. Israel was God's child, his chosen nation. And the Old Testament pattern was that by saving the Jewish people, they would then show the world the living God. And Jesus is saying, is it really appropriate for him now at this moment to bless people from the nations when the news is still being spread among Israel that the king is here? And if we think it sounds harsh, let's remember that Jesus knows this woman's faith. He knows how she will respond. And he knows that this was going to teach his disciples and show up Israel for how they're responding to him. So look at verse 28.

Lord, she replied, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. So her faith here is like a diamond. And by asking the question Jesus asks, it's as though Jesus is putting the diamond in a setting so that we can see it in a different light. That we see that what this woman understands is that even a crumb from this king's table is all that she'll need to receive for her desperate need to be met. And she must have felt desperate. We heard this week, didn't we, in the news, the long-awaited news that finally Nazanin Nagari Ratcliffe came home from Iran. And she's had this daughter who's seven years old, who spent six years of her life with her mum away in prison. And we all feel for how that much must have felt for Nazanin away in Iran. How much worse for this woman that Jesus meets, being with her daughter every day, but seeing that her daughter is under this evil power and no one can do anything about it. Her daughter is not in her right mind. And she somehow knows that

Jesus can help. She has enough faith for her prayer to be urgent and dependent and humble. And so look at Jesus' response to her in verse 29. Then he told her, for such a reply, you may go, the demon has left your daughter. We've already seen that Jesus has power over evil, that evil is a power in our world. And that Jesus is the one who can plunder it and set people free. So look at verse 30.

She went home and found her child lying on the bed and the demon gone. And just think of the relief. Think of the joy of having her daughter back and in her right mind again. And when Jesus does miracles like this, he's not just showing us his power so we get who he is, he's showing us the kind of kingdom that he will bring. He shows us from his character in the miracles what the future will be like.

[16 : 52] When he establishes his kingdom, evil will have to flee away. When Jesus is on the move, evil flees. Anxiety is replaced with relief. Grief is replaced with joy. And remember that question that Mark's gospel has been building in our minds. Is there anyone who can be saved? Is there anyone? Is there hope for anyone to be part of God's kingdom? And in just one scene, this woman from far away gives us the answer. And the answer is anyone. Anyone can be. Anyone at all. However far away you might feel from God. What great news, folks. However much you might feel that you don't belong here in church this morning with the people sitting next to you. You know, you might feel you're not dressed like them.

You might feel your accent is different to them. You might feel that your family background is different to the people you meet at church. This woman would have felt exactly like that with Jesus. And Jesus chooses her to teach the world what we need to know in order to know God and be rescued by him. We just come to him in faith. And this week, for those who've been at the events, we've seen that faith in Gary from Yorca, who was serving a life sentence in prison.

When he turned to Jesus with humble faith. We saw it from Jeff, a musician. And this morning, we've seen it in a Chinese student. In an English guy who heard about Jesus in Catholic school.

And a school teacher who flies planes. Such variety, even in the people we've heard from this week. It doesn't matter who we are. We put our faith in Jesus.

And our problem is just that our hearts naturally are not open to doing that. So how are we going to get the faith that this woman had? So that we find the restoration and the freedom of being in Jesus' kingdom.

[19 : 02] Well, we find that from our second scene as we meet a hopeless man who needs a miracle. So I'll pick things up in verse 32. Some people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and could hardly talk.

And they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. So as Jesus is out in the world, he finds the world in great need, doesn't he? Evil power. Someone who's deaf and can hardly speak.

And we know this morning that our world is in great need. It's obvious, isn't it? With the things we've had to pray about this morning. It's a broken world. How does God respond to the brokenness in our world?

Well, first Jesus takes the man away from the crowd in verse 33. And then he touches the man. He puts his fingers in the man's ears. And he puts saliva on the man's tongue.

And I wonder if he's communicating to a man who can't hear. Saying, I'm involved in this. I choose to be involved in this. Intimately. In this world.

[20 : 06] In its brokenness. And then he looks up to heaven. To communicate to the man who can't hear. That the power for what I'm about to do comes from God in heaven. And then he sighs.

