

Discussion Notes

Mark 7. 24-30 (The faith of a gentile woman)

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We're going to find that this story has some challenging and inspiring application for us.

Where we have been (chapter seven):

- Mark is showing us that Jesus, by his words and actions, identifies himself as Israel's God, all the while re-ordering the world around him. He appoints twelve disciples, he masters the elements, and dispels evil spirits. He also breaks purity laws.
- This all comes to a head in chapter seven where Jesus states that ritual impurity is no longer a concern for Israel, because they have a new narrative, a new identity in him.
- People will no longer find meaning, make sense of things, or order the world based on outer-rituals. We will found our lives on, and primarily identify with Jesus.
- As we do this we see that God's not so concerned about outer things, but interested in developing his character in our inner life.
- Our identities are no longer rooted in our religious rituals, hair color, gender, profession, earning power, social status, sexual orientation or team preference in the World Cup.
- Our new identity, Jesus says, is to know and reflect God's character, and become truly human.
- As we get to know Jesus we shed former narratives and identities and primarily live out God's story for us, welcoming God's character in us.
- The question is, what is God's character? We understand God's character through the person Jesus.
- Through Jesus God invites all people to experience and then reflect God's character.
- This reality takes some getting used to.
- Hawaiian scuba diving.

Mark 7.24

24 Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know which house he was staying in, but he couldn't keep it a secret.

- Jesus is in Galilee which is filled with nice Jewish people, but Mark tells us he leaves Galilee and heads north to a place called Tyre, present day Lebanon.
- Tyre is not where nice Jewish people live. It is where gentiles live. Greek speaking people, or unclean people, not Israelites.
- The people living in this region were historically bitter enemies of the Israelites, and most Jewish people wouldn't associate with them. In Jesus' time we know the people in this region were even referred to as "*mangy street dogs*" by the Jewish people.
- So Jesus does all this teaching about inner purity, about clean and unclean, and Mark then tells us he packs up and heads north, to an unclean place.
- We're not told where he goes exactly, but we know he's in a house, which means he's likely eating, and therefore making himself "unclean" based on the Mosaic Law.
- Mark also says he's trying to fly under the radar, but he's so popular people can't stay away. The stories about the miracles and wonders have spread beyond Jesus' ethnic circle.
- Some read this and suppose Jesus' intention is to take a little break or have a little vacation since he's been going non-stop since the feeding of the five thousand. This is possible, but there's just one problem with that: This unclean, seemingly God-forsaken region is the last place a nice Jewish person would go for some R&R.
- It's more likely, therefore, that Jesus heads to Tyre to make a point, to put flesh on the teaching he's just done about what is clean and unclean, about what our true identities are as human beings.

25 Right away a woman who had heard about him came and fell at his feet. Her little girl was possessed by an evil spirit, 26 and she begged him to cast out the demon from her daughter.

- Jesus is in a house and a woman approaches him, falls at his feet in reverence and humility, and he is immediately inundated with a desperate need.
- Now to put it mildly on paper this woman is problematic for a Jewish Jesus. She's a triple threat of uncleanness: she's a woman, she's not Jewish, and her daughter is demon-possessed. Everything about this person is "dirty" according to the Jewish religion and culture.
- What is Jesus' response to her going to be? He's gone all the way to Tyre, has entered an unclean house, what will his reaction be?

Since she was a Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia, 27 Jesus told her, “First I should feed the children—my own family, the Jews. It isn’t right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.”

- So Jesus paints a little picture, a small parable, which essentially means that the miracles, the signs, the blessing, the Kingdom of God is first for Israel, not the Gentiles or Greek speaking people.
- This is one of those moments in Mark where without a some background we might be a little confused by or even disappointed with Jesus.
- What do we know?
 - This woman’s race and culture is despised by the race and culture Jesus hails from. The Jews call these people “mangy street dogs”.
 - We know Jesus has intentionally gone to Tyre and is staying in a house, likely eating and making himself unclean by Jewish standards.
 - We know he’s interacting with this woman, and we can’t know for sure but there’s a good chance Jesus is not speaking to her in his native Aramaic, but in Greek.
 - We know Jesus has been previously only been interacting with Jewish people, but just a few days before has been teaching that everything Israel defined and identified itself by was now obsolete. So, what then will happen to the segregation that’s previously been between Israel and the rest of the world?
 - We also know that the term Jesus uses for “dogs”, is not the same “mangy street dog” term his Jewish family would use. Instead, he paints the picture of a household, a family meal, and the animal he refers to is more of a household pet.
- So based on all of this the question is: is Jesus degrading and rejecting this woman, or is something else going on?

28 She replied, “That’s true, Lord, but even the dogs under the table are allowed to eat the scraps from the children’s plates.”

- The woman responds and almost playfully jumps into the scene Jesus paints, and takes it further, she improvises, and makes some observations.
- She says that the dogs and kids (at least in her understanding of a Greek household) often eat at the same time. At some tables there’s more than enough to go around.
- She also calls him “Lord”, meaning master, and this is the only time anyone does this in Mark.

- So she's fallen at his feet in humility and reverence, she's brought him her need, a demon possessed daughter, she's called him Lord, and identified him correctly. She is trusting in his good character.
- Jesus responds this way....

29 *"Good answer!" he said. "Now go home, for the demon has left your daughter."*

30 *And when she arrived home, she found her little girl lying quietly in bed, and the demon was gone.*

- We just saw that is the only time anyone calls Jesus *"Lord"* in the book of Mark, and this is the only time in the book that Jesus preforms a healing from a distance.
- So desperate is her need, so overt is her trust in Jesus character that says, "Well, you seem to know who I really am, what I'm really like...and you know what I can do if you just trust me." so her daughter is liberated.
- At the end of the scene it's obvious that Jesus isn't degrading or rejecting this woman, he's gone all the way to Tyre, to a people his Jewish culture would despise and never regard as Godly or righteous, but apparently, Jesus is interested in these people, too.
- Mark tells us this story to blow the minds of Jesus Jewish followers. Because when it comes to Jesus, in whom we see God's character evidenced, everyone's welcome.

Application:

Because of Jesus no one has to be on the outside looking in on God's love, life and purpose for him or her.

- This permeates through our practice and experience of Christian community.
 - It's why we welcome outsiders in, and it's why we put one another first in service and humility.
 - We do everything we can to help a person come to the realization that God is interested in them, and will bring fulfillment and purpose to their life.
 - It means God will transform our insecurity, pride and selfishness, into confidence, humility and selflessness. Because we are secure in and humbled by God's love we are selfless rather than selfish.

- This defines our posture toward and relationship with non-Christians.
 - Our primary attitude and lens is first inclusivity, not exclusivity. Jesus “*goes to*” and so do we.
 - Jesus will call people out of an old narrative and to embrace a new identity, we are responsible for extending his love and truth through words and actions.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you find compelling or interesting about this story?
- Why is this story of such importance in Christian history?
- Whom might we consider “outsiders” (and have trouble relating to) that we know God loves and wants relationship with?
- Jesus is both fundamentally inclusive (everyone is welcome) and fundamentally exclusive (He is God and should therefore be the writer and designer of our narrative/identity). How is this challenging? How is this inspiring? How might our culture react to this kind of Jesus?
- Share a time you felt you were “scuba-diving” and fully trusting in God to guide, direct, provide for you as you aimed to live like him.