

Jesus Blesses A Humble Woman
Mark 7:24-30
Key Verse: 7:29

“Then he told her, ‘For such a reply you may go; the demon has left your daughter.’”

In this passage Jesus blesses a humble woman’s faith. The woman was a Greek, a Gentile. Jews looked down on Gentiles. Jews also looked down on women. There was a famous prayer among rabbis that went like this, “God thank you that I was not born a Gentile, a woman, or an ignorant man.” However, this Gentile woman obtained Jesus’ blessing. She is a great teacher for us. Let’s humble our hearts and learn from her how to obtain Jesus’ blessing.

I. She begged Jesus for help (24-26).

After dealing decisively with wicked religious leaders, Jesus left Galilee and went to the vicinity of Tyre. Tyre was west of Israel, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and it was Gentile territory. This was part of a strategic retreat by Jesus. Jesus wanted to avoid the hostility of the Pharisees and the demands of the crowds. Jesus wanted to spend some quality time with his disciples to plant gospel faith in their hearts. So Jesus entered a house and did not want anyone to know about it. Yet he could not keep his presence a secret. People found him. It is amazing to see Jesus. Jesus served those who came to him by faith at any time. Though he had a very important plan with his disciples, he allowed the interruption. Jesus always welcomed people of faith, even when he was busy. Jesus’ heart to embrace and serve needy people is infinite.

Who came to him? Look at verse 25. “In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet.” This woman had a very difficult problem. Her little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit. “Little daughter” implies that she was quite young, maybe a preteen. It was time for her to enjoy the love of her mother and to learn the basics of being a young lady. It was time to read many books and to dream the impossible dream. A mother’s great joy is to watch her precious daughter grow in noble humanity and in the grace of a young woman. But this girl was possessed by an evil spirit, who caused her to do many evil things. The evil spirit filled her with rebellious thoughts toward her mother. The evil spirit made her intentionally misunderstand everything. The evil spirit filled her with bitterness and malice and drove her to do terrible things. Perhaps she skipped class, rode in cars with boys, and partied late at karaoke bars. Her mother had tried to temper her with discipline, and various rewards and punishment, but nothing worked. When her mother saw her come home long after bedtime, wearing a devilish grin, she felt sick. Most likely the mother’s heart felt dead.

However, when she heard about Jesus, something happened in her heart. The name Jesus stirred her soul. She heard how Jesus had driven many demons out of people in Israel. She believed that Jesus could heal her daughter as well. New hope sprang up and her heart came alive. She got up and went to Jesus. She knew it was an awkward moment, yet she came in boldly, interrupting Jesus’ plans, and fell at his feet. This scene was so striking that Mark takes a moment to dwell on its meaning. Look at verse 26. “The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.” We can learn three things from this woman.

First, she overcame cultural and racial barriers. The Greeks were the purveyors of culture in that ancient time. Greek was the language of the scholar. Greek philosophy and art were regarded as superior. Greek rulers had tried to completely eradicate Jewish culture and replace it with their own. To the advanced Greeks, traditional Jews seemed out of date. So this woman would have had a natural tendency to look down on Jews. Yet she was coming to Jesus and falling at his feet. She shows no trace of national or cultural pride. Most Christians want to think that they have no racial barrier in their hearts. But it is surprising to see some otherwise mature parents who abhor the thought of their children marrying someone of a different nationality. On the other hand, there are many great missionaries in UBF who have embraced peoples of other nations from their hearts, participating in Jesus’ incarnation in a deeper way. Missionaries Joseph and Maria Ahn blessed their precious only daughter Maria to marry an American man, Benjamin. Recently, the Tohs in Chicago and the Suhs in Korea blessed their children Sam and Anna, and last week they were engaged to marry each other. Dr. Paul and Sarah Hong in Toledo have embraced their son-in-law Kevin,

an African American Christian. Like these great missionaries, the woman in this passage went beyond the barriers of culture and nationality. She could do so on the basis of truth. She could do so on the basis of love.

