

JESUS ADMIRES THE FAITH OF A GENTILE 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 the last passage we learned how Jesus defended his disciples' eating without washing their hands. At that time there was a handwashing ceremony which was unavoidable for any Jew. The disciples began to eat, making crunching and munching and slurping noises before any important people sat down to eat. The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law, who had come from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus' company, were amazed at Jesus' disciples way of delicious eating. At the same time, they found the disciples' illegal action even before they began their investigation of illegal behavior. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with `unclean' hands?" (Mk 7:5) Jesus rebuked their hypocrisy. Jesus rebuked them that they served God with their lips, not from their hearts. For example, they had a Jewish tradition called Corban (that is, [a gift](#) devoted to God). At that time the religious leaders wanted to rake money from people. To solicit contributions to their synagogues, they allowed people the rule of Corban. If people gave a little money to the religious leaders, they were exempt from [nursing](#) their old parents. At that time, the young people were worse than the young people of these days. They gave a few dollars to the synagogue and abandoned their parents, saying "Corban." Finally, Jesus told them that what comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean (Mk 7:21-23). Jesus was saying, "Therefore, you are unclean and my disciples are clean, even though they did not go through the handwashing ceremony and made a lot of noise while eating." Today's passage tells us the [story](#) about the faith of a Gentile woman from Syrophoenicia. Let's forget about the eating problem and get into this beautiful woman's story.

I. A Syrophoenician woman came to Jesus by faith (24-26)

After defending his disciples Jesus withdrew into Gentile territory, to the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, Syrian Phoenicia, which lay between Galilee and the sea coast (24). There Jesus wanted to take a breath and refresh himself from the Pharisees' choking pressure. For a few minutes Jesus and his disciples enjoyed walking on the seashore and the sea water's rippling over the sand on the seashore. Now Jesus and his disciples were fully refreshed and enjoyed the sea breath. Then Jesus and his disciples entered a Gentile's house for a retreat. What happened? Look at verse 24. "Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret." Here we see the gospel of Jesus had already spread widely to the Gentiles. At this moment, it seems Jesus declares that he is not only the God of the Jews, but the God of the Gentiles, too.

What did Jesus do for all the people? Jesus immediately began to take care of those who were sick, one by one, so that no one was left uncared

for. But one woman drew Jesus' full attention; she was in particular a seemingly broken woman. Who was she? She was a woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit (25). And her misery and suffering as a mother was more than one can say. It seems that the woman and her daughter were the only family members. The mother was a source of joy to her daughter and the daughter was the source of happiness to her mother even though they lived under the scorching heat all year round. They were also living without much income. But they felt as if they were living in a paradise as long as they were together. The daughter called the mother "Mommy." And then the mommy felt unutterable happiness smeared in her soul. When the mommy called her daughter, she felt that she had everything and lacked nothing. A daughter is the beauty of the world to any parent. There is a saying, "Sons are sons until they marry. But daughters are daughters to their parents for a lifetime." To the mother, her daughter was everything to her. And even to others' eyes, she was unusually beautiful. Usually, many a mother thinks that her daughter is the most beautiful in the world, even if her daughter looks like a wrestler. Many a mother expects her daughter to be very popular among her peers. Yet these are mothers' wishes; it is not reality to most mothers. But the Syrophenician woman's daughter had a magic beauty and a capturing attraction. Many boys might have fallen down when they passed by and happened to see her.

One day the daughter said, "I have a headache." Next, she was talking excessively all day long. The next day she was not eating, and she was not talking. Her eyes looked strange. Then on the third day, she was in a maniac situation. For a moment, the mother felt like the world was crumbling. And the world looked like it was falling down to the darkest darkness, into a bottomless pit. Such a beautiful daughter, who was more beautiful than Elizabeth Taylor or Juliet in Shakespeare's work, was beginning to be disfigured in her beauty, and her magic attraction was disappearing. Her daughter seemed to be changing into a demon-possessed witch. The demons made this little daughter screech in the middle of the night so that her mother would get up from her bed and wait on her until the power of demons in her calmed down. The demons made the little daughter rush in madness, sometimes to the top of a steep bank, and sometimes into the water of a rushing river after heavy rains. Her mother's most difficult time was when her daughter was sitting in melancholia without talking at all for two or three days. The mother felt that they were someplace else and she was totally helpless.

