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The Demonstration of True Holiness

Mark 7:24-30, "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 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 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 but she answered and said to him yes Lord but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs 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 having left .”

Let's pray! Heavenly Father, Your word says that You caused growth by what every joint and ligament supplies. I pray that You would cause growth this day through me that I would be as a ligament to join You to Your people. That You would cause Your word to be effectually taught and proclaimed with power. That You would give me unction through Your spirit to proclaim Your word and that Father, You would give Your people the ability to feed upon it. I pray that You would feed them this day, not from the scraps, not from the crumbs, but from the feast of the children's table. Please feed us this day, we ask in Jesus name, Amen.

There's a sobering verse in Hebrews 12 that says without holiness no one will see the Lord. If you're like me, you might ask well then how do I get holiness? How do I become holy, if I will not see the Lord without this holiness. I want to know where it comes from? How does one become a saint? How does one become a set apart one? How does one become holy? And if someone were to ask you that question what would you say?

That someone said how do you become holy, what would you answer them?

What does holiness look like in your life? Would you define holiness by the:

- Clothes you wear? Are there certain styles of clothing that are more holy than not? That are more Christian than not? I'm not necessarily talking about provocative versus modest clothing but as is their Christian style of clothing?
- And what about hairstyle? Believe it or not there was a time when I did have hair and I had a professor tell me that I had an unchristian hairstyle, whatever that is. He said, I had an I had an unholy hairstyle that did not conform to Christian holiness.
- What about smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol? Are you more or less holy if you partake of these or refrain from them?
- Perhaps more controversial what about tattoos, external markings on the skin? Does that determine whether you are holy or not?

Now if you've been trending along with these questions, you'll notice that every single one of them dealt with an external. That they were all physical, they didn't deal with the heart. So the question before us today is this: Is holiness merely external or is it internal as well? Does it touch upon our thoughts upon our affections upon the will?

Well this question was a was brought up in in the life in the ministry of Jesus. And it's the context in which Mark 7:1-23 comes before us. It gives the account of the time where the scribes and the Pharisees came and disputed with Jesus over the fact that his disciples were eating with unclean hands. They said why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the fathers? Why do they eat with unwashed hands? Why do they eat with unclean. unholy hands?

Jesus rebuked them first for elevating their traditions above the commandments of God. But secondly, for also thinking that holiness was merely a matter of externals, that it was merely a matter of following certain rites. Jesus declared to them that there is nothing outside of a man that can defile him, but that it's the heart of man that defiles him. It's not the things that go into a man's mouth that defile him. It's the things that come out of his mouth. It's out of the heart that precede adultery's, murders, fornications and thefts. These are the things that defile a man.

So, Jesus declared that holiness is a matter of the heart. It's internal but he not only declared it, He demonstrated it.

There's an interesting pattern in the book of Mark where we see Jesus declaring some truth and then he demonstrates it. For example, in chapter 2, Jesus declared that the Son of Man had authority upon earth to forgive sins and then immediately after that we see the call of Levi the tax collector, the sinner to be one of his innermost disciples. That Jesus had forgiven this sinner. Likewise in the same chapter Jesus declared that he is the Lord of the Sabbath, He makes the declaration and immediately following the He heals the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day.

And the same is true before us today. He declared in verses 1- 23 that holiness is not a matter of external rights, it's a matter of the heart. And now he is going to demonstrate it by calling this Gentile woman, who externally was unclean. Externally she had everything going against her, but He demonstrated that internally her heart had been cleansed by faith. It's a demonstration of the truth of Scripture, that he is a Jew not who is one outwardly but he who is one inwardly. That circumcision is not outward in the flesh, but it is inward of the heart through the spirit and so we have before us today. The truth that holiness is internal, and it comes through faith in Jesus Christ holiness is internal and it comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

This morning we are going to look at this in two parts. We will look at the fact that this woman was externally unclean. We primarily will see this in verses 24-27. Then we're going to see that she was internally clean in verses 25 – 30.

