

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

October 1, 2021

Communion Sunday - The Syrophenician Woman

Mark 7:25-30

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for this sacred time, we thank you for communion. We just continue to pray as we open up your book on this communion day that you would give us the gift and the presence of your Holy Spirit. We acknowledge without your spirit this is a hopeless task. And so we pray that you would accompany us, that you would again give us the ability to look into your word and to worship you through it and to make it of permanent value. And we pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.*

Well it's once again as I've said many, many times, it's the first Sunday of the month and this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And that Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and he celebrated for the very last time he celebrated the Passover supper, and we have that in *Matthew 26*, starting at verse 26. It says this: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying,*

"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and of his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis, and this is what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by then examining ourselves, we ask God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our lives where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well we're following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark. Jesus has been locked in combat with the Pharisees and the religious leaders, he's had a confrontation once again with the Pharisees over ceremonial washings and cleansings. He's now looking for a place of solitude. Jesus has already fed the five thousand, he's already walked on water, the disciples have returned

from their first mission, they're full of tales of success but Jesus knows that his time is growing short. John the Baptist has just been executed. Jesus now wants more down time to teach his disciples. And we pick up at *Mark 7:24*. It says: *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.*

If you recall, the situation is much like we saw before, Jesus had his fame go ahead of him. Just back in chapter 6: *He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.* So Jesus is looking for and he finds an out-of-the-way place to instruct his disciples. But before they can begin, they're interrupted by a desperate woman. This is verse 25. It says: *But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 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." But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." And she went home and*

found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Well we've been doing a lot of looking at the role of the church, and one of the things that I said, one of the key elements of God's church is teaching and that is the apostle's teaching and that is the truth as revealed in scripture. More so than ever that truth is under assault today. You see if you can just get people to view the Bible as a flawed vehicle, not really as the word of God, you can present it as something akin to human experience and subject to all kinds of limitations, all kinds of errors. Well do that and then you're free to become what we call "cafeteria Christians." You know, that's someone who wanders through a theological cafeteria, a "Golden Corral" as you will, and says of the Bible "I'll take some of that, I'll take some of that, I don't want any of that, none of that and, oh, I really like that." In essence what you wind up doing carving your own personal Bible out of the Bible. And your success at that really depends on what presuppositions you bring to the scripture. Now a presupposition is something that you suppose beforehand. It's something you presuppose about the Bible. If you presuppose, first of all, that Jesus is God incarnate, that he is God who took on flesh, who lived out his life perfectly in order to go to the cross and purchase eternal life for us by laying down his perfect life as payment in full for our life of sin so that we could stand before the Father

claiming Jesus's righteousness as our own and therefore become worthy of heaven itself, if that's what you presuppose about Jesus, well you're going to view this story very differently than the way the progressive church presupposes Jesus.

If you're progressive, you presuppose that the Bible is as fallen and as human as its characters, including Jesus. You see and you suppose that God as revealed himself in scripture in a primitive and fallen way in a document that's ever growing, ever evolving, ever progressing but a document that has to acknowledge that it's rooted in cultures that are backward and sinful. Hence the progressive way of viewing this passage is that it's a remarkable exchange that exposes Jesus as someone who has nativist and racist tendencies that need to be addressed, that need to be corrected. In this view of scripture the hero is clearly the Syrophenician woman. She's a woman who was willing to speak truth to power by standing up to Jesus and his racist name calling. Jesus is so impressed by her courage that it forces him to reassess his own personal racism and thus grow in his own personal understanding. And the lesson we are to get from this is to recognize our own inherent racism and be willing, like Jesus, to acknowledge it and to grow in a likewise manner.

This really exists, I mean, I watched a sermon, I watched a whole

sermon given by a progressive Christian who basically taught that exact lesson. I thought to myself, there are people sitting in that congregation, they're looking at this man as someone who has spiritual authority. I mean, he's speaking, he's taking a spiritual role, he's got a collar, he's got robes, he's got all kind of things that look like he is a person in authority who supposedly loves Jesus, so if you're sitting in the congregation, why not accept what he says as gospel truth? Well the problem is only a cursory understanding of who Jesus is would tell you right off the bat that there's something desperately wrong here. And what's wrong is the presuppositions that he brings to the scripture. This man presupposes that Jesus is a sinner like you and me, because racism and nativism is a sin and racism and nativism which says my group, my tribe, my people, they're the ones that count. Well that's clearly sinful. It's a violation of God's order of creation wherein he says in *Galatians 3:28*: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Well now the scripture clearly identifies this woman as a Greek and as a Syrophenician. And both of those titles point to someone who is outside the Jewish community. Not only were Greeks considered to be Gentile pagans but Syrophenicians were part of the Canaanites. They were a cursed tribe known for their profound

