

The Syrophenician Woman

Gospel of Mark Part 15

Mark 7:24-30

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Not getting what you want

- Share a story with someone next to you about a time when you wanted something, you didn't get it at first, but eventually got it.
 - I wanted a four-wheeler for a long time. I was initially told no. But my parents eventually bought me one on my 13th birthday.
- In tonight's passage, we're going to study an episode from the life of Jesus, when a woman comes to Jesus and begs Jesus for something. He initially (seems to) deny her request, but eventually fulfills the request.

Mark 7:24-30

- *Mark 7:24* - "Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret."
 - Jesus, up until this point in Mark, has been doing some amazing things. He's calmed storms (4:35-41), healed lepers (1:40-45), cast out demons (5:1-20), fed 5,000 (6:30-44), and butted heads with religious leaders, even to the point where they want to kill Him (3:6, 7:1-13).
 - Jesus spent most of His time in the region of Galilee up until this point (He did travel a short distance away at times (5:1-20)).
 - Jesus could have temporarily left Galilee to maybe teach his disciples in private; maybe to retreat from hostile opponents; or maybe to get away to rest.¹
 - Jesus went to the vicinity of Tyre, which was several miles north of Galilee on the coast of the Medeterranian Sea.
 - Jesus' popularity grew so much that He could not go anywhere, even to Gentile territories, without being noticed.
- *Mark 7:25-26* - "In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. **26** The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter."
 - Mark gives us two details about this woman - she's Greek and a Syrophenician. "This is a two-step progression that Mark uses to get the reader to notice something." This is used by Mark to tell us something crucial.²
 - What's unique about this woman?
 - This woman was a Gentile pagen.³

¹ David E. Garland, *Mark: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1996), 287.

² Garland, *Mark*, 287-288.

³ Garland, *Mark*, 288.

- For many Jews of Jesus' day, "Gentiles were impure simply because they were Gentiles."
 - Remember what happens right before this story. In *Mark 7:1-23*, Jesus confronts Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come all the way from Jerusalem (7:1). The disagreement was all about cleanness - What makes one clean or unclean. Jesus says it has to do with the inside of a person, not the exterior (7:14-23).
 - This story is located within the Gospel According to Mark here intentionally.
 - But even though she was a Gentile, she had heard about Jesus (He could not keep His presence a secret), and believed that this man might be able to save her daughter.
 - She didn't just ask. She came in and fell at His feet and begged Jesus to heal her daughter.
- *Mark 7:27* - "'First let the children eat all they want,' he told her, 'for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'"
 - Did Jesus call her a dog?
 - "Jews often thought of Gentiles as 'dogs', and what Gentiles said about Jews was usually just as uncomplimentary."⁴
 - Jesus uses the diminutive form of the word for dog meaning "puppies"⁵ or "little dogs." "Jesus has alluded to the pet dogs scampering around the house, not to the mongrels prowling the streets."⁶
 - Biblical scholars note the tone of Jesus here.
 - N. T. Wright thinks this is "teasing banter" between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman.⁷
 - David Garland suggests that this is a riddle.⁸
 - Children represent Jews, and dogs represent Gentiles.
 - Is Jesus saying that Jesus' mission was ONLY for the Jews? This leads us to the next verse.
- *Mark 7:28* - "'Lord,' she replied, 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'"
 - "This clever woman catches the meaning of Jesus' riddle immediately."⁹
 - Jesus doesn't say that His message of the Kingdom of God is ONLY for the Jews, and therefore would exclude the Gentiles. The message of the Kingdom was for the Jews FIRST, and then will be made available to the Gentiles. Jesus says "first" in verse 27, which implies that the dogs will be fed eventually.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 95.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 87.

⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 289.

⁷ Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 95.

⁸ Garland, *Mark*, 288.

⁹ Garland, *Mark*, 288.

The gospel is available to all people.

- This story teaches us that the Kingdom of God is not only for religious elites or for people with a Jewish heritage. The gospel is also available to Gentiles. Jesus is not only King of the Jews; He's the King of the whole world.
- What would change about your life if you truly believed the Gospel of Jesus was available for all people? What if we saw people as God saw them?
- I think this C.S. Lewis quote helps to explain what it means to see people as God views them - "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal...your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ--the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden."¹¹
- What types of people do you hold prejudices against?
 - People of a different race or ethnicity
 - People who come from a different part of the county
 - People from a different socio-economic background
 - People affiliated with a different political party
 - People who struggle with a sin that's different from the sins you struggle with
 - People who committed certain mistakes in the past
- The gospel and love of Jesus is available for all people.
- What about the individuals with whom you hold grudges or don't like:
 - These people are made in the image of God. And even though they sinned, Jesus came and died for them. The gospel and love of God is available for them. Jesus created them and died for them as much as He did for you.
- What about you? Do you believe the gospel and love of God is available for you?
 - No matter your background
 - No matter your intellectual struggles you're facing
 - No matter your biblical knowledge
 - No matter your past sins and mistakes
- God sent Jesus to reconcile you to Himself. He loves you so much! You're expensive.
- The gospel and love of Jesus is available to all people.
- What would our ministry look like if we believed that the gospel and love of Christ was available to everyone, no matter what?
 - How welcoming would we be?
 - How much more gracious with one other would we be?
- What about on a more personal level - what would be different if you viewed everyone as a person, made in the image of God, who has the gospel made available to them?

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 46.