You will notice that there is some overlap here because Mark doesn't necessarily lay him out in order he weaves these two truths together in his account. So first, the fact that the woman was externally unclean and then that the woman was internally clean through faith.

We will look at four points under each heading. There are four things that Mark draws our attention by showing us that ceremonially this woman was unclean externally, and likewise there will be four points that he will point us to demonstrate that this woman's heart had been cleansed through faith.

So, let's start by looking at the at the first point, that the woman was externally unclean. We see this by the fact that she was from an unclean land.

Mark 7:24, "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."

Here Jesus has left Israel and He's embarking on a journey through Gentile territory. And the region of Tyre is His first stop. Most likely He is drawing His disciples away from the hustle and bustle of ministry and Galilee. So that he can begin to teach them on a more intimate basis.

This isn't necessarily a Gentile mission that was to come later in the preaching of the Apostles. But this was a time where our Lord wanted to retire, He wanted to get away with his disciples and build into the lives of these men so that they could go out with the message that His death, resurrection and ascension was pending and was near.

So, He retires to the region of Tyre and He wants no-one to know of it. He wants to remain quiet in this house, but He could not escape notice. Note that there will be times in our lives where we want retirement, where we want to get away, but ministry will call, parents, children or other things. Pastors on vacation might get a call.

There are times we want to retire. We see this in our Lord's life as well. He wanted to retire, but He could not escape notice. But not, the He is in Gentile territory. Here he's in the region of Tyre. This is an unclean land.

Tyre originally had decent relationships with the nation of Israel. If you remember under the kingship of David and Solomon, Hiram was an ally. He sent wood for the building of the temple but it was soon after that Tyre became an enemy to the Israelites. It was from this region that Jezebel came. We know that wretched name, the wretched Jezebel, the worshiper of Baal who brought the stain upon the Northern Kingdom.

At the time of Ahab, we also read that at the time of the Maccabees when the Seleucids were seeking to convert all the Jews to Greek culture and language and religion, that the people of Tyre sided against the Israelites. The sided against the Jews.

And by the time we come to the time of Josephus, which is pretty much this time, the first century, Josephus labels the people of Tyre as amongst the bitterest enemies of the Jews.

So, this is Gentile territory. This is unclean, an unclean land. And it's the land, which this woman is from.

Also notice that she had an unclean family.

Mark 7:25, "After hearing of him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at his feet."

Notice that she had an unclean spirit. The Spirit is called an unclean spirit. It's an unholy spirit and in the context of the passage this is significant. This isn't unique to this passage. Actually, this is one of Mark's preferential terms for a demon. He uses this some eleven times in this gospel, compared to thirteen times that he uses the word demon. But given the context of Mark 7, that it's all about cleanliness and holiness and the difference between being defiled and common, and holy and clean. We ought to perk up and recognize that there's significance to the fact that this little girl had an unclean spirit.

But beyond that the woman was also of an unclean race.

Mark 7:25, "Now the woman was a Gentile of the Syrophenician race."

It actually says she was a Greek. If you if you recall at this time the world and the Jewish mind was divided between the Jews and the Greeks. That's why Paul could say that he was a debtor to bring the gospel not only to the Jews but also to the Greeks.

It doesn't necessarily mean she was a Greek by descent, she wasn't from the land of Greece or from the Isles of Greece, she was a Syrophenician. As it says, but in this time the word Greek was a label for Gentile.

Actually, Matthew tells us that she was a Canaanite. If you know your Old Testament, you know that the Canaanites were that vile race, that unclean race, that God had commanded His people to wipe off the face of the earth. He had told them not to make any covenant with them, not to intermarry with them, to have no dealings or relationships with them because they were unclean. And that His people were called to be holy. So, they should have no dealings with the Canaanites.

Matthew tells us it is this woman, this Syrophenician was a Canaanite. And that she is Syrophenician by birth.

Canaan's firstborn was Sidon. And the Canaanites dwelt in this land all the way from the north down through what is called Palestine. And she's called a Syrophenician because the Phoenicians were split in antiquity. They not only dwelt the area which is now modern-day Lebanon where along the coast of the Mediterranean, but in ancient times they had sailed across the Mediterranean and they had dwelt in North Africa in Carthage.

