

The Gospel According to Mark A Humble Faith and the Reach of Salvation

Mark 7:24-30

Sunday, October 18, 2020

Introduction

As Jesus describes the person of faith in the Sermon on the Mount He describes a person of mercy and humility, a person who recognizes their position before God and lives for Him in righteousness and peace (Matthew 5:3-10). Suffice it to say, it's a description that stands in stark contrast to the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus's day (Mark 7:6-13; Luke 20:46-47).

In the previous sections of Mark 7 Jesus has rebuked the Pharisees for their callous hearts and their reliance on religion. He taught that defilement doesn't come from the outside, but that defilement is a matter of the heart.

As we come to Mark 7:24-30 we may initially think we have come to a transition in focus. But in fact what Mark reveals through a Gentile woman who comes to Jesus is an example of the kind of faith that Jesus honors. While the religious leaders trusted in themselves and their ability to keep the Law, this unclean Gentile woman exemplifies the kind of humble and genuine faith that Jesus seeks. In addition, through this interaction Jesus foreshadows the inclusion of the Gentiles and the offer of the Gospel going to all nations.

Jesus Goes Away – An Unlikely Place (7:24)

- **Seeking solitude** – In these chapters of Mark we have seen this recurring theme of Jesus trying to get away for a time of rest and probably to instruct His disciples. After several failed attempts Jesus now goes to an unexpected place, perhaps a place where He could escape the crowds.
- **Tyre and Sidon** – Not only are Tyre and Sidon outside of the borders of Israel, but they are cities that are well known for their history of paganism and oppression of God's people. Based on what happens next it seems that Jesus may have chosen this place not only for solitude but in order to highlight his teaching on the source of true defilement. Not only did He declare all foods clean but He is showing His willingness to go to historically unclean places.

Jesus is Found – An Urgent Plea (7:25-26)

- **A desperate mother** – It seems that Jesus had just arrived and His presence was already known. A woman comes to Jesus begging for His help in freeing her little girl from an unclean spirit.
- **A detailed description** – Mark goes to great lengths in describing this woman, and more specifically showing all the ways in which she seems unfit to receive anything from Jesus. She is a Gentile woman from an extraordinarily pagan nation. It seems clear that Mark wants his readers to recognize the contrast between the religious leaders and this woman.

Jesus Responds – An Unusual Reply (7:27)

- **Odd or offensive** – Many have stumbled over this statement from Jesus as odd (at best) or potentially offensive. Of course we know that Jesus is perfect and did not sin against this woman, and that His parables are always intended to teach something about the nature of God's kingdom.
- **The point is priority** – The response of Jesus uses commonly understood designations (children = Jews and dogs = Gentiles) to remind this woman and all who were listening that His first priority was to the nation of Israel. Jesus had come as the long promised and awaited Messiah and throughout His ministry Jesus expressed that He was sent to the Jews first (Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24; also Romans 1:16). As this Gentile woman begs Jesus for mercy He reminds her that His priority must remain to the nation of Israel.

The Woman's Answer – An Unflinching Faith (7:28)

- **A respectful persistence** – Note that the woman doesn't argue with Jesus's statement. She fully accepts the priority of the Jews and her place as an outsider to people of God. But nevertheless she believes that Jesus can help her and that there is a measure of mercy even for Gentiles.
- **Content with crumbs** – The woman doesn't ask to be seen as a child. She remains humble and expresses great faith in the power of Jesus. She believes that even the crumbs of the bread He offers would be enough.
- **The inclusion of the Gentiles** – While it's not explicit in the text, we do see a foreshadowing of things to come. It has always been God's plan to save people from all nations in keeping with the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 49:6) and this woman seems to have a sense that the benefits that Jesus brings will have a reach beyond Israel.

Jesus Heals – An Undeserved Mercy (7:29-30)

- **A humble faith** – Because of this woman's humble and confident faith Jesus extends mercy. Again, we shouldn't miss the contrast with the scribes and Pharisees. They were pompous and proud and stood against Jesus, and they received His rebuke. This woman was humble and full of faith and she received His mercy; her daughter was set free.
- **Salvation through faith for who believe** – It's true that Jesus came as the One promised to the nation of Israel. But what we see in this story is that salvation isn't reserved for those of a certain ethnicity or for those who adhere to religious traditions. Jesus honors those who come to Him with sincere and humble faith (see also Matt 8:5-13; Rom 11:30-33; Gal 3).
- **A word for Christians** – Not only are we saved through faith, but humble faith should be an ongoing way of life. God has called us to obedience and holiness, but our growth should always be marked by humility and a recognition of how undeserving we are of God's grace. We were dogs who have been called children! Let us live in gratitude and obedience.