

Mark 7:24-30

"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." Mark 7:24-30, NAS95.

The chasm which existed between Jew and Gentile could hardly have been wider. The Jews made it a point of faith not to eat at the same table with Gentiles. Indeed, one tradition had it that the reason God created Gentiles was to provide fuel for hell. In light of this, it is especially noteworthy that we see s interacting with Gentiles.

Mark 7:1-23

Clean and Unclean Foods

Religious attitudes concerning unwashed hands

Jesus Jewish Pharisees exhibit no faith.

Lesson to Disciples: All foods are clean.

Mark 7:24-30

Clean and Unclean People

Religious attitudes concerning uncircumcised Gentiles

Gentile woman exhibits great faith.

Lesson to Disciples: Gentiles are clean.

We have seen Jesus cast demons out of Jewish people. Now He will heal a Gentile that is demonized.

Mark continues the theme of 'impurity' with the story of a Gentile (therefore 'impure') person. In a sense it is a missionary story. It seems as if Jesus was seeking a place of quiet in a Gentile region, but he could not escape notice. This time, it was not a crowd, but a Greek-speaking local woman who came, begging that he would drive out an evil spirit from her daughter.

A TIMELY RETREAT

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. (Mark 7:24).

For several chapters we have seen the theme of Jesus desiring to get away from the crowds. Following the short-term mission trip of the Twelve, He had suggested that they retreat to a lonely place in order to rest for a time. But the crowd had followed and Jesus had fed them.

Then He had spent a night in prayer while the disciples rowed back across the Sea of Galilee. This solitude had been interrupted by a storm.

Now He actually leaves the lands of Galilee to travel northward to the ancient city of Tyre. Tyre was an old city. It had once been the home of the mightiest navy in the world. But these days it was a mere shadow of its former self. Just a tiny fishing village jutting out on a peninsula.

Jesus comes here to escape the crowds. He is seeking peace and quiet ("he wanted no one to know of it"). Why? Perhaps it was because He knew of the great trial that lay before Him. It is possible that He was taking advantage of the calm before the storm.

One of the reasons we don't do too well in the midst of storms is that we haven't taken advantage of the quiet before the storm.

There is a direct correlation between what you do in a crisis and what you did before that crisis.

Are you in the quiet before the storm? Are things going pretty good in your life right now? It isn't a time for playing checkers. It is a time for you to get ready. It is the

Perhaps another reason that Jesus may have left was that He was tired of religion. In the previous verses, He had just gone through a confrontation with the Pharisees over a hand-washing ceremony. And Jesus may have been tired of it.

Have you ever been around a brand new Christian lately? He hasn't learned all of the cliches. He isn't trying to put on a show of looking spiritual. He is like a breath of fresh air.

Sometimes I get tired of being around stuffy religious people. In those times, I want to pack up and run away. And that is what Jesus did.

A PERSISTENT REQUEST (7:25-26)

But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet.

Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. (Mark 7:25-26).

There is something special about this request. This woman was...

- A woman - as such she was doing something out of the ordinary in coming and speaking to Jesus.
- A Gentile - The text calls her a Greek, but this is used as a general term to describe one who was not Jewish.
- A Syrophenician - from an ancient race of idol-worshippers.
- A mother - this was the source of her need.

Her daughter "had an unclean spirit." She was demon-possessed. And so she came to Jesus. The Greek tense indicates that she continued to ask Jesus to cast out the demon. She did not stop with a single request. She asked and then she kept on asking.

A RADICAL REFUSAL

Mark 7:24-30 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier March 29, 2008, 4
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." (Mark 7:27).

The reply of Jesus seems harsh in the extreme.

Jesus was probably quoting a popular proverb, and was therefore not being as harsh as it sounds. In any case, the emphasis is on the first part of the sentence. While Jesus was on earth, his mission was in the big picture, first place to Israel

That is because we tend to feel that He owed her something. He did not. His mandate, "Let the children be satisfied first," seems to point to the disciples. Jesus had not come here in order to draw a crowd. He had not come here in order to heal.