wickedness. *Leviticus 18* is a whole chapter devoted to warnings about sexual immorality and it's introduced by this statement, it says: *You shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes.* And their statutes were outrageously bad. Canaanite poetry celebrated a god who repeatedly raped his sister while she was in the form of a calf. As one historian put it, they literally worshiped a god who represented rape, incest and bestiality all at the same time. So to say this woman was of a cursed minority is to put it mildly. But according to the progressive understanding she's a desperate woman who appeals to Jesus and he treats her despicably, calling her a dog. Well there's clearly an incident describing what took place and like any incident it has witnesses and those who want to read into what took place with their own prejudice and insights, with their own presuppositions. And we who are not in the progressive camp who believe that Jesus is very God, who was perfect, who never sinned including the sin of racism, we see it quite differently. We see Jesus once again engaged in multitasking as he often did. He's interacting with his disciples and he's ministering to them also by demonstrating what he's doing with this woman. Now the disciples have been growing and learning but they still have much to learn about God's plans and about God's mercy, and Jesus in this interaction with his disciples is brilliantly teaching them about both. Remember the disciples had already gone

out on their own, they'd seen these great miracles, they'd seen these great healings, they'd seen demons being exorcised, and so they return from that journey, they're excited and empowered by the power God had given them and the effectiveness of their ministry. But as Jesus points out they still had a lot to learn.

This is the way Luke's gospel puts it. It says: *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* See Jesus never stopped teaching even as his disciples are rejoicing. And this incident that takes place with the Syrophoenician woman, this is a teaching moment as well. Remember the disciples, they're retiring with Jesus to a place where they can get some rest and relaxation, away from the glare of the crowds. And so having just arrived they're greeted by this woman who obviously knows something about Jesus. I mean she may be a Greek and an outsider, a member of a cursed tribe, but she clearly knows who Jesus is and she clearly knows that he is Lord. *Mark 6:25* says: *But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet.*

Her posture is one of complete submission. She's desperate. And she's approaching Jesus not as a stranger but as Lord. And we get this from Mark's gospel -- not from Mark's gospel but from Matthew's because it's Matthew's gospel that gives us a little bit more detail. You see, the picture that Matthew and Mark paint together is of a desperate woman falling at the feet of Jesus repeatedly crying out to him for mercy. This is how *Matthew 15* puts it. It says: *And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."*

Well those are the facts as Matthew and Mark describe them. And here is where what you presuppose about the Bible, here's where it makes all the difference in the world. It's a fact, Jesus responds with absolute silence, saying not a word to the woman. Now if Jesus is just yet another flawed human being that God is working on, that God is growing, helping him to see his racism, to see his nativism, well then Jesus is simply acting the part of a racist, exercising power over somebody else. And actually the woman here is the hero and Jesus is the goat. However, if your presupposition is that Jesus is God in the flesh, that he is flawless and omniscient and also given to taking life circumstances and using

them as teaching moments, then the circumstances that unfold take on a totally different meaning.

Now Mark's writing this gospel to Gentiles, and Matthew is writing it to Jews. So Matthew includes an important distinction in the dialogue that took place between Jesus and this woman. This is what Matthew says. It says: *He -- that's Jesus -- answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* You see, God's plan was to bring the good news of the kingdom of the nation of Israel first who would then broadcast it wholesale to the rest of the world. And that's precisely what wound up happening but not at all the way human beings expected that it would. I mean the Jews were supposed to become the priests to usher in a new covenant but they utterly rejected their Messiah, crucifying him as an imposter. And to be sure it was not the Jews alone who put Christ on the cross, your sin and my sin as well as the sins of all of us is what put Christ on the cross. And actually to be more accurate it was Christ who put himself on the cross as he voluntarily undertook the process of our redemption. But Jesus at this point in his ministry, he's still appealing to the nation of Israel to become the priests that they refused to become. And nevertheless Jesus was committed to doing God's will God's way first and foremost, and that meant that his first priority was Israel. This is the way Paul put it in *Romans 1:16*. He said: *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. But here's where Jesus as multitasker becomes self-evident. I mean just picture the scene as Matthew is describing, this woman is begging and pleading and Jesus is absolutely silent. Well the tension and the pressure begins to build until it gets to the place where the disciples intercede with a typically human response to a very uncomfortable moment.