So, the people of Carthage, those bitter enemies of the Romans, those were Phoenicians. So there was a distinction between a Syrophenician and those of the province Phoenicia. But this woman is from what was the Roman province of Syria, even though today it's not the country of Syria, it's the country of Lebanon. But at that time, it was called Syria so she's from an unclean land, she has an unclean family, she's from an unclean race.

Notice as well that she has an unclean designation, she is called a dog in verse 27.

Mark 7:27, "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."

Dogs in Jewish speech at this time was a term for the Gentiles. They would call the Gentiles dogs because dogs in the Jewish mind were unclean animals. They ate from the corpses, they ate from the carrion, and they ate from the refuse. They were unclean animals. So, in their mind it was a fitting description of a Gentile.

Now I recognize and realize that we are in America, dogs are beloved. In fact, we live in a state where it is a felony to abuse your dog and it's a misdemeanor to abuse your child, if you can believe that. We love our dogs. We love our animals. But I hate to break the news to you in Scripture dogs aren't typically spoken of as being lovable creatures. That's not to say that they're bad and it's bad to have a pet, but the general tone of Scripture is that dogs are unclean animals.

In the Old Testament it was a curse to have your flesh eaten by a dog. It was a curse to have your blood licked up by a dog. It was an insult to call someone a dead dog. And in the New Testament it's no better. Jesus tells us not to take what is holy and cast it to the dogs. Paul calls the Judaizers who were cursed of God, who had who are under the anathema of God dogs in Philippians 3. And when you read in the book of Revelation the description of those who are outside of heaven, outside of the holy city of Jerusalem, amongst the list is the dogs.

So, the dogs in Scripture are thought of as being outside of the camp, as being unclean. So that's the use in amongst the Jews and amongst the Scriptures. But why is Jesus calling this woman a dog? Does it seem a little insensitive, almost rude, almost uncompassionate?

We know from the book of Mark that one of his purposes is to show the compassion of our Lord that throughout the book of Mark we see that our Lord was moved with compassion. For his disciples were moved with compassion for the people and for the crowds. So why is He now calling this woman a dog?

You can believe it, some have even accused our Lord of sin at this point. Now regardless of what He's doing, I can tell you a hundred percent what he is not doing. And that is He is not sinning by calling this woman a dog. The scriptures are very clear that our Lord never sinned that He was holy and separate from sinners. That there was no deceit found in His mouth. He had a pure mouth. Everything He said was what His Father had commanded Him to say. So our Lord is not sinning by calling this woman a dog.

But why does He call her a dog? Some say that He was merely using conventional speech that the Jews were so accustomed to calling the Gentiles dogs. Jesus was a Jew so He calls her a dog. Some say that perhaps there was an object lesson that in this house that He's sitting at with His disciples, He's eating a meal and there's a dog there, and when the woman barges in He uses it, the setting, as an example. And He merely points to the dog and uses this as a parable, as an example to teach that is not good to take the children's food and send it to the

give it to the dogs. Others have argued that He is testing her faith. And I think that's the more accurate view of this.

Remember that our Lord is demonstrating to His disciples the truth that faith isn't internal, that faith is what makes someone clean. And that this a demonstration that this woman is clean through faith. And so He's putting her faith on display by testing it, by trying it, just as He tries our faith at times. Just as He puts our faith through the crucible.

As we read in 1 Peter, He proves our faith which is more precious than silver and gold. And by testing this woman's faith, He shows the perseverance of her faith. He shows that her faith is genuine, that it perseveres even through discouragement and, even as we will see, that it persists when He ignored her.

Initially, but I think we do all understand what He's saying here is that it is not good to take the children's food and give it to the dogs. Not too long ago, maybe a year or so ago, we were in Los Angeles, and actually in God's providence we were at a Lebanese restaurant. So it could have been a distant descendant of this Syrophenician woman who had immigrated to Los Angeles and opened a Lebanese restaurant.

