

Mark 7:24-30 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. <sup>25</sup> But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>28</sup> But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." <sup>29</sup> And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." <sup>30</sup> And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

## Mark 7:24-30 | Gentile Woman's Faith

This is one of those passages which raises the question, "Did Jesus just call that woman a dog?" And the answer is, well kind of. If you read that and it feels like you're missing something, then the answer is yes you probably are. Like the woman who reached out here hand in faith and touched the fringe of Jesus garment and was healed, or the poor woman who put all she had in the offering at the temple, or the woman who broke the alabaster jar of perfume and anointed Jesus for his burial, here we see another of the great women of faith in scripture. And here in this interaction with Jesus we are given an insight into a reordering of the world that Christ will accomplish. The Jew and the gentile become undivided under Christ's grace.

What little faith it takes, what little knowledge is needed, to receive the grace of Christ.

### 1. A Season of Retreat

Mark 7:24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden.

The past two weeks with the help of our guest preacher David Rapp, we saw Jesus facing the accusations of the Pharisees who sought him out in order to discredit him. On their side was the traditions of Men on the side of Christ was the pure word of God. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was plainly revealed. Jesus desired a break from teaching and preaching in the predominantly Jewish environments in which he faced deep hostility. Likewise there was word that King Herod believed Jesus to be John the Baptist reincarnate this assumption put Jesus's life in danger. Jesus therefore enters gentile land.

Jesus was not shy in facing conflict, his entire life is a march towards the cross, but he is no fool. He received the limits of his humanity and sought rest, recovery, and the more focused and still necessary ministry with just his disciples. He could argue with the Pharisees all day, but this is not the best use of the time. So Jesus enters a house, and Mark speaking of Jesus' humanity lets us know that he desired to remain unknown in this gentile land. But his fame was too great, and he could not be hidden.

## 2. Gentile Woman's Plea

Mark 7:25-26 But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

In typical Markan fashion, Jesus is *immediately* interrupted. A woman had a little daughter who had an unclean spirit. She hears of Jesus and comes to him and falls down at his feet. The text lets us know that she is a gentile. When this same story is relayed in Matthew she is described as a Canaanite. It is a typical description of a gentile who is labeled as one of the arch enemies of God's chosen people. Arch enemy perhaps, but for now she is a mother with a daughter under the power of something she can't control.

It makes you wonder what else she had tried? When she finally concluded it wasn't just several fussy nights, but something else was going on? Who else had she turned to for help, who did she ask to sit with the child while she ran to this Jewish healer? Did she look like a fool when she ran? When she arrived her pride did not get in the way, she begged. Cast out the demon from my daughter.

When Jesus was in Jewish territory the Scribes and Pharisees also sought him out. They did not throw themselves down at Jesus' feet begging for his care. They instead noticed his disciples did not follow their customary hand washing. As Mark does in the text we must keep these interactions next to one another. But what of Jesus's strange response?

## 3. Jesus' Strange Response

Mark 7:27 And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

What is this strange response from Jesus to this helpless woman? In Matthew the drama is heightened. Jesus does not respond at first. And the woman persists to the point where the disciples ask Jesus to tell her to leave. It is then that Jesus makes this reply to her pleading. What is it that Jesus is saying by his analogy? A bit is clarified in Matthews account in which before Jesus makes his analogy about the dogs he tells the woman that he was only sent to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." These are of course the children that Jesus is referring too. Christ is here to proclaim this message of the kingdom of God to those whom it was directly promised.

Jesus is revealing a redemptive order, one which we hear many times in scripture. Consider the thesis statement of Paul's letter to the Romans, Romans 1:16 *For I am not*

*ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

What is it that belonged to the Jews except all of the privileges of being God's chosen covenant people? And what do we make of this decision on God's part? Was it unfair to choose from among the nations of the world one to call his own? And what is the nature of this priority?

Here there is a question of what the blessing is for and has always been for. Don't you remember the blessing to Abraham was so that Abraham would be a blessing. "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." This is the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. And yet the promise was to Abraham and his offspring, they were the ones who held this promise. Not Abraham's nephew Lot and his offspring but Abraham and his offspring. They truly held the promise, God called them children. To them he gave the law and the promise that he would be their God and they would be his people. God committed himself to this particular people, uniquely, would it be right to neglect this office? What is their inclusion as children if it is true for all?

You see there is an order to this redemption, just as there is an order to the dinner table. This woman comes with talk of children and her hope for her own, well Christ has children of his own, whom he came to seek and save, they have a long history, but his heart is for them. Don't you see this redemptive story has an order. Jew first then Greek.

But the dynamic is not so simple as an exclusive disposition towards the Jew over and against the Gentile, because the scriptures are full of exceptions to the rule. In fact one such exception has a striking resemblance to this interaction in the same part of the world but many centuries before. A Gentile widow asked a Jewish Prophet to heal her son. And in 1 Kings 17 Elijah prays and the widow's son returns to life. And Jesus will reiterate this very story and add another example of Naaman's healing.

Luke 4:25-27 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, <sup>26</sup> and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. <sup>27</sup> And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

So we see the priority that Jesus is describing to the woman of children eating before dogs, has all of these strange exceptions along the line. It is a promise of exclusivity to the descendants of Abraham, and within that promise is a promise to bless all the families of the world. But those have to be nested together. Because it is by this particular promise that the general promise is accomplished. You see there is one way of viewing this grace given to the gentiles as exceptions to the rule of the covenant. But there is another way in which we see them as participating in the fullness of the promise.

What is at stake in this woman's request. Will the Jewish savior rescue gentiles? Listen to the woman's response.

Mark 7:28 But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

How many responses she could have had here and yet her path is one of absolute humility. I knew you were just like the others, you think I'm a dog you are a dog. But no she receives the pattern which Jesus has described, and even enters into it herself. But in her entering into it she expresses a hope that there is abundance enough for even one like her.

This is the pattern which we all must enter into. There is salvation for us, but only for us as sinners. There is rescue for us, but only in Jesus Christ. Only in the Messiah of the Jews, only in receiving their king might we be saved.

Mark 7:29-30 And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." <sup>30</sup> And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

For this statement. It was enough for her daughter to be healed. Often Jesus touches, he is almost always in the presence of the one whom he heals. But twice he heals the person in question without even seeing them. It is this woman and another gentile, a Roman Centurion for whom Jesus heals his servant. In Matthews Gospel this woman receives a similar exclamation. "Oh woman great is your faith!" Let us look at her faith and be inspired and convicted. Let us consider how little she knew and how much we know of Jesus. Do we pursue him so humbly? Do we love our children so well?

Look at how the faith of this woman shines against the backdrop of the Pharisees. To them the promises were made, and they only reject Jesus. But here the one on the outside is brought in because she hopes in Jesus.

It is a hard thing to grasp the relationship between the Jew and the Gentile and what that means throughout the history of salvation. But we must see that the whole tension is bound up in the person of Christ.

Christ is the fulfillment of the promise, the Messiah sent to the lost sheep of Israel. He is the true Israelite.

Christ is rejected by his own, cast outside the city like a dog, killed like a gentile.

But in his rejection, all are brought in.

Do not stumble over Christ our savior.