

The Blessing of Faith to the Nations-Mark 7:24-30

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 7:24...

I heard a story from a pastor friend of mine regarding one of the pastors' of his church who spent quite a bit of time in China sharing the gospel. In one particular encounter, this brother began sharing the gospel with a Chinese college student. In one of the initial conversations, as he started talking to him about Jesus, the student responded with, "Who?" This young man had never heard the name Jesus. So, he spent the summer reading the Bible and explaining the good news to him, and by the end of the summer, the college student placed faith in Jesus. As the missionary shared this story, he said the young man told me, "I always knew there was a God; I just never knew his name." By God's grace, he came to not only learn the name of God but to turn to serve the living God.

God had been working on that young man's heart, preparing him to hear the gospel. Preparing him to hear of the God-man who vacated heaven to live a perfect life on earth, only to be followed by a substitutionary death for his people and a glorious resurrection. What we discover from reading Scripture is that God is the ultimate evangelist. He seeks out his sheep, whom he calls by name, and draws them into his fold through his servants' preaching of the gospel. And the beauty of God's plan is that he's saving a people from every tribe and tongue. By God's grace, that's even represented in this room, as we see folks who may have an Irish background, Ethiopian, Indian, Mexican, Persian, Indonesian, and so forth. Our God is not a tribal deity. He's not limited to Jerusalem or Judea; instead, he's chosen a people spread across the four corners of the earth. This is the beauty of the gospel!

However, it wasn't always as evident to the original disciples of the Lord Jesus. In their mind, if other nations want to get to the Messiah, they have to go through Israel; in other words, proselytize. And although they would mark the box that said this was true, their posture towards Gentiles would say otherwise. Hence, Jesus' interaction with this Gentile woman would have initially repelled the disciples. However, it's a precursor to what God will reveal to his people in greater detail in the book of Acts. So, let's dive into the text.

I'll be honest with you upfront: it was difficult coming up with three of four points of alliteration as an outline for this sermon, so notetakers may have to follow more intently this morning. However, I pray the content itself is edifying. So, let's set the scene. Jesus has had a full and busy schedule. He taught at least five thousand in chapter 6 and supernaturally provided them with meals. He healed the sick in Gennesaret

and rebuked the religious leaders in chapter 7. The text tells us from there that he entered Gentile territory, namely the region of Tyre.

This is the first and only time within Mark's gospel that he travels to a region dominated by Gentiles. And for those who don't know, Gentile simply means non-Jewish. So, anyone who was not a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who was renamed Israel, is a Gentile. I imagine that our gathering this morning is composed of mostly Gentiles if not all. This will undoubtedly come into play as a primary theme within this passage.

Verse 24b states that he didn't want anyone to know he was there. We can only speculate why Christ wanted to remain hidden; however, I'm prone to think that he desired to rest after a long period of ministry, which should lead to a certain awe within his people. God really did become a human to the fullest extent. Everything about your anatomy, mind, body, and spirit, Christ took on. For those who may say, "Well, he didn't have a sin nature, so he wasn't truly human." Neither did Adam, and no one would argue that he became a human after the fall. No, Jesus humbly and graciously obeyed the eternal covenant agreed upon between him and his Father in eternity past to veil his glory and limit himself to a human suit. Often, those who affirm the deity of Christ view his humanity as somehow lesser than ours, and that's not the case. Furthermore, it debases Christ's moment-by-moment dependence on the Holy Spirit to fulfill the will of his Father. We mistakenly compare it to Clark Kent jumping in the booth as Superman. Clark Kent is just an ordinary citizen, but when things get tough, he jumps in the booth and relies on all his supernatural powers to defeat evil. Analogously, the assumption is that when things get tough for Jesus, he relies on his divine nature to get him out of a jam. "Well, my divine nature never gets hungry; I'll suppress my humanity and depend on it. My divine nature is inexhaustible, so no need to sleep." But what do we find in the gospels? Our God-man, our beautiful savior, starving after a 40-day fast that would have impacted him as much as it would have us. It's not like, "Jesus was just God-man hungry; after 40 days, I'm human hungry." He's fast asleep on the boat because he's exhausted. And in this text, he's most likely seeking a rest due to the limitations of his body. Take a moment to consider the excellent humility of the Lord Jesus.

Let's continue our journey through this text. We'll first consider the immediate context and some applications thereof. And then we'll zoom the lens back and consider how this story fits into the entire metanarrative of Scripture, as there are some monumental overarching truths to consider. Hopefully, you noticed the intentionality regarding the consideration of biblical theology on how specific themes we find in Mark can be traced from Genesis to Revelation. I pray that this has helped you see how the entire Bible fits together, leading to a richer private reading of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Let's reread verses 25-26.