Verse 23 says: *And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."* Well Mark 6:27 says: *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."* Now here is a very subtle distinction as to what is being said and the way it is being presented, again, depending on your presuppositions. You see in scripture there are dogs and there are dogs. In fact there are two very different Greek terms for "dog." There is the first term "kuon" which means "dog" in the very worst possible sense of that word. It refers to wild animals that travel in packs, that attack people, attack children, attack other animals. It's the very word that Paul used in as derogatory a way as he could to describe false teachers when he said in *Philippians 3:2: Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.* Or *Revelation 22:15* which says:

Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. But there's another Greek term, it's the word "kunarion" which is a completely different term which is used to describe puppies or domesticated little dogs that used to stay under the tables and eat the scraps that fell under the table. And in no way is Jesus using the pejorative understanding of "dog." In fact he uses the endearing form of the word but one that captures the idea that these creatures may well be beloved but they're not first in line. She picks up on what Jesus is saying and she responds in kind. Verse 28: *But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."* You see she gets it. She completely understands her place and basically tells Jesus she would gladly accept the children's crumbs knowing what a blessing even they would be. Verse 29 says: *And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."* And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

So once again Jesus the multitasker, he's basically done three things. Number one, he has taught the disciples to respect God's proper order of things; number two, he's taught them to respect all people, even cursed Canaanite women; and number three, he's done an extraordinary miracle. And just like with another outsider, the

Roman centurion whom he also commended for his faith, Jesus heals from a distance. It's only when the woman returns to her home that she learns that her daughter had been healed instantly.

Now as we prepare to take the bread, I want us to just take a moment to consider the privilege that she represents as well as our privilege. You see this table, our communion table is a lot more than scraps. In fact it is a full seat at the table. We listen to *1 Corinthians 11:28* which says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* And this is the warning I repeat each time we undertake this. I say communion is an extremely serious undertaking and to enter communion in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. I say if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother and sister before you bring the gift of yourself to this altar, then just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, then err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

And on the other hand, we can make the mistake of thinking that unless we're spotlessly perfect we're unworthy to receive communion, and that too is a mistake that the enemy loves. And being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're spotless and sinless and that you never fail, it means that you recognize the salvation you've been given is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by -- quote -- "being good." And I repeat once again Dane Ortlund's quote. He says, "In the kingdom of God the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we do fail we are aware that we've sinned, and the reason why is because we have the Spirit of God within us. And the Spirit of God inside us convicts us, showing us that we have grieved the Father. And so we grieve as children who know we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, who says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're spotless, it means you understand that when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, someone in heaven itself speaking on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And so it's because we

have Jesus's own righteousness, an alien righteousness that's now ours, we are now free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. He lived the life we were supposed to live and died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be here at this moment worthy of heaven.

So this morning we want to ask God for the gift of his Holy Spirit to help us prepare our conscience to receive communion, to consider the privilege that it is. So take a moment to consider that. *1 Corinthians 11:23* says: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* So take, and eat.

There are three things that this woman knew that we would do well who know as well. Number one, she understood her position; number two, she understood her place; and number three, she understood her privilege. First, she understood her position. I mean she was an outsider, she was from a cursed tribe and yet she understood perfectly who she was and who Jesus was. Again back to *Mark 6:25*: *But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet.* I mean she knew

she had absolutely nothing, she knew that the most appropriate position she could possibly take would be to fall down at his feet. Well, just compare that with the attitude of the Pharisees and the religious leaders. Chapter 7 opens not with their reverent submission but with this stunningly arrogant attack. This is the opening of *Mark 7*. It says: *Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.*

So picture this, this cursed Canaanite woman is on her face while the religious leaders address Jesus by telling him I've got a bone to pick with you about the way your disciples clean their hands. I mean what is compelling in this picture is the wisdom and the insight that this cursed outsider has compared to the ignorance and blindness that the religious leaders expressed. I mean they genuinely felt that their adherence to all of these little minor requirements of the law, stuff that they'd even made up had built up for them a debt of positive goodness that gave them the right to question Jesus's motives and actions. But that's exactly what I do as well. I mean I may not express it outwardly but inward lies the very same kind of thinking. Lord, I don't steal, I don't do porn, I don't cheat on my wife, I'm one of the good guys, so why is X, Y or Z happening in my life? I mean the Canaanite woman had none of

that baggage. She knew very little about theology but she understood all too well that song that says, "Nothing to thy throne I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." And the beauty of genuinely having nothing like the Canaanite woman had is that you don't have to suffer the delusion of thinking you come to Christ with anything other than your sin and your need.

