

## **BREAKING BREAD AT THE BORDERS**

### **MARK 7:24–37**

#### **Monday – Big Picture Overview (Mark 7:24–37)**

*Read Mark 7:24–37 in one sitting.*

Mark 7:24–37 marks a deliberate move outward. After stating that defilement comes from the heart rather than the hands (7:1–23), Jesus enters Gentile territory and immediately puts that statement into practice. He meets a Syrophenician woman whose daughter is possessed by a demon, and then a man who is deaf and hardly able to speak. These two stories are closely connected—they form a movement that continues through the feeding of the four thousand (8:1–10). Notice how the word “bread” (ἄρτος, *artos*) links this section to the feedings on either side, and observe who understands Jesus’ actions and who does not.

1. What details in the text indicate that Jesus has entered non-Jewish territory? Why would this movement have been important for Mark’s first readers, especially coming right after 7:1–23?
2. Read 7:27 alongside 6:52 and 8:14–17. Who understands the significance of bread in each passage, and who does not? What does this pattern suggest about the nature of faith and understanding in Mark’s Gospel?
3. In what ways do 7:24–30 and 7:31–37 complement each other as a pair? What does each episode add that the other does not?

**Theological Prompt:** Mark points out that Jesus “could not remain hidden” even when he sought privacy (7:24; cf. 7:36). What does this recurring motif imply about the nature of the kingdom of God and Jesus himself?

**Practical Application:** Where in your life do you most clearly see the “bread” of the kingdom? Where is it hardest for you to recognize it?

**Prayer Prompt:** Lord Jesus, open our eyes this week to see what you're doing in and around us, and give us ears to hear what you are saying. Amen.

## Tuesday – The Ordered Mercy (Mark 7:24–29)

*Read Mark 7:24–29; Romans 1:16; Isaiah 49:1–6.*

When Jesus tells the woman that the children must be fed *πρῶτον* (*prōton*, “first”), he is not improvising a refusal; he is expressing a conviction about how God interacts with history, a belief shared by the prophets and later by Paul. The Abrahamic covenant promised that through Israel, all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:2–3). Isaiah expanded the Servant’s mission to be a light to the nations (Isa 49:6). The word *πρῶτον* in 7:27 embodies this entire tradition: Israel’s priority is the designated means through which God’s saving purpose extends to the world. The woman’s brilliance lies in her acceptance of this order and her argument, from within it, that it already makes space for her.

4. The word *πρῶτον* (“first”) appears at key moments in Mark (3:27; 9:11–12; 13:10). What does it signify in each context? How does its pattern throughout the Gospel shed light on its use in 7:27?

5. Compare Jesus’ words to the woman with Paul’s summary in Romans 1:16 (“to the Jew first and also to the Greek”). Is Paul introducing a new idea or expressing something already present in Jesus’ ministry? What are the implications?

6. The woman acknowledges Israel’s priority—she argues from within it. How does her approach differ from demanding an exception? What does it suggest about the proper way to present our needs to God?

**Theological Prompt:** Salvation has a history—it comes through a specific people in a certain sequence. Does this sequence seem theologically significant or embarrassing? How does it shape the church’s relationship with the Jewish people?

**Practical Application:** Are there times in your life when you’ve tried to argue around a framework God has established rather than presenting your case within it? What would her approach look like?

**Prayer Prompt:** Father, you work throughout history and through your chosen methods. Grant us the wisdom to trust your ordering of things and the faith to press boldly within it. Amen.

### **Wednesday – Dogs Under the Table (Mark 7:24–30)**

*Read Mark 7:24–30; Mark 9:33–37; Mark 10:43–44.*

The Syrophenician woman's response is one of the most remarkable statements in the Gospel. Despite what sounds like a sharp rejection, she accepts the unflattering image Jesus used—Gentiles as dogs beneath the children's table—and turns it into the basis of her argument. She does not protest that her need is so great it should override the usual order. Instead, she notes that the children's feast is so plentiful that its overflow already reaches her. This attitude—willing to be last, satisfied with crumbs, trusting that Christ's mercy is enough—is exactly what Jesus tries and fails to inspire in his own disciples, who argue about who is greatest (9:34) and about seats at his right and left hand (10:37).

7. Jesus teaches that greatness in the kingdom belongs to the one who becomes “last of all and servant of all” (9:35). How does the Syrophenician woman embody this without being explicitly taught? What does her example suggest about the connection between humility and faith?

8. The woman immediately grasps the bread metaphor; the disciples, after witnessing the feeding of five thousand, still do not (6:52; 8:17–21). What does Mark mean by this contrast? What has their proximity to Jesus failed to produce in them?