So, off the cuff, this woman has quite a few things working against her. First off, the region they're in. According to extrabiblical resources, the population of Tyre had repeatedly participated in anti-Jewish actions. The Jewish historian Josephus describes Tyrians as "notoriously our most bitter enemies." So, there was bad blood between Jews and the people of this region. This would explain why the disciples were so combative towards this woman in the parallel account in Matthew. That's strike one. Here's strike two: she's identified as the "Canaanite woman" by Matthew, which, of course, for Jews who knew their Hebrew Bible would only bring further contempt. So, she's the wrong ethnicity. Not only is she living in hostile territory, but she's a Gentile living in this Phoenician region. Jews didn't have dealings with the

Gentiles. They considered them unclean and called them “dogs” in their literature and tradition. Lastly, it would have been unbecoming for a Jewish woman to approach a Rabbi in this manner, let alone an unclean Gentile kneeling and begging this rabbi for assistance. Strike three, you’re out.

This woman wouldn’t have been ignorant of these marks against her. However, the fame of the Lord Jesus has apparently spread not only to Jewish regions but also down to Tyre. So, when word got to her that the miracle-working Messiah of the Jewish people was in town, those strikes were utterly irrelevant. All she was concerned with was her daughter being unchained by the demonic spirit tormenting her. Regarding this passage, Tim Keller said, “There are cowards, there are regular people, there are heroes, and then there are parents. Parents are not really on the spectrum from cowardice to courage, because if your child is in jeopardy, you simply do what it takes to save her.” And we see that on display with this woman.

The verb for begged here is in the present progressive, meaning she kept on begging. She was desperate! Consider the parallel passage in Matthew.

22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” 23 But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” -Matthew 15:22-23

She laid it all on the line. Let’s consider Jesus’ response in verse 27. At first glance, it seems as if Jesus is insulting this woman by labeling her as nothing more than an unclean Gentile. However, that’s not the case here. Jesus merely provides this woman with a parable instead of a direct statement. Now, he happens to compare her to a dog in his parable, but his point is not to highlight her uncleanness. He’s making a different point we’ll consider momentarily. But another reason for this interpretation of Jesus’ words is the word Mark employs for a dog in this passage. He could have used a different term in the Greek language that refers to an undomesticated street scavenger type of dog, but he doesn’t. Instead, he uses a term corresponding to our word, “puppy.” This would denote a household pet, which the parable makes clear.

The main point in his parable is chronology, not uncleanness. In other words, according to God’s divine timeline, the lost sheep of Israel was to receive the gospel message first, and then the Gentiles. Again, we’ll consider this in greater detail later in the message. And how does the Syrophenician woman respond? Let’s reread verse 28.

This woman’s response demonstrates an astounding faith in Jesus. Christ’s words weren’t meant to be an end-all be-all but a test. And the woman seemed to understand this. So, it’s not that Jesus says, “Well, hey, you’ve changed my mind with your convincing argument, so I’ve healed your daughter.” It instead means, “You’ve passed the test; your faith in me as the saving Messiah is evident.”

And we can see the gospel so clearly in this passage. Notice that in her response, she doesn’t assert her rights. “This is what you owe me, Lord!” She doesn’t bring up a laundry list of her good deeds as the reason he should grant her request. She does quite the opposite! She acknowledges: “Lord, I am unworthy! Lord, I am the begging dog at the table, unable to fix my own food; therefore, I rely on the

mercy of another. And Lord, you are the master of the house who sets the table and provides crumbs to those whom you please. Please, Jesus, give me what I don't deserve on the basis of your riches, and your kindness, and your goodness." That is the posture of this woman. And consider Jesus' response in the Matthean parallel.

²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. -Matthew 15:28

This is the gospel message! It's for people who possess a broken and contrite spirit—those who recognize their impoverished position. No matter the money in your bank account or your high managerial status, we're all dogs at the table begging for the crumbs of God's grace because we are all people who don't have what it takes to stand before God. But when we come to the crucified and risen Christ with repentant faith, he welcomes us into his family, where we gain an eternal position with him. This is the good news for all in this verse.

Let's consider a point of application before we turn to the big picture. Does your prayer life mirror this woman's persistent and passionate plea before Jesus? The New Testament prescribes this type of practical pursuit of God in our lives. Have you ever entered one of those raffles that lets you submit multiple entries? And you know how when you don't actually believe you'll win, but for kicks, you make one submission. And then, other times, you genuinely think you have a chance, so you persistently submit as many entries as possible day after day. The first scenario doesn't display any faith. It's more of a "let's see what happens attitude." The second says, "No, I know I can win. Therefore, I'm going after it!"

This is why Jesus demands persistent prayer! It's a demonstration of our faith that declares, "I know my Lord will meet me in my prayers. I know he'll respond to my prayers!" Now, it's always with a humble posture because God is sovereign at the end of the day, but it nevertheless presents itself before God daily. Does this describe your prayer life? Does this describe the way you pray for nonbelievers in your life? Does this describe how you pray for further sanctification in your life? Does this describe the way you pray for your brothers and sisters as you go through the membership directory? Does this describe the way you pray that the Lord would send laborers? Does this depict your prayer life?

