Sermon Transcript
01.25.2026
Mark 7:24-30

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- Good morning. Thanks for braving the storm!
- Since we figured attendance might be a bit spotty this morning, I wanted to push back my Hebrews sermon another week so that the majority of our people don't miss it because, as we've said a number of times, of all the books in the NT, Hebrews might be the most like an elaborate string of pearls where each argument depends on the previous.
- We'll just push that sermon back a week & today we're going to discuss the text that we talked about at this past week's Wed morning Bible study. For those who were there, this will be a little refresher. For those who didn't make it, maybe the various insights that we'll talk about this morning will even compel some of you to start joining us.
- In fact, this might feel a bit more like a Bible study than a traditional sermon. I always encourage you to bring your Bible to church, but today of all days you'll need it because we won't have slides. As I mentioned on GroupMe, we're just winging some stuff this morning.
- If you don't have a Bible, there should be one below one of the seats in front of you.
- Now, before we dive into the text, there are a few contextual issues to clarify. Jumping into a text cold, without context, is a bit like going into the game w/out stretching or warming up.
- So let's warm up a bit with some context.
- You may recall that after Charlie Kirk's assassination, we pivoted from Hebrews that weekend and I talked about Mark 4 and the stilling of the storm. In that story, we heard the disciples ask the question, who is this man, that even wind and sea obey Him.
- I the underlying question of Mark. Who is this man? Its asked by the Pharisees and scribes, who mean it in a derogatory sense, like we might ask, who do you think you are. It was asked by the disciples after the storm. Jesus Himself will ask His disciples who do people say that I am. Peter answers, you are the Christ.
- But even then there are hints that He doesn't get it in that in the very next passage Peter rebukes Jesus. Obviously, if you fully understood who Jesus is, you would never presume to rebuke Him.
- This identity of Jesus progressively unravels in the book and it finally crescendos at his death when a centurion exclaims:
- "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39)
- So the book as a whole is dealing with the progressive revelation of what it means that Jesus is the Christ. Even that truth is like a parable that unfolds over time.
- In fact, back on Easter of 2024, I preached on Peter's confession and rebuke and included the immediately preceding pericope. If you want to turn to chapter 8, we won't go into depth, but I do want you to see this for yourself.

- Notice Peter's confession begins in vs. 27 and immediately before that, Jesus heals a blind man. What's interesting about that healing is that I only two stage healing in Christ's ministry. What does that mean? Well, the blind guy is first partially healed and begins to see, but says that things are blurry and then He experiences further healing.
- And that will then correspond to the disciples experience & to our own. As evidenced in the next account, Peter can see, He says, you are the Christ. But its still blurry since He rebukes the Christ. He can see in some sense, but not fully.
- And our own lives are filled with similar patterns of seeing and not seeing. Paul would say we see in a mirror dimly. We can resonate with the man who says, I believe, help my unbelief.
- So, the book of Mark, perhaps more than the other gospels, highlights the failures and flaws of the disciples. They argue over who is greater, the jockey for position, they rebuke Jesus, they don't understand the parables, they run away in fear, and so forth.
- All of this makes the response of this woman in chapter 7, all the more interesting. So let's pray and we'll dive in.

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. **(Mark 7:24)**

- In the previous pericopes, by the way pericopes are self-contained, distinct units of thought in Scripture. Your Bible might say something like the Syrophoenician Woman's faith, that whole section under that subheading is a pericope. BTW, those subheadings are not part of the inspired canon of scripture, they're added by translators, just to help readers.
- So in the previous pericopes, Jesus was ministering along the sea of Galilee. But now He leaves. The Greek word translated went away is a stronger & more emphatic word than the normal word for leaving. It signals a decisive departure. He leaves w/ intention. He's got a mission.
- What that mission entails is left unspecified.
- Perhaps its a combination of factors. He's experienced a degree of opposition from the Pharisees so He might have sought a bit of relief from that. He knows He will die at their hands, but He also knows that He needs to do so at the right time and in the right place and that isn't here and now.
- Next, He desires intensive time away with His disciples. As you see throughout the book, thus far they've been interrupted by the constant clamor of crowds. So getting away provides a degree of respite to be able to makes disciples of the disciples.
- Lastly, He's got work to do in those areas. BTW, this will help to frame what He will say to the woman. If you read this account as implying that Jesus didn't intend to help non-Jewish outsiders, then you've missed the context in which He is intentionally traveling to Gentile areas.
- So He leaves Galilee and heads to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Where's that?
- That's in modern day Lebanon, so north of Israel, and right along the Mediterranean.
- Now, we need to grasp some of the historical context here because this is a Gentile region with a long history of antagonism to Israel.

