

Some People Accept Jesus
February 17, 2008
Mark 7:24-30
Reverend Carolyn McOwen

Synopsis:

The most unlikely people respond to Jesus. It is those in need who respond to God's presence on earth, as **The Syrophenician Woman**

Have you ever been so desperate and in need of help that you bowed down before God and cried out to him, "Help Me." When was the last time things were so out of control in your life that you cried for HELP? Maybe you are in that place right now.

Is it health issues, or loss of financial support due to the loss of a job or the economic state of our society? Do you have a situation with a child that you are frantic over? Or are you in a very estranged relationship with someone?

This is the emotional tone of the syrophenician woman here in our scripture today.

As we continue in the Gospel of Mark, at first glance, this story seems very harsh and difficult to understand. So, let us pray for the Holy Spirit to help us comprehend this passage.

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord. May your Holy Spirit fall upon us as we desire to hear your words today with truth and understanding for the purpose of loving you more and being renewed by this great love.

Last week Jeff preached on the first 13 verses of this chapter in Mark, where some people rejected Jesus because of Traditions and rules. This week the syrophenician woman believed in Jesus in spite of the traditions and rules.

This story is told in 2 Gospels, Matthew 15:21 (p. 20) and Mark 7:24 (p. 52). We will be going back and forth, as Matthew adds a few more details than Mark, but it is the same event that both Matthew and Mark wrote about. So keep your fingers in both of these passages.

Keep in mind that the gospel of Matthew was written primarily to the Jewish Christians who knew the Old Testament, whereas the gospel of Mark was written for the Roman world, for the Gentiles.

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Before we begin understanding this story let us place Tyre on a map in relationship to Jerusalem. North and West- on the coast of Phoenicia (today Lebanon). Matthew includes not just the city of Tyre, but the whole region up to Sidon. A beautiful seaport on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Tyre was a gorgeous, commercially magnificent, highly successful seaport. But the people of Tyre were the Jew's "bitterest enemies." Among other reasons, the Israelites resented the Tyrians because they felt outclassed financially and intimidated militarily.

This is the only occasion in which Jesus was outside the boundaries of Jewish territory.

V. 24- "from there, he set out, and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there." From Mark 6:53 we know that Jesus was in area of the Sea of Galilee and traveled about 40 miles to be alone in Tyre.

How did this desperate woman know about Jesus and his power to heal? We know from the gospel of Luke 6, that there were people from Tyre who came to Jerusalem to hear Jesus and see his healings. We can assume that this is how the syrophenician woman heard about Him.

Going back to today's scriptures, v. 24 says, "yet He (Jesus) could not escape notice." That is our compassionate, caring Jesus. Tired as he was, wanting to get away, yet he noticed. V 25, the woman with a little daughter who had an unclean spirit, bowed down at Jesus' feet, and begged him to take away the demon from her child. Matthew adds that she cried

to him, “Have mercy on me.” Look at Matthew 15:22, “Have mercy on me, Son of David.” Where did that term come from- remember she was a gentile, unaware of the Old Testament? Again, I think it was from what she heard, the stories and rumors about Jesus had filtered up to Phoenicia and she believed. **Gentile** though she was, this grief-stricken mother recognized the authority and deity of Him whose name was great in Israel, and now becoming great among the Gentiles.

Here comes the hard part of this story. From Matthew 15:23, “Jesus did not answer her at all.” And the disciples wanted to take her away. To this grieving mother who was crying out to Jesus, calling him Lord, falling down at his feet, Jesus responds, **V. 27: ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs,’** The meaning of this story is hinged on the use of the word, “dogs.” The reference to the woman as a dog ranks among the most offensive sayings of Jesus. Many times in the Old Testament, dogs were associated with uncleanness, because they eat garbage and corpses. In the New Testament, Jesus describes human wretchedness in terms of a street mongrel licking the sores of a beggar (Luke 16:21). The Greek word used here in both Matthew 15 and Mark 7 is the word

“puppies,” dogs that are house pets, and being fed and taken care of along with the children. A much more endearing term than a wild dog.

