

39 Mark 7:24-30

The Abundance of the Feast

Text

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.

Introduction

We cannot help but notice the placement of this pericope. Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees on the notion of defilement. Jesus calls them hypocrites because they give lip service to purity all the while rejecting the One, the only One, who can bring real purity. Real defilement, Jesus went on to assert, comes from within. That is the place where we need to start. The natural extension of Jesus' teaching is that he declared all foods to be clean.

The rites and ceremonies have fulfilled their intended purpose. They were shadows, but the substance has now arrived. All foods are clean. This theme is strongly reinforced by Peter's vision of the sheet in Acts 10.

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Peter thinks about this for a bit when Cornelius (not a Jew) arrives at the house asking for Peter.

28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

Cornelius tells his side of things and Peter says in verse 34:

"Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

It is widely held that Peter was the source behind Mark's gospel, so it is difficult not to see Peter in this account in Mark.

A Place of Dogs

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.

"From there" describes what was probably Capernum or some place nearby. He enters the region of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre has a long history with Israel. Tyre and its kings had a good relationship with Israel during the time of David and Solomon. However, Jezebel came from the Sidonians. Ezekiel spoke of how "she and her inhabitants imposed their terror on all her inhabitants!" We also find that Tyre fought against the Jews during the Maccabean revolt. Josephus describes Tyrians as, "notoriously our bitterest enemies." This reinforces the uncleanness of the place. After Jesus declares all foods clean he goes into a Gentile region and stays in a Gentile house. Jesus' actions are unthinkable to the legalistic Pharisees. He has gone to a place of dogs. All of this notwithstanding, Tyre was also spoken of in Psalm 87:4 as being recipients of Messianic blessing

He goes there, in part, looking for some privacy. His course will soon change. In time Jesus will set his face toward Jerusalem and the cross. So we see extra efforts from here on from Jesus to teach his disciples and prepare them for what is coming. Thus part of his seeking privacy may not be rest so much as a place that he can discourse with his disciples.

But not even here, so far from home, so far from his people, in the house of some Gentile stranger does Jesus find the privacy he seeks. He cannot be hid. His reputation has preceded him. Even in this place people have heard about Christ.

Begging for Food

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.

The uncleanness of the story comes into sharp focus here as Mark describes detail after unclean detail. From a Scribal standpoint, Jesus is pushing the envelope just by going into this Gentile region. But then he converses with a woman. Women were not highly regarded at that time, so spending time with women was a bad thing.

But it gets worse. Her daughter has an unclean spirit. A woman in a Gentile region whose daughter has an unclean spirit? That is pretty defiled. But Mark is not done painting the picture for us. The woman was a Gentile, Mark informs us. That is to say she was a Gentile culturally. She grew up in that environment. Mark continues to tell us that ethnically she was Syrophenician. Born Syrophenician, with a gentile background. Yet this woman comes to Jesus. This combined description means that she is not a Jew who is Gentile culturally, nor a Gentile that is Jewish religiously. She is Gentile geographically, culturally, and ethnically. What a powerful contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding their view of uncleanness. This woman comes and falls at the feet of Jesus. Just like Jairus, this woman prostrates herself

before the Lord. In this position of submission and humility she pleads with him for her daughter. The tense of the verb indicates that she kept asking him.

Children First

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." This is a pretty hard statement to come to terms with. Even by today's standards that is a pretty tough saying. Calling someone a dog is clearly insulting. Many preachers have tried to lessen the impact of this by noting that the term for dog *kunarion* is the term for a little dog, a puppy, the families beloved pet, practically part of the family. While technically it is true that *kunarion* means little dog I think that these well meaning preachers miss the point a bit by trying to get Jesus out of trouble. Jesus used the term he did for a reason. I believe that it was intended to have a certain force behind it.

Dogs were unclean animals. Marking them as unclean was not just a Jewish thing. Jews and Gentiles alike regarded dogs as unclean creatures. Throughout scripture identifying people as dogs was highly insulting. So while he does use the term for little dog or puppy, still there is no way this is a term of endearment. Jesus casts their discussion in a way that highlights her uncleanliness.

Christ's reply is to focus attention on her faith. Was she simply looking for any old miracle worker to help her, or did she appreciate the unique role of Jesus as Israel's messiah? Among Gentiles there could be any number of deities that she could trust in. Over against the historical deities like Molech, Ashera, Isis, Osirus, Baal, Dagon, and the innumerable gods of the Greek and Roman pantheon stood the lone figure of YHWH. Did she acknowledge this? Did she recognize Jesus as the Anointed One of Israel and submit to those terms?