He is saying that he will not heal like pagan magicians; he wants her to demonstrate faith, specifically faith in the supremacy of the true God. (Her reply takes up his illustration: she concedes the priority of the Jewish people, the children, but protests that even the dogs get to eat crumbs. In so arguing, she indicates her faith that only the smallest fraction of his power is necessary to heal her daughter.)

He had come here to spend time with His disciples. They seem to be the object of the reference to "children." His time on earth was limited. And His time with His disciples was equally limited.

In spite of this, the reply of Jesus still seems overly harsh. Especially in view of his referring to the woman and her Gentile ancestry as "dogs."

The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs" in the same way we would call someone a "bitch" (Matthew 7:6; Philippians 3:2; Revelation 22:15). It was a term of contempt.

"6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." Matthew 7:6, NAS95.

"2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;" Philippians 3:2, NAS95.

"15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." Revelation 22:15, NAS95.

Jewish people did not expect much faith from pagans, especially from pagan women.

Like Sidon, Tyre belonged to ancient Phoenicia, and the most prominent woman from

Phoenicia in the Old Testament was the wicked Jezebel. But another Phoenician woman who petitioned Elijah in the same generation received God's favor for her son (1 Kings 17:17-24).

"17 Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!" 19 He said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. 20 He called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?" 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him." 22 The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived. 23 Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." 24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." 1 Kings 17:17-24, NAS95.

Greek culture had long influenced Syria, and many Greeks had settled there; the citizen class of the Phoenician republics Tyre and Sidon was thoroughly Hellenized. Thus she is both Syrophenician and Greek.

7:27-28. Jewish people did not regularly call non-Jews "dogs," as some commentators have argued. Rather, Jesus is making his point by way of illustration, as wise teachers in his day often did. Worthless food would be cast to the dogs (cf. Ex 22:31). In Jewish Palestine, dogs were regarded as scavengers, but in well-to-do households influenced by Greek custom (more familiar to the Syrophenician woman), dogs were sometimes pets. Jesus is making an illustration: the children must be fed before the pets, and the Jewish people therefore had first claim (e.g., Ex 4:22).

But Jesus does not use the normal Greek word for "dog" - *kyon*. He uses instead the diminutive form - *kyonion* - "puppy." And perhaps this gives us a clue that we should not be imagining a harsh tone in His words. Perhaps there is a twinkle in His eye as He makes a play on the words which were so commonly used by the religious Jews to insult this woman.

A HUMBLE RESPONSE

But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." (Mark 7:28).

The woman was not insulted by the words of Jesus. She accepts His judgment. And then she asks Him again for His help. There is no false pride here. She does not become offended. She recognizes her unworthiness, even as she continues her request, pointed out that "even the little puppies under the table eat the little crumbs of the little children."

This woman is a loser. She is a woman in a man's world. She is a Gentile before a Jewish Messiah. But that is the kind of person to whom God can respond in grace. He only reaches out to losers. If you are going to Christ because you want Him to tell you how wonderful you are, then don't bother. But if you are a loser, then call out to Him and He will help you.

And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon.

Against all odds, the woman had come to Jesus and had continued to petition Him until her prayers were answered. She had faced a challenge to her faith and she had persisted, wrestling with the Lord until she received the blessing she sought.

The reason God doesn't answer our prayers is because we really don't believe that He will. When you pray for rain, do you take your umbrella? If not, then you don't really believe.

There is a sense in which this woman represents the Gentile world. Jesus had come to His own people - the House of Israel. But the leaders of the Jews rejected Him. That bread of heaven which was rejected and thrown away by the Jews is now received by the Gentiles. But there is a warning. If we do not receive that same bread of life from the hands of Jesus, then it will be taken from us.

Martin Luther went through a period when he was tempted to think that God wasn't interested in him and he told his wife Katie that God was being so silent the Lord might

as well be dead. When Luther went out, Katie thought about that expression of unbelief and thought she would teach her husband a lesson. She dressed in black from head to toe, as a woman in mourning would in the 16th century, and she pulled all the curtains closed and plunged the house into darkness. So when Luther returned he spotted all the signs of a death having taken place. He called for his wife: "Katie! Who's died?" "God," she said. "You told me that God was dead to you." Luther was humbled and chastened by his wife. Whatever the reason for the Lord's silence it is not that the angels in heaven are holding a funeral service and are burying God.

