

The Lord Heals a Demon-Possessed Girl

Mark 7:24-30

Mark 7:24-30 – *“From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden. ²⁵ For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ But Jesus said to her, “Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”*

²⁸ And she answered and said to Him, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.”

²⁹ Then He said to her, “For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.”

³⁰ And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.”

Background Notes

Verse 24 tells us that the Lord went, most likely from Capernaum, to the region of Tyre and Sidon. That was Gentile territory; it’s the area where Lebanon is today. This is the only time in the Gospel accounts that the Lord ever traveled outside of Israel.

Why would He enter a house, and not want anyone to know it? The reason is that He was taking His disciples away on a retreat (not a vacation!). He wanted to have a time of rest with His disciples, and do some teaching. But He could not remain hidden. His reputation and fame had preceded Him and had already reached this area.

A woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard that Jesus was in the area. The unclean spirit (demon) that possessed this girl caused her to have unusually unclean or lewd or immoral thoughts and talk - and possibly actions. The woman is described as a Greek, or Gentile, and also a Syro-Phoenician. Tyre and Sidon were in the region of the ancient nation of Phoenicia, and that area was now in the Roman territory of Syria.

In verse 27, the Lord made what appears to be a very harsh statement: *“Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”* It seems to be a harsh statement because Jews used the term “dogs” to describe Gentiles, to emphasize their ceremonial uncleanness.

However, notice that the Lord did not use the term for the wild scavenger-type dogs of the city – the negative term that Jews used for Gentiles. He used a different term: *little dogs* or *puppies*. The woman immediately picked up on His word use, and she responded, *“Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs”* (v28).

If you ever had a pet dog you'll understand what the woman was saying. When our children were young we had a little beagle, and she constantly spent dinnertime under the table, begging for a little bit of our children's food. Recently our son and his wife were away, and we cared for their huge Labrador retriever - and this dog begs from the table, too. He's so big that his head actually rests on the table, and he doesn't wait for crumbs to fall - he nudges his big head right up to your plate!

I think we can all appreciate what this woman was saying, and we can recognize that she had a humble attitude: the little dogs are allowed to eat the crumbs that fall from the children's bread. At that response the Lord said, *"For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter"* (v29). In the parallel account in Matthew 15, the Lord refers to the woman's response as **"great faith."**

Doctrinal Points

1. God must be approached on the right grounds.

This truth is taught in the humble position the woman took, before the Lord responded to her in grace. We, too, must take that position. We must come to God on the right grounds and with the right attitude - in humble faith.

At first the woman came on the wrong grounds. The parallel account in Matthew 15:22 says, *"Behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.' But He answered and said, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'"*

At first the woman came on the wrong grounds, or the wrong basis, and the Lord didn't answer her. She was a Gentile, and she had no right to claim the Son of David, the Jewish Messiah. The Lord commented that He had come to the lost sheep of Israel. Imagine my reaction if a friend of my son, Ron, came to me and shouted, "Hey Dad, how about giving me \$10?" That boy would be coming on the wrong grounds. He's not my son. Ron could say that to me, but not an unrelated boy.

In verse 27 the Lord graciously nudged her toward the right grounds on which to come. His statement may appear to be harsh. However, it really wasn't harsh, because if He had spoken in a harsh way the woman would have turned away. But the Lord was urging her to press on by approaching Him on the right grounds. Notice that the Lord used the word *"first."* *"Let the children be filled first."* In other words, there is grace for the Gentiles! I think we have a preview here of what was to come - the gospel extended to the Gentiles.

When the woman heard, “*Let the children be filled first,*” she would have realized that the door to healing was not closed. The Lord was just nudging her to approach Him in the proper way. The Lord used the term for *little dogs*, not the derogatory term for wild dogs that the Jews commonly used for Gentiles. Would the woman be willing to take that humble position, the position of a little dog, compared to the children of the house?

Back to the illustration I gave about my son’s friend asking me for \$10. When he called me “Dad,” he came on the wrong grounds. It was presumptuous for him come as if he were my son. If I responded, “It’s not right to take the family’s money and give it to leeches” - *that* would be a harsh response! But suppose I said, “It’s not right to take the family’s money and give it away to one of my son’s buddies first.” Now, you see, the door is open. I’d be nudging him towards coming to me on the right grounds.

That’s what’s going on here in our Lord’s response to this woman. The Lord was opening the door for her to come on the right grounds. Would she take the right grounds? Yes! She took the humble place.

Then, in great faith, she said, “*Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.*” She was not only willing to take the humble place of the little dog under the table – she was willing to feed on the crumbs! Her humble faith was very persistent, and the Lord called it **great faith** (Matthew 15). Basically she was saying to the Lord, “Even while the children are eating, the little dogs can have the crumbs that fall under the table. They don’t have to wait until after the meal.” And the Lord referred to that statement as showing “great faith.”

The Lord replied, “*For this saying, go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.*” The woman had approached Him on the right grounds – in humble faith – and the Lord responded by healing her daughter. We, too, must come to God in humble faith, recognizing and confessing our unworthiness to approach a holy God. God must be approached on the right grounds. Have you come to God on the right grounds?

2. The power of prayer can remove demons.

This is the only event in the Gospels where a demon was cast out from a distance, without a verbal command. Can the Lord do the same today? Of course He can.

Demon possession exists today. What should you do if you, as a Christian, individually or as a church, are confronted with what looks like a case of demon possession? What do you do? I don’t think that you have to find an exorcist, or take the person to some kind of special healing service. As a group of Christians, you can pray fervently for that person and you will see that person delivered. The power of prayer can remove demons.

Practical Applications

1. When we're willing to settle for crumbs, the Lord gives us a full loaf!

The woman was willing to take the humble place, and ask for nothing more than crumbs – but she received much more than crumbs! Our prayers often center on “what we want,” rather than recognizing our humble position before God. We almost demand of God that He gives us this or that, health and wealth and everything our hearts desire – and expect God to approve and answer our requests right away. We may not be as demanding as the “name it and claim it” preachers, but I think we may at times come pretty close.

Psalm 37:4 says, *“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”* If we delight ourselves in the Lord, we won't be demanding things from the Lord that He knows are not good for us. If we delight ourselves in the Lord, we'll be content with what we have. If we delight ourselves in the Lord, our desires will line up with the will of God. When we're in this humble condition, we will find that God blesses us with everything we need. When we're willing to settle for crumbs, we'll find that God will give us a full loaf!

2. We should always bring the spiritual condition of our children before the Lord.

The woman was concerned about the spiritual condition of her daughter, and she brought that problem to the right Person. She brought that need to the Lord Himself - and we should do the same.

Some of you have children. Some of them are toddlers; some in junior high; some are teens; some are college age and older. No matter their age, parents should never stop bringing the spiritual condition of their children before the Lord.

We tend to naturally pray for their growth and health, good grades and good jobs, but we must never forget their spiritual condition. Pray for their salvation. Pray for their spiritual well-being. Pray for the Lord's protection against evil. Pray for the development of their spiritual gifts. Did you realize that your child, if a Christian, already has spiritual gifts? They're there. It's just a matter of time and development.

We need to pray. We need to pray for the person they will marry. God is already preparing that person. My wife and I have special prayer times when we specifically pray for the spiritual condition of our children, and now our grandchildren as well.

We must do this. We must always bring the spiritual condition of our children before the Lord.