

Mark 7:24-30

The Faithful Persistent Gentile Woman

Mother at Uvalde school who was told she couldn't be there. After getting her handcuffs taken off, she bolted into the school and went past all of the armed officers to get her two sons and bring them out. She was a determined mother who was scared for her kids.

Today we see another determined and desperate mother who acts boldly on behalf of her child.

24 Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. 25 But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, *but* even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." 29 And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." 30 And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

According to some bible scholars the words of Jesus to the woman represent a sinful response. George Bernard Shaw – "This was a time when Jesus was not a Christian."

A particular feminist scholar wrote a sharp critique of Jesus' response to the woman. His words were harsh and chauvinistic and crossed the line, i.e. he sinned. If so, then he did have sin and couldn't be an atonement for our sin so he's no savior at all. Let's just end the service here and all go home, never to return to any church that proclaims that Jesus was a sinless savior...

.....OR

WE CAN look at this passage from a broader perspective.

The broader perspective is to see that- Jesus is the ultimate cross cultural missionary.

He comes from heaven to earth, and as a Jew, He crosses the physical, religious, and social cultural borders and ministers to Gentiles. Here in Mark 7 we see two instances of his Gentile salvation ministry -
v. 24-30 the deliverance for the daughter of the Syrophenician woman
v. 31 -37 the hearing and speech impaired man in the region of Decapolis (heavy Gentile area).

"From a socioreligious perspective, Jesus' visit to Tyre universalizes the concept of Messiah in terms of geography, ethnicity, gender and religion in a way entirely unprecedented in Judaism" (James Edwards, Mark, 217).

What we've seen in Mark is the revelation of Jesus as the Son of the Living God and the response of faith from those who follow him. Then and now, scripture puts the focus on a living faith in Christ, a faith that holds fast to Him as savior and Lord.

A Gentile woman believes in Jesus and because of her faith, she is able to see a demon cast out of her daughter.

When people get a bee in their bonnet over Jesus' initial comment to her, when she herself didn't seem that offended or put off, then they have missed the bigger issue.

I seriously doubt that the takeaway for anyone in the story is Jesus spoke to her about how the children should be satisfied first. On her way home, I doubt the woman was grumbling about how Jesus addressed her. She would be rejoicing that her daughter was delivered from the demon.

THE CONTEXT

It seems that Christ had had enough of the spirit of hypocrisy and the stiff necks of the Pharisees that he now goes to the region of the pagan Gentiles. To get away from the religious leaders, Jesus goes to a gentile region i.e. an UNCLEAN area.

He's been disputing with the Pharisees about ritual cleanness and what makes one unclean, so now he goes into an unclean region. It was the one place where they wouldn't follow him.

REMEMBER, it's not what is on the outside that renders one unclean, but what is in the heart.

** We hear this and may think, "Jesus went to unclean places and wasn't afraid of being tainted, so why can't I?"

Because we're not Jesus. Yes, there are times to engage deeply with non-believers, but it requires some resolve to be with them but NOT like them. Sadly, many Christians don't have that resolve, yet. **

Jesus seems to be on a getaway and was looking to be incognito. A Gentile woman heard and went to find him. She had gotten word about Jesus, and she went to find him. She was driven by her need and her faith to seek the person and power of Christ.

EX: "I've tried everything and nothing seems to help." She probably got pushback from friends who told her to have nothing to do with that Jewish preacher.

EX: Have you been in a situation where you seemed to have no resolution, and you think you've tried everything. HAVE YOU TRIED bowing at the feet of Jesus and asking for his help?

You may not get what you wanted but it may be that you'll get some needed perspective or humility or perseverance.

This woman is a total contrast to the religious leaders.

She was a Gentile i.e. unclean vs They were meticulous in keeping the laws about ritual purity.

(Did they come up with "cleanliness is next to godliness"?)

The text indicates that she was Syrophenician – a region that had a long history of opposition to Israel.

James Edwards says,

"Tyre probably represented the most extreme expression of paganism, both actually and symbolically, that a Jew could expect to encounter" (Edwards, *Mark*, 217).

She came and fell at his feet vs They were hostile and plotted to kill him.

Matt 15:22 She address Jesus as "Lord, Son of David"

She believed in Jesus' power and grace vs They were skeptical of his miracles and ministry.

She was persistent in her faith – "she kept asking"... vs They were persistent in their opposition

This is the Persistent faith of this gentile woman- A mother pleading for her daughter.

She recognized the spiritual danger of her daughter's situation vs They were blind to their own spiritual danger

Note: There is NO indication that the demonic influence was not real. Scripture treats this subject head on, unlike our approach today.

We live in an age that is "too sophisticated" for that kind of stuff, right?

Have you seen the increase in movies that deal with demonic themes? During October there is a constant barrage of commercials for the horror genre. "Horror Month"

Halloween yard décor has exploded. It plays into the culture of death and the dark side of the spirit world.

1 Tim 4:1 same word used where Paul warns about how in "later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

** SIDEROAD Two key areas where we see deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons are The CREATION ORDER AND REDEMPTION. In both of those areas, Satan wants us to believe that we know more than God.

He wants us to believe that we can define ourselves and that we don't need a savior. Romans 1 gives us a picture of what it looks like when a culture is given over to worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator. For women and men the natural function is replaced by that which is unnatural. We should heed the realities of that in our current cultural climate. There is nothing more unnatural than a society that promotes confusion regard the image of God as male and female. It is unnatural to promote policies that bring about the death of the unborn or the chemical or surgical sterilization of children. **.

