

Mark 7:24–30 — Great Faith In Jesus Brings Great Mercy From Jesus

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Take out your outlines. If you have a paper or electronic Bible, open it to Mark 7:24. As a church, we are studying our way through the Gospel of Mark. In this study, we need to remember that Mark is writing this Gospel in the city of Rome to Gentiles of the city of Rome. His primary audience was people that were not Jewish. It was extremely important for him to communicate that while Jesus was Jewish, and most of the action in this Gospel takes place in Jewish territory with Jewish people, Jesus' mission was ultimately to bring salvation to the entire world. Jesus came to save *Jews and Gentiles*.

The challenge was that if you talked to the average Jew on the street in days of Jesus, you wouldn't feel a lot of love from them toward the Gentile people around them. Jews viewed themselves as better than Gentiles. Instead of a compassionate heart for the lost, they had a chip on their shoulders. Jews viewed Gentiles as far from God's covenants and separated from God's purposes. The Jews in Jesus' day isolated themselves from Gentiles. They were generally hostile toward them.

That was not the attitude God wanted, nor the plan the Old Testament promised. The Old Testament told the Jews that God's plan was for his people to be a light to all people. All people were to be introduced to the one true God of the universe through the Jews. The Jews were not to separate themselves from the lost world around them. We see this in Isaiah.

I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun

and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. Isaiah 45:5–6 (ESV)

God's intent was for his people to have hearts of compassion and share the truth of God with all people. God's people were to serve as a light to the Gentile world. That wasn't what happened.

A good illustration of this is the story of Jonah. Does anyone remember the story of Jonah? Jonah was a poster child for the Jewish mindset. Rather than traveling to Ninevah, calling them to repentance and offering God's forgiveness to the Ninevites, Jonah sailed in the opposite direction refusing to offer the Ninevites a chance at repentance. Jonah didn't even want the Ninevites to have a chance at benefiting from God's grace. He wanted to see them burn. The attitude Jonah had toward the Ninevites in his day was similar to the attitude the Jews had toward Gentiles in Jesus' day.

While the Jews were heartless toward lost nations, the Bible clearly tells us God's plan is to save people from every nation. Psalm 87 talks about God extending his grace and salvation even to the Jews' enemies. Psalm 87 talks about God extending salvation to people in Egypt. They enslaved the Jews for 400 years, yet God would extend grace toward them. Psalm 87 also talks about God extending his salvation to people of Babylon. They also were enemies of the Jews. The Babylonians destroyed the southern kingdom of Israel and took the Jews into captivity. Psalm 87 also talks about God extending his salvation to the city of Tyre. What was it? Those citizens were also enemies of the Jews. What they had done to God's people and the salvation God would begin extending to them is what we will study this morning.

Someone might object to the point I am making. If it was always God's plan to reach the lost nations of the world, why was most of Jesus' ministry limited to Jewish people? There are even verses where Jesus told his disciples to avoid sharing the gospel with Gentiles. What is that about?

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

Why did Jesus tell his disciples only to work with the Jewish people when it is God's plan to bring salvation to all people?

I will explain that mystery. God's plan was for Jesus to bring salvation to the Jews first, then to bring it to the Gentiles. There was an order to God's plan of salvation. This is one of the big themes in the book of Romans. The apostle Paul explained it this way at the beginning of Romans when he gave the theme verse for the book.

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. Romans 1:16 (ESV)

This is why when Paul traveled on his missionary journey in the book of Acts, when he came to a town, he went to the synagogue first to share the good news of Jesus. After he was rejected at the synagogue, he went to the Gentiles in that city. We find the same thing in Acts 2 in the fabric of the Great Commission. The gospel was to be taken to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. These are concentric circles beginning with the gospel coming to the Jews, then the rest of the world. The Bible tells us there is an order to God's plan when it comes to sharing the gospel. God offers salvation to his people first, then to Gentiles afterward.

This morning, as we continue our study in the Gospel of Mark, we see how God's plan to offer salvation to the Jews first, then the Gentiles, played out in the life of Jesus. Let's begin our study.