Second, she saw the problem as it was. Parents love their children and want to protect them so they can grow well. But sometimes, as the saying goes, "love is blind." There is a child who says and does hurtful things to others, yet acts like an angel before mom and dad. The parents never think their child is the problem. They always think other people are the problem. So they don't come to Jesus on behalf of their child. Of course, no mother wants to reveal her daughter's demon possession. But without seeing the problem as it is, we live in an illusion and have no motivation to bring it to Jesus. This Greek woman did not downplay her daughter's problem, or blame others. She came to Jesus. May God give all of us a sense of reality as we look at our children, both spiritual and physical. Then we can come to Jesus sincerely.

These days we see that Grace Yang has become a new creation in Christ Jesus. She is growing in faith and in the love of God. She serves many Bible students with the word of God and practical care. But a few years ago, she was more like the little daughter in this passage. At that time, her mother saw Grace honestly in the sight of God and realized that only Jesus could help her. So she cried out to God in prayer. Other shepherds also cried out for her in prayer. Grace has become a new person through these prayers.

Third, she begged Jesus' help. Most remarkable is her begging Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. Begging is asking for mercy without claiming merit of any kind. This woman was completely emptied before Jesus. She had nothing to be proud of or to claim. She was totally dependent on Jesus' mercy. She not only asked, but she begged for Jesus' help. She cried out with all her heart and all her strength. She came to Jesus as a matter of life and death.

We learn from this woman her begging prayer. It is to empty ourselves of all self-righteousness, hypocrisy and pride and to come to Jesus with nothing but a request for mercy. It is to take hold of Jesus because only Jesus can solve the problem. It is to persist until Jesus answers our prayer. Last summer, Shepherdess Sharon Schafer from Penn State visited us here in Chicago. As the wife of Dr. Joseph Schafer, she is a very honorable woman in many ways. She came to help her son Joey, who has mild autism, to attend a special school for several weeks. She did not hesitate to reveal this problem openly in order to help her son. She put aside all other duties, and even asked her husband to babysit their other three children, in order to devote herself fully to Joey. Most of all, she cried out for him in prayer and asked others to cry out for him in prayer. Through that special care and prayer, Joey advanced two grade levels in his reading comprehension. Shepherdess Angie Fitch has been serving the CBF ministry for some time as a teacher and steward. As she prays for the children to know Christ and have saving faith, she often cries and begs Jesus in her prayers.

Dr. Joseph Chung is known to be a saint among us. For the last six years, he has prayed for his own son with honesty, a broken heart, and persistence. Dr. Chung has also prayed for God's sheep under his care. For the last three years he has studied the Bible with Carlos Santiago of Triton. Carlos was not a gentleman when he began Bible study. His girlfriend Elisa was afraid of him. But Dr. Chung prayed for Carlos to know Christ and grow in the grace of God. God answered this prayer. Carlos changed inwardly and became a noble man of God. He decided to go back to college and finish a degree. He also won the heart of Elisa and they had a beautiful wedding yesterday. Among us there are many parents whose children are struggling with sinful desires or a demon's work. They need Jesus' intervention in their lives urgently. Yet some are not crying out like this woman. Perhaps our hearts have hardened because of the pain. Or perhaps we have pride that has not died yet. Perhaps we are making ourselves busy in other things to forget about it. Let's learn the begging prayer of this woman.

II. Jesus blesses the humble woman's faith (27-30).

After seeing the utter sincerity and humility of the woman's prayer we might think that Jesus would quickly answer. Yet Jesus said something hard to accept. Look at verse 27. "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." When we carefully examine Jesus' words, he is not saying, "No," but he is saying, "Not yet." I do believe that Jesus' heart was greatly moved by the woman's prayer. Yet Jesus did not simply grant her request. Jesus reveals his deep respect for the sovereignty of God in world

salvation work. In verse 27, “the children” refer to the people of Israel. God had chosen Israel out of all the nations to be adopted as his firstborn son. God had made a covenant with Israel based on his promises to Abraham. In terms of this covenant, Israel enjoyed special favor among the nations. God had said, “...out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God made Israel his chosen people to cowork for world salvation. God had been faithful to this covenant, even if Israel had not. Jesus absolutely respected God’s order and plan in salvation work. It is amazing that Jesus respected the Pharisees on the basis of this covenant, even though they were so malicious and wicked. Jesus stood on God’s side and his shepherd heart for Israel was burning hot, even then.

