

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Now The Woman Was A Gentile

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Mark 7:24-30

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 7:24; that’s on page 843 in your pew Bibles. This story that we are looking at this morning begins a new section in Mark’s Gospel – it’s a short section. It runs from 7:24-8:10 and it shows Jesus travelling through Gentile territory. You sometimes hear it said that Jesus never travelled outside the nation of Israel – well that’s not true! He does it here. Look at verse 24:

And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. (Mark 7:24 ESV)

That is in modern day Lebanon and Syria. That’s why the woman is called a “Syro-Phoenician”. She lived in the Province of Syria and was a Greek speaking Phoenician. So Jesus is clearly outside the geographical and cultural boundaries of Israel – probably because of the pressure he was under from the Pharisees. This is intended as a retreat, but it quickly becomes a mission.

Now the story we are reading is the first of three stories that Mark provides from this trip. It centres around a very interesting encounter that Jesus had with a Gentile woman of unusual faith. It is something of a digression. Thus far Mark has been arguing that Jesus IS God – but here he shows us Jesus AS God and what we see is marvellous! Remember Mark isn’t giving us an “air tight argument” – rather he is giving us an air tight person and if this is who God is then he is

truly worthy of our praise! Thanks be to God!

We'll read the text and we'll examine it together. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

24 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. 25 But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 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." 28 But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." 30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone. (Mark 7:24-30 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now we probably need to begin by dealing with the language that Jesus uses in his encounter with this woman. There is some nuance and subtlety in the Greek phrasing that does not pass over well into English. In the Jewish religion the word "dog" was a common way of referring to the Gentiles. It communicated the fact that they were unclean and outside. That's what dogs were! They were unclean because in the ancient world, the whole reason dogs were domesticated was to eat garbage and control rats. Even in places like India today – which is still largely living in the ancient world – that is the function of dogs in urban areas. They didn't have regular garbage pick up so they put the garbage in big fields and then it was the job of dogs to eat everything that would spoil and to eat the rats that would otherwise multiply unchecked and spread disease throughout the population. So dogs were UNCLEAN. They ate garbage and they were OUTSIDE – where they ate garbage. So to refer to a Gentile as a dog was to say that they were unclean and outside.

But here's the thing, Jesus doesn't use the normal word for dog in this story. The Greek word for dog is *kuon* but Jesus here uses the word *kunarium* which means "puppy" or "household pet". Understanding that subtle shift is the key to understanding the entire exchange that Jesus has with the woman. I'm not stretching here, William Lane says:

"Jesus' statement and the woman's reply depend upon the nuance in the diminutive "little dogs" (which are admitted to the house and can be found under the table at meal time in contrast to the yard dogs or the stray scavengers of the

street).”¹

Alright, so don't trip on what Jesus says here. He is not being offensive he is being brilliant and subtle. This is Jesus being Jesus – this is what Jesus does all the time! He builds a little barrier – he proposes a little obstacle that inquiring souls must wrestle with and trip over in order to find themselves in the place of saving faith. This is Jesus THE ALL WISE TEACHER OF MEN AND WOMEN! I love what R.T. France says about this conversation; he says:

“He appears like the wise teacher who allows, and indeed incites, his pupil to mount a victorious argument against the foil of his own reluctance.”²

Do you see that? Jesus puts up a little barrier here for her to push through as a demonstration of her faith. That's what's going on here! This is Jesus the masterful and merciful teacher.

Now with all that out of the way, let's focus in now on what this incident teaches us about Jesus AS God. Mark isn't arguing here that Jesus is God – he'll get back to that - here he is showing us Jesus AS God. And we learn a great deal in his story about his glorious nature and character.

The first thing we learn is that:

What Do We Learn About God In This Story?

1. He is faithful to his promises

God had made many promises to the people of Israel beginning with the promise that he made to Abraham way back in Genesis 12. He said:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2–3 ESV)

Way back in Genesis 12 God said to Abraham – the founder of the Jewish people – there is a

¹ William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 262.

² R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 296.

blessing in you that is for all the families of the earth. First I'm going to give it to you – I will BLESS YOU – and then I'm going to give it through you to all the families of the earth. That was the promised plan and program and Jesus is sticking with it.

He has not ABANDONED the Jewish mission. This is not that! Yes, Jesus is taking a break from the hostility – he is on retreat but he is not in retreat. He still has his eye on the mission. The mission at this stage, is to give the Gospel to the Jews. You will notice if you read carefully that there is no teaching and no evangelism even in this entire section – from Mark 7:24-8:10. Jesus doesn't preach to anyone and if you've been following along you know that isn't normal. It demands an explanation!