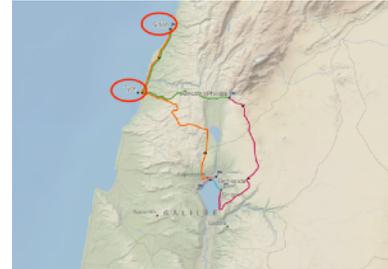
The Background

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.
Mark 7:24 (ESV)

It begins by saying, "And from there..." Where was there? Two weeks ago, when we were last in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was in the city of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus made that city his home base when sharing the gospel in the area of Galilee. Jesus was also most likely staying in the home of Peter and Andrew in that city. We learned earlier in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus stayed at Peter and Andrew's home when in that city. Two weeks ago, when we were last in this book, we saw that Jesus just finished debating with some local Pharisees and scribes who were brought in from Jerusalem to discredit him. If you were with us for earlier parts of our study in Mark, you know that at this time, things were heating up for Jesus. After the feeding of the 5,000, which was more like 20,000, Jesus was insanely popular with the people. He couldn't go out in public without being harassed by the crowds. The Jewish leaders in Capernaum, which had already decided in Mark 2 that they wanted to put Jesus to death, stepped up their effort after the feeding of the 5,000, and they used every opportunity to attack and undermine Jesus because he was a threat to their power. It was like watching modern politics. Every opportunity for one party to discredit or undermine the other party in the eyes of the people is taken.

At this point, since everything for Jesus in Capernaum was a constant conflict, and Jesus could get no rest from the people and the harassment of the leaders, Jesus left Capernaum for the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Remember Jesus had less than a year until he was crucified. He was trying to focus on training his disciples to carry the gospel to the world, but with the harassment of the people and the Jewish leaders, he didn't have much time to train his



disciples. That is why he left to Tyre and Sidon. That was a major road trip. Tyre was 35 miles northwest of Capernaum, out of Jewish territory, deep into the Gentile world. It was a wealthy, busy and pagan city. Sidon was another 20 miles north of Tyre. It was also wealthy, famous and pagan. This trip deep into the pagan world would keep the prying Jewish leaders away because they would never travel to these pagan cities.

Tyre and Sidon had a long history of antagonism to Israel. Tyre was the hometown of Jezebel in the Old Testament. Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Tyre. When she married King Ahab, she worked hard to introduced Baal worship into the northern kingdom of Israel. She tried to kill all of Israel's prophets. Even though there were brief periods of time when the northern kingdom of Israel recovered from Baal worship, it ultimately drifted back into Baal worship, and as a result God sent the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. The northern kingdom was exiled and never returned. In the mind of most Jews, they associated the demise of the northern kingdom with Jezebel,

who brought Baal worship from the city of Tyre. That is one of the reasons the Jews despised this city. In addition, only 200 years prior to the time of Jesus, Tyre and Sidon fought against the Jews during the Maccabean revolt. In addition to being cities deeply involved in Baal worship, which was a fertility god, they also worshipped Astarte, the goddess of beauty. When you worship a god of fertility and a god of beauty, you can guess what made their worship services so enticing.

As cities go, these cities represented the most extreme forms of paganism a Jew would encounter in his or her life. As a revered rabbi, Jews would never expect Jesus to travel to this area. If you were Jesus looking for a little quiet with your disciples to train them, these cities were the perfect place to go because they kept most Jews away.

Jesus' trip deep into hard-core pagan territory lasted a long time. The Bible tells us he and his disciples walked between 120-150 miles on this trip. This trip may have lasted weeks. It could have lasted months. Jesus would eventually return from this trip to the Decapolis, which was on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee and was more Gentile territory. It was called the Decapolis because it was an area of 10 cities. Deca means 10. Polis means city. The passage we will begin with next week is a travel log summarizing Jesus' trip.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. Mark 7:31 (ESV)

Outside of what we are studying this morning, the Bible doesn't tell us of any great teaching or healings did in Tyre or Sidon during this long trip. I think one reason Jesus did not heal or teach people in this area is because at this time

Jesus was looking for time with his disciples to teach them before he was crucified. This was not a trip to reach these people with the gospel. It was a trip to train the disciples to better understand the gospel.

This is probably why it tells us in the opening verse that Jesus entered a house in that area and didn't want anybody to know about it. He was trying to avoid a crowd. In addition, earlier in our study of this Gospel, we learned that every time it tells us Jesus went into a house, it was to teach or explain something to his disciples.

Now that Jesus was between 35-50 miles away from Capernaum, do you think these people in this pagan city knew anything about Jesus? While Jesus was not as popular in Gentile territory, he was still well-known in Gentile territory. We learned this in Mark 3.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. Mark 3:7-8 (ESV)

Jesus was trying his best to stay undercover and teach his disciples in these pagan cities, but Jesus was still known by enough people that he couldn't keep his identity a complete secret.

Let's meet the woman who came to him as soon as she heard he was in town.

