

## FOR SUCH A REPLY [FAITH].

Mark 7:24-30 (Key verse 29)

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

In today’s passage, Jesus breaks social and religious divides to help a gentile woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon. This grace of God came in a rather controversial manner. Jesus said to her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs. However, it was Jesus’ way of planting saving faith in heart of the woman. This is the faith by which all gentiles, and sinners alike, can now share in the grace of God and be saved. We are saved when we accept our spiritual reality, as defined by God, and most importantly holding on the love of Jesus. So then, have you ever been offended by God? Have you ever felt shamed, challenged and exposed when confronted about your wretched sinful nature? Should we harden our hearts, not willing to expose our spiritual realities in the light of God? No! May we have the faith of this gentile woman who agreed with Jesus about her spiritual reality, and held on the love of God for her salvation, and the healing of her demon possessed daughter. I pray that the Holy Spirit open our hearts to receive this glaring love of God, and this saving faith.

Let us look at verse 24. 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. Tyre was a gentile city located in Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) which bordered Galilee to the northwest. Jesus has been in and around Gennesaret preaching and teaching about the gospel; sending out disciples as apostles to preach to everyone, and even delivering those who are sick and demon possessed. Jesus had fed a multitude of a crowd miraculously with five loaves and two fish. However, even the disciples of Jesus didn’t understand the sign of the miracle. Jesus walked on water to plant faith in the disciples. However, they were terrified by Jesus, mistaking Him to a ghost. Now, recently, Jesus was met by the pharisees and teachers of the law who travelled long distances from Jerusalem, not for salvation, but they came for looking to see this threat called Jesus. Jesus rebuked them harshly, “these people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me”. Even though Jesus first began His ministry work with His people, it seems like His people were not fully comprehending what His ministry is all about. Though seemingly disappointing, Jesus didn’t give up in His ministry of inviting all people in the kingdom of God; Jews and gentiles alike. He then moved from the Jewish regions, to the gentiles in the vicinity of Tyre.

It was unheard of for a Jewish religious leader to enter a gentile territory, let alone to be in a house in a gentile region. In today’s terms, it would have been as though a ZCC leader seen eating pork. Let us be reminded about the social and religious divides between the

Jews and the gentiles. Because of many wars between the Jews and the nations around them, this animosity between these races flared up all the more. The Jews further regarded the gentiles as unclean, wicked and godless. The gentiles also hated the Jews; these arrogant entitled race that thinks it is special because of their God [god].

So, why would Jesus leave to a region that is predominantly of the gentiles? Of course there could be many reasons, but what is clear is that Jesus could've also needed a quiet time with the disciples and with the Father, away from all these rather negative responses from His own people. It seems that Jesus wanted to move away from the oppositions of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, to replenish His strength and refocus the purpose of His ministry. Above all, Jesus was furthering the purpose of His ministry, which is not only for the Jews, but for everyone.

Yes, the kingdom of God is not for the Jews, but for everyone, even Africans such as you and I. However, even though this gospel of Jesus is for everyone, there is an important qualifier; faith, that all those who wish to be custodians and beneficiaries of this ministry must have. We will see that faith as we go through the passage.

Jesus entered a house and did not want anyone to know that He was there. However, He could not keep His presence a secret. One person might have spotted Jesus and His disciples. Having heard about His amazing ministry in the predominantly Jewish regions, His presence spread like wild fire through this one 'snitch'; 'That great miracle worker named Jesus is in our vicinity here in Trye'. Among the many, and these news also reached the ears of one gentile Syrophenician woman.

Look at verse 25, 26. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. This woman was a Greek, she was not Jewish. She was born in Phoenicia of Syria. It was strange for a Jewish man to be seen in public with a woman. How more controversial was this picture of a Jewish religious leader to being seen in public with a gentile woman? This woman came to Jesus with an urgent and serious problem; her daughter who was possessed by an impure spirit. Motherly love kicked in; she couldn't bare seeing her daughter in this state. She must have tried many things to have her daughter delivered from the impure spirit, yet failed to resolve this problem. She must have tried to evoke the attention of one of the many Greek gods to heal her beloved daughter, yet, no success. The gods were mute and powerless. So, she took the risk and went to meet Jesus. Leaving her daughter behind, and with probably the fear of being rejected by this Jewish religious leader, she set out with a desperate hope to meet Jesus

and put her request. She arrived, and fell at Jesus feet. This was a sign of her humility and respect of Jesus from whom she needed help.