We were at this restaurant visiting our friend who brought his mother with him. His mother had a service dog with her in the restaurant. And those of you who have children know that children don't eat at the same pace as adults. That's why oftentimes the waitress asks if the kids food should be brought out first, because they take a long time to eat. But in this case, we all started together and when all of the adults had eaten their food first, and we were done, but my beloved daughter was still eating her food; my friend's mom took it upon herself to reach over and to grab a piece of my daughter's food to give it to her dog. Now you can imagine that this didn't go over well. Obviously, there was a gracious rebuke. But you don't take the children's food and give it to the dogs. Let my daughter eat first. Let her be filled first and then the dog can eat.

And so that is the lesson that our Lord is giving to this woman. But notice that there is some hope in it. He says let the children be satisfied first. He's not telling her that there will not be a time where the Gentiles will not eat. There will be a time where the Gentiles will eat in full!

That is the time we are in now, it wasn't until after the resurrection that the dividing wall had been brought down and God called the Gentiles into the church. And the Gentiles became fellow heirs and fellow citizens with the children of Israel. That the Gentiles were as wild branches were grafted in to the root of Israel (Romans 11).

So, there was a time coming where the Gentiles would be called in that had been proclaimed in the Old Testament. Salvation would go to the ends of the earth but first, the children needed to be satisfied. This was the pattern of Jesus in His ministry. As He told His disciples not to go into the cities of the Samaritans, not to go into the cities of the Gentiles. And it was also the pattern of the Apostles. First, they were to go to Jerusalem, then to Samaria, then to the ends

of the earth. And that when the apostles did go to the ends of the earth, they first went to the synagogues, they first proclaimed the message to the Jews in the synagogues. And when the Jews would reject the message it would be then that they would turn to the Gentiles. Salvation according to scripture is for the Jew first and then for the Greek; for the Jew first and then for the Gentile.

So, we see that this woman was externally unclean according to the Ceremonial Law. Outwardly speaking, this woman would have been outside of the community of Israel. But remember the purpose of this text, the purpose of this example is to show that our Lord has the ability to cleanse the heart. He has the ability and the authority to cleanse the heart. We read in Acts 15 that God had cleansed the heart of the Gentiles through faith. That He is the one who declares what is clean and unclean. And just as Jesus and in Mark 7:19 declared all foods clean, He also had the authority and the ability to declare all men clean. And He's going to demonstrate before us today, that this woman was internally clean.

So, let's turn now to the second point and look at the fact that this woman who is externally unclean according to the Ceremonial Law was internally clean by faith. True holiness comes through faith in Jesus Christ and that it is an internal reality.

Look with me first at the fact that this woman's faith was demonstrated by her worship in verse 25.

Mark 7:25, "But after hearing of him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at his feet."

She came and bowed down before Jesus. Matthew actually tells us that she came, and she worshiped Him. This woman recognized who He was. We see that in verse 28, in the fact that she calls him Lord. Matthew's account tells us that she called Him the son of David. This woman knew who Jesus was and she came, and she demonstrated her faith by worshiping Him! She bowed down before Him she worshiped Him. Acknowledging Him as Lord and acknowledging Him as the Messiah the son of David.

Likewise, she demonstrates her faith through prayer. If you notice verse 26.

Mark 7:26, "Now the woman was a Gentile of the Syrophenician race and she kept asking him to cast the demon out of her daughter."

That is a good translation. She kept asking Him. This woman didn't just ask once, she persisted in asking Him. In Matthew 15 it says that Jesus initially didn't answer her a word, so she asked Him Lord, son of David have mercy on me, cast a demon out of my daughter. And He completely ignored her. He didn't say a single thing to her to the extent that the disciples finally came and said, Lord please send this woman away. Send her away, she's crying out. She persisted in prayer. She persisted in asking Him, demonstrating her faith through persistent prayer.

Do you pray? Do you pray to God? Are you persistent in your requests?

