

How Rude Was Jesus?

Mark 7:24-37

Jesus goes to Tyre and Sidon. This is one of only a couple of instances where Jesus ventures outside of Israel since He was a little baby when Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt Matthew 2:13-15. But before we go any further, I want to look at Luke 18:1-8, the parable of the unjust judge.

We're told that Jesus went into a house and wanted to keep it secret but such was His celebrity that He was recognised even in Tyre or Sidon and word got out and soon spread. A lady heard that Jesus was in town, whether she was Greek (Mark 7:25) or Canaanite (Matthew 15:22) maybe both. It's immaterial, she was a Gentile and to Jesus at that time, giving her her request was a problem. That being the case, what was Jesus doing in Tyre and Sidon? What was the problem with healing a gentile? He healed other gentiles, Matthew 8:5-13, the healing of the Centurion's servant. Mark 5:1, the demon possessed pigs. Luke 17:11-19, the 10 lepers. It was possible that Jesus was testing out His theory in Matthew 11:21 in which case, why did He go into the house secretly and why was He so reluctant to perform any of His mighty works there?

This passage throws up a lot of questions.

Back to the story. The woman had a problem, her daughter was demon possessed. She'd heard about Jesus and His reputation for dealing with Spirit possession and she wanted some of that for her daughter. She'd heard that Jesus was in town and so off she went. We're not told where her husband was, was he baby sitting or was he out of the equation altogether?

The first act of humility and submission, she throws herself onto the floor at Jesus's feet. Then she starts begging. Is there a lesson there for us, when we desperately need something? Remember that unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8. She pleads; 'Have mercy on me.' It's like she's assumed responsibility for her daughter's condition. She's honest, she's opened up and publicly approached Jesus. She's not covered it up, pretending everything is OK.

In the account in Matthew 15:21-28, the woman addresses Jesus by His proper title, 'oh Lord, son of David.' She was clearly a believer. You see, the Pharisees never acknowledged that title, rather addressing Him rather patronisingly, 'teacher' or 'Rabbi'. No, this woman knew about King David, she knew the Messianic prophecies that He would be a direct descendant, and she clearly believed that Jesus was that Messiah, and so she comes to Him with her petition. Firstly, Jesus blanks her and so she had to keep asking Him, irritating the disciples according to Matthew, which gives an indication of their cold hearts towards Gentiles, even those in distress.

So was Jesus being indifferent, uncaring and cold towards this poor woman, just because she wasn't Jewish? He loved this woman but just like He loves us, Jesus does not want us to have the notion that by following Him, all we need to do is ask and every little problem and bump in the road simply just melts away. Jesus was testing the resilience of her faith.

This woman who lived and grew up in a town with no synagogue had a genuine faith and belief in God. Because she had this need and problem, she then sought out His son, Jesus. Often, it's so easy to come to God when we have a crisis; it's when everything is going nice and smooth that we can become complacent, and He starts to slip down our priority list. But because of her problem, this woman's daughter was the trigger that compelled her to seek out Jesus. Relationship breakdowns, cost of living crisis, career and work problems and health issues can all serve to jolt us out of complacency and intimate His blessing.

In the end, He answers her, but not with the answer she was looking for. In fact this is the only time Jesus says no to anyone asking Him for healing. The Bible doesn't seem to be very 'doggy friendly'. 1 Kings 14:11, Matthew 7:6, Luke 16:19, and this is another example. What Jesus says to the woman looks uncannily like an insult and would almost certainly today be deemed as racist hate speech; imagine if a journalist had been there. What would the headlines be the next morning? But was it? It can't be because there is no hate in Jesus.

This woman not only shows humility, she also shows strength and tenacity. She's going nowhere until she gets what she came for. Are there other similar stories in the Bible? Genesis 32:22-30.

So was Jesus restating His mission to the Jews as described by Paul in Romans 1:16, or simply reminding her that she wasn't part of His remit. or did He know what the woman's response would be if He insulted her in this way, or all three? Her lack of indignation but rather her acceptance of Jesus's rather unfair characterisation demonstrated a humility that He was not used to. This woman was the embodiment of The Beatitudes (Matthew 5 verses 3 and 5). How could Jesus resist? So Jesus was persuaded to break His own rules. Numbers 23:19. That said, it could be argued that God had previously broken that rule. Genesis 18:16-33 and Jonah 3:9 but the answer to that is how can you change your mind if you knew precisely the outcome of the events unfolding?

The lessons we learn from this passage are -

That God loves genuine humility, not like Dickens's Uriah Heap but genuine humility, and we need to be persistent in our prayers, Luke 18:1-8.

Today, this woman would have almost certainly have taken the hump and if not, given Jesus a mouthful. She'd have stormed out of there and her daughter wouldn't have seen any improvement. But no, this woman gave as good as she got and still retained her humility. Could it be said that a more humble, gentle struggle against inequality is more effective than violent protests, riots and insurrection?

The woman seems happy to be offered crumbs. How arrogant would it be to snub God's crumbs? Mark 6:43.

We rightly turn to God during times of crisis and problems Psalm 119:71-77.

Do we sometimes take our lofty and privileged position as adopted children of God, joint heirs with Jesus for granted? Romans 11:17-24. We expect, we demand; sometimes a lack of humility and demands are dressed up as faith like a mustard seed but to God that can seem like petulance?

So, how Rude Is Jesus? Not at all !!

Mark 7:31-37.

Then Jesus leaves Tyre & Sidon, drops down south, past Decapolis and into Galilee, back on home turf. Then Jesus is presented with a deaf man with a speech impediment and a request to heal him. Now this guy is somehow treated differently from most other healings. Hitherto healing was instant but on this occasion Jesus makes a bit of a meal of it; it's like He performs a minor operation on the man so instead of Jesus just saying, be healed, He puts a finger in the patient's ears and spits and uses His spittle by touching the guy's tongue with it and says 'Ephaphatha' which translates, 'be open'. Then immediately the man can hear fine and he talks normally. This is similar to John 9:1-7. So why is it that this man's condition seemed a bit harder for Jesus to heal than say the Centurion's servant who was close to death but was healed at a distance Luke 7:1-10? When I'm lifting weights

at the gym, they tell me not to jerk the weights but lift them slowly to get maximum benefit. In the same way, Jesus is showing total control over illness, He can heal instantly or slowly. He doesn't need a sledge hammer to crack a nut!

But why does Jesus time and again, instruct the recipients of miracles to stay quiet? Wouldn't it make more sense if miracles were broadcast far and wide to the glory of God?

Jesus was never a good showman. Notice, right at the beginning, Jesus took the man aside from the multitude. Miracles were performed more out of love for the patient than as a publicity stunt. There were exceptions, John 9:1-7. There are similarities between these two miracles; neither were instant results. In the John 9 miracle, Jesus makes a clay from His spittle. It's likely that He did that to wind up the Pharisees, knowing that they'd view this making clay on the Sabbath would bring condemnation from the Pharisees for breaking their mad regulations, which clearly had no scriptural authority.

Questions from this miracle-

Is there a place for high publicity healing services?

What's the difference between Acts 3:6-16 and Matthew 7:22?