

The Crumbs are Enough

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Mark 7:24-37

Today's event is a new situation with a strange story. Jesus finally was able to have some **privacy**. Jesus and the disciples moved outside the Jewish territory, namely to the north to Lebanon (Tyre and Sidon) and they found a house where they could be alone. Most likely the household was a Jewish family. I believe Jesus wanted to be alone with the disciples so they could grasp all these events. Feeding the 5000, walking on the water, Theophany, calming the storm, healing the sick, teaching about the matters of the "heart": what is defiled and what is clean, challenging the dietary laws ... these were too much to grasp. **They needed time to process.** They wanted to be alone.

Read the passage 24-30

Jesus was seeking some privacy, yet fame was preceding him. Here we meet another **unnamed woman**. (The first one was the bleeding woman who touched his robe.) Who is she? **"The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter."** (Mark 7:26 ESV)

In Matthew we read further details, she said: **"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."** (Matthew 15:22) A **Syrophenician woman calling Jesus, Lord, son of David**, this means she recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

This story reminds us of the prophet Elijah who was guided by God to visit a non-Jewish woman in **Zarephath** who lived in Sidon, roughly in the same territory. We don't know if she was a widow, (most likely) who had a sick child and was very poor. God worked a miracle in this family (1 Kings 17:9ff.).

"Most likely Jesus was visiting the home of some Jewish disciple or friend in this area." [I wonder if Jesus had Zarephath on his mind?](#)

"The miracle of Elijah was already in the mind of Jesus is shown by Luke's account in 4:25–26, where, after his rejection at Nazareth, Jesus gives clear warning of a

coming mission to the Gentiles, using the widow of Zarephath as an illustration (Syrian General Naaman as well). It is in the light of this background that we must read the initial response of Jesus to the woman, for, although Mark does not mention the widow of Zarephath as Luke does, she cannot have been far from his thoughts as he recorded this story.”¹

This is strange. We see more faith **outside** of Israel.

- Do you recall the man who was possessed by evil spirits, **Legion**? He was a gentile on the other side of the lake in the region of Decapolis.

- Do you recall the first missionary to the gentiles, the **Samaritan woman**? (According to John’s Gospel)

- How about the **Roman Centurion** during the crucifixion of Jesus?

- Here we find this gentile, a Syrian-Lebanese woman who could have gone to her shrine for healing. There was a Canaanite temple *Eshmun* outside of Sidon.² This unnamed woman **insisted** on coming to **the Lord, the son of David**.

Why?

How come?

Who told her?

Why did she have faith in the Messiah?

These are questions with no answers. We just see an unnamed woman coming to Jesus for healing.

Did Jesus grant her request?

Here is a very strange answer from Jesus:

“Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” (Mark 7:27 ESV)

“The word “**first**” implies that Gentiles have some **ray of hope**, but for the time being this woman must wait patiently for her turn. Jesus asserts the same priority of Israel that Paul affirms: “**first for the Jew, then for the Gentile**” (Rom. 1:16; 2:9–10).”³

In Matthew we read: **These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.** (Matthew 10:5-6 ESV)

Of course, **the children** Jesus refers to are **the children of Israel**. God chose Israel to be light to the nations. But first, the “**children of the house**” should be fed and enlightened, so that the food and the **light of Jesus will be spread all over.**

The verb **“to be fed”** used here is the same verb used in the feeding of the 5000 (6:42). As you remember the 5000, the “children” have been fed, and there was plenty of leftovers, **12 sacks of leftovers**, symbolizing the 12 disciples and their mission to all nations.

This unnamed woman heard the answer, she got the meaning of the riddle,...she challenged Jesus.

To call someone a dog is not a very polite thing in the Middle Eastern context. To the Greek the **word “dog” meant a shameless and a dishonored woman**⁴. In the Armenian language we use the expression “to act like a dog” for adultery.

(shnoutioun mi ener շնութիւն մի ընէր)

- **The Jews used the word dog to refer to the gentiles.**

Why did Jesus use such a word? You can read many commentaries (I read five of them) and you cannot find a good answer. Although Jesus used a softer word for *kynation* for a dog, meaning a puppy, a house dog, vs *Kyon*, a street dog, yet I still have difficulty in understanding why Jesus used this image.

- Maybe he was teaching his disciples a **lesson**. “Although you guys are the children, but see how the outsiders, the ones whom you guys call dogs, have faith, and a strong faith.”

- Maybe he was **testing** this woman’s faith.

- Maybe he is telling all of us to be careful in our judgment about “dogs”, whoever those dogs are in our life!

One thing is very clear, this unnamed woman insisted on not leaving empty handed.

But she answered him,

“Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.”

(Mark 7:28 ESV)

The woman answers with faith.