And the explanation is simple, the Gospel must go to the Jewish people first. Jesus says that to Syro-Phoenician woman:

“Let the children be fed first (Mark 7:27 ESV)

That was the plan! ‘I didn't come here to do evangelism; I've been focused on the Jewish people.’ Its still their turn! Do you remember when Jesus had sent out the 12 disciples? He said to them:

“Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ (Matthew 10:5–7 ESV)

Its still their turn. But then after they have rejected him and their leaders have crucified him and he has risen from the dead, he will say to his disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19–20 ESV)

Jesus understood the plan. The Gospel would be offered to the Jews FIRST! The blessing would be given to the world THROUGH THEM! And so it was. The first generation of Gospel witnesses were JEWISH! Peter was Jewish! John was Jewish! Matthew was Jewish! All of the 12 disciples and PAUL were JEWISH! The Gospel went from their hands into the hands of the Gentiles.

And Paul says that at the end it will come back to the Jews from the Gentiles. He says that in Romans 11. He admits that it seems odd that more Gentiles have embraced the Gospel than Jews, but he insists that this is the plan and program of God. He says:

I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **And in this way all Israel will be saved**, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;
27 “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” (Romans 11:25–27 ESV)

Paul understood that the Gospel began with the Jews and was given to the Gentiles but when the full measure of the Gentiles has come in it will return to the Jewish people with a vengeance! In fact he says:

For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?
(Romans 11:15 ESV)

Think of all the good that has come from their stumbling gift of the Gospel to the Gentiles! Now imagine what will happen when they embrace the Gospel fully at the end? What will that mean for the world but life from the dead!

And from that verse, many of our spiritual grandparents understood Paul to be saying that the conversion of the Jewish people as a whole would herald the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the consummation of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

God has a plan and a program and he is faithful to all that he has promised. That is the first thing that we learn in this story. God is faithful to his promises. But there is more and it gets better.

The second thing we learn is that:

2. He is generous with his grace

Now what is remarkable is that we learn this through the wit and wisdom of a Gentile woman! This woman is amazing! In Matthew’s version Jesus’ commendation of her is even more extravagant. He says:

“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” (Matthew 15:28 ESV)

Jesus likes this woman! And her understanding of God and of the Messiah is far beyond that of the disciples at this point. Look again at what she says. Jesus says 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.” (Mark 7:27 ESV)

So, Jesus says that the grace of God – here symbolized as “bread” – must be offered to the children first. That is, to the Jews first. They were the children of God in a unique and covenantal way and God had promised to do this through them. This bread, Jesus says, must be offered to them first. And she does not dispute that. Rather she goes on to say:

“Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” (Mark 7:28 ESV)

She does not dispute that the Jews must be served first she merely contends that with God there is always enough to spare. Even while the Gentiles must wait until the Jews have eaten their full, nevertheless, even now there is more than enough grace in Jesus for her meagre needs. God always gives enough and to spare.

This woman sees what even the disciples have not.

Do you remember the miracle of the loaves? In that story Jesus fed 5000 people from 5 loaves and two fishes – but do you remember what happened at the end of the story? Mark says:

they all ate and **were satisfied**. 43 And they took up **twelve baskets** full of broken pieces and of the fish. (Mark 6:42–43 ESV)

Those were Jews Jesus was feeding that day and they were ALL SATISFIED. And they took up 12 baskets TO SPARE.

Are you seeing that? There is obvious symbolism in that – what does it mean? It means that the grace that God gives for the salvation of the world is sufficient for the Jews AND for the all the nations of the earth! Are you seeing that? Now the disciples didn’t see that – but apparently this woman did. Mark wants to make sure that we’re seeing it, so he uses the same word in Mark 6:42

that Jesus uses here in Mark 7:27.

The Greek word in Mark 6:42 translated as “were satisfied” is *chortazo*; the same word used by Jesus in Mark 7:27 translated as “fed”. Same word. Jesus says to the woman: “the Jews have to be fed first – they’ve got to have as much as they want”. The woman says to Jesus: “That’s fine, because when God feeds his people there is always enough left over to share and I shall be content with that.”

No wonder Jesus said:

“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” (Matthew 15:28 ESV)

This was an incredible woman and she saw something that all the disciples had missed.

God is generous!

You don’t risk anything in sharing what the Lord has given. There is always enough for you to eat and be satisfied – and to share. His resources are never ending.

You can’t out give God. His grace is overwhelming.

The third thing we learn about God in this story is that:

3. He is drawn to humility and faith

How many times have we seen this? God has a plan, God has a purpose, but it is also true that God has pity and personality and in this story we learn that he is drawn to humility and faith. Jesus did not go into Gentile territory to minister to Syro-Phoenician women! He went there to escape the harassment of Jewish men! He was off plan, he was on retreat and yet, he could never not be who he was. He could never not respond to human need.

Look again at Mark 7:24. The text 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 (Mark 7:24 ESV)

Jesus was not there to minister, he was there to rest. And yet how could he say no to this woman? She was just like the woman in Capernaum with the issue of blood. She had tried everything, she had nowhere else to go and she was in desperate need. And also like that woman, this woman **PRESSED THROUGH!** That woman in Capernaum pressed through the crowd to take hold of Jesus – this woman pressed through Jesus feigned reluctance to take hold of the mercy and the grace that only he could give.

