

“How to Lose an Argument”

Sermon OUTLINE

for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, September 9, 2012

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Holy Scriptures: John 8: 12 James 2: 1-17 Mark 7: 24-37

John 8: 12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

James 2: 1-17

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ² For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷ Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

⁸ You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ⁹ But if you show

partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹ For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Mark 7: 24-37

The Syrophenician Woman's Faith

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁸ But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹ Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Jesus Cures a Deaf Man

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” ³⁵ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more

zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Sermon Outline

Spin doctors may not like this passage.

People who care more about image than character may not care for it.

Some see this text as an example of Jesus’ humor and brilliant repartee.

I receive it differently.

When confronted by a person of another ethnicity and gender,

Jesus reacted with prejudice.

The *Syrophoenician* woman responded with grace and wit,

even though she was most likely hurt and possibly dismayed by his comment.

She still trusted God even though she had been slighted.

Jesus paused.

At least, I like to think he did,

because when you add some silence between the responses,

between the give and take of a daily conversation,

it adds a degree of depth and weight of thought.

Did Jesus realize that what might have preceded the comment was wrong?

Did he suddenly realize that he had erred?

That his comments and prejudiced response were racist?

He may have been given pause,

knowing that he had lost the argument yet gained some growth.

What does it take for us to lose an argument with grace

so that everyone may gain,

so that someone else may live with dignity?

Jesus made himself vulnerable; he humbled himself.

He knew that he had erred, and the choice he had to make.

Save face or save a life.

What do you think is more important in the long run:

your pride or your relationships?

Jesus helped two souls that his culture said he wasn't supposed to.

No one would have blamed him if he had ignored them.

His rudeness would have been accepted;

his outright, public display of racism would have been considered acceptable.

Consider the frankness with which the writer of James addresses the same question.

Consider how you can apply Jesus' own faith walk into your daily life.

- Listen to someone whom others might not.
- Listen to someone from a different perspective.
- Allow people to interrupt you when s/he needs help.

The Good News: Jesus is a model for something any one can

do!

We can do this.

We can be and share this attitude and behavior and faith walk.

We can love people, even and especially those society and friends say we don't have to.

In the aftermath of 9-11, what does this mean for our relationships in community?

A perfect image and experience for living with losing: merging traffic.

Besides driving, are there other arenas in your life

that God and your neighbors call for you to be humble?