9. Dwight Moody reportedly said that Jesus sent no one away empty except those who were full of themselves. How does this shed light on the Syrophenician story? What does the woman's way of asking reveal about what Jesus is seeking?

**Theological Prompt:** How does the woman's acceptance of the “dog” image differ from self-contempt or passivity? Is it possible to accept a low place before God while still boldly seeking mercy? What does that paradox look like in practice?

**Practical Application:** Where in your life do you tend to seek recognition instead of accepting what grace freely gives? What might it look like to face that situation with this woman's attitude?

**Prayer Prompt:** Lord, forgive us for the pride that keeps us from receiving your mercy. Teach us to come as beggars, trusting that your abundance is more than enough for those who ask. Amen.

## Thursday – Be Opened (Mark 7:31–37)

*Read Mark 7:31–37; Isaiah 35:1–10; Exodus 4:10–12.*

When Mark identifies the deaf man's speech impediment with the Greek word *μογιλάλος* (*mogilalos*, “hardly speaking”), he is intentionally signaling a scriptural reference. This word appears only twice in the entire Greek Bible: Isaiah 35:6 and Mark 7:32. Isaiah 35 presents the great New Exodus vision—Yahweh himself returning to lead his ransomed people home, with deaf ears unstopped and mute tongues singing (vv. 5–6). This healing signifies that the promised return in Isaiah has arrived in the person of Jesus. The crowd's exclamation in verse 37—“He has done all things well”—echoes Genesis 1:31, where God surveys creation and calls it very good. Jesus acts as Yahweh, the agent of new creation, performing what only Yahweh can do (Exod 4:11).

10. Read Isaiah 35 completely alongside Mark 7:31–37. What specific parts of Isaiah's New Exodus vision are fulfilled by the healing? Why is it important that this happens in Gentile territory?

11. The crowd's exclamation in 7:37—“He has done all things well”—echoes Genesis 1:31. What does it mean to read a healing miracle as an act of new creation? How does this reframe the way we think about Jesus' miracles generally?

12. Jesus uses physical means here—fingers, saliva, a sigh, an Aramaic command—unlike the distant, wordless exorcism of the previous episode. What might the physical intimacy of this healing communicate to the man? What does the variety of methods suggest about Jesus's authority?

**Theological Prompt:** Isaiah 35 envisions the end of exile and Yahweh's return to his people. How does viewing this healing through that perspective change its importance? What does it mean for us that we live after this, in the era the New Exodus has started?

**Practical Application:** Is there an area of your life—a deafness to God's word, a tongue bound in prayer or witness—where you need the Lord to say “Ephphatha”? What would it look like to bring that to him this week?

**Prayer Prompt:** Lord Jesus, say “Be opened” to whatever in us is closed—your word, your call, your mercy. Set free whatever binds our tongues from speaking your praise. Amen.

### **Friday – Ears to Hear (Mark 7:31–37)**

*Read Mark 7:31–37; Mark 8:14–21; Mark 4:9, 23.*

The healing of the deaf-mute in Mark functions as a double sign. For those who recognize the allusion to Isaiah 35, it proclaims that the New Exodus has arrived. But it also quietly anticipates what Jesus still needs to do for his own disciples. Right after these miracles, he asks the Twelve a very serious question in the Gospel: “Do you have eyes and fail to see? Do you have ears and fail to hear?” (8:17–18). They have been with him, heard his teaching, witnessed his miracles, eaten his bread—and yet they remain practically deaf. He opened this man’s ears with his fingers and a word; he will open his disciples’ ears through the cross and the resurrection.

13. Compare the deaf man’s condition in 7:32–35 with the disciples’ condition as Jesus diagnoses it in 8:17–18. In what way are the disciples “deaf”? What has caused this inability in people who have been present for everything?

14. Jesus takes the deaf man aside privately to heal him (7:33), just as he consistently takes disciples aside for private instruction (4:10–11; 7:17; 9:28). What does this pattern suggest about how spiritual understanding is developed? What conditions does it require?

15. Mark begins with a repeated call to “hear” (4:3, 9, 23; 7:14) and ends with disciples who say nothing out of fear (16:8). How does the healing of the deaf-mute serve as both a promise and a challenge for Jesus’ followers?

**Theological Prompt:** In what way does the church in each generation need the miracle of 7:34 repeated in its own life—ears opened and tongues loosed? How does the community gather around the Lord in ways that enable him to carry out this ongoing work?

**Practical Application:** The disciples were near Jesus but didn't understand. What faith practices in your life are designed to help you go from just being close to truly hearing? Are they effective?

**Prayer Prompt:** Father, we confess that too often we are deaf to your word and silent when we should speak. Say “Ephphatha” to us again and again, until we hear you clearly and speak plainly of what you have done. Amen.