Remember the parable of the unjust judge that our Lord told in Luke 18. He told this parable instructing us that that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. That we ought to be persistent in our prayers and He told the parable of the woman who came to the unjust judge and she kept asking him and asking him for justice at the hand of her opponent. And Jesus said that the unjust judge didn't regard man, he didn't care about God. But since this woman pestered him, since she kept asking him, he finally said though I do not care about God or man I will I will give this woman the petition of her heart simply because she bothers me. And what's the point in the parable? The point of the parable is that we if we bother God that He'll listen to us.

May it never be! The point, that God is saying to us is listen, if an unjust judge who doesn't care about God or man will listen to this widow, how much more will God who loves you, who cares about you, who looks upon you as beloved, how much more will He listen to you when you come to him in prayer!

So, are you persistent in your prayers? And when you do pray what do you pray for? Do you pray for other people to notice?

This woman is praying for her daughter. Parents, when you pray for your children, what do you pray do you pray for? Do you just pray that they'll be happy or healthy? That they'll be rich? That they'll live a comfortable life? Or do you pray that the power of Satan would be broken in their lives regardless of what Providence that might take? Even if it involves bitterness and trial and hardship so long as they know Christ? So long as they love Him and believe in Him? What do you pray for your children? Do you pray for your unbelieving family and friends? Do you pray for other people?

Notice this woman's persistent faith notice her persistent prayer>. Her faith is demonstrated through her prayer. Notice also that this woman demonstrates her faith in her humility.

As I as I read before in verse 27, Jesus refers to her as a dog but in verse 28, let's look at her humility.

Mark 7:28, "She answered and said to him yes Lord! But even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs know."

Two things from this one, we've already seen, that she calls Him Lord. She is a humble woman. She recognizes that He is Lord. She is servant, He is the master. She is the slave, but she also is willing to call herself a dog. She doesn't deny the fact that she's a dog, she knows her place. She knows that she is a Gentile. She knows that the gifts and the callings are for the Jews; therefore, the Israelites at this time. They have not yet fully been given to the Gentiles and she

is willing to identify herself as a dog. She is willing to humble herself and say yes, Lord I am a dog. But I am content to eat of the bare scraps. I'd be content with just the crumbs.

And finally, we see her faith demonstrated in her trust. Look at verse 25.

Mark 7:25, "But after hearing of him a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, immediately came and fell at his feet."

Notice that she heard of Him. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Faith comes through hearing about Jesus Christ. And this woman heard the report about Christ.

We don't know where she heard the report. In Mark 3 it describes large crowds that had gone out to follow Jesus. There were crowds from everywhere. There were crowds from across the Jordan. There were crowds from Judea and from Galilee. And amongst the crowds it mentions that there were people from Tyre and Sidon. So perhaps this woman was amongst the crowds. And she had seen the miracles and the healings that He had performed.

Or perhaps she stayed home and one of her neighbors was amongst the crowd and came back and said the Messiah of the Jews is here, He is healing people! Go and talk to him about your daughter.

Regardless of where she heard, she heard, and she trusted. She believed the message that she had heard. And we see that in verses 28,29, and 30 her response. Remember that Jesus said that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man because it doesn't touch the heart, but that it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles a man because out of the abundance of the heart. The mouth speaks. The mouth is downstream from the heart so it's not enough for us simply to ask God.

A frequent prayer that I ask is that He put a guard over my mouth because I say foolish things. We also ought to ask Him to go upstream to clear the source, to cleanse the source, to make the spring clean, so that our hearts might be clean. And that He might give grace to all those who hear.

So out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. And this woman's faith is demonstrated by her speech. Look with me at verse 29.

Mark 7:29, "And he said to her because of this answer, go, the demon has gone out of your daughter."

Literally it says because of this word. Jesus recognized that the word which proceeded from her mouth was a window into her soul. It was a window into her heart. That her word revealed her faith.

In Matthew, Jesus commended her and He says “great is your faith.” He acknowledges that this woman is a woman of faith. Even though she is externally unclean, according to Ceremonial Law, she is clean by faith.

And we also see her trust. The word of Christ was enough for her. Notice again in verse 29, 30. Jesus tells her to go, the demon has gone out of your daughter. Verse 30 says in going back to her home she found the child lying on the bed the demon having left her.

