

Persistent Faith

Mark 7: 24-30

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²⁴ And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. ²⁵ But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 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.*” ²⁸ But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹ 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.”

You have probably the heard the adage – “Persistence pays off”.

I think Christians should qualify it by saying “Persisting faith pays off”.

If you read through the New Testament, you could easily conclude that a faith that persists is true faith. *Persisting* faith, *enduring* faith or a *patient* faith is the only kind of God that God expects, honors and God rewards.

- In Mark 4, when we looked at the parable of the soils Jesus lists three kinds of bad soils - sidewalk soil, rocky soil and thorny soil. These *three* soils are indicative of a shallow faith. But the good soil is a soil that produces a faith that persists. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus says the following “*As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*” Luke 8:15.
When you hear about people de-converting or de-constructing from their faith, you can easily trace that their faith is either from a sidewalk soil, a rocky soil or a thorny soil. No root or shallow root. And therefore, no lasting fruit. Something upsets them, something triggers them and they fall away.
- Paul wrote to the Colossians saying that Jesus has saved so one day you can be presented holy, blameless and above reproach before God. The condition is *persistent* faith. “*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard*” Colossians 1:21-23
- When Paul urged young Timothy to keep a close on himself and his teaching, he said

“Persist in this for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” 1 Timothy 4:16

A persisting faith leads to many blessings in your life and in the life of those around you and eventually to eternal life.

On the other hand, persisting in sin leads to corruption of the soul, eventually to damnation and eternal separation from God. Last Sunday, we saw the things that come out of the heart and corrupt a man.

- Paul wrote to Romans 6:2, *“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! (Never!)”*
- Paul urged Timothy to warn the church in Ephesus *“As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear”* 1 Timothy 5:20

Today in our passage, we see a Gentile or a Canaanite woman. A lady from Lebanon coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. She comes with a dire need. Her need is that her daughter needs to be healed of demon possession.

But Jesus appears to be insensitive to her needs and even offends her.

Jesus was really testing her.

And this lady displays a faith is so persistent that Jesus commends her and fulfills her request.

We see at least *four* things in this passage :
A Request. A Response. A Resolve. A Reward.

A Request.
Verses 24 through 26.

²⁴ And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. ²⁵ But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

In the parallel passage from Matthew’s Gospel, we know a little bit more about this woman, her child, and where she’s from.

²² And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” ²³ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” ²⁴ He answered, *“I was sent only*

to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” Matthew 15: 22-24.

In the previous passage, Jesus was in Capernaum. That was a Jewish territory. Now he is in a Gentile territory. The territory of Tyre and Sidon.

When we taught through Mark chapter three, we saw great crowds came all over to see Jesus. *Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon* - Mark 3:7-8.

The people of Tyre and Sidon obviously knew who Jesus was. These were Gentile cities. Jesus was less critical of Tyre and Sidon than Jewish cities. Hear what Jesus said “*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.*” Luke 10:13-15

The historian Josephus writes that Phoenicia or Tyre was a bitter enemy of Israel during that time. Phoenicia belonged to Syria administratively.

Mark wants his readers to know that Jewish and Gentile people did not mix. A Gentile woman specifically was off limits to the Jews.

And yet, here we see Jesus enters a home in the region of Tyre or Phoenicia (Lebanon today). We don’t know why Jesus went there. It could be that our Lord wanted to take some rest. It could be that he wanted to get away because of the increasing conflict with the Pharisees. But Jesus does not want to be known. Of course, that never works. People were always waiting to meet him. So, the quiet time does not last for long. There is an *immediate* interruption. A woman comes for help.

This woman is identified as a Canaanite or a Syrophenician. Not a Jew but a Gentile or a Greek. Question: Now why is her ethnicity noted?

When you read the Gospels, or the book of Acts, or the Letters, you’ll notice two major classes of peoples?

Jews and Gentiles.

That is important because this woman is non-Jewish and a believer. How do we know?

1. First, notice how she addressed Jesus? Lord and Son of David (Matthew 15:22, Mark 7:28). She calls Jesus Master or Lord and knew his Messianic title – Son of David.
2. Secondly, notice her posture. She came and felt at his feet. She worshipped Jesus.