Many sick people were going to Jesus. But for this woman to come to Jesus was not easy. There were many hindrances when she wanted to come to Jesus. The Syrophenician woman knew that she was a Gentile. She also knew that she had no money to pay Jesus for the treatment of her daughter. Most of all, she felt she would rather die than reveal her demon-possessed daughter in public. If we want to understand this Syrophenician woman's feelings, we must know the mother and daughter relationship. Many mothers hide their daughters' weaknesses and exaggerate their daughters' achievements thirty percent more. They never pay attention to others. They only brag and brag about their own daughters. All mothers of the world want their daughters to be most beautiful; they never want their daughters to look ugly.

At this moment, to the Syrophenician woman, her heart was completely despaired and frozen. But suddenly at the moment she heard about Jesus, her heart became normal and now the Spirit of Jesus was giving her

faith. After that, she did not know what she was doing. But she was going to Jesus. However, Mark comments in verse 26 that the woman was Greek, a Gentile woman. So she had nothing to do with Jesus, the Jew. Therefore, to her, coming to Jesus was somewhat difficult because of historical racial barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles since Assyria invaded northern Israel and northern Israel became a mixed-blooded people (722 B.C.). Since then the Jews in Judah stopped talking to the people of Northern Israel, thinking that they were unclean people. In the ancient time, when the world was not fully civilized, racial prejudice and discrimination between free people and slaves were exercised to the extreme. There was a racial barrier. But this didn't matter to the woman. When she heard about Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus warmed her heart to have faith (25a). By faith she came to Jesus and begged him to drive the evil spirit out of her daughter. Her coming to Jesus was her great faith, not a chance expectation.

II. The Syrophenician woman humbled herself (25b-28)

As soon as the Syrophenician woman came to Jesus, she fell at his feet (25b). She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter (26). At the moment, she was extremely nervous and was waiting on Jesus' mercy and compassion and on the recovery of her daughter by the help of Jesus.

What did Jesus say to her? 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." Why did Jesus speak harshly to this woman? Jesus did so in order to test a Gentile woman's faith. It was a test which would make anybody's heart fail. Jesus tested her in that way so that the seed of faith might be planted in the Gentile world. Jesus always had world mission vision in his heart, even through a woman in deep trouble. 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." It sounds like the Jews were children and she was a dog as a Gentile. Humanly speaking, it was an unbearable insult to a woman. But from Jesus' point of view, Jesus had a great hope of planting the seed of faith in Gentile soil. He did so in that way.

When we study the Bible, we find that God's labor of love to plant faith in a person's heart is remarkable. There was a man called Abraham. You know him very well. His wife's name was Sarah. God had a plan of making Abraham and Sarah a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In other words, God wanted to fill the whole world with the knowledge of God and the love of God through this one couple. God began to train Abraham until he became a God-fearer. He had no child. But God gave him a son after twenty-five years of training. Then God asked him to offer his son as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. It was a very painful faith test for Abraham. But Abraham believed that God would give him back children like a nation, and he was ready to offer Isaac, his one and only son, as a burnt offering on a stick fire.

We can see how God trained Moses as a shepherd for his chosen people Israel. His chosen people Israel were in slavery in Egypt so that they might know that the world without God is cruel and the world with God is a paradise. After the training was almost over, God chose Moses and raised him in a palace. Moses received the best education of the time. He was

also an expert in martial arts. He mastered boxing. Because of boxing training, he hit an Egyptian man and killed him with one punch. After that, he was in the wilderness. He received forty years of divine discipline as his father-in-law's shepherd man. He received enough training until he had no human strength or any human idea. Then God called him as a shepherd for Israel. God's first task was to deliver his people from bondage in the Egyptian Empire. It was an incredible thing even to think about. But it was possible when Moses had faith in God Almighty. Faith training was indeed long and difficult for Moses. But he learned to depend on God in faith. He could deliver his 600,000 people from Egypt and lead them into the wilderness and give them daily bread training. Daily bread training was essential for Israel, as it is for us.

