

A Refreshing Example of Real Prayer

Mark 7:24-30

Halifax: 10 November 2019

Introduction

Today in our sermon series from Mark we continue to look at how Christ is presented as the one who has what we need.

- In Galilee, He and His disciples have been overwhelmed with a continual stream of people coming to Jesus to be healed.
 - This might have been quite encouraging for our Lord if they had come with humility seeking mercy, but it would appear that they were coming with a sense of entitlement—unmindful of the fact that they were not worthy and that they were in need of mercy for their souls.
 - And now, to add to the discouragement, a delegation from Jerusalem had come and were displaying the utter blindness of Israel all the more... as they claimed superiority to Jesus because of the many ritual purifications that they had added to the ones God had given them.
 - They were so warped. All the washings and sacrifices that God had given them were to show them that they were distinguished as those who had received mercy for forgiveness; but they had added ceremonies that turned it into a display that they were purified from the uncleanness of the Gentiles.
 - It was a case of completely missing the point!

In our text today, we find Jesus, no doubt weary from all this, going with His disciples for some rest into the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon.

- He comes to this place in Syria and there he meets a remarkable Gentile woman who has the faith of a true Israelite—an attribute that was very rare in Israel itself.
- In fact, this woman has the distinction of being the first person in Mark to understand one of Jesus' parables without having to have it explained to her.
 - How refreshing it must have been to the Lord to see her.
 - She gives us a refreshing example of real prayer.

Our reading is from Mark 7:24-30

- This is the Word of God. Please listen now as I read it to you.

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.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy word.

Surely this account is recorded for us as an example of real prayer.

- So many church members today are strangers to real prayer because they are strangers to true saving faith.
 - They know nothing of coming to God as a sinner seeking mercy.
 - They come as those who suppose that they deserve to be heard, when they don't deserve it at all.
- This woman, by her example, takes us back to Jacob, when his name was changed to Israel at Peniel.
 - He was a desperate man as he realised that only God could deliver his family.
 - He had relied on his own cleverness, but at Peniel, for the first time, he relies on God alone.
 - He refuses to let the Lord go unless He blesses him because he realises that if God doesn't bless him, he and his family will be ruined.
 - His name was changed to Israel because in this way he prevailed with God in prayer and become a model of true faith for us all.
 - Many Israelites were not true Israelites because they were without this true faith—just as many Christians are not true Christians because they too are without this true faith that prays to God for mercy.
- The example of this woman, this Gentile Israelite, is an example to which we need to pay careful attention.
 - Let's do so now.
 - We will look at three characteristics of true prayer that we find in this woman.

I. First, she shows us that in real prayer, there is desperation.

- A. There is a sense that my problem is very serious—that my need is very great.
1. This woman had a little daughter who was demon-possessed.
 - What a terrible thing to see her child driven about by a malicious spirit.
 - Likely, she could not rest as she was driven about by this devil.
 - There may have been devilish shrieks and contortions of her body and her face—violence and self-injury—curses and anger.
 - This mother was desperate to find deliverance for her little girl.
 2. What do we find in our own life and in the life of our children?
 - a. In the worst cases, we may find a sinful heart of unbelief.
 - If this prevails, you or that child of yours will end up in the place of everlasting torment.
 - Such persons will be left to wallow in their own sin and depravity forever, without remedy.
 - You may be in relative happiness now, in this world where both sin and punishment is greatly restrained, but once you see your true condition, you become desperate for deliverance.
 - One of the great things we learn in this text is that we can pray not only for our deliverance, but also for our children... even when they are so under the dominion of Satan that they cannot pray for themselves.

- b. In the best case, we may have come to Christ and we may be walking with Him, but in all of us there is what Paul called this body of death that we bear about.
 - In our Confession, this is called remaining corruption.
 - We find that though our hearts have been changed so that we want to do good, we still find that evil is present with us.
 - When you have true faith, you cry out in desperation to be delivered from this body of death, especially when you find it rearing its ugly head in you and your children.
- So you are desperate because you see your great need of deliverance...
 - You are also desperate in your prayers for a second reason.
- B. You are also desperate because you see that none but God can deliver you.
 1. This woman came to Jesus with a sense that He was her only hope. She was right about that.
 - Her daughter could not escape from this demon—it had her.
 - Her mother could not wrestle this demon or demand it away from her.
 - This was not a matter that any doctor could correct.
 - That is the reason she found Jesus and came to Jesus and fell down before Him—because she had no other place to go.
 - She knew that if He did not help her, she would not be helped.
 2. When you come to God for your deepest need—deliverance from your sin...
 - you know that nothing else can deliver you.
 - a. Like this woman, and like Jacob, you finally come to the Lord Himself in faith and you refuse to let Him go unless He blesses you.
 - You know that unless He delivers you, you will not be delivered.
 - b. You are not content with bare ordinances of prayer and sacrament—you come to all of these looking to the one that they point to, insisting that He act in your behalf.
 - The great deception of many is that salvation is in the ceremonies rather than in meeting the LORD in the ceremonies.
 - There are many, like the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus encountered, who are very diligent in all the ceremonies, but know nothing of coming to the LORD in those ceremonies and looking to Him for deliverance.
 - In many cases, they have even suppressed the very fact that they need deliverance at all.
 - c. And certainly you know that you cannot deliver yourself!
 - Sin is deep within—it flows right out of your heart.
 - You have no place to go but Christ.
 - Without His deliverance, you are desperate.
 3. No barrier will keep you from Him.
 - He can resist you as Jesus did this woman, but you will press upon Him all the more, and, as it says in verse 26, you will keep on asking Him.