In Matthew's Gospel, even the disciples wanted to send her away. But she kept pleading and begging for her daughter to be healed. What does Jesus say?

A Response.
Verse 27.

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."*

At face value, Jesus sounds rather outrageous and insulting in his answer. What did Jesus mean? Is Jesus implying and even calling this woman a dog? Before we answer the question, notice Jesus makes a distinction between *children* and *dogs*. And he says "Let the children be fed first".

Who are these children?

In a broad sense *children* here refers to the people of Israel and *dogs* refer to Gentiles. The Old Testament is filled with such metaphors.

On reference to *children*:

Exodus 4:22 God commands Moses to tell Pharaoh "*Israel is my first born son*".

"Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment." Exodus 7:4

God to says in Jeremiah 31:9 "*I am a Father to Israel*"

The Gospel came to the Jews first. They were the first to be blessed.

Remember Jesus said to the woman at the well in the Gospel of John?

*"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for *salvation is from the Jews*"* John 4:22.

Paul writes in Romans 3 and 9.

"They (Jews) were entrusted with the oracles of God". Romans 3:2

"to them (the Israelites) belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ".

Jesus was a Jewish Messiah. A Rabbi. All the early followers were Jewish. Paul was a Jewish Pharisee convert.

So, salvation is *from* the Jews.

On reference to *dogs*:

The people of Israel were instructed to eat and offer food that followed ceremonial purity

laws.

- “You shall be consecrated to me. Therefore, you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs” Exodus 22:31
- Psalm 22:16 says “dogs surround me”.
- Jesus says in Matthew 7:6 “*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you*”
- Paul uses language of dogs Philippians 3:2. “*Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers*”

So, in a broad sense, *dogs*, from a Jewish perspective refer to those who eat tainted meat, those who do evil and oppose God’s laws.

Ancient Jewish people did not have dogs for pets like we do.

Ancient Jewish people looked down on the gentiles. *Dogs* became a disparaging term or a slur.

However, our Lord does not use the expression used for *dogs* in the other parts of the Bible. He uses a soft expression for dogs – mostly likely little dogs that are allowed in the home. Like a puppy dog. Not a stray dog.

One commentator D. Edmond Hiebert observed, “*Jesus softened the force of the expression with His use of the diminutive, ‘little dogs’ . . . Clearly His reference is to the little household pets, which, while not children in the house, yet had a place in the affairs of the household*”

So, Jesus says let the children be fed first. She understood the expression but she won’t take no for answer. Verse 28.

A Resolve.

Verse 28.

²⁸ But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

What a remarkable answer from this woman! She is not offended by Jesus. She replies with respect and humility. She acknowledges that the Israelites were first to receive God’s promises but refuses any exclusion.

Sure, salvation is *from* the Jews but salvation is *for* the Gentiles also.

Churches in the New Testament were made up of both Jews and Gentiles together worshipping one God and one Lord - the Lord Jesus Christ. Hear what Paul says in some of his letters.

“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:6

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” Galatians 3:28

This woman wants to receive the blessing and healing from God. She is persistent in her faith. This woman is not offended by Jesus. She wants what Jesus has to offer. She is desperate enough to desire relief from the oppression that her daughter is going through.

What does Jesus say and do?

Verses 29 and 30.

A Reward

Verse 29-30

²⁹ 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.

Two points to note:

1. The Gospel is not being comfortable in your skin but to follow our Lord’s example.
2. God’s Word sometimes may offend you but, like this Syrophenician woman, we must persist and seek his favor even though it does not feel comfortable.

Faith must be persistent.

Faith must have a humble disposition.

As we conclude, hear the words of Paul to the church in Rome.

“stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue (persist) in his kindness” Romans 11:20-22

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Persistent Faith. Mark 7:24-30

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Jesus appear to offend the Syrophenician woman who came to him for help? What kind of faith does God expect, honor and reward? James 1:2-3

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe God rewards those who seek him? How? Go around and share. Hebrews 11:6, 26

3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: When the odds are against you, what will you do to persist in faith?