It is amazing to see the things we can do when we need God's attention. A proud and merciless criminal can suddenly humble himself before God in order to receive mercy. A gentile mother can travel all the way to meet a religious Jewish leader for help in healing her demon possessed daughter. Is that enough though to get the necessary help from God? Even though will get the attention of God, to receive from the Lord requires something else; faith. So then, Let us look deeper in the motives of why we are coming and following Jesus. What compels you in following Jesus? When I need a job or want to pass a test, I would fast and pray, come to church and ensure that I don't miss bible study so that I can gain favour with God to grant me success. Is it enough though? No! Even though all these actions are commendable to do, God is after something else, to accompany them; faith.

Jesus looks at the heart, and above all, needs faith. The gentile woman came to Jesus thinking that her urgent problem is the deliverance and healing of the demon possessed daughter. However, Jesus saw the salvation of the mother, her heart, as her most important need. So Jesus used this situation to plant faith in the heart of this gentile woman. Yes, what she did and how she came to Jesus was commendable, however misplaced. She had a misguided need. Jesus want all of us to come to Him to know Him, and receive His salvation. Of course, there are challenges, real life issues that we face. They are not the end, but rather, they should be viewed as a means through which God uses for us to know Jesus and be saved from our sins. Praise and glory be to God who, with love in His great wisdom, welcomes us and our sinful hearts, to correct and give us salvation as the solution for all our issues. Amen!

Let us see how Jesus corrected the heart of this gentile woman, and granted her more than she bargained for nor expected. The gentile woman put her request, and how did Jesus respond? Look at verse 27. 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 the dogs." How would you have felt if you received this response? I believe we would feel offended and gravely insulted. How shocking that these words would be coming from the lips of Jesus? What did Jesus mean by this response?

In correcting the faith of this woman, Jesus, firstly affirmed God's sovereign choice in selecting the nation of Israel as His own people, and most importantly that is it through them that God would make Himself known to the many other nations of the world. Exodus 19:4-6. 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then

out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, I will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' From this Jewish nation, came the great law and the great prophets. Ultimately, in God's appointed time, it is from this nation that the Messiah Jesus Christ was born. Indeed, since God revealed all these to the Jews, salvation was first for the Jews. The Lord God is the Father of these Israelite children, who are well fed by His hand at the table. Romans 1:18 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. Many of us might misinterpret the harsh rebukes to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law as though Jesus hates them, and that He has rejected them. No. This is Jesus' love for them that He needs them to repent and be saved. After all, they are His people of the covenant, and He was sent, first to them.

[The elephant in the room] Some of you might not see this, but only see how rude and cold He was to the gentile woman who had a serious problem. I mean, Jesus referred to her as a dog! A dog here in context is someone who is not of the same nature or race as of the Jews. We have the children who are fed by their Father, and then dogs who are nothing but animals. The children are fed, but dogs are tossed at, thus highlighting this religious contrast between the Jews and the gentiles.

Secondly, this is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus; salvation is now available to the gentiles as well. Just as the Lord God is the God of the Jews, so is He the God of the gentiles as well. Let's go back to response of Jesus. "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 the dogs." Both the children and the 'dog' are fed by the same Father. Yes, it is the same Father who feeds both of them with the same bread as well. So, it is true the grace of God is available to both Jews and gentiles. Jesus could conceal this grace of God so that He can evoke and plant the appropriate faith in the heart of this gentile woman.

If we focus on the insulting words, we would miss our salvation. If we remain on the surface and not see deeper beyond the harsh words of Jesus, we will miss our blessing. This is how we can overcome the insults; by fully accepting the words of Jesus as the truth about ourselves, and holding on to His love.