The Woman

But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth.... Mark 7:25-26 (ESV)

The Gospel of Matthew has a parallel account of this story in Mark that gives us a few more details about this woman and the things that transpired between her and Jesus. Let me read a little from Matthew's account so we can learn more about this woman.

And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out... Matthew 15:22 (ESV)

From Matthew, we learn she was a Canaanite. That was not good. Canaanites were people that were cursed by God in the Old Testament times. God told his people in the Old Testament to exterminate them because of the greatness of their sin. The Canaanites were a constant thorn in the side of Israel for most of its history. They were far from God.

This woman was also a Syrophenician. Under the Roman general Ptolemy, Phoenicia was annexed to Syria and the names of those two countries combined. This means this woman was not a Jew. She was a Syrophenician, which means she came from Roman culture and most likely worshipped the gods of Rome.

In addition, she was a woman. While Jesus gave a high place to women, in the culture of that day, women were given a low place. One common prayer Jewish men would pray every morning in that culture began with these words, "God, thank you for not making me a woman and not making me a Gentile." That shows you the despised position women occupied in a chauvinistic culture.

This woman had everything against her. First, she was a woman, which meant she was not respected in the minds of many Jews. Second, she was a Canaanite, the sworn enemy of the Jews. Third, she was Syrophenician so she

identified with the gods of the Romans. Fourth, she was living in one of the most hardcore pagan cities of that day. In short, the background of this lady identifies her as being about as far from God as you can get.

For her to even be in Jesus' presence, in the mind of many Jews, would be to discredit Jesus. We often hear about the Jews despising tax collectors because they were Jews that turned on their own people to extort money from their fellow Jews to give it to the Romans. This lady was considered far worse than a tax collector.

Here is what is beautiful in this story. While this lady's background was terrible, her attitude was great. She approached Jesus and fell at his feet, begging him to heal her daughter, who was demon-possessed. The last time somebody fell at the feet of Jesus in this Gospel was Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum. This woman had the exact opposite spiritual pedigree as Jairus. Jairus was the spiritual elite of Capernaum that fell on his knees before Jesus, looking for Jesus to heal his daughter. Now we have someone who is far from God doing the same thing. This woman falls on her knees, begging Jesus to heal her daughter.

Let's learn more about this woman's daughter. It says she was severely possessed by a demon. In that culture, young girls were married at the age of 12 or 13. Since she was not married, this means she was probably 8-10 years of age. To have a daughter this age that was possessed by a demon would be a horrifying experience for a mother. As we learned from the passage that taught us about the Gadarene demoniac, when a demon manifests itself in a person,

one of the things a demon does to that person is encourage him or her to mutilate themselves and produce self harm. Remember the Gardarene demoniac was constantly cutting himself with stones. I imagine this mother felt like she could never leave her daughter home alone, because if the demon manifested itself in her girl, she no doubt would cut herself, as the demon sought to destroy and disfigure this little girl in any way it could. This woman, who loved her daughter and would do anything to protect her, was living in constant panic and horror.

I am sure this mother had already gone to her Canaanite gods and her Roman gods, following whatever ceremonies the pagan idols requested for the healing of her daughter, but they all proved useless. Her daughter didn't get better but no doubt grew worse and more deranged over time. Whatever she had done to heal her daughter of a demon in the past, she no longer had confidence in those methods.

Then someone told this woman about Jesus. She heard about Jesus' ability to cast out demons with just a word. She heard how the demons screamed and were sent fleeing from Jesus' mere presence. She knew in that moment that her gods were not gods at all. Jesus was the real deal. There was not a demon he couldn't cast out. There was not a demon he didn't have authority over. Jesus was the one she should worship. Jesus was her only hope to save her daughter and her life.

This woman knew very little about Jesus but from what she knew about Jesus' healing power, she knew he was the one she needed to go to. He was the one she could trust to save her daughter's life.

The Plea

...And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. Mark 7:26 (ESV)

Let's also look at how Matthew describes it.

...and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." Matthew 15:22 (ESV)

Mark says the woman begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. We already know she was on her knees. In front of Jesus, she was begging Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter and to save her little girl. Matthew says she was not just begging. She was crying. Picture the tears running down her face as she was on her knees in front of Jesus, begging and crying to him to save the little girl she loved more than her own life. She was placing all of her hope and all of her trust in Jesus to save her little girl.

Interestingly, the Greek tense in Mark's account tells us she didn't just ask Jesus once to save her daughter. It is the continual tense. She kept crying and begging in front of Jesus repeatedly. Again and again she cried and begged Jesus to heal her daughter. This was one desperate mother who loved her little girl and feared for her life.