Verse 34. Mark says he sighs. A deep sigh. The sigh of a heavy heart. At a world wrecked by sin and suffering. And I don't know what you think about that.

But I find it very comforting that Jesus is affected like this. This reveals to us God's attitude to a world in great need. And then he says, Epapha.

Which means be opened. And they're the first words that the man hears. Verse 35.

At this the man's ears were opened. His tongue was loosened. And he began to speak plainly. Well, what a moment. And for anyone like the disciples.

[21 : 05] Who knew the scriptures. Ringing in their ears. Isn't just the command. Epapha. But also some words from 700 years before.

Words from the prophet Isaiah. Who would. Through whom God had promised. That his rescuer would come into the world. And when he comes. What will it look like? Isaiah 35 verse 5.

The words will come on the screen. Isaiah says, Then will the eyes of the blind be opened. And the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer. And the mute tongue shout for joy.

And Isaiah goes on to describe a time of flourishing. That this king will bring. He says, Water will gush forth in the wilderness. And streams in the desert. And verse 8.

He says, And a highway will be there. It will be called the way of holiness. It will be for those who walk on that way. So folks, This is ancient language. It's language that people would have understood at the time.

[22 : 04] To picture what life is like. When God comes to rescue. That if you come to the rescuing God. He will lead you through the wilderness of this life.

On a highway. As though you're going on a journey. On the way of holiness with God. And he's leading you. To a glorious future with him.

Isaiah goes on. He says, They will enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them. And sorrow and sighing will flee away.

It's extraordinary, isn't it? To have a crown of everlasting joy. Promised to be on your head. So as we hear that echo here. And we see Jesus with his hands in his man's ears.

Unstopping their ears. It's as though the spotlight turns from that once deaf man. Now hearing. And the spotlight turns onto us. It's a bit like there was this video.

[23 : 01] Music video in the 1980s. Some of you will remember the 1980s. And there was this video. By the song AHA Take On Me. Where this girl was in a cath.

And she was reading a comic. While she was drinking a cup of tea. And there was this hero in the comic. And then suddenly. The hand came out of the comic.

And the hero invited her in. So the hand stretched out to her. And invited her to come in. To the comic. To the story. And Mark's gospel does that to you.

Again and again as you read it. That you see Jesus with people. But it's as though then the hand reaches out to us. And invites us to respond. Because we see him with the deaf man.

But we know that God promised. Through Isaiah 700 years earlier. This is the sign. That God's rescue is here. And a hand of invitation. Would you like to come to Jesus?

[23 : 58] Jesus. We have to hear rightly. Jesus said in chapter 4. Consider carefully how you hear. And now he's saying.

Hearing him rightly. Starts with a miracle. And he can grant you. That miracle. You just come to him as you are. And you ask him. And he opens your ears. To his message.

So that you can respond. Like that woman of faith. And have him lead you on the right path. To be with him forever. Forever. And the people all around. Can't stop talking about it. Verse 37.

They're overwhelmed. With amazement. And they praise him. They say he has done everything well. And he does. He does everything well. So what's it going to look like.

To let Jesus be your rescuer. And guide you on the way through life. To be with him forever. What's it going to look like. For this life and the future. Well Jesus gives us a picture of that.

[24 : 54] In our next scene. So our third thing we see. After the helpless woman who has faith. And the hopeless man who needs a miracle. Is a hungry crowd. Who were satisfied. So let's pick things up.

At the beginning of chapter 8. In verse 2. Jesus is now with this large crowd. And look at what he says. He says. I have compassion for these people. They've already been with me three days.

And have nothing to eat. It's extraordinary isn't it. 4,000 people have been with him three days. So that it's dangerous. He's taught like no one has ever taught before.

And people won't leave. But they've got no food left. And he says in verse 3. If I send them home hungry. They will collapse on the way. Because some of them have come a long distance. So they hunt around.

And they find these seven loaves. And a few small fish. And Jesus turns it into a feast. In verse 6. He tells the crowd to sit down on the ground. He takes the loaves.