- You will give Him no rest until He hears you.
- Your friends and relations can ridicule you, but you must have Him...
 - Your condition is too desperate to let social conventions, persecutions, loss of status, economic loss... even loss of life... keep you from crying out to Him and clinging to Him.
- Of course I don't mean that you will always be in a state of desperate agitation.
 - There is a beautiful resting in Christ when you know that He has heard you.
 - But you will always have an underlying foundational sense of how desperately you need Him and His salvation...
 - so that you refuse to forsake Him—even when the world pressures you to do so—you refuse to step away from Him or to draw back.

TRANS> So there is this firm recognition that I am desperate without Christ.

- This fuels my prayer, so that like this woman, I keep asking (vs 26).
- Now let's move on to the second characteristic of true prayer.

II. Second, this woman shows us that in real prayer, there is a sense that I am entirely unworthy of the Lord's mercy.

A. This Gentile woman shows that she fully understands that.

1. She was unworthy because she was not from Israel.
 - She was a woman from Phoenicia. Mark calls her a Syro-Phoenician because she is a Phoenician living in the province of Syria.
 - These people were not just non-Israelites, but they were, in the words of Josephus, "notoriously our bitterest enemies."
 - They were wealthy neighbours who were of Canaan, the very people Israel was supposed to destroy, and they had assisted Israel's enemies in the Jewish wars of the Maccabean period.
2. She certainly knew that Jesus was a Jew who was ministering to the Jews.
 - She knew enough about Him to seek Him out as the one who could heal her daughter, and so she knew that He was Israel's Messiah.
 - Matthew tells us that she even addressed Him as the Son of David, so she looked at Him as Israel's Messiah.
 - Everybody knew that the Messiah was coming to save Israel...
3. But that she recognises her unworthiness is especially brought out by the way she responds to Jesus when he compares her to a dog and insists that she has no place at His table with His children!
 - Look at verse 27:
 - She has been asking Him to cast the demon out of daughter and Jesus says: **"Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."**
 - a. How would that fly in our day when everyone feels entitled?
 - As a non-Israelite, she is an outsider and has no right to eat the children's bread. Their bread must not be given to the little dogs.

- How insulting is that?
- b. But she does not take offense!
 - She accepts that she must take second place to the children.
 - She even accepts that she is as a little dog under the table.
 - She is humble, like Jacob, when he finally realised that he was not worthy of the least of God's mercies.
- What a refreshing contrast from most of the covenant people of Jesus' day, who had forgotten that they were as unworthy as anybody else!
- B. And what about us—have we forgotten that as Christians we are as unworthy as anybody else?
 1. Yes, God has accepted us as children and we have a place at the table where He provides for His children.
 - But the provision He gives us is the provision of mercy for the undeserving!
 - God's provision for us is of a crucified Saviour.
 - The symbols of our acceptance into God's family are baptism and the Lord's Supper... and what are these?
 - Baptism, the symbol we all receive at the door to God's house, the symbol of washing for those who are unacceptably filthy and defiled.
 - The Lord's Supper, the symbol of a Saviour crucified for us as our spiritual nourishment as those who are looking to Him to be brought out of a sinful, defiled life.
 - These are not symbols that ought to make us feel proud and superior.
 - They are symbols that show us how unworthy we are and fill us with a sense that we belong because of God's unmeasurable mercy!
 2. If we are the children of believers, we have a right to what?
 - To be accepted as desperately defiled sinners that God washes.
 - We are not accepted because we are good, but we accepted as wretches who are shown mercy—mercy that is wholly unmerited.
 3. Our posture toward unbelievers should be like that of Paul...
 - We should see ourselves as debtors to them, debtors to whom God has shown mercy when we are no more deserving of it than they.
 - We no more belong at the table than they do.
 - Perhaps even less so—when we see how proud and ungrateful we have been as those who have been given a place at the table as children.
- C. And let me warn you—if you have forgotten that you are entirely unworthy to have a place in God's house... it shows that you are a son who will be cast out.
 1. It shows that you were never truly a son.
 - You have a place in the visible church, but you do not have saving faith and you will be put out.

- The Jews boasted to Jesus that they were sons of Abraham, but Jesus countered that though they were in the house, they would be kicked out because they were not true sons at all.
2. A true son or daughter is one who knows that he is entirely unworthy to be in God's house.
 - You have come to Christ for mercy because you know that without Him you are lost.

TRANS> And that brings us to the third characteristic of those who know what true prayer is.