But Not Children Alone

28 But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

With wit and grace she does submit. She recognizes that she currently stands outside of the commonwealth of Israel. She knows that she is not worthy. She humbly admits her place. Pleading with Jesus based solely on grace and not upon any kind of merit, she receives his favor. She exhibits the kind of faith that marks the true Israel of God.

Truth be told, Christ led her a little bit in how he phrased the discussion. He said to her *protos* first let the children be fed. The obvious reference was to Israel as the children of God. He did not say that the Gentiles would never have any place, but he did establish an order. They would be fed, but there was an order. Jews first, and then the Gentiles. Paul says in the early chapters of Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Rom 1:16-17) and "There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the

Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality."(Rom 2:9-11). God's plan was to go to the Gentiles, but not before the time. What had to happen before he went to the Gentiles?

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' 5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. (Matthew 22:1-10).

There must first be a rejection before the blessings will flow out to the Gentiles. Joseph was first rejected by his brothers before he brought salvation to them. Jephthah was first rejected by his family before he delivered Israel. Jesus was first rejected by Nazareth and the religious leaders before making this Gentile tour. He will face the ultimate rejection before salvation come to the world. The church had to be rejected in Jerusalem with the stoning of Stephen and the persecution before the church really spread to the Gentiles. Paul was rejected by his fellow Jews before he shook out his coat and said "from now on I go to the Gentiles." This theme of rejection runs through much of the OT and points forward to Christ, and we as the church may now, through continued rejection, point back to Christ. No servant is greater than his master.

Not only does the answer of this woman show her understanding of her place and worthiness, but she also took Christ's analogy to argue for a crumb. Yes, the children first. No one will feed the dog first. The dog will be fed after the family has eaten, yet the dogs may eat at the same time if but only the crumbs. She is not looking for an entire loaf here, just a crumb. 1

In contrast to the faith of this Gentile woman is the cold-hearted stance of the Pharisees and Scribes. Here they are as Israelites, as the religious leaders, yet they reject their own Messiah. They count their place as one of privilege and not grace alone. Sure, grace was in the equation somewhere, but it was relegated to some distant position. Ethnicity, and law keeping defined who they were. It was based on these external observances that they considered themselves to be worthy. They disregarded the heart as the difference maker in one's relationship to God. All the external forms were to come after a genuine relationship to God. The law keeping comes as a result of a heart that has been made right before its Creator.

This woman is a living example of what Jesus was driving at in his previous discourse.

Will she acknowledge that this is a YAHWEH thing rather than a Zeus thing? Will she plead on the basis of grace rather than merit? Will her cleanliness be based upon a ceremonial hand washing or upon a heart of faith in Christ?

Finally a Feast

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.

This woman has exhibited great faith. She fell at the feet of Christ and pleaded for grace. When challenged, she rose to the occasion. She acknowledged the priority of Israel. But she recognized that this Messiah of Israel could not be contained there, his blessings would overflow to the Gentiles. Accepting the terms that Christ framed the discussion in, she receives the grace she sought.

This faith is further demonstrated by the fact that she went home. Jesus did not go to see her child, he did not lay his hands on her. He did not speak any words of exorcisms. Jesus simply told her to go and that the demon was gone. What confidence was there that her daughter was well? None! None, that is except the word of Christ. She trusted the word of Christ and went straight home.

Already the feast of Christ has begun spilling over the table to the Gentiles. The feast in the wilderness with the 5000 signified the coming of the Messianic kingdom and anticipated the great wedding feast. Christ will very soon repeat this mass feeding miracle, this time with the Gentiles. Ladies and gentlemen, you are the result of such feasting, and the recipients of this same feast of blessings. Hendrickson asks a good question, "If a woman, born a Gentile, put her little knowledge of the Lord to such good advantage, what is required of those who have received much greater privileges?"

While at the moment the Gentiles are just dogs through faith they become full fledged members of Israel. We are, by faith, the children of Abraham. We are, by virtue of being joined with Christ, part of the commonwealth of Israel. The dividing wall has been torn down and there no longer is Jew and Gentile, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. There is one body, one bride, one vine, one flock and one Shepherd! Praise be to God for adopting us and feeding us as His children!

1) Lane, 263