Jesus did not say no to such people. Ever. Even when it wasn't the plan. You remember that it wasn't "the plan" to heal the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus was on his way to do something else. He was on his way to Jairus's house to heal his little girl. But that woman pressed through and grabbed hold and Jesus **STOPPED** and **ATTENDED TO HER NEEDS**. Do you see that? Jesus knows the plan. To the Jew first and then to the Gentiles – he knows the plan and he's working the plan – but he has pity and personality and he is drawn to humility and faith.

Never forget this my friends. Jesus is a person not a power. Powers operate according to principles and laws. People have personalities. The Apostle John knew that. He said:

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments **and do what pleases him**. (1 John 3:21–22 ESV)

Do you see that? John says, obviously we need to keep the commandments – we have to start there if we expect to have power in prayer but **MORE THAN THAT** we do what pleases him. Do you see? Jesus is not a **POWER** who operates **MERELY** by principles and rules, he is a **PERSON** and he has a personality therefore it behoves you to know what pleases him.

Have you ever thought about that?

Jesus is **ATTRACTED** to certain things. He is **PLEASED** by certain things and he was pleased with what he saw in this dear woman. I love what William Lane says here. He says:

“The irresistible confidence of the woman in Jesus delighted him.”³

Isn't that good? I think its worth knowing what delights God. Now of course, we want to know and keep his commandments - by his grace and with the help of his Spirit – we want to know and keep his commandments – BUT I don't think we don't want to stop there, because God is a person and he has a personality. We want also to think of what DELIGHTS HIM. Like John, we want to do what PLEASES HIM and in this story we see that clearly. Jesus delights in humility and faith. This woman fell before him and saw in him her only hope. This woman would not be deterred. She was not put off by the gentle obstacle that he erected. She pushed through. She knew that only Jesus could give her what she needed. And he loved her. He delighted in her and he gave to her all that she asked for and desired.

Thanks be to God!

Application And Response:

Now, what do we do with a story like this in our Bibles? Obviously we enjoy it, obviously we delight in it but we haven't finished reading our Bibles as Christians until we have applied it. The Bible says:

be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22 ESV)

So, we want to apply what we have learned. We want do what we see in the story and I think that means first of all that we want to:

1. Imitate the attitude of this woman

Now, clearly Jesus is the hero of every story in the Gospel of Mark and yet, it is also true that Mark is frequently holding up pictures and snapshots so as to guide us in the true path of faith and that he is doing so here. He is saying to us: this is what faith looks like! This is the sort of person who receives mercy and grace from God.

³ William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 263.

You see, the people in Mark's Gospel who receive mercy and grace from Jesus have a great many things in common. They are, like this woman, like the woman with the issue of blood and like the paralytic lowered to Jesus through Peter's roof – they are people of faith, persistence and desperation. They press through obstacles in order to take hold of Jesus and they receive. They don't argue. They don't commend themselves. They don't bargain. They push through and plead.

That is the posture of faith. That is the attitude and disposition of the people who receive mercy and grace from God.

We would all do well to remember and to imitate their example.

Secondly, in application of this story I think we want to:

2. Receive and rejoice in the grace of God in Christ

This woman understood that it was not yet her turn at the banquet table of God – the children of the covenant had to eat first. She understood that – and yet – she also understood that God is so generous and so overwhelming in the giving of his grace that she could survive merely on the crumbs that would fall from the children's table. That how she saw the grace of God in Christ!

How do you see it?

We so often limit the grace of God to the reach of our own imagination. This is why we so often FEEL beyond the reach of his grace. We can't imagine ever forgiving someone who has done the sorts of things that we have done. But the good news is that you are not God and he is not you. He can do a great many things beyond what you could ever ask for, hope for or imagine.

Whatever your problem, whatever your sin, he has grace for that. Marvellous, infinite, matchless grace. Freely bestowed on all who believe. You have only to receive and to rejoice.

Thirdly and lastly, as we respond to this passage I think it is clear that we must:

3. Share what we have with others

The woman in this story understood that there is a plan and a process. She doesn't have a problem with that. For now she will be content with the crumbs beneath the table.

But here's the thing: its not "for now" anymore.

We aren't dealing in crumbs anymore. We're on the other side of the cross and the empty tomb and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. We're on the other side of the Great Commission wherein the church was told:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19 ESV)

The chains are off brothers and sisters! The handoff has been made, the gifts have been given, the children have been fed and our job now is to take this BREAD to the nations!

It would be difficult to think of a passage more suitable as a prelude to communion than this.

Today when you are well fed – REJOICE. This is God's grace in Christ for your salvation. Rejoice! Take what you need. Eat and be satisfied! FEAST at the table of the Lord. Taste and see that the Lord is good! Be filled and fuelled by his mercy. And then get up from the table and GO!

Go and make disciples of all nations. Go and share what you have freely received in Christ.

Take this bread to the nations.

For the glory of God and the good of all people, this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.