

"JESUS SAID WHAT?"

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Texts for the Sermon: Mark 7:24-30

Introduction.

Phama and I have some sons who are serious travelers. Todd just stopped in again this weekend from leading a group through the Canadian Rockies. Now he's on his way to San Francisco to finish out his tour season with a couple of trips in the Southwest before taking some time off in Oklahoma and Florida. The good news is he plans to be home for Christmas.

Our son Marc is in Spain on his way to Portugal. He survived the Middle East and North Africa including an unplanned stop in Tunis, Tunisia. He has travel through some pretty hostile and pagan territory. The good news is he plans to return home just before Christmas as well.

Mark 7:24-26, Jesus went where?

Our Heavenly Father has a son who was a bit of a traveling man. Of course He condescended to travel the greatest distance of all, from heaven to earth. While He was on earth He never wandered more than about 150 miles from His place of birth. If He had been born in Lynden, Olympia would have been as far as He ever walked.

On a couple of occasions Jesus traveled outside of the Jewish regions of Palestine. On one occasion He went to NW Palestine to the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast.

Jesus is in foreign territory among heathens. In the words of Paul in Ephesians, these people are "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

Remember Mark is writing to Gentile believers in Rome, so they would hear this story with special interest.

Seeking some peace and quiet Jesus goes to this region to get away from the press of the crowds and the stress of the opposition leaders. "But immediately..." Mark tells us a distressed Gentile woman came to Jesus to plead for mercy on behalf of her demon oppressed daughter.

Obviously Jesus' fame has spread far and wide, it knows no borders, it knows no culture barriers. Though she is far outside the sheep fold of Israel, somehow she knows about this shepherd and has knowledge of and faith in His ability to cast out demons and heal diseases.

Mark says that she heard of Jesus. What does Paul say about hearing? Faith comes by hearing.

Mark 7:27, Jesus said what?

Mark 7:27 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."

The children's bread refers to those specific blessings the God has reserved for His elect, His children by adoption, Abraham's seed.

Jesus rebuffs her. He tells her to get lost. He as much calls her a dog, a worthless, Gentile dog. He came first to the Jews. This may be the most offensive statement of Jesus recorded in Scripture.

If someone called you a mangy dog how would you react? If your pastor or care district elder called you a worthless excuse for a human being how would you react?

What would be her natural reaction to Jesus' words?

"Well this certainly proved to be a waste of time, I could have just as well stayed home. Is this any way to treat a poor woman and one whose child is suffering so much? I heard you were kind and compassionate, that you cared about the poor and the needy. What a bunch of lies. And then to be called names, a dog no less."

A proud woman might have said that but not her, she isn't easily put off even by an offensive insult. In fact she accepts it. She's the first person in the Gospels to understand a parable of Jesus. "Yes, Lord, first the children, but your provision will be more than enough that we can have what falls to the floor."

Perhaps she had heard of the feeding of the 5000 and that after all the people had eaten and had their fill, there were still scrapes left over. She didn't want to deny anyone their rightful food, just that she might glean from the edges a little for her daughter.

All she asks is for a chance fallen crumb, just a little taste. She is really magnifying the mercy of Christ by suggesting that even His crumbs are a great benefit for those who have even little faith.

She humbled herself and emptied herself, that she might gain Christ and His benefits. She was not demanding, no sense of entitlement. She knew she was unworthy, but she knew that her unworthiness didn't disqualify her from Christ's grace. Let me repeat that. She knew she was unworthy, but she knew that her unworthiness didn't disqualify her from Christ's grace.

Mark 7:29-30, Jesus answered and treated her this way why?

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

Matthew 15:28 Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."

Most of the other requests for healing were answered without resistance. Was the difference this time because she was a Gentile and He didn't wish to offend the Jews? I think He knew her need and her heart and He intended to do *three things* for her, to test her faith; and by testing it, to strengthen her faith; and by her perseverance to praise her faith.

Jesus tested her faith to prove her faith was the real deal.

Christ directly denied her request. But I believe He did so not because He didn't want to grant it, but because He wanted to test and draw out her faith and to give us an example of great faith.

God tested Abraham through Isaac, God wrestled with Jacob, Jesus tested Peter. There is a dark and mysterious side to the providence of God in His dealings with us that's not clear until long after. Let's us learn to say with Job, "though he slay me, yet will I praise Him" (Job 13:15).

When we bring our requests to Jesus, there are times when He will put an obstacle in our path and everything hinges on our response to the obstacle. The obstacle will be a test of our faith, of our trust in Jesus.

The obstacle for the rich young ruler was money and that was where Jesus tested Him.

One of the biggest obstacles to faith is pride, and that's precisely where Jesus will test us (also impatience, trust, unbelief). If we humble ourselves before God and each other, He will see our hearts and respond.

Jesus strengthened her faith by making her press further. Jesus' words weren't a refusal, they were an invitation to press in, to lean into His heart, to desire the move out of the shallows of faith into the depths of faith.

Her faith was put to a test and it came out stronger. In the face of Jesus' reasons for not answering, she hangs onto Jesus for dear life, not letting go. Undaunted by Christ's obstinacy, she redoubles her relentless and persistent pursuit of His mercy. Faith believes even when reason says it's hopeless.

