

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
MARK

Week 22: Grace Doggy-Bag

Read Mark 7:24-30

Sermon Commentary:

In the previous passage, Jesus taught that being 'unclean' was an issue of the heart and not an issue of ritual or circumstance. In this week's passage we read that Jesus entered an 'unclean' gentile town where he engaged with a Syro-phoenician woman who was desperate for his help. She was not a Jew and yet she had still heard of Jesus and believed that he could free her daughter from demon possession.

From our perspective the conversation Jesus had with the woman seems insulting towards her, but this was not the case in their context. He was teaching her in parable form that there was an order in which his ministry was being established. It was to be given first to the Jews and then to the gentiles. Unlike his disciples who still didn't quite understand why Jesus had come, or that his ministry would be to the gentiles as well, this gentile woman understood his parable immediately and recognised and had faith that Jesus would be able to save and restore her daughter. Jesus responded to the woman's faith and freed her daughter from the demon possession.

- ❖ Q: Why do you think Mark places this story of Jesus' encounter with an 'unclean', gentile woman just after the story where he taught his disciples that being clean or unclean was a matter of the heart?
- ❖ Q: Why is it significant that the Syro-phoenician woman understood Jesus' parable immediately and responded to it with the right heart?
- ❖ Q: As a church of gentiles, why is this story so encouraging for us?
- ❖ Q: Why did Jesus choose to free the woman's daughter from demon possession? (vs.29)

Sermon Points:

1. The Gospel Declares That We Are Worse Than We Fear And We Are More Loved Than We Hope

When the woman fell at Jesus' feet, he acknowledged that she was hopeless, but then gave her the hope that she needed. The gospel message always poses a challenge and an offer. The challenge is that we cannot save ourselves, but the offer is that Jesus can (Tim Keller).

2. Two Ways To Reject The Gospel Are To Reject The Challenge Or To Reject The Offer

The woman showed understanding of her need and her place in God's big plan of salvation. She did not react defensively and she did not demand a special place within Jesus' plans and purposes. Many of us react defensively when the gospel puts us in our place, calling us hopeless sinners who need saving. We struggle to accept that our very nature falls short of God's standards (Romans 3:23) and that we cannot do anything to change that ourselves. When we do this we miss the gospel by thinking that we are better than we are. In order for us to genuinely accept God's gift of grace, we have to admit and accept that we need it and that there is no hope without it.

The woman could have walked away knowing that she did not deserve Jesus' help, but she didn't. Though she accepted her hopeless and sinful state, she still asked Jesus for help, knowing that she was totally reliant on his grace and mercy. We will miss the gospel offer if we choose to walk away in guilt and shame, instead of accepting God's grace and mercy towards us when we realise how hopeless and sinful we are.

There are 3 ways in which we can respond to this message:

- I. Adjust our posture of approach to Jesus - if we have been filled with self-importance we must bend our knee and humble ourselves before God. If we have been filled with self-loathing, we need to look up and accept God's grace.
 - II. Be desperate to bring the needs of our loved ones to Jesus – the woman engages boldly, humbly and persistently for the sake of her daughter.
 - III. Faithfully take the crumbs of grace that you see
- ❖ Q: Think about your heart response to the gospel. Whether you have been a Christian most of your life or not, how does your heart respond to the fact that you are a helpless sinner? Do you tend to struggle to accept God's love and forgiveness for you or do you tend to think of yourself as less sinful than others and not in need of daily mercy and forgiveness?
 - ❖ Q: What is wrong with both of these heart responses and how should we respond instead?
 - ❖ Q: What do we learn about faith and intercession from this desperate mother and how can we apply that to our own lives?