Unfortunately we're a lot more closely related to the Pharisees than we are this Canaanite woman. It's hard for us because we're in a collapsing culture. Casual evil is so prevalent we can simply look around at our own relative goodness and start thinking how lucky God is to have us on our team. I mean we may not practice the same ceremonial cleansings as the Pharisees, but rest assured, God, we're good people and we vote pro-life and we don't get drunk, we don't get high, we may even picket a school board meeting. And those may be all very, very good things but when it comes to standing before a holy God, they fall hopelessly short. I mean the Canaanite woman understood she had nothing when she fell at his feet. And she realized that the only appropriate action to take before a holy God was to fall down exactly as she had but she didn't stop there. She also knew her position and she understood her place as well. Jesus told her in verse 27: *"Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* She understood she was not first in line or

second, but that was okay with her. And the question is do you and I realize that when we come before a holy God we've got nothing as well, absolutely nothing. And no matter what good you think you might have accomplished measured against the standard of God's perfection, everything we do becomes filthy rags which is how the prophet Isaiah put it.

He said in *Isaiah 64:6*: *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.* I mentioned before Isaiah used the strongest possible term he could find to express what our finest deeds are like before God's holiness and that "filthy rags" is what Isaiah used, it refers to used menstrual cloths. Just remember that he's addressing people to whom blood was extraordinarily important and they had all kinds of rules about cleanliness and blood, even in the animals that they butchered and ate. So Isaiah used the image of filthy rags because he knew what that image would conjure up to his fellow Jews. But notice, he included himself in that characterization. He said: *All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.* No exceptions. Everything touched by human hands becomes polluted.

Now Isaiah's not saying there is no such thing as a good deed that

a human being can do. He is instead describing the power of God to take polluted human beings and somehow make them good enough for heaven. I mean Isaiah introduced this idea of our filthy rags. This is how he introduced it by saying this verse 4. He said: *Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.* I mean Isaiah is describing God's goodness and how it applies Christ's righteousness to anything and everything we do to make it worthy of heaven, and that includes our good deeds. You see, only by the grace of God are we capable of and expected to do good works. I mean after all it says in *Ephesians 2:10: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Well, how can the good works which God prepared beforehand be filthy rags as well? Well it all comes down to how you view them. You see as an expression of the grace of God in your life, your good works demonstrate the power of God. That's why Christ says in *Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your what? -- your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* Now if those good works are filthy rags, how can that possibly glorify God? Well it all comes down to how you view them. You see, if our good works are brought forth and they're put on the table as somehow making us deserving, well then

God can subject them to the scrutiny of his perfection and inevitably they will fail. If my good deeds are an expression of God's grace and power, they do what they are supposed to do, they glorify our Father in heaven. I mean the very same good deed, whether it's a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name or something far more industrious, that very same deed judged as an expression of God's grace is good and fitting and proper, but when it's extended as payment or entitlement for grace given freely, as God's grace is, then and only then it becomes subject to God's perfection and then only by comparison to that perfection does it become filthy rags. It's the standard that makes it so.

I mean if I take a sip of water from a babbling brook up on a mountain side in northern Maine, people would probably say that's as pure and as fresh as you can get. But if I compare that sample of water to something that's sterilized that comes out of a biological lab, something subjected to some ultraviolet bombardment and every kind of medical intervention it can get to make it spotless, well that water is going to make my spring water look filthy. It all depends on the standard that you judge it by. I mean take the very same good deed and try to press it forward to absolute perfection and you're going to see that any deed that you do and measured against that standard is going to appear spiritually filthy. Not only must your action be flawless, your

motives have to be absolutely flawless as well, and that's why God says it's by grace alone that we enter heaven. And when we rely on our own good works, God said they fall hopelessly short.

See, the beauty of the Canaanite woman was she had no good deeds to fall back on. She had nothing but her nothingness, and that proved to be everything. She was blessed to find herself among the puppies under the table feeding on scraps and she happily acknowledged any position that would put her near the Master.