Sometimes when the door is closed you need stronger faith to push it open and sometimes when it still won't open you're supposed to squeeze through the key hole or under the crack in the door. Jesus left a crack open saying He came to the Jews first, but not only.

Jesus puts a great premium and value on faith and on strengthening our faith, faith obtains things not gained by any other means. The prayer offered in faith has great power and reaps many rewards.

If I can offer an appetizer from our upcoming Bible Study on James:

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Jesus praised her faith in public. Only one other time did Jesus do that, and it was with the Roman centurion, another Gentile, who showed great faith in Jesus' ability to heal. I think Jesus traveled here specifically for this woman to put her faith on display for our sake.

With only a rumor of second hand news from a long ways away, she recognized in Christ divine power, and she pursued Him and pressed her petition and didn't easily give up. A mustard seed of faith moved a mountain of obstacles.

Her faith was great and Christ honors faith because faith honors Christ. Of all the graces faith is the greatest and from it flows all the others. Confidence in the goodness of Jesus wins us His praise and affection.

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Mark 7:30, Jesus rewarded her how?

Mark 7:30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Her daughter was restored to health and sanity and home is restored to peace and joy. And all by a crumb from the master's table. She asked for one thing that she did not deserve and she received it by faith. Mercy and salvation comes to the world, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile, through Jesus.

Application and conclusion.

Humility in the face of painful insults.

Jesus has insulted you and me. We are Gentile dogs, we are the outcasts, the outsiders, the strangers and foreigners. Does this bother you at all? Is there any sting of offense? You know what that feels like, you have felt it before, do you feel it now?

How do you react when insulted or called a name or made to feel worthless?

I remember hearing about a missionary in Albania who had been nominated to a position of leadership among the missionaries there. He was sitting in a room with some fellow missionaries when another missionary came in and in front of the rest said to this man that he wasn't qualified because of several sins and deficiencies in his character. And without flinching the first missionary answered, "You don't know the half of it. Not only are those things true, I have also done this and this. I am a worse sinner than you know. I didn't ask for and I'm not worthy of this nomination."

His humility and honesty completely disarmed the second man, who reversed his opinion and supported the first man's leadership.

If we can show humility and grace, if we can not take an offense or go on the defensive, but graciously accept criticism or insults and offer a gentle response, battles are stopped, victories won.

When a believer is slighted, he doesn't fire back to even the score, he gives the opposition more ammunition. The truth is I am the worst among sinners, more than you know.

We would profit spiritually if we would meditate and ponder what our condition was before Christ came to us as our Savior. We would be humbled and given greater cause to worship if we considered how we were all dogs, not worthy of a single crumb of God's grace, but totally lost in the darkness of our sin, until Christ came as our Bread of Heaven.

Humility in the face of painful insults reflects Christ on the cross. It's what separates Christianity from Islam and why we are rioting in Harvard Square over a piece of papyrus that mocks our Savior.

Boldness in prayer.

She boldly approached Christ and prayed for someone who couldn't pray for herself and she gain in prayer what no human being could give her.

The prayers of fathers and mothers have great influence and great effect. A praying father and mother is one of the greatest forces in the world. Never cease, don't grow weary or discouraged. Don't let hopelessness and despair keep you from your knees. Press in to the Father in the name of Jesus on behalf of your children and grandchildren.

We can give our children a Christian education, we can show them the way of truth and life, but we can't give them minds to know God or hearts to love God or wills to obey God. For that we must pray. Pray for your prodigal sons, pray for your worldly daughters, pray for grandchildren who love the pleasures and things of this world more than God. They may not listen to you anymore, but God will listen to you on their behalf.

The greatest prayer any of us can pray for our children is that they be set free from the bondage of Satan and sin, that he be cast out of their lives, that they no longer be synagogues of the devil but temples of the Holy Spirit.

It's the most serious duty of parents to pray for their children and most especially for their souls. Too many of us are too weak and too infrequent and too easily forgetful in prayer. We pray once or twice and then are on to other things. Perseverance is an essential part of fruitful prayer.

Satan knows the power of prayer and so he labors hard to keep us from praying, and if we do pray, then he labors hard to draw us away as soon as he can, filling our minds with distractions and reasons to give up.

Prayer is God's primary means of working in our world. Prayer is God's primary means of bringing glory to Himself and benefit to His children. The Spirit is stirring up more and more Christians and churches in Lynden to be in earnest intercessory prayer.

James 5:16 The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Pray for the hardest, for the most unbelieving. Pray for the souls rushing toward hell. Intercede to the Father, to the God who is the changer of hearts. How long? Year after year after year. How many of our prayers have cobwebs on them? How many of our prayers have layers of dust building up on them?

We don't know God's time of mercy, we don't know His purposes or how or when He will display His glory. The time for the Gentiles was thousands of years in coming. The Jews prayed 400 years for a Messiah.

While we have breath, let us pray. In heaven we will be staggered to hear how many souls are there because of the faithful, earnest, persevering intercessory prayers of humble saints.

He, who heard the Gentile woman, is seated on the throne at the right hand of the eternal Father, and He hears our prayers offered in faith, and He will answer after He has tested and strengthened our faith.