Matthew's account of what happened adds an important piece of information that tells us what she thought about Jesus. Even though she came from a hardcore pagan background, she called Jesus the Son of David. The Son of David is the title of the Messiah. It is the title the crowds would call Jesus on

Palm Sunday during the triumphal entry. This woman may have been a hardcore pagan that was far from God, but she was putting the pieces she knew about Jesus together the right way. She saw Jesus as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Jesus' healings proved to her that Jesus was worth trusting with her life and the life of her daughter. She didn't have all the pieces, but even as a pagan, she put the pieces she did have about Jesus together the right way.

She knew she did not deserve Jesus' help. She knew her background was wrong. She knew she was not a Jew, but she needed Jesus to heal her daughter, so she came to Jesus in humility and brokenness, knowing that Jesus was the only one who can save her daughter and meet her needs. Let's continue this story in Matthew.

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 15:23 (ESV)

Let's look at the disciples' reactions to her desperate pleas first. They saw her tears. They saw her on her knees. They knew she was there to save her daughter, a little girl, but the disciples were about as compassionate as a brick toward this woman and her needs. Earlier, I told you the Jews had no love for the Gentiles. This is an example of that in action. In fact, the disciples told Jesus to ignore this woman and send her away, because they were afraid all her crying would blow their cover and they wouldn't have as much private time with Jesus. I am not sure I can think of a more selfish statement for the disciples to make. They had no compassion on this woman. All they could see was the filth of her background, not the purity of her heart when she came before Jesus.

Now let's look at Jesus. We see Jesus ignored her and let her continue to beg and cry. Why did Jesus ignore her? Was it because Jesus also had about as much compassion toward her as a brick? I don't think so. Every place in this Gospel Jesus was filled with compassion toward people in need. Why did he appear to ignore this one woman in her time of need?

I think Jesus ignored her on purpose for a while. It was not because he didn't have compassion. Remember this trip was a training trip for the disciples. The longer he ignored her, the more this woman cried and her heart was seen by the disciples. In this Gospel, there were not many people who displayed genuine, authentic, saving faith. This woman was one who did. Even though her background set her up as someone who should be far from God, the attitude of her heart revealed her to actually be someone who was near to God and who saw Christ for who he truly is. If Jesus just instantly healed her daughter, the disciples wouldn't have had a chance to see the true nature of her heart and her love for Jesus on display. She called him the Son of David. He was the Messiah. She asked for mercy. She was humble. She was persistent. She left her foreign gods. She saw Jesus as her only hope. She was desperate. She was penitent. These are the right ways to approach Jesus and receive his mercy.

Finally Jesus answered her.

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." Matthew 15:24–25 (ESV)

Jesus finally turned to her and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I was not sent to help you, a Syrophenician, Gentile far from

God.” Remember Jesus was sent to the Jews first. The mission to the Gentiles was scheduled to begin later.

I love her response to Jesus at this point. She simply fell in front of Jesus and said, “Lord, help me.” There was nothing more to say. There was nothing more she could do. She brought her entire life to Jesus, her daughter to Jesus, and placed them in front of his feet with all the broken pieces in her world and simply said, “Lord, help me.” Have you been there in life? Have you come before Jesus with all the broken pieces of your life and you could say nothing more than, “Lord, help me”? If you have been there, you know the moment this woman was experiencing.

Now let’s return to Mark for the rest of the story.

The Parable

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.” Mark 7:27 (ESV)

What was Jesus saying with this comment? Jesus told this woman a small parable she could understand. When you make dinner, you feed your children first. You give your dogs the leftovers from your children’s meal after the children are done eating. You don’t give your dogs the food you made for dinner first, and after the dogs are done, give your children the leftovers. The kids come first when you make dinner for your family. Jesus was saying there is an order and a priority when it comes to salvation. The Jews came first. The Gentiles were to get what was leftover. It was not yet time for God’s salvation to be brought to Gentiles.

Some people get offended right here in this parable, because Jesus referred to this woman as a dog, which is not a very nice thing to say. There is a lot of ink spilled on this subject. Personally, I don't think it is well spent.

Jesus did not directly call this woman a dog. He was simply telling a parable. The kids in the house eat before pets in the house. The pets eat the leftovers when the children are done eating. The children don't eat the leftovers when the pets are done eating.