Jesus referred to the Gentile people, including the woman, as “dogs.” It is interesting that the word used here does not refer to wild street dogs, but to cute pet dogs, like M. Paul Chung’s dog, “Happy.” But still, the word used is “dog.” This reveals that God really did make a distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles, and it mattered to Jesus. In light of God’s covenant with Israel, the Gentiles were dogs. According to Jesus, they did not deserve to share the children’s food or the children’s blessings. The time would come, but it was not then.

How did the woman respond? Look at verse 28. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’” The woman said, “Yes, Lord.” She recognized Jesus as the Lord. Even though Jesus implied that she was a Gentile dog, she acknowledged Jesus as Lord. This is real humility. She accepted from her heart that she was an undeserving Gentile dog. Her humility was not pretense; it was real. Many people want to be humble to obtain God’s blessing. But they are not really humble. They begin with humility, but when they are tested they reveal an ugly pride in their inner beings.

American women may not be an exception to this. Most of the time they are really sweet. However, if we say to one, “You are a Gentile dog,” we are asking for trouble. It is likely that a kind of volcano would erupt. It is understandable that they react to sinful men like that. After all, they were oppressed for many centuries. It is surprising to remember that American women did not have the right to vote until 1920, less than 100 years ago. Through intense struggle, they have won equal rights in many ways. Now a well-qualified woman is a serious presidential candidate. We see great women scholars, social leaders, and professionals of every kind. We only thank God that American women are realizing their potential more and more. However, ladies and gentlemen, when we come to Jesus we must be humble. Jesus will likely test our humility in some way. If we are not really humble before Jesus, we may blow up at Jesus. This is not the way to obtain Jesus’ blessing. Jesus blesses humble people. Let’s learn the humility of this Greek woman.

When the woman had such humility before Jesus, she could have sparkling wisdom in her spirit. When she carefully listened to Jesus’ words, she could find hope and a basis for further prayer. She said, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” She believed the overflowing blessing of the Master’s table. She believed that even though Israel received everything necessary, there would still be leftover crumbs. And just one crumb was enough to solve her problem. When we see her wise reply we envy her keen insight and quick wit. Some people may have thought of this reply several days later, but this woman thought of it on the spot and replied with great wisdom, love and even humor. Her secret was her humility before the Lord Jesus. In fact, the Holy Spirit helped her to answer Jesus in this way. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. When she was empty before the Lord, God helped her through the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 29. “Then he told her, ‘For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.’” Jesus accepted her wise and humble answer. Jesus answered her begging prayer. This woman obtained Jesus’ blessing through her prayer and humble faith. This woman is not named, but she became a pioneer of faith for all Gentile people. She showed us that even though Jesus has a clear order and direction for his gospel ministry—based on the will of God—he blessed faith nonetheless. Gentiles can come to Jesus by faith. Women can come to Jesus by faith. In the final analysis, there is no human barrier, but anyone with faith can obtain Jesus’ blessing.

Jesus drove the demon out of her daughter. The daughter did not do anything to obtain Jesus’ blessing. But through her mother’s faith, the daughter was completely healed. This teaches us the tremendous power of intercessory prayer. True beauty returned to the little daughter once again. She was more lovely than Sleeping Beauty.

In this passage we learn from the woman to come to Jesus with begging prayer that depends on Jesus' mercy alone. We also learn to accept Jesus' answer with humility, even when it may sound like an insult, and to respond with wisdom that comes from faith. Jesus blesses the humble faith of such people. With this faith and prayer we can cry out for our children and for all the children of our nation and the world. Many young American girls need our prayers. Britney Spears was once known as a good Christian girl. But through demons' activity she has become a most miserable and wretched woman. We are responsible to pray for her. There are many young girls around us. They are in the blooming stages of life and should be candidates to be prayer mothers and Bible teachers, but they look more like Britney. We must cry out to God for them. We must beg Jesus' mercy on them. May the Lord teach each of us the humble faith of the woman in this passage.