³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" -Luke 18:3-8

⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he

needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. -Luke 11:5-9

Jesus is continually instructing his people to present themselves as this woman has in Mark 7. Go from this place and pursue God consistently with a humble faith. For God blesses this type of demonstration of faith.

Okay. Now, let's take our cameras and zoom out and consider the importance of this interaction and how it pertains to the big picture of God's plan. It's typically hard for us to truly appreciate this conversation because we're so far removed from this original context. I'll do my best to bridge the gap with the help of the Spirit. This week, I prayed that the Lord would press this upon my heart so that I'd overflow with gratitude and praise, hoping that would be contagious to you all. That's my prayer.

Although in our day, the idea of a relationship with Yahweh God for all people is assumed, this was far from the case in Jesus' day. However, it was always God's plan to draw the nations unto himself for the purpose of worship. Notice that in this text, the way the story is written is meant to shame the hard-heartedness of the Jews in a sense. For the first time, we read of an individual who understands the parable employed by Jesus, and responds accordingly. All the while, Jesus Jewish audience, including his disciples, were often times clueless regarding Christ's parables and miracles. Remember Mark's words in verse 52 of chapter 6. "...for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."

We see this as a trend in the Old Testament as well. The Jewish prophet Jonah is commissioned by God to preach, and yet he does the opposite. The Gentiles he's on the boat with obey the voice of Yahweh almost instantly. God had sent prophet after prophet to the nation of Israel to no prevail. And yet, it took one revival service for the Gentile Ninevites to repent under the preaching ministry of Jonah. This was meant to accentuate the hard-heartedness of the nation of Israel. These are the bread crumbs in the Old Testament that was pointing to the inclusion of the Gentiles. God's plan was always to draw the nations to himself through a son. So, let's go back to Genesis and consider this together.

First there's Adam, who's referred to by Luke as the son of God. He was tasked with spreading image bearers throughout the globe. This was encapsulated in the command to be fruitful and multiply. In other words, produce more representatives of me all around the world. As we all know, this first son failed. Instead through his act of rebellion, sinners were spread throughout the world. And then God raises up another son, who's name is Israel.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. -Hosea 11:1

Israel was to be a nation of priests.

'and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. -Exodus 19:6

Notice that it doesn't say a kingdom *with* priests. But rather a kingdom *of* priests. What were the role of priests? To represent the people before God, bringing them closer to him through atonement. This was

meant to be a key role of the nation at large. The missional plan of Israel was to be centripetal; moving to the center. God provided them with commandments, that if they followed, he would bless them abundantly, so as to draw the pagan nations around them to worship Yahweh as the one true God!

We see a couple of examples of this in the Old Testament. Consider when Queen Sheba traveled to see Solomon because word of his wisdom reached her. Or another beautiful picture of this can be found in Exodus 18.

⁷ Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. ⁸ Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. ⁹ And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰ Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people." ¹² And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. -Exodus 18:7-12

So we see glimpses of this centripetal mission of Israel on display in the Old Testament when the covenant people of God were obeying his laws. And there are also a plethora of passages in the Old Testament that reveal God's heart to have all the nations worship him.

May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed! -Psalm 72:17

he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." -Isaiah 49:6

There's an endless list of texts in the OT to prove this point. So, another son who was supposed to spread worshippers across the globe failed! Adam couldn't cut it. Israel couldn't cut it. And then God reveals what his plan was all along. To send his eternal Son to be the one to accomplish what neither could before him.

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." -John 12:32

This text comes directly after a passage that mentions some Greeks seeking Jesus. The point is that he's drawing all nations unto himself. So, our text this morning is a precursor to what God will fully reveal in Acts. And it's no coincidence that it comes directly after Jesus teaches people what makes someone unclean. He's preparing them for the inclusion of the Gentiles. After teaching it's the heart that defiles someone, Jesus enters into a region that the Jews would have categorized as unclean, talks to a Gentile woman who would be considered unclean, and casts out the unclean spirit of her daughter! The narrative itself is meant to teach us that God is cleaning the Gentiles and drawing them to himself. However, the thought for the nation of Israel was that the people would come to Zion and become proselytes, and that's

how the nations would participate. But the New Testament reveals a different picture. Even after this encounter and the resurrection, the disciples were still nationally focused.

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” -Acts 1:6

After a vision, Peter eventually gets it that God is not calling the Gentiles to become Jews, but he’s calling them unto himself. And this was the mystery.

⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. -Ephesians 3:6

Wait, how is this a mystery if it’s plastered throughout the OT, as we’ve seen? The mystery is that we don’t have to come through national Israel to get God. We don’t have to adopt a bunch of rituals. We just need Jesus, and we’re our par as the people of God with Jews! Jesus is the true Israel, so all those in him are Israel. Saints, this won’t truly rock you unless you understand where we were. Understand our condition as Gentiles and praise God for his glorious grace and masterful plan!

¹¹Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹²remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. -Ephesians 2:11-16

This is the glorious gospel! So that one day, we will all bask in this scene.

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” -Revelation 7:9-12

Let’s pray.