



THE GOSPEL OF

MARK



Sermon Series Notes

“A Persistent Pagan In Need” (Mark 7:24-30)

Danny Hodges - NT3683 Topic: Humility, Prayer

Intro: Last weekend in the first part of Mark chapter 7, the Pharisees criticize Jesus’ disciples for not ceremonially washing their hands before they eat, one of many religious traditions passed down by Jewish leaders through the years. Jesus of course came to his disciples’ defense, and then went on to declare that no religious tradition does anyone any good if the heart is not changed. Man’s problem is not a lack of religion, or religious practice. Man’s problem is sin, and that is an issue of the heart. The icing on the cake was that in this radical teaching he declared all foods clean. Hallelujah!

It is in that context that we come to this next scene in the life and ministry of Jesus. Take a look with me. Read Mark 7:24-30.

We are not given the woman’s name, she is anonymous. The father does not come to Jesus to seek help, which causes me to ask questions and wonder. Is this a single mom? Was she ever married? Is she divorced? Is she living with the father? The father, whoever he is, is no doubt a pagan, so even if he is married to the mother, he would never think of humbling himself and seeking help from a Jewish rabbi like Jesus.

Pagan – People with a polytheistic religion (worship more than one god); religious beliefs other than Christianity; Someone not subscribing to any of the main religions of the world; a hedonist (belief that pleasure is man’s highest good & aim).

This woman is a pagan, from the standpoint of a Jewish person in that day, in that culture. That is why the Holy Spirit is careful to tell us that she is Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. This was ancient Canaan; Two keys cities of this area were Tyre & Sidon; See Ezek.28:22-26; Zech.9:3-4. The sites of both of these cities is today in Lebanon.

The Canaanites were extremely pagan (hedonistic), and bitter enemies of Israel. They worshipped a pantheon of gods, some of the most common mentioned in the Bible were Baal, Dagon, Molech, & Asherah. But there were many others as well.

Why did this woman not go to the temple of one of the gods of her country? Perhaps she already had. Could it be that that is where her daughter contacted the evil spirit? Whatever attempts she had previously made to get help for her daughter had obviously failed, and she now hears of this man named Jesus, that He is doing all kinds of miracles and healing people. So she, like Jairus the synagogue ruler, whose daughter was dying, does not care what anyone else thinks, she just wants help for her child. She also does not care that Jesus did not want anyone to know he where He is. She is desperate.

In Mark 6:30-31, Jesus was trying to get the disciples some rest after their first missionary outing. Now, Jesus attempts to seclude himself, no doubt to get a break from all the ministry demands everywhere He

goes. That appears to be the reason he goes outside of the boundaries of Israel. But just as His attempt to give the disciples a break had failed, so his attempt for Himself also fails.

Who ratted on Jesus as to where he had secluded himself?

Now, if you have paid any attention at all to this story, there are some puzzling things in it. Jesus' actions are out of character from the normal way He interacts with people.

I'm extremely thankful for four gospel accounts, because when we compare them, we get a more complete picture of Jesus, and a much better understanding of His ways. This will be the case in this story, as we look at the parallel account in Matthew 15:21-28 (read).

The first thing I want us to notice in the fuller account Matthew gives us is that initially, Jesus does not even respond to her (v.23a). When He does, on the surface He sounds like some pompous Jew who is offended at even the sight of this pagan woman.

If you look even casually at Jesus response toward people in the four gospel accounts, you realize very quickly that his response here is not normal, and is even offensive to those who fail to understand what is really going on. On the surface it appears to be out of character with the clear declaration of the Word of God as to God's nature, of which Jesus is the perfect human manifestation (Heb.1). The Bible says that God is love (I John 4:8); See also II Cor.1:3.

I randomly found this statement as I was doing some internet research in preparation for this message: "Overall, it's not a very positive picture of the Almighty God we are getting here. What we are seeing is a petty person who picks and chooses which people he helps based upon what their nationality or religion is. When combined with his inability to help people from his home area because of their unbelief, we find that Jesus doesn't always behave in an unreservedly compassionate and helpful manner even when he does finally deign to leave some crumbs and scraps for the otherwise unworthy among us."

Examples of Jesus' normal ministry interaction: Leper who said "If you are willing, you can make me clean." And the Lord said, "I am willing." The widow of Nain who Jesus sought out and raised her son from the dead. The crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda, etc.