[25 : 50] He gives thanks. He breaks them. He gives them to his disciples. To give to the people. Verse 7. He takes the fish. He gives thanks. He gives it to his disciples.

To give to the people. And in verse 8. The miraculous. Look at verse 8. The people ate. And were satisfied. Afterwards.

The disciples picked up. Seven basketfuls. Of broken pieces. That were left over. And if you've been with us. The last couple of weeks. This might seem bizarrely familiar.

If you just flick back. A couple of pages. In chapter 6. Verse 30. You can see from the heading. In the Bible. Jesus fed 5,000 people. They were in a remote place.

A wilderness. Jesus had compassion on them. He instructed the crowds. To sit down. He took 5 loaves. And 2 fish. And with them. He fed the crowd. They all ate. And were satisfied.

[26 : 47] And there were 12 basketfuls. Of leftovers. And Mark. Is the shortest. Of our 4 books. About Jesus life. Mark. Why did you record the replay? Of all the things.

You could have done. Well when we looked at the feeding. Of the 5,000. We heard its significance. That. Centuries earlier.

1300 years earlier. God had rescued. These people's ancestors. From slavery in Egypt. Under the leader Moses. And he fed them. In the wilderness. And now Jesus is saying.

He is God's true. And better rescuer. He's the one. Who can lead you. Into the world. Put right. The ultimate promised land. And he can provide you. With everything. To be satisfied.

Everything your heart. Needs. And longs for. For. But this second feeding. That we're looking at today. Shows us something. That those first disciples. Would have found. Even more astonishing.

[27 : 46] It's that this great rescue. From God. Is not just for Israel. It's for the whole world. Because these people. Are on the other side. Of the border.

Jesus has crossed boundaries. He's with the nations. And yet. They've come to Jesus. They're listening to him. And so he'll provide for them. And so as we see Jesus again.

Tearing off clumps of bread. And handing them to the disciples. To feed the people. We get a picture. Of what it looks like. To stick with him. Picture his compassion.

As he sees the crowd. And he teaches them. And he provides for them. Picture his wisdom. And his ability. That he knows what you need. And nothing is too hard.

For him. I reckon. I would have been grumbling. If I was in that crowd. On the second day. And the third day. And I have weeks.

[28 : 44] In my life. Where living as a Christian. Feels a bit like. Following Jesus. Into a wilderness. But this miracle. Says to me. That when you're with Jesus.

In the wilderness. He can provide for you. Just what you need. Just depend on him. Just trust him. And picture his generosity.

Let your eyes. Scan the crowd. That day. The families. The kids. The single people. And see somewhere in the crowd. The Syrophenician woman.

And her daughter. She was humble enough. That all she asked for. From Jesus. Were the children's crumbs. The leftovers. Leftovers. But when you're with Jesus.

No one gets leftovers. He doesn't run out. Of what you need. No in verse 8. Everyone eats. Until they're satisfied. And there are seven hampers.

[29 : 41] Full of bread. Left over. And maybe. We need to hear that today. That if you feel. You're in the wilderness. And lacking what you need.

To be assured. That you can depend on Jesus. To provide. Folks. Our time. Has gone. But we've seen Jesus here. And how he responds. To a world in need.

He offers us a rescue. It's a rescue for anyone. You just come to him. In humble. Dependent. Urgent faith. It's a rescue that starts. With a miracle. If you come to him.

As you are. He'll give you. The fresh start you need. And it's a rescue. That satisfies. He's the heart maker. He knows what we were made for. And we can trust him.

To provide. So let me pray for us. Let's pray together. Father. People were overwhelmed.

[30 : 36] With amazement. He has done everything well. They said. Heavenly Father. We praise you. For your great rescue plan. And that it's for anyone. Even for us.

And we praise you. For your rescuer. As we see his compassion. And his power to save. And his generosity. And his provision. And so Lord Jesus.

We pray to you. Recognizing that on our own. Our ears don't hear you rightly. And our hearts are far from you. Would you give us ears to hear. Like that deaf man.

And would you change our hearts. That we might turn to you. And trust your provision. And enjoy the feast. And be satisfied. For your name's sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.