The next is part of an address by Dr Joel Beeke when he was speaking at the Aberystwyth Conference in England.

“There are two great reasons as to why God is sometimes so strangely quiet in our lives. The first incident casting some light on this is found in John 11 and it describes the serious illness of Lazarus. His two sisters send an urgent request to the Lord Jesus to come immediately to the house to help their brother. But we are told that the Lord stayed two days where he was. He didn't drop everything and go there, and by the time Jesus had reached Bethany Lazarus had breathed his last and had been buried. Why was the Lord silent? The delay was for the glory of God. You are not immediately persuaded or comforted by that. You are too familiar with the phrase. You have been told by the pulpit too often that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever. You know that our goal in life is to bring him glory in everything, and so when I say that Jesus' non-healing of Lazarus was for God's glory you agree but are not impressed. Then hear me! That is not my theological imposition on this passage. We find the Lord Jesus himself saying about Lazarus' terminal sickness, "It is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (Jn. 11:4). Later on Jesus says to Martha the brother of Lazarus, "'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'" (Jn. 11:40). She indeed saw the glory of the resurrection power of Christ as he raised Lazarus, and we see it here too, that Jesus is mightier than death. We see it in this living Word, and the whole church has been seeing it in the same place for 2,000 years and will go on seeing it there until what it signifies becomes the

greatest of all realities - the General Resurrection in the day of Christ. You say, if someone rose from the dead then you'd believe? Someone has risen from the dead. How many resurrections will satisfy an unbelieving heart? A hundred wouldn't satisfy it, because an unbelieving heart that always demands signs is a heart of stone. What is our chief end in life? It is to glorify God, not to have our questions answered, not to be healed or to heal others but in every circumstance to glorify God. The silence of the Lord led to the glory of God. It always does. Let me be still and glorify God when he is silent even as when he comes with the sound of a rushing mighty wind.

The second reason for the silence of God is to refine our faith. Joel Beeke used the illustration of the white space on a printed page, on the margins and tops and bottoms of each page, and between the lines, and between the words, and between the letters or even within some letters. Thank God for white space or everything would be black. Music needs pauses. An art gallery needs blank walls on which to set the paintings. Our lives are better with some white space. Which is the happier home, one in which the television is always on every evening for five or six hours, or a home where there are pools of peace? Our sermons are better with some white space - the pause when questions are being asked and challenges have to be considered. The Lord's Supper is better with white space where we can confess our sins and examine our hearts and thank God afresh for Jesus' love for us all. There are many Christian activities that I don't want to do to music, and which shouldn't be done to a backing group. They are merely cushioning me from opening myself to the living God. Blessed silence."

Dr Beeke says, "God takes us into dark tunnels and pauses, drawing us tenderly to himself. I believe I have learned more about God in times of silence than when he has not been silent. I have learned, for example, the wonder that I am not destroyed." This incident does not say that Jesus did not hear the woman. It says that he did not answer her. The Lord often waits to be gracious. He is matching his silence to our maturing. So when he said nothing he was teaching this woman, just as much as when

he decreed the demon to be removed from her daughter. So often the Lord deals with the parents of needy children in instruction and in silence. What parents are able to deal with raising the children God has given them? The only ones who think they can are those who have never had children.”

God used a terrible thing, a demon possessing a little girl to cause this woman to flourish in grace. The Lord uses every such heart ache and tear to that end. Whatever he brings into our lives he will use the bitterest and most frustrating providence to bring you nearer to Christ. This woman was not from Israel, was not a man, was not a Jew and had nothing to bring to Jesus except her own great need, yet she persevered in trust and gained such blessings.

Don't follow the empty world. Follow the living Son of God. Richard Cecil saw a herd of pigs following the farmer to the slaughter house. They were all going along snuffling and sniffing the air, the tails prettily curled, and all of them were going to have their throats cut. "How do you get them to follow you?" Richard asked the farmer. He smiled and pulled his hand out of a big pocket. It was full of acorns and tasty pieces that the pigs loved. He was dropping some of it every few paces and the pigs kept going happily on to their death. That is so like many who go happily to the grave, every day nearer and nearer. We need to pray that men will turn from evil and repent and believe the gospel. What will it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?