One commentator said that Jesus, in His initial silence, was ignoring her. Is it possible that He is offended at her uncaring interruption of His attempt to get some R & R? I don't think so. See James 1:16-17; Heb.13:8 He is the same yesterday, today, & forever.

I strongly disagree that Jesus was simply ignoring this woman. He was not ignoring her, but rather testing her. See John 6:5-6. This was not a punitive silence but a purposeful silence.

After initially not responding to her verbally, she now follows after Him, and she is relentless. The disciples urge Jesus to send her away – they were annoyed by her.

Note with me that his answer in verse 24 is not to this woman, but rather to the disciples' suggestion to send her away. Jesus was sent to the nation of Israel. See Rom.1:16; 2:9-10; Jesus coming was not to engage in worldwide ministry. There is a pattern & plan for the gospel to go to the world; See Acts 15:16-17.

But even after Jesus made the statement about being sent specifically to Israel, she continues to seek Him. Now, she comes and kneels before Him, crying out, "Lord, help me!" Can't you just hear her in your imagination? Can't you hear her cries, feel the brokenness of heart? Surely now the Lord will stop what appears to be an uncaring and even cruel treatment of someone in such a pitiful situation. But He continues to confuse us with his next words (v.26).

Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs. Dogs were unclean animals under the OT Law. See Rev.22:15; Phil.3:2; Matt.7:6.

I grew up with dogs, cats, etc. and we never fed them first, or even at the same time we ate. If there were any pets around the table, the only way they got something is if it fell from the table, or one of us slipped something to them secretly under the table. Our dog Hushai would always go under the table and seek out the most weak & compassionate member of the family, and I would generally make him get out from under the table, especially if we had guests over for the meal.

What he says to her was the proverbial (familiar) language of the day. She understood what He meant.

v.27 She does not take offense that Jesus has labeled her as a “dog.” Her answer implies that she understands how undeserving she is, how sinful she is. Her background would prevent her from the privileges of the unique covenant relationship with God that a Jew had access to. Her cultural, pagan environment & upbringing, and perhaps (probable) lifestyle certainly did nothing to grant her any kudos with Jesus, quite the opposite.

v.28 Finally, as this painful real life drama reaches its climax, Jesus grants her request. He does not go with her to place his hands on her daughter, and yet she believes His word. See Matthew 8:5-10.

So let’s break down what happened here.

Her initial approach – She speaks the way a Jew would, addressing Jesus as “Lord, Son of David.” What she must learn is that it is not the quality nor quantity of the words she uses.

Matthew 6:7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Jesus’ initial silence – Not punitive, but rather purposeful.

Her persistence

Read from *The Circle Maker*; Luke 18:1-8 (see notes); Keep on seeking, keep on asking, keep on knocking
In standardized math tests. Japanese children consistently score higher than their American counterparts. While some assume that a natural proclivity toward mathematics is the primary difference, researchers have discovered that it may have more to do with effort than ability. In one study involving first graders, students were given a difficult puzzle to solve. The researchers weren’t interested in whether or not the children could solve the puzzle; they simply wanted to see how long they would try before giving up. The American children lasted, on average, 9.47 minutes. The Japanese children lasted 13.93 minutes. In other words, Japanese children tried about 40 percent longer...Researchers concluded that the difference in math scores might have less to do with intelligence and more to do with persistence quotient. (*The Circle Maker*, p.85)

Elijah praying for rain (I Kings 18:42-45)

II Kings 13: 18 Then he said, "Take the arrows," and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground." He struck it three times and stopped. 19 The man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times."

James 5: 16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

God honors fervent, consistent, persevering prayer.

Jim Cymbala on Hannah’s prayer

Her acknowledgement of her spiritual condition.

See John 9:39-41; The Pharisees were blind to their true spiritual condition, and when Jesus exposed it, they refused to acknowledge the truth. See John 8:31-34; Matthew 23:1-3, 5a, 25-28.

See John 4:22; On the surface this sounds pompous & proud, but it was the truth. And there is only one truth. Muhammed & Jesus cannot both be right, etc.

Her humility

Psalm 138:6 Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.

Psalm 51:16-17 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite *heart*, O God, you will not despise.

“wrecked & repentant”

Her faith

She trusted Jesus’ words, without having any physical evidence that what He said was true. Sometimes we have to trust Him, even when the physical evidence is contrary to our understanding, i.e. Jairus’ daughter, Mark 5:35-36; Lazarus, John 11:4.

INVITATION

What’s your need? God cares. What might you need to do for the Lord to meet you at your point of deepest need?