III. This woman shows us that in real prayer, there is a sense that Jesus has plenty of mercy... that He overflows with mercy.

A. My request, though huge to me, I must also see as but a crumb to Him.

1. Another way to say is that it is a mere drop of mercy in the whole ocean of mercy that He has for His people!
2. That is what this woman beautifully displays to us here.
 - When Jesus says, (v. 27) **“Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”**
 - She replies (v. 28): **“Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.”**
 - It is clear she is not appealing to Him because she thinks she is entitled to a place at the table with the children...
 - She is appealing to Him because she believes that He has so much mercy for them that there is enough for her without in the least depriving the children.
 - It is not that she thinks she is just as deserving as they are.
 - It is rather that she believes that He has so much mercy for them that they can have all they want and there will be plenty of crumbs for the little dogs.
3. Let's take this a little farther...
 - She believes that He is the kind of Master who fully intends to feed the little dogs after He has fed the children...
 - Did He not say, “Let the children be filled first?”
 - She notices that word ‘first’!
 - That word *first* indicates that He does not plan to let the dogs go hungry—He will feed them after Israel has had all they want.
 - He is going to feed the little dogs that are under the table after He has fed the children...
 - But is there any reason that the little dogs cannot enjoy the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table *now*?
 - She needs mercy for her daughter *now*...
 - There is more than enough for the children because there is such an abundance of beautiful, delicious mercy!

B. So all of you, come to Jesus. In Him there is plenty of mercy to go around!

1. Are you already one who is at the table?
 - Then see that you are not like Israel was when the Messianic banquet was given to them.
 - They did not think forgiveness and cleansing was what they needed... even though all of their symbols pointed them to that need.
 - They spurned our gracious Saviour—they only wanted Him for the things that everybody in the world wants—riches, freedom from enemies, prosperity, a place of honour among the nations.
 - They were full of pride and had disdain for those outside the covenant people.
 - No, no, if you are in the church, if you already have a place at the table, see that you partake of the grace and mercy He has for salvation from sin.
 - Come to Him as a sinner and feed on Him as the one who pardons you and cleanses you.
2. And if you are outside the church—if you are one who has not been baptised...
 - Then come to Him—not because you think you are somehow worthy—but because you see that He is a Saviour who is full of mercy for sinners.
 - Your confidence is not in your fitness, but in His mercy—in Him as the Saviour who is full of grace and truth.

IV. Look at how pleased our Saviour was to show mercy to her!

- A. He shows how pleased He is in verse 29 by what He says to her.
 - **Then He said to her, “For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.”**
1. “For this saying” shows that she has said what was true and good.
 - She understood His parable, not because she was so clever, but because she had true faith that recognised how merciful He is.
 - This faith was a gift of God.
 - Few others exhibited it in all the people that Jesus had met.
 - But for this woman, her confidence was in Him.
 - She did not try to justify herself at all.
 - Indeed, she was a little dog, just as He said, but He was so merciful that He had plenty for little dogs...
 - Her hope lay not in herself, but in Him and the wideness of His mercy.
2. It is clear that He wanted to show her mercy all along.
 - He wanted to spar with her and He wanted her to prevail, just as He wanted to spar with Jacob and wanted him to prevail at Peniel.
 - How it thrilled Him that she would not accept His refusal—
 - She basically said, “You have too much mercy to refuse me.”
 - She would not be put off because she knew how merciful He was.
3. He is delighted when you speak of His mercy also.
 - Not in the false way that so many people do today where you speak of Him as merciful because you suppose that you and others are entitled to it,

- But when you speak of His mercy as this woman did—as mercy to those who truly deserve the opposite—when you are not like so many that get offended if you are compared to a dog who takes second place to others.
- It is only then that you can know the true joy of receiving His mercy.

B. We are shown how pleased He is by that fact that He gladly grants her request.

1. He tells her so in verse 29 when He said...
 - **“Go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.”**
 - How she must have hastened her step to go and see!
2. When she got home, she found that it was so as verse 30 says,
 - **And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.**
 - A more literal rendering would be that this mother found her little daughter *thrown* on the bed.
 - The implication is that when the demon departed, it tossed her onto the bed.
 - And there she was, lying there, resting sweetly—a beautiful sight to behold, for those with demons are often kept from rest.
 - To see her there asleep, without all the agitation and terror.
3. Truly the mother’s prayer had been answered.
 - And now this family knew the grace of God, for this dear mother understood the mercy that was to come to the Gentiles...
 - not because they deserved it, but because the Saviour of the world who was full of mercy had come.
 - They could rest in His mercy forever.

Conclusion: The great question for you is this:

- Have you learned the way of real prayer? or real faith?
 - Are you resting in what you have done, or are you resting in His mercy?
 - Do you stand before our Lord without any claim of merit but with hope in the abundant mercy of Jesus Christ?
 - Do you stand upon the mercy and refuse to take no for an answer regarding the things that He has promised?
 - If you do, then you will know His deliverance for you and your children.
 - You have learned the way of real prayer.