

Mark 7:24-30 How to Get Close to God Jan. 30, 2022 PM Falls OPC

God's kingdom has no barriers of race, gender, ethnicity or nationality. Jesus is not just for one group of people. Jesus has true love for all nations. Anyone can come to Christ by faith.

Anyone can get close to God the same way – by faith.

By the end of this chapter, later in verse 37, the people would say that Jesus "...has done all things well." Let's study how Jesus did well in His interactions with this woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon, the area that represented the most extreme expression of paganism, both actually and symbolically. Can a person get close to God from there?

1. From any nation, class, or gender – by faith. (v.24-26)

The previous passage, chapter 7:1-23, contained an increasingly heated debate between the Pharisees and Jesus about purity. How far did the mission of Jesus have relevance? Can Jesus reach even beyond the community of Israel?

What about purity vs. impurity? That was the issue so far in chapter 7.

How could the Jewish Messiah have an influence outside of Israel, when even the food laws were different and divisive on purpose? The observance of food rules from Moses was an effective practical barrier to social contact with those who did not observe those rules. Kosher food or not kosher food was a dividing point. However, we see Jesus breaking down barriers. Back in verse 19, our author Mark previously interjected a summary principle, in the voice of the narrator, when he wrote, "*Thus [Jesus] declared all foods clean.*" That was quite a radical new approach, which in due time was what made it possible to have the integration of both Jew and Gentiles into a single community of discipleship that we now know as the church.

But Jesus was leading the change. Jesus was way ahead of the separation caused by food law differences. Jesus was already reflecting the future unity that would become possible between Jew and Gentile in the geographic movement of Jesus into a certain territory known to be Gentile. The people with whom Jesus interacted were clearly Gentiles. Mark is writing down and reporting all of this for us to notice.

Was Jesus intentionally entering into a phase of ministry in which Jesus reaches out to Gentiles? Apparently not! Consider what Mark tells us in the first verse of our passage, verse 24, that Jesus entered an area recognized to be outside of the precincts of Israel and famously Gentile geographically, and you would think that Jesus would stand up and say I am the Savior of the Gentiles, everyone come to Me! But that is not what Jesus said or did. Let me read verse 24, and you listen for the degree to which Jesus was attempting to make His entry into Gentile territory a public event, "...from there [Jesus] arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And [Jesus] entered a house and DID NOT WANT ANYONE TO KNOW, yet [Jesus] could not be hidden."

Did Jesus intend or attempt to make a public display of His entry into Gentile territory as a new phase of His ministry? NO. Jesus did not want to become publicly known or discovered.

Jesus was not capable of remaining hidden.

Soon Jesus will be responding to needs beyond Israel. Soon Jesus the Savior of the JEWS will be working a miracle for a GENTILE.

Mark highlighted for us how that unfolded. Jesus the Jew reached a point of debating with a Gentile about who should receive God's blessings. Should it be only the children of God? Or should others receive the blessings of God? Who gets the bread from God's table – does the bread belong only to the children, or could some of the bread also be enjoyed by any of the little dogs of the household?

Here Jesus made it clear that the bread would be available to a wider community. Bread is supplied not just to the children, but to the dogs. This story will be followed by Mark telling another feeding lesson in chapter 8 – a miracle of Jesus multiplying literal bread and making that bread now available to a wider, Gentile community. This is repeating the pattern of the verbal lesson in our passage. To whom is the bread to be distributed? To whom are the blessings of God to be given?

Yes, it is for Gentiles too. Yes, the blessings of God are for Gentiles, too.

The geographic movement of Jesus shows His priorities. So, here in verse 24, Jesus physically left Israel and arrived instead in Gentile territory, in a place called Tyre and Sidon. It was a clear sign of a widening sphere of the mission of Jesus. In our passage tonight, we get the first inclining of a coming trend – that Jesus will be deliberately extending His area of activity outside of the sphere of the Jews.

We move to verse 25, *“but immediately (remember one of Mark's favorite words is immediately) heard of Jesus, a woman...”*

Verse 25 further informs us that the woman *“had a little daughter who had an unclean spirit”* which is a demon. How did the woman approach Jesus? She *“fell down at His feet.”*

Our hearts go out to her. Her daughter, her little daughter, has a demon. How sad. She shows great respect for Jesus. She is pleading.

