

Scripture: Mark 7:24-30

### Jesus Draws A Gentile Woman to Faith in Him

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Pharisees and the scribes were as cold as ice. They were rigid in their laws regarding clean and unclean – with regard to either things or people. They were always washing their hands! There was no gospel of love, no forgiveness, only law.

They chose to follow their own traditions rather than believe Jesus, who has power to make clean from sin.

Now picture the contrast in Mark 7:24-30! The response of the woman powerfully contrasts with the unbelief of the Pharisees and scribes. Her sterling faith in Jesus is a stinging rebuke to unbelieving Israel, God's own precious people!

This story is a great encouragement for anyone who has not yet come to faith in Christ. But this story is also a great encouragement to a believer who may be struggling with his or her faith in difficult circumstances. In her great need, the Lord Jesus draws this Gentile woman to faith in Him. In light of this, we see,

1. Her humility [vv.24-26]
2. Her persistence [vv.27-28]
3. Her submission [vv.29-30]

#### *Her humility [vv.24-26]*

Jesus withdraws Himself from Israel because of the opposition He has experienced there. With His disciples, He goes outside of Israel to the region of Tyre and Sidon, to the land of the Gentiles! Will He find faith there?

Tyre and Sidon were twin port cities on the Mediterranean Sea, about 25 miles apart. They were cities of Syria-Phoenicia. They had a long history of antagonism against Israel. The main god of Tyre was Eshmun and of Sidon, it was Melqart. This region was also the home of Jezebel, wife of king Ahab, who at that time [800 years before] brought Baal worship into Israel [1 Kings 16:31-32].

In the region of Tyre and Sidon, we read that Jesus *"entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden"* [v.1].

But again His rest was short-lived. We know from Mark 3 that crowds, also from this area, [Tyre and Sidon] came to Jesus in Galilee for healing [3:8]. And now a Gentile woman discovers where Jesus is staying. No; rather we should say that the Lord Jesus allows this woman to find Him. He draws her to Himself! Such is His great love for sinners!

This woman is filled with grief. Her young daughter was very, very dear to her. But her daughter had an unclean spirit. Yet her mom knows Jesus is the Powerful One. She believes. This shows in her humility. She *"came and fell at His feet"* [verse 25] begging Him to cast out the demon from her daughter. The last time we see someone falling at the feet of Jesus was Jairus, when his daughter was dying [Mark 5:23ff].

But there was a big contrast between Jairus and this woman. Jairus was the well-respected leader and president of the Jewish synagogue. But of all the people to approach Jesus in this gospel, this woman had the most against her from the perspective of the Jews. Her race was wrong; her religion was wrong; her country

was wrong; her gender was wrong. See **verse 26**. She was a woman, a Greek Gentile, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and a pagan.

What qualifies her to come to Jesus? She's ignorant, godless in the mind of the Jews. Yet, for all the differences between Jairus and her, a Jew and a Gentile, Jairus had no advantage with Jesus.

Jesus does not see human status, like people do. Jesus sees human need. He doesn't look at pedigree, criminal records; He requires no background checks. As one author says it, 'her only cover letter is her desperate need.' As one song says, "When the needy seek Him, He will mercy show."

Suppose this woman had gone to the Pharisees and scribes. Can you imagine??? It's hard to imagine, considering the tradition of the elders. You can come to your own conclusions.

This woman, in spite of all the obstacles of coming to Jesus, does not apologize or shrink in fear. She comes to Jesus in faith. She comes in true humility, with a true heart. Having fallen at the feet of Jesus, we read in **verse 26**, that "*she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.*" The tense of the verb shows that she kept on and kept on asking.

Where was her husband? Was she a widow perhaps? Does this remind you of the prophet Elijah's encounter with the widow in the same region, outside of Israel, 800 years before during the time of King Ahab? In both cases, the child of the widow needed deliverance and both widows showed faith [1 Kings 17]. Earlier in Luke Jesus says that there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath in the region of Sidon" [Luke 4:25-26]. They did not find faith in Israel! What was Jesus saying now to the Jews by allowing one like this to discover Him?

Regarding this woman's faith, we not only see her humility. We also see

*Her bold persistence [verses 27-28]*

She did not let up, but persists in asking. She shows her faith by persisting, in spite of what seems to be Jesus' reluctance or hesitation in **verse 27**. He tells her a little parable, possibly at the time He was having a meal, "*Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.*"

Is Jesus referring to this Syro-Phoenician woman as a dog? What is Jesus saying? If He is referring to her as a dog, isn't that one of the most offensive things to say to a person? Isn't it like calling her worthless? Dogs were associated with uncleanness because they ate garbage. The term 'dog' is hardly a compliment!