I remember how I became a shepherd. Of course, it was many years ago, and I was still an undergrad here at Wits. I was active in the word of God, studying and preaching the word of God to almost anyone I came across to. Perhaps it explains why I came to be in the faith with most of my closest friends; Katlego Snr and Shp Donald. However, even though I was that active and growing in the knowledge about Jesus and the word, I had not had a genuine realization about my sinful nature. Yes I was active with the things of God, impressive, but secretly I was dying in sin; sexual immorality and my studies were also

getting affected as I couldn't focus anymore. We once had a church conference were later in the evening, went to my then Shep Jacob, and confessed by struggles with sin and the effect this had on my life. He also probed more questions about my sinful life, though painful as it was, I genuinely disclosed to him. At the end of the conversation, just before we prayed, he asked me if I could consider becoming a shepherd. I was astonished but at the same time comforted that a terrible sinner like me can be saved, and then used by God to bring His light to the His children on campus. I realize that I had to accept the truth of God about by sinful nature. Yes, I was a dog caught in the web of sin, needing the salvation of Jesus. Now I am a child of God, I call him Abba Father, He calls me son.

So then, I pray we are all the more encouraged and emboldened to bring ourselves before the mirror of God. May we not shy away from convicting words of God, but rather welcome them, in fact, run to them to see who we truly are in His sight so that we are saved. May we not be discouraged by our shame of sin. Our sins are not to be concealed, for if we do so we will miss the salvation of God. What shall we do when we see this embarrassing and shameful nature of ours? In God's sight, it is not an abomination, but rather a call to sincerely repent and then receive the salvation of God. What is your shame? What is your challenge? That is a call to repent; and invitation to receiving the grace of God. Yes, above all, despite the many sins we might have, no matter how shameful and disgusting they are, let us hold on to the love of God. With these, we will not be put to shame, nor will we stumble.

After Jesus planted this faith in her heart, what did the gentile woman find? Let us read verse 28. 28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." With these words, she agreed with Jesus that even though she is unworthy and underserving, holding on to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, she too is a child of God. The Lord God is not only the God of Israel, but also her God as well.

How did Jesus respond her? Look at verse 29. 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." There is something about her reply by which Jesus granted her request, and more; her very own salvation. Let us all learn from her reply, and adopt that faith as well. What is the faith? We are all terrible and unworthy sinners before God, and our salvation is nothing but the love and grace of God found in Jesus Christ. It is this faith that not only saved her, but when conceived in that hour, the demon immediately left her daughter. Amazing! Praise be to God for His great love and His shepherd that guides lost sinners such as these, and us to salvation. Amen!

30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. So what can we say? Did Jesus reject her? No! Jesus broke all the social and religious boundaries to allow this conversation with her. Jesus welcomed and accepted her even though her heart was initially

misguided. Jesus blessed her by planting this faith in her heart that she sees beyond the deliverance of her daughter, that she overcomes the social and religious divides, even the dirty sinful spiritual reality to receive the saving grace of Jesus.

In conclusion: Jesus is for everyone. He is the God of the Jews and gentiles; more so, He is the God of sinners as well. Let us then take heed of this call, through repentance and faith in Him to take our seats on the table of grace to be nourished by blessings of His salvation. No longer dogs, but to now be called His precious sons and daughters. Perhaps we are facing many challenges and troubles. Perhaps we are so much weighed down by the shame of our sins and the guilt there of. We are encouraged by His words today that we need to first accept that we are terrible sinners, and most importantly come to Him by faith to receive His salvation. Jesus has so much love for us, there is so much mercy available for us. Now then, and forever, let us be come to Him by this faith to make Him our Lord and God. In the past, we have wandered away not knowing where to God, nor to whom we belong. But now, we have this great God, filled with love to make us His chosen sons and daughters. For such a faith, we are saved. For such a faith that hold on to the word of Jesus, and His great love, despite our glaring and many sins, we are saved. The Lord God bless His Word, Amen!