I told the staff here at Geneva that I was going to use them as an illustration. I took a survey of 8 people that were at the Tuesday morning staff meeting. You won't believe the number of pets these 8 people take care of--20- dogs, cats, one snake, and a bird. Now, I don't have any pets, so it's really only 7 people, so that is almost 3 pets per person- can you believe it! As successful as Tyre was, I don't think that they had Pet Co. I don't think they give presents to their animals at Christmas time. How about pet bakeries, and strollers for pets! Last week, I even saw Valentines cards for pets and from pets!! That's way over the top. What the Greek word was referring to in both Matthew and Mark, was the lovable word for Puppy- so it softens Jesus' response.

Jesus' ministry here on earth was only 3 years in length. In his humanity, he lived under a 24 hour day, with human energy and endurance. His primary purpose was to come first for the Jew and then for the Gentile. The Jews were the chosen children of God. The use of the word 'dog' here refers to the Gentiles, **when the children of God, the Jewish**

people, did not believe the life sustaining good news of Jesus coming as their Lord and Savior, the loved puppies, the Gentiles benefited from it.

We must be sure on this, Jesus said to the woman, “The children first must be fed,” because it was God’s program that this gospel **go** to the Jews first and then to the gentiles. He never intended that the gentiles be excluded. But it was to be in the order of the Jews first, then the gentiles.

Now, note, the woman wasn’t offended, and she didn’t give up on her petition, **V. 28, “she answered him, ‘Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’”**

This reply from the woman brought an immediate response from Jesus. **V. 29, “For saying that, you may go- the demon has left your daughter.”** Matthew adds in **V. 28, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.”**

Because of her persistence, this story ended with the woman going **“home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon was gone.”** Because of her faith, our compassionate Jesus healed the woman’s daughter.

So, now, how does this affect us here today?

First, we can identify with this women in her desperate concern for her daughter. We all have been in a hopeless,

out of our control situation. Maybe you are there right now. Your health, your child is out of control, your marriage is on the rocks, your finances are very precarious, your job is up in the air. If Jesus, who didn't even know her name, heard this woman and healed her child, how much more will he readily hear you. Go to him and lay all your needs at his feet. Let the father of all compassion and the God of all comfort, comfort you in your time of need. You need not walk through this rough situation by yourself.

Secondly, I am so grateful for the persistence of this syrophenician woman, because I identify with her, as I am 1/4 Lebanese- both of my great-grandparents were born in Beirut and immigrated to the U.S. when they were 16 yrs. old. And I have a son-in-law who also was born in Lebanon and came here when he was 8 years old.

In our sovereign God's big plan, this woman from Tyre, from Lebanon, is one of the tools God used to bring me to him. I dare say to bring you to him, also.

In this story the Israelites were the children of God and the Gentiles were the "dogs." 2000 years later, I consider myself a child of God. This story makes me think about the "Puppies" in my life- the people that I come in contact daily,

my family, my neighbors, the people around me that are not believers. Especially the people that I think are the furthest from accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior. I ask myself, “Am I praying for them? Am I as concerned about their eternal security as I am about their security here on this earth? Am I as persistent as this woman in praying for these people?

How is Jesus’ compassion and love falling on these people?

I will close this sermon in prayer, first prayer for us, with all that situations in our lives that we might cry out to God, “Help me Lord.” And then I will lead you in a moment of prayer for all the loved puppies in our lives that need simply need Jesus.

Let us pray:

Lord God, we all identify with this woman who was desperate for your help. We all have situations that we cannot control, that we need your help. So right now, we place them in your hand. You know what is best. So, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we trust you with them.

And in the silence of our hearts, we also lift up the names of the people in our lives that don’t know you yet, the people that are estranged from you.

Thank you for loving us and caring for us right here, right now.

Amen