We should note that **it was an interesting act of Providence that brought salvation to this woman. Those who were among the children of Israel had rejected Christ, so he goes to the land of the Gentiles. It was the hard hearts of the Pharisees, who despised the Gentiles, that led Jesus to cross into Gentile territory and bring deliverance and salvation to the woman and her daughter. Their unbelief led to grace coming to that little girl.**

It was not that demon's lucky day. He had a CASABLANCA moment:

EX: "of all the towns in all the world, Jesus wonders into this town and meets this girls' mother."

**APPLY: When we experience trials and difficulties, it may be God's design to drive us to Him. Even if we don't get an immediate solution, we still gain by running to the throne of God.

v.27 JESUS' RESPONSE:

He does not respond immediately, and she keeps asking.

His words may sound odd, offensive, or harsh to us.

"Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

This sounds like a massive insult unworthy of our Lord. Yes, Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs—unclean scavengers unworthy of salvation. Is this what Jesus meant? Probably NOT

(1) The very words of Jesus are something of a parable rather than a direct statement.

(2) The word for "dogs" is a word that corresponds to our word *puppies*. It is not a street scavenger but a household pet, which the parable makes clear.

(3) Jesus points out that His first mission is to the people of Israel. It is not exclusive to Israel, or else he wouldn't be in that Gentile region, but the Gospel is "God's power for salvation to all who believe, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek." ROM 1:16

(4) We don't know the tone or facial expressions in this exchange, but Jesus is giving her a bit of theological and heart pushback by way of a metaphor about dogs and food from the table. She joins in and gives a response that shows how much she values who Jesus is. The crumbs from his table are better than anything the world has to offer.

When Jesus confronted the Pharisees about their uncleanness, they pushed back indignantly. This Gentile woman is compared to a small dog under the family table, and she is happy and humble enough to take the crumbs that fall on the floor.

We may take great offense at this, but does she?

The woman does not seem to bristle at the words of Jesus. SHE doesn't rise up and accuse him of being part of the misogynistic patriarchal oppressor class.

She knows that she is not part of the children of Israel, but she carries Jesus' analogy further and says, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." What insight! What humility! What faith! She is asking to be satisfied with the crumbs that fall from the table.

She has more spiritual insight about the crumbs than the Pharisees have about the miracles or the disciples seem to have about the loaves.

She has the spiritual insight to see that the crumbs from Jesus are abundantly powerful.

This is ANOTHER CONTRAST WITH THE PHARISEES. They were exposed to the Full Meal of the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus, but they were never satisfied. She is satisfied with the crumbs.

She understands that she is asking for something that she has no right to demand, i.e. GRACE.

By definition grace can't be demanded, or it is not grace.

This is an example of James 4:6 – God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the Humble.

She is not infected with a 21st Century entitlement attitude. Her faith is such that she humbles herself because she believes that the crumbs from Jesus are worth it. The crumbs of grace can bring deliverance for her daughter.

** Do we believe that? Do we humble ourselves before God to ask Him for great things knowing that what is a great thing for us is really a small thing, a crumb in comparison God's power?

Crumbs should satisfy us, but God gives far more than crumbs. He prepares a table for us. He invites us to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

In Matthew 15 we have the same story, and Jesus commends her MEGA faith, her great Faith.

Her faith is displayed by her persistence and by her humility.

Her persistence is seen in that she kept shouting to the point that the disciples were saying, "Send her away; she keeps shouting at us" (Matt 15:23)

Her humility is seen in that she was humble enough to come and plead and bow down in front of others – a group of Jewish men.

And she was humble enough to go with the metaphor and say, "Yes, but even dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs."

It's as if she knew that being compared to a dog was not an insult to her. It was an insult to the dog.

Even the most feral of dogs is not as vile as the least sinful person. Wild dogs aren't sinning against God, but the law keeping Pharisees were sons of their father the devil.

Can you imagine her walk home and how she responded when she saw her little girl?

How do you suppose she prayed and lived from that time forward?

Was there rejoicing or was there complaining that Jesus referred to her as a little dog at the table?

This story shows the grace of Jesus for this Gentile woman, and it gives us some insights into how we might approach God in prayer.

- 1) **Some approach God with an attitude of pride and entitlement** – "God, I've been doing well and so much better than so and so. I really think you owe me one here. If you don't come through on this, then I'm through with you." They'll seek God's help, but He'd better not say or imply that there is anything deficient in them. They'll demand from God but won't bow before Him.
- 2) **Some approach God with a sense of despair and doubt** – "I've always known you couldn't be trusted. You've always let me down in the past. I guess I can't blame you because I'd be put out with me too. I might throw out a little prayer, but I don't expect God to do much for me."
- 3) **Some like this Gentile woman, know their need and that they have no other hope.** She's not pretending to be worthy or trying to impress God with her spiritual resume. She's not too proud to seek Jesus' help. "She aint to proud to beg."

She reveals a key to prayer – "Don't help me because of my goodness, but because of Your goodness."

She exhibits the quality of faith described in Heb 11

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

This Spirit inspired passage was given so that we might be encouraged to run to Christ and pray and pray and pray- Humbly yet boldly.

Discussion questions

How far would you go to protect or benefit your child?

What barriers did this woman overcome to seek help from Jesus?

Mark has several instances of demonic influence or possession. How do these stories land with you?

How does Jesus' response to the woman land with you?

What crumbs did the woman expect? What did those crumbs represent?

What motivates you to pray?

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