But we have to be careful how we read Jesus words here. The context is important here. He is not saying what we may think He is saying. Jesus has just confronted the Pharisees and scribes for the issue of clean and uncleanness. That's what they would say! They would call her a dog with the above associations. But that's not how Jesus is using the word here. Jesus is not calling her a mongrel. He confronted the Pharisees on this point and Jesus does not go against what He says.

So why does He use this term 'dog'?

The word Jesus uses means a small dog {"little dogs"}. It is kept in the house as a pet. It's not a mongrel but a household pet. This woman accepts this word and even uses this word for her and her daughter, showing she understands it as Jesus intended.

Jesus here is distinguishing the Jews from the Gentiles. The Jews are called 'children' here. They were the 'children of God'. They received great privileges. And that by God's grace! They differed from all the other nations because of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Jesus is saying that they must be filled first. The food had been set before Israel in Jesus, the promised Son of Abraham. Only when Israel has enough, the Gentiles get their turn! The woman understood that more than the Jews did! How do we know?

In her reply to Jesus in verse 28, she acknowledges the same distinction: children and little dogs but in the Greek she uses a different word for 'children' than Jesus did. The word she uses for children implies both children and servants in a household.

She understands that God's mercy in Christ extends to nations beyond Israel from Jesus' own words! Jesus says, *"let the children be filled first."* He came to the Jew first. This does not mean He excludes the Gentiles. But His priority was to Israel first. This was God's plan in history.

After this one sentence, this woman understands Jesus' mission. She does not reject Jesus' comparison. She goes one step further. She shows the depth of her faith in her persistence, saying in **verse 28**, *"Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."*

When children are eating the food, the little dogs are under the table. They know the children will drop the crumbs on the floor and the little dogs eat the crumbs! 'There are crumbs for me, too!' There is enough grace in Christ for her as well -and for you, and you, and you! There is surplus with Jesus! Like Jacob, she wrestles with Jesus. She wrestles for a blessing from Him and, by His grace, she overcomes. In faith, she persists, knowing God's promises of salvation in Christ will extend fully to the Gentiles.

The Lord's ways with believers may seem harsh at times too. But when we are tempted to take offense at Christ, we should, as one author says, ask ourselves, 'Am I willing to humble myself completely before the Lord? Do I believe so strongly in my need of Christ that I will keep clinging to Him even when His ways are hard? Will I submit to whatever He gives me on His terms, not my own?'

This brings us to verses 29-30. In drawing her, she also submits to Christ in faith, her Savior

#### *Her submission [vv.29-30]*

She shows her faith by submitting to the Word, to the Word of Jesus. He says to her in **verse 29** *"for this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."* He performs this miracle 'at a distance' by His Word.

This woman, in spite of her background, is the first person in Mark to hear and understand a parable of Jesus! She sees herself in the parable. It's about her. She meets the living and true God in the parable, the Lord Jesus, with whom she struggles and contends for a place, as a child, at His table!

Jesus now says, *"go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."* She takes Him at His Word. She shows her faith by submitting to it. He said, 'go!' She goes. She obeys. In Matthew 15:28, Jesus praises her for her faith, saying *"O woman, great is your faith."*

When she came to her home; sure enough, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on her bed. By trusting in Christ, she now, a little dog under the table, has a place as a child of God at the table in the household of God.

Sadly, Israel did not want to be filled with the bread that Jesus gives. This woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon receives it. She wanted it, she wrestled for it – even for crumbs! She was rich. Jesus praised her for her faith! But sadly, the surprise is that so many in the church don't want it. Do you see how privileged you are in Christ?

The conflict increases between the Jews and Jesus. As it does, Christ is revealing more and more of His plan that in Him, all the nations are blessed. Through His death and resurrection, the gospel today goes to all peoples, all nations. Do you remember after Peter's vision of the clean and unclean animals, after God declared them cleansed, the apostle Peter said, *"In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him . . . is accepted by Him"* [Acts 10:34-35].

Beloved, there is room at the table in His house for all those who repent and trust in Christ who died and rose again from the dead to give new life. There is no more eating of crumbs under the table. In Christ, we are full participants at His table. There is room at the table for all who repent of their sin and trust in Him -- for poor people, for people with criminal records, for transgenders and homosexuals. There is a place at the table for all who come to God through faith in Christ.

In a world of division, racism, discrimination, and hatred, this story clearly has relevance for the mission of our congregation today. May sinners come, and not feel afraid, and know the love, compassion of Christ through us – the Christ who embraces sinners with His arms, the very arms that were stretched out and nailed to the cross! By His Spirit, Christ draws sinners to Himself through His Word. May they feel free to come in faith with all their sorrows and needs. Christ is the only place where people from all backgrounds may openly come, casting all their sin at the cross. Then they are brought to eat at His table through fellowship in Him.

The dividing wall of hostility was broken down in the cross. Jews and Gentiles are made one in Christ. The Bible says that *"His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross . . ."* [Ephesians 2:14-16]. In Christ, there is a new creation, a new world. Amen!