We can see Jesus training his twelve disciples. Jesus did not give any favor or any leisure time to his disciples. He let them grow in labor power by hanging around his healing ministry. Jesus also taught them about his death and resurrection. The story about Jesus' death and resurrection was indeed an unhappy one to his disciples. But he repeated it again and again until Peter one time took Jesus aside and rebuked him, "Don't say such a thing anymore." But Jesus training his disciples in hunger and sleeplessness and being despised and rejected was to enlighten their spiritual eyes to see the spiritual world. After Jesus' resurrection, they opened their spiritual eyes, and Jesus' gospel, which had been circling around, was spread to the whole world by his disciples. When we look at Hebrews 11, there are so many heroes and heroines of faith. They wanted to have faith in God. Abraham followed God's command when he was 75 years old. He followed God when he should have registered in a senior citizen's house. Moses gave up his princeliness in the Egyptian Empire. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a short time. We do not have time to tell about all the heroes and heroines of faith. Some shut the mouths of lions; some quenched the fury of the flames; some escaped the edge of the sword. Their weaknesses were turned to strength; they became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were sawed in two. They were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. These were all commended for their faith. Yet none of them received what had been promised. In other words, they did not get things of the world from God by having faith in God. Through much suffering and keeping up the life of faith, that is, through intensive divine discipline, they obtained faith in God Almighty. Faith is everything.

There have been many heroes and heroines of faith during the last few centuries. In order to obtain faith they lost a lot. A few centuries ago, the French Catholic Church massacred Protestant Church members everywhere. John Calvin studied the Bible and wrote "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" from ages 22-25. His prologue is a defense to the King of France that Protestants believe the same faith as Catholics. In writing the defense to the king, he quoted sometimes fifty, sometimes one hundred twenty references from the Bible for one sentence of defense. It is amazing that he had such a complete memorization of the Bible and could freely quote such a tremendous amount of references. But John Calvin only wanted to have faith in God. He was happy when he obtained faith

in God. Here we have to think about why we believe in Jesus. It is to obtain faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the God Almighty. Those who have faith overcome the world. Those who have no faith become liars and cannot obtain God's reward, the crown of life and the Kingdom of God. We must do all our best in whatever we do to obtain faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Almighty God. We must do even one-to-one Bible study to obtain faith in God Almighty. There is victory. There is happiness. There is meaning of life. There is joy. There is love to those who seek faith as a matter of life and death.

The Gentile woman had faith. She had nothing to brag about as a woman. But surely she obtained faith and healing for her daughter by the grace of Jesus. By faith she learned how to become wise. By faith she learned how to humble herself. As we know well, women are very emotional due to their sensitivity. Most women like admiration, even if it is nothing but lip service. They never expect any insult from men. If a woman is insulted, even by her husband, the husband who insulted his wife must expect an unhappy future; he will get no respect or love from his wife. Moreover, he will have to cook and wash dishes, and on the weekends wash all the clothes, including his wife's brassier and pajamas, in the laundry room. People think women are weak so men can sometimes be rough to them. Women are weak, but their wisdom and persistency are never ending.

The Syrophenician was also a woman who had a woman's pride. But she was not an emotional woman because she had faith in Jesus. She saw Jesus as God Almighty. She sensed why Jesus was testing her in such a way. How did she reply? Look at verse 28. "'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'" Here we learn the secret of faith. When one has faith, he becomes very wise and patient and has overcoming strength. Not only so, anyone who has faith in Jesus can become humble.

How could she be humble to Jesus who spoke to her so roughly? Because she had faith and faith made her humble. This is a poor Syrophenician woman's story. But we can see many examples of those who had humble faith and received God's mercy. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was a humble woman. After hearing God's command in Genesis 12:1-3, she could not but laugh. Abram was 75 years old. He was a generous and good husband, but he was not material to be a great man or a source of blessing to all people. But God said to him, "You will be great. You will be a blessing to all peoples of all nations." Sarah heard this and thought it was really the best comedy. But she humbled herself and followed her husband, Abraham, when he said, "We are going to leave our hometown. We are going to leave our parents. We are going to leave everything and go where God wants us to go." But to her surprise, he also said, "I don't know where it is." Sarah didn't rebuke him that he did not know where he was going. Sarah didn't say anything and just followed Abraham. Many people who study the Bible characterize Abraham as a vague man, and Sarah as a permanently romantic woman to Abraham. Naaman, the commander of the army of the King of Aram, had leprosy. Even though he had leprosy in his body, he was a mighty and valiant soldier who was invincible in his country. So he kept his position as army commander. He was next to the king. One day, General Naaman heard through a Jewish slave girl about the prophet Elisha's healing power. So the commander went to Elisha with his large entourage to be cured of his leprosy; it looked spectacular. When they arrived, Elisha the prophet