Listen to how the psalmist puts it. This is *Psalm 84*. He says: *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

So the Canaanite woman understood her position. She instantly recognized Jesus as Lord and Master, she understood her place, happily accepting the scraps under the master's table; and finally she understood her privilege. There were a lot of other people around Jesus that very day but they didn't have the privilege of the conversation that took place between Jesus and her. Why did that happen? I mean why did God choose to allow this woman from a cursed tribe to have access to God himself? I mean I ask that same question of myself all the time. I mean why is it that God is present and available and active and involved in my life? I mean you see just like the Canaanite woman, I brought absolutely nothing

to God. In fact by comparison I brought a negative. I was decidedly anti God when he -- quote -- "intruded into my life." And so it's stunning to me the level of privilege that I've been given. And it's a privilege only begin to grasp at the smallest possible level in eternity. I mean even at the human level we don't get it. We don't get it at all. It's almost meaningless to say that a million centuries from now I'll still be basking in the privilege I've received right now as a gift from God.

I mean, do you ever consider the extraordinary privilege that you've been given by having a heart for the Lord Jesus Christ? See, here's the amazing thing, you didn't create that heart. God did. It's God who said in *Ezekiel 36*: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* See it wasn't your will, it wasn't your efforts that brought you to God, it was God himself. And God jealously guards his own reason for choosing you which I have no idea of. But this is what God says: *For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. And that mercy's not a right, it's a privilege. You know right outside that door you and I know that there is a world full of people who have no time, no energy, and no desire whatsoever for God. And such were some of

you before God did that work in your life. So as we're about to receive the cup, just take a moment to consider the blessing you've received.

1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." So take, and drink.

Well as you know this is the part that we call "heads, heart, and feet," where we try to have some kind of practical application of what it means to know Jesus. And we're talking about privilege. Every single privilege I remember hearing this when I was knee high to a grasshopper, every time I heard it, "every privilege brings with it responsibility." And that's exactly what we see. And we see that in scripture. You go all the way back to Genesis, you see God speaking to Abraham. God says to Abram, "I will bless you" but he doesn't leave it at "I will bless you," he says, "I will bless you -- what? -- and you will be a blessing." That was the privilege and that was the responsibility. It's something that Jesus had to remind his disciples about. And what he reminded them in the passage that we read this morning is the extent of their privilege. They weren't even thinking about, they're exactly like us, they came back from this missionary journey, they said, look,

even the demons responded to us, we were healing, we were doing this, we were doing that. And what does Jesus remind them of? He reminds them of their privilege. Listen to what he says. He says: *"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* That's what we've got. I mean our names are written in heaven. And what Jesus says, hey, demons and miracles, that's small stuff compared to what you actually have and you don't really realize: Your names are written in heaven.

Well all of us have loved ones that we know, friends and acquaintances that we know, that don't have this privilege. There are folks who may be lovely people but you and I both know they have no appetite whatsoever for God or for the things of God, and our hearts should be breaking for those people. We should be in the position of anxiously awaiting opportunities to share the good news with those people.

So what I want to do is take a practical moment, I just want to take a minute and I want you to think of somebody. It can be somebody famous that you see on TV, it could be your next-door neighbor, your brother, sister, husband, wife, anybody, somebody that you know who doesn't know Jesus. Right now I want you to focus on him, I want to just take a minute, I want to ask you to

pray for that person right now.

I'm thinking of a neighbor of mine who I've shared the gospel with a number of times and each time I do he gets more and more angry. Just a wonderful person. At the drop of a hat he'd come plow your driveway, do this, that, and the other thing, has zero interest in God. Now I want us to take a moment to pray that God would do a work in that person's life because we know unless God turns hearts around, unless God does a transplant work in that life, it's a hopeless task, but we want to be prepared, we want to be ready, we want to be able to present the good news to that person, so we want to pray ahead of time that God would do that very work. Just take a moment and do that now.

Father, we just want to lift up all of these people that you've heard of this morning, there's friends and neighbors and people who are not at all operating under the privilege that we're operating on. The chances are extremely good their names have not been written in the lamb's book of life or if they are, they haven't been discovered at this point. Lord, I just, I pray for each and every person that has been presented before your throne this morning. I pray you would do a work in their heart and I pray you would do a work in our heart so that we're prepared, that we're ready, that we're anxious to be able to have the privilege of

sharing the good news, and we pray that they would embrace that privilege and make it their privilege as well. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.