To prove to you that is the right interpretation, you need to know that dogs in the ancient world were typically scavengers. Dogs were not loved. They were typically avoided by the Jews. One thing that doesn't come out in the ESV, which is worth mentioning, is that there is a special term used in the Greek for dogs in this passage. It is the term for little dogs. While big dogs in the ancient world were scavengers and were typically avoided, in Gentile households in cities, little dogs were popular pets, especially with children. That is the word used here.

In our house, we have a little dog. Her name is Willa. She is a miniature Dachshund. She is my son's dog. She is a great pet. This is the kind of dog being referred to. When Jesus makes the comparison between children and the dogs, it was not meant to be insulting to her. It was a parable that a mother with children and a little pet dog in her house would understand, because dogs in that day didn't eat dog food. They ate the leftover people food after the meal.

As we know, Jesus was saying that it was not yet time for a wide-open door for the Gentiles to come to Christ. That was still in the future. That mission was later. This is why Jesus was not teaching and healing in Tyre and Sidon.

In my opinion, I think Jesus knew what would happen next. I think that just as Jesus let this woman beg and cry before him to show his disciples authentic faith, he knew how she would respond to further display her great faith.

But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Mark 7:28 (ESV)

This woman understood her place in God’s plan and accepted that salvation would come first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. However, she also made a point. The dogs don’t always have to wait until the children are finished eating. They are allowed to eat the crumbs that fall to the floor from the table even while the children are eating.

She said, “Yes, Lord, I know I am a dog. I know I have no right to your mercy. I am begging for mercy from you now for my daughter now. I know mercy for the Gentiles comes in the future but I also know that you are incredibly gracious. Will you please let a few crumbs of mercy fall to the floor now before it is time to reach the Gentiles and will you heal my daughter now?”

Do you see the difference between this woman and the scribes and Pharisees? The scribes and Pharisees had the right background, but they had a terrible attitude toward Jesus. They undermined Jesus. They were plotting the death of Jesus. This lady had the wrong background, but she had the right heart. She placed all of her faith in Jesus. She humbled herself before him on her knees. Even though she realized it wasn’t time for a wide-open door for ministry to the Gentiles, she knew Jesus was gracious and kind, so she was willing to beg for a few crumbs of Jesus’ mercy to heal her daughter.

Look how Jesus responded.

And he 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 (ESV)

Why did Jesus heal her daughter? She may have been a Gentile with the wrong background who was far from God, but when she approached Jesus with the right attitude — humbly, persistently, looking for mercy she didn’t deserve, recognizing her own unworthiness of Jesus’ mercy — for her daughter, she was confident Jesus would look beyond her background and because of his graciousness heal her daughter out of his mercy anyway.

As Jesus said in Matthew:

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 (ESV)

When this woman placed great faith in Jesus, she received great mercy from Jesus even though she had her background working against her, and the fact she was a Gentile and it wasn’t time for God’s mercy to be extended to the Gentiles. When she placed great faith in Jesus, she received great mercy from Jesus.

Nothing is different today. It doesn’t matter your background. What matters is that we are on our knees in front of Jesus, seeking his grace and mercy. Some of us are like Pharisees and the Jewish leaders. We trust in our own goodness because we grew up in church or have always gone to church. The problem is our backgrounds don’t matter. What matters is that we are on our knees in front of Jesus, humbly asking for his mercy like this woman.

Others of us do not find ourselves identifying with the Pharisees who had a great background. We find ourselves identifying with this woman who had a

terrible background. The good news is that our backgrounds don't matter. What matters is the attitude of our hearts. If we are on our knees, broken, asking for Christ's mercy and forgiveness, we will find it. Anyone who places great faith in Jesus will receive great mercy from Jesus.

For this woman, her background didn't matter. The fact that it wasn't time for mercy to be given to the Gentiles didn't matter. What mattered was the great faith and humble trust she placed in Jesus to be the savior of her and her daughter.

The good news is the great mercy this woman received from Jesus is nothing compared to the great mercy that is offered each of us today through Jesus. No matter what our backgrounds — it doesn't matter what we have done. When we come before Jesus on our knees, genuinely asking for his forgiveness, grace and mercy on our lives, no matter what the obstacles, he will extend his mercy our way. For us, that means we are born again when we trust in Jesus. Jesus completely forgives all of our sin. He gives us new hearts that love Jesus more than they love sin. He also takes us for all of eternity and transfers us from fully deserving his eternal wrath for our sin to being the most blessing beings in the universe for all of eternity — the adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus, the very son of God.

What greater mercy can anyone receive than the mercy that is offered to us from Jesus when we place our faith in him?



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