did not even come out to see him, but said through his servant, "Hey, go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River" (2Ki 5:10). General Naaman was greatly humiliated by Elisha, the bald-headed prophet. He started back to his own country with fierce anger. At this moment, his servant talked to him, saying, "If he demanded you to do more than washing in the Jordan River, should you not have done that in order to restore your body?" Then Naaman humbled himself, went to the Jordan River, washed, and was cleansed. General Naaman was a true general who knew how to overcome and humble himself. But his humbleness was not greater than the Syrophenician woman's humbleness in quality. Her humbleness is matchless.

III. Jesus admires the Gentile woman's faith (29-30)

Look at verse 29. "Then he told her, 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.'" Jesus' words, "For such a reply" had tremendous nuance. She was recognized by Jesus as a woman of God. To be recognized by Jesus as a woman of God or man of God is indeed great. As we observe, there are so many saintly names which parents give their children. Shepherd Chase Akins named his son David D. Akins. He hopes that his son will be like David, a man after God's own heart. Shepherd Chris Kelly named his son Joshua the general. A newly arrived missionary is Peter Park. A medical missionary's name is Dr. John Jun, similar to Dr. John Jun in Korea. There are so many Pauls in this world, even though the world is going around in reverse. Even a huge number of very unstable parents name their sons Paul, John, James, and Peter and their daughters Pauline, Joan, Jamie, and Petrus. Many parents in history want their children to be men and women of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Almighty God. They are born to have faith in Jesus Christ the Almighty God. To each human being, what they really want is faith. But when they have to live in this world, which is full of reality, they become scatterbrained. They forget why they named their children saintly names. They go to the Catholic Church and Lutheran Church and Anglican Church and Presbyterian Church and Methodist Church and Baptist Church, etc. etc. But they do not know why they believe in Jesus. Many church pastors want to live by faith for the glory of God. But when they are confronted by the reality of the world, they become practical and relative. They lose the saltiness from their faith and become unnecessary existences. These days, those who make Jesus sorry are Christian workers. They do not teach the Bible as it is. They go around and around, as if one is beating around the bush to say Jesus is the Christ. We can scarcely see the clear gospel of Jesus Christ: those who believe in him will be saved, those who do not believe will be condemned (Mk 16:15,16). Rather, they are teaching many stories from the newspapers and magazines and psychological books more than the Bible.

We can clearly see this world of Christianity. They want faith in our Lord Jesus Christ the Almighty God. But they are completely overshadowed by the power of Satan's darkness. Like this Gentile woman, our purpose in coming to church must be to obtain faith. We want treasures of the world. We must know that faith is the best treasure which gives happiness in our soul while we are living in this world. Still, even those who seek faith are fooled and spoiled to see money as the source of blessing and salvation.

Have you ever come to church to obtain faith in Jesus Christ which gives eternal salvation? Have you ever come to church to enlighten your

eyes to see the kingdom of God? Have you ever come to church to live in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ? We have to make very clear that we want to be like the Gentile Syrophenician woman and come to Jesus by faith, asking his salvation.

What happened when Jesus recognized her faith? Look at verse 29 again. "Then he told her, `For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.'" We are consciously and unconsciously seeking faith in God. But in our practical life we are spending our time as slaves of money. People all get sick and demon possessed chasing only money. But the Gentile woman sought faith in God for her daughter's healing. Her daughter was healed. Exceptional beauty came back to her daughter's face. She was lying on the bed singing and the demon was gone (30).

We only think about the realities of life. We don't think about the spiritual world where there is the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit. We must know that either we are possessed by a demon, or we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Most of all, we must come to church to obtain faith in Jesus Christ our Lord the Almighty God.