Mark is back on theme in verse 26, to tell us what is at stake with this statement, *“Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth....”* What is Mark trying to show us? Mark is showing us that there was more going against her, than any other person that Jesus has met in the Gospel of Mark. 1) she is a woman, and therefore one whom the respected Jewish teacher really should not associate 2) she is a Gentile, and this is further emphasized by naming her exact race. It could not possibly be a mistake, nor can it be overlooked. 3) her daughter's condition could invite a reaction of disgust and revulsion, for often demons would cause children to do and say terrible things and 4) we are back to the matter of

purity, what sort of ritual defilement might a Jewish Rabbi risk if he comes close to the little girl who has an unclean spirit living inside of her? It would be expected that Jesus would not acknowledge her presence, not allow her to come close enough to actually touch His feet while she is on the ground in front of Jesus, and certainly Jesus would not be expected to speak to her, much less enter into a dialogue, and even less likely, to have her statement influence Him, and least likely of all, to perform a miracle of God to benefit her child, based on her expression of religious belief.

Mark is making sure we understand the scene. Do you get what is happening here? So many people who think they know about Jesus, and read this passage, become uncomfortable with what appears to be reluctance on the part of Jesus to help her, or that Jesus seems to be only persuaded to help her by her persistence and by her debating skill. People misunderstand Jesus here, and conclude that Jesus made a grudging concession. The truth is that Jesus conducted His ministry purposefully and intentionally as a matter of principle leading Him to this very place, and this very person.

Mark shows us that at this moment, Jesus had a choice to make. Jesus would further open the door to ministry to the Gentiles, or Jesus would swing shut the door of ministry to the Gentiles.

Every action of Jesus and every word of Jesus is always in line with His mission and His priorities. So, what Jesus does here will show us a lot.

The story is about casting out a demon – an exorcism.

But it is telling that the exorcism does not get the attention here. Instead, the conversation that Jesus had with this woman and the implications of the conversation, are ultimately more important than one specific little girl having her demon problem solved. In other stories where Jesus casts out a demon, the emphasis is on the greater authority of Jesus than the demon through a direct confrontation with the demon. But no such confrontation takes place here. In fact, the exorcism is accomplished with Jesus at a distance from the little girl, and Jesus at a distance from the demon. It actually serves to additionally emphasize the authority of Jesus in a new way – that Jesus' command alone, without His physical presence near the possessed person, has the power to drive out the demon. Jesus has an authority that extends beyond His current locality. No matter where Jesus is, He has authority over all demons, no matter where they are.

2. From any religious or non-religious background - by faith. (v.27)

So, what is it that we need to learn from the words of Jesus to the woman?

The fact that such a woman, a Gentile woman and a Syrophenician by birth, would make the decision to approach a Jewish healer, and even to fall at His feet, indicates she was a desperate mom, and she had remarkable insight into the uniqueness of Jesus.

She is a parent. In verse 26, when Mark wrote that she “*begged [Jesus] to cast the demon out of her daughter...*” it has the form of the verb that is a present ongoing. What it means is that SHE....KEPT... ON....BEGGING. Verse 25 told us that her position is now having fallen down at the feet of Jesus, and verse 26 tells us that she kept on begging Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Nothing could stop her from begging Jesus. No one could stop her from begging Jesus. Over in Matthew’s account of this in Matthew 15, her begging reached a point where the disciples actually urged Jesus to send her away.

Who has this sort of boldness? On the chart of people with boldness and courage, we start with cowards on level one, then regular people on level two, then heroes on level three, and above heroes, there are Moms. A Mom who has a little daughter in jeopardy, would do whatever it takes to get help.

At long last, here in verse 27, Jesus spoke. Jesus finally answered her. What was Jesus’s response. Verse 27, Jesus “...*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.’*”

The statement of Jesus is less diplomatic than we would have expected. The tone is negative, and nearly offensive. It suggests that Jesus has no intention of helping the woman. But when we look more carefully, we realize that Jesus was actually giving her a parable, and hidden within the parable was an offer to help her. Jesus commented on the proper order of who can receive blessing of demon extraction from God. The parable is based on children vs. dogs, and the children receive bread first, and then the dogs. So the Jewish people are the children of God, and they receive blessings from God first. Jesus was sent to focus on the people of Israel. God had spent many years giving promises, tabernacles and temples, prophets, priests and kings who all pointed ahead to the fulfillment of God’s covenant blessings to His people Israel. Jesus is reminding her that there is an order here. Jesus must first go to God’s children with ministry and miracles, and then the other nations later.