The word of Christ was enough for her. She didn't need anything more. It was enough for her that He had said the demon has gone out.

This is a healing at a distance. We ought to notice that she didn't need Jesus to come down to her house. She didn't need Jesus to come and lay his hands on her daughter. She didn't need some other token or sign. It was simply enough that He had said it. She trusted in His word. She trusted in the integrity of His word.

And she received what she had believed. When she went home, and she found her child finally at peace, finally lying on the bed, no longer convulsed by demons but at peace. The demon having left her. So, we see then that true holiness is internal, that true holiness comes through faith in Jesus Christ. that even though this woman was externally unclean, living in an unclean land, having an unclean daughter, being of an unclean race, having the unclean designation of a Dog, that internally she was clean by faith.

She demonstrated her faith through worship. She demonstrated her faith through prayer and through humility and through trust. This woman demonstrated the fact that He who is a Jew is not one who is one outwardly but one who is one inwardly. That circumcision is of the heart it's not merely of the flesh. So, I ask you today, what are you trusting in for your holiness? Are you trusting in the things, that I mentioned at the beginning:

- The clothes you wear
- The style of hair
- Whether you eat or drink certain foods
- Whether you smoke cigarettes

Are you focused upon external things? Have you slipped into a legal spirit in your walk with 7:52 Christ? Have you slipped into the spirit that you think that you are sanctified and made holy merely by external realities? Are you trusting in the law for your ultimate sanctification and salvation? Or are you as this woman believing and trusting in Christ?

Perhaps you say I don't know? I don't know if I'm if I'm believing or not?

Look to this woman as an example. Look to her faith and compare it to your own. Look to her life and compare it to your own. Ask yourself do I worship Christ? Do I acknowledge him as Lord in the inner man, where no one else sees, when it's just you and Him, nobody else is

around? Do you worship Him? Do you acknowledge Him? Does His command have authority in your life? Do you see him as your Messiah, as the king, as the son of David? Do you pray? Do you pray for you brothers and sisters?

This is a demonstration of faith when we pray in our secret place in the closet and nobody else sees. Do you trust that God wants to hear your prayers that He is willing and able to hear them? Remember that is why we pray, our Father. He is willing to hear our prayers. He who is in heaven, He is able to answer anything we ask according to His will.

Do you have humility? Are you humble to eat of the mere scraps of the mere crumbs? If you can but taste Christ? If you can but have any portion of Him, are you content? Content to be a door a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord? Are you content to take the lowest place in His house? If for some reason you might taste of the crumbs?

This woman was called a dog but she recognized that she was willing to eat up the crumbs. This is something that I did not touch upon when I spoke of this, is that the word that is used for dog is actually the little dog. Dogs in this time weren't only those who were the big voracious ones that ate of the corpses, but there are also little dogs that obviously would come into the house and would eat from the scraps. Are you willing to eat from the scraps?

The good news is you don't have to. The dividing wall has been broken down so that you and I, whom I imagine by and large are mostly Gentiles, have been brought into the Covenant Community. You are no longer considered dogs, you are considered sons and daughters, children of Christ. Children of God. You are at the table were you eat of the feast. Or will you neglect it as the scribes and the Pharisees did? Will you despise the feast that has been set before you?

You can feast upon Christ in His Word and through prayer and through the sacraments. And all the means, as our brother exhorted us on before I came and exhorted you from this passage, brothers and sisters the feast is yours! Will you feed upon it? Will you humble yourself and say yes, I am lowly, but I recognize that I have become a child. Is the word of Christ enough for you? Do you trust his word? Do you trust when He tells you that all your sins have been forgiven? Do you trust when He tells you that He loves you and cares for you? Or do you need something else? Do you need some other token in order to believe?

Brothers and sisters, look to this woman this day. No matter how far off you might think you are, no matter how unclean you might think you are, salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. He is able to cleanse your heart.

If He is able to cleanse this woman, He is able to cleanse you. Turn to Him. Come to Him and be cleansed.