The woman’s answer reveals that she sees something in Jesus that even sometimes people who were close to Jesus did not see, like disciples.

She was ready to be called “dog”.

She was ready not to be the first invitee. (fine...that is fine)

“She knows that she cannot insist on God’s mercy and does not take offense when Jesus tells her so. She will gladly accept the rank of household dog if it means getting fed.”⁵

By her reply, the woman wanted to say that God’s household is beyond the children of Israel. She is also a member in God’s household, and she wants to be **fed even with the crumbs**. And she is satisfied with the crumbs.

I love her attitude. She does not argue saying, “How dare you call me a ‘dog’”? She does not fight with words, “Where are my rights?” She humbly accepts the leftovers.

This woman got it. She accepted the fact that Jesus should first feed his household, but she also told him that ***she was part of this household*** and being called a puppy dog did not offend her. WOW, I am not sure if I would do the same thing...

She understands the purpose of Israel’s Messiah better that Israel does.⁶

Did Jesus grant her request?

And Jesus said to her, **“For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.”** And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone. (Mark 7:29-30)

- Jesus’ ministry back in the Gentile World (Mark 31-37)

Jesus walks with his disciples to the same cities he had been kicked out from, **Decapolis**. Again, **Jesus is in the gentile world**. He moves from Lebanon to Syria (Golan Heights) to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. If you recall Mark 5, Jesus arrived there on a boat. **“Legion” was healed**. This was not taken well, because 2000 pigs were thrown into the water. **That unnamed man** became a missionary in that part of the world. Now Jesus is back and they bring him a man who was **“deaf and spoke with difficulty”**. Jesus healed him too. But his healing actions remind us of the creation story, as if God is recreating humanity (Gen 2:7). First, he spits; next he touches his finger in the spittle and places it in the man’s ears;

then he lifts his eyes to heaven and, with a deep groan, prays and gives the order, “*Ephphatha*”, which means “**Be opened**”. Cranfield comments that the verb means “**be opened**” or “**be released**”. The idea is not of the particular part of the person being opened, but of the whole person being opened or released.” ⁷

Do you see the picture?

Israel is deaf. She is the chosen one, yet she cannot see, cannot speak the words that the Lord wants her to say. But if the children of Israel cannot see, that does not mean God’s mission is finished; it means Jesus is challenging his disciples to move on to spread the Word and recreate humanity.

What can we learn?

1. Do you give up, or do you consistently bring your cry to God?

Do not give up praying. Consistent prayer is good for our soul. It brings us close to our Maker. It shapes us. It molds us. Remember the parable of the unjust judge and the widow. The unnamed Syrophenician woman did not turn back and leave Jesus alone. She cried out to be “fed” and she insisted on her request.

2. Struggle and submit to God’s will in humility.

When things do not happen the way you want, what is next?

The woman understood her place. She did not argue why Israel had the first place.

“Why others have some privileges that I don’t...”

Do you face this kind of question....

“The woman shows the greatest humility that expels her prejudice when she begs for a few crumbs from the bread sent to the Jews. She does not become bitter about the privilege of others. She does not resent their share of God’s blessing. She accepts her place and comes, as everyone must, as a sinner, poor and needy.

Dwight Moody is reported to have said that Jesus sent no one away empty except those who were full of themselves.⁸

This is exactly how we should come to God, sinner, poor and needy of Jesus.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

As the hymn says: I need thee every hour....

Martin Luther says about this woman:

“She took Christ at his own words. He then treated her not as a dog, but as a child of Isreal.”⁹

We all face situations like this woman did, when we do not understand what is happening in our life. Then we want Jesus to answer our prayers the way we want. We do struggle, perhaps for years. Do we hear Jesus’ answer to our cries? He touches us in a way we did not expect.

3. No More leftovers

Come with humility poor and needy with the right heart ready for leftovers.

I am ready to take His leftovers. His crumbs are enough for me. Keep this attitude...

Yet, on the cross when Jesus died for all humanity. No more leftovers. God offered himself, the best for all of us. He gave Himself fully to all of us.

He took the bread and gave it to his disciples, so that every time we open the Table, we will remember Him, and we will have communion with Him. **It is not leftovers anymore, because on the cross Jesus gave everything**, so we can have life, abundant life. We are the children of God, and we are eating from His Table.

Let us approach to the table

1. R. Allen Cole, Tyndall Commentary on Mark Vol 2 P 192, 193
2. Ben Witherington III, *The Miracles of Jesus* p.74
3. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 289
4. William Barkley, *The Daily Study Bible*, Mark p.178
5. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 290
6. James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* p. 222
7. Cranfield, *St Mark*, p. 253
8. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, p. 297
9. R. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A life of Martin Luther*, p. 362