However, remember this is a mom, fighting for her little daughter.

This Mom is not done fighting.

Let’s move to our third point, and the last 3 verses.

3. From any life situation or predicament – by faith. (v.28 - 30)

Verse 28, “*But she answered [Jesus], ‘Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’*”

In other words, when she heard the key word “first.” “*let the children be fed first...*” As a desperate parent, she heard that there is hope for her daughter.

She basically said back to Jesus, “Yes, Sir, I know that I am not one of the children at the table, and that I am only a dog under the table, and that I have to

wait my turn behind others, but when my turn comes, even I get crumbs. That is my request, please.”

She is saying this - I know that I’m not Jew, and not part of Israel, but even other people get blessings from you, and so today I need you to do one small thing that is not even hard for you – please heal my daughter.

I have no rights. I have no demands. You owe me nothing.

She was saying this: Please give me what I do NOT deserve, on the basis of Your own goodness, Lord.

Verse 29, Jesus said to her, “*For this statement, you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.*” Verse 30, the woman went home and it was true, there was her little daughter! The demon was gone!

Her statement had secured the granting of her request for the healing of her little daughter.

What was it about her statement? It was faith. She viewed Jesus as being so filled with goodness and gifts that Jesus would be able to supply abundantly until all God’s children were fully satisfied with bread from heaven, and there would be plenty of crumbs left over for the dogs of the world to enjoy.

This woman knew how to get close to God.

Let me ask you something.

Who taught desperate parents to love their children like that? God.

Who can teach that woman to trust in God to provide? God

This is central to the understanding the gospel. This woman saw that she is wicked and ought to remain outside of God’s blessings, but that there is love in Jesus beyond what this woman could dare to hope, before she met Him.

This SyroPhoenician woman, whose name we never even get, is the first person in the Gospel of Mark to actually HEAR AND UNDERSTAND a parable of Jesus to her. She understood the words of Jesus. She understood the gospel.

She even answered Jesus from WITHIN the parable. She answered in the very terms and concepts that Jesus used to address her. She did so with understanding.

Jesus said - First the children get bread, not the dogs.

She replied, but even the dogs get the children’s bread crumbs.

CONCLUSION:

Application: Use what words from Jesus you have to get close to God.

This Syro-Phoenician woman only received one sentence from Jesus, and look how she used it to get close to Christ.

We don’t get close to God by having faith in ourselves.

We don’t get close to God by trusting our own persistence. That is not the lesson of this passage.

We get close to God by coming to understand that it is within the character of WHO JESUS IS to show us mercy.

Jesus came into the world to offer us mercy.

Jesus came not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles.

Everyone and anyone can get close to God.

Do you want to know how?

Right now where you are erase every other factor about yourself – your gender, how much money you have, how much schooling you have had, how old you are, your position in the world or in the church, how well you have done with your prayer time or church attendance or giving, and you forget all of that.

Just as a person, what do you think would make you close to God?

Do you deserve to be closer to God?

Have you been good enough?

Were you raised in the church?

Being close to God is not about any of those things.

This Syro-Phoenician woman has a prominent place in the Gospel of Mark and in the Gospel of Matthew in order to remind us throughout the history of Christianity and the spread of the church worldwide until Jesus comes, that any person anywhere has the opportunity of getting close to God.

This woman got close to God by understanding one sentence of the Words of Jesus.

One parable. One sentence.

One Word.

If Jesus will just say, “Believe” and you believe in Him, then you ARE close to God.

Do you believe that the outpouring of grace and gifts and kindness and love and mercy and tenderness and compassion and strengthening from Jesus is so great and big, that there is plenty for all of God’s children in the church, and still plenty to spill over to all the unbelievers we ever meet?

If you believe that, then you know how to get close to God. Ask for His blessings. Know that you don’t deserve any of it, but ask for His blessings anyway.

Because He is always giving and pouring out gifts and blessings upon the world. That is the kind of God that He is.