- During the Maccabean Revolt which Jews celebrate each Hannukah, Tyre and Sidon had sided with the Seleucid Empire against the Jews.
- In fact, Josephus called the inhabitants of Tyre "notoriously our bitterest enemies."
- But if you really want to grasp the significance of this, we need to understand that Tyre was home to another famous woman of the Bible. A woman so famous that even people who've never attended church and never read the Bible, know her name. But its not a name that anyone would ever name their daughter. What name is that? Jezebel.
- So the overwhelming biblical and historical mood on Tyre and Sidon was negative.
- But at the same time, there are hints in the OT that God's grace would shine on the land. As Psalm 87:4 says:
    - *Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush— "This one was born there," they say.* (Psalm 87:4)
- So in Christ's ministry in the area, we see the beginnings of the fulfillment of this prophetic hope. He's fulfilling the messianic mandate and mission.
- Now, you would think that with this OT hope, with the Abrahamic promise that says, in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed. You would think that Israel would gladly proselytize the world, but that's not what we see. Remember Jonah? The reluctant prophet, who is actually angry at God for allowing the Ninevites to repent.
- But Christ is, as Matthew says, greater than Jonah. Here He is willingly going to Gentile areas to carry out His mission.
- So He goes out and enters a house, but then we have this enigmatic statement that He didn't want anyone to know. Now, that seems out of sorts with the idea that He's there on mission. So what's happening?
- Well, this is part of a Markan motif known as the messianic secret. That particular term was derived by a theological liberal, but the observation itself is orthodox. Basically, the messianic secret as conservatives use the term refers to the phenomenon of Jesus regularly telling people to be quiet, to not say anything. When He heals or casts out demons or whatever.
- And there are a few reasons for this.
- First, there is a lot of messianic fever in the first century, but most of it is misunderstood and misplaced. Pharisees thought the Messiah would be a Pharisee, zealous for the laws and traditions of the elders. Zealots thought He would be a zealot who would make war on Rome. Everyone had their own conception.
- According to Jewish tradition, the Messiah would expel and subdue the Gentiles, not visit and embrace them.
- So Jesus can't just come out and say I am the Christ without first defining what He means by Christ.
- Second, as mentioned before, He has a date with death, but that death must come at Passover and in Jerusalem. If He's stoned to death by Pharisees in Galilee, His mission wouldn't be accomplished. So part of the meaning of His commanding silence was to reduce the scuttlebutt and speculation so as to not draw undue attention before the appointed time.
- But the main reason is I think to clarify what it means to be the Christ. That's why you'll see that once He begins to explain that He would die and rise again He no longer

employs this technique. We see Him commanding people to be silent up until that point and then suddenly He doesn't seem to do so anymore.

- So He didn't want anyone to know which is a fascinating statement about His intent. Jesus isn't interested in generic crowds, He's interested in individuals. In John 6, He has a huge crowd of followers, but He intentionally offends them because the kingdom isn't a matter of pragmatically growing the largest following. Its instead about faithfulness and the slow and steady work of discipleship.
- Having worked at a megachurch, I can tell you that larger crowds not only don't mean greater faithfulness, but can sometimes even impede it.
- So you'll see a contrast in Mark between the crowds and the disciples. As anyone who saw the protests at the church in MN this past week can attest, teaching and preaching and praying is inhibited with the clamor of the crowds. So if Christ wants to be able to teach His disciples, He needs a degree of peace and quiet.
- So He goes into a house and desires secrecy, but as if often the case in Mark, the silence is interrupted.
- Let's keep going.

***But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter*. (Mark 7:25–26)**

- Again, this is a constant theme in Mark. Jesus pulls away from the crowd, only for the crowd to infringe on his quiet time. As an introvert, this would bug me to no end, but thankfully, I'm not the Christ.
- So immediately a woman comes. The word immediately is a very Markan word. It appears 6 times in Matthew, 3 in Luke, 3 in John, but a stunning 41 in Mark.
- It moves the narrative along and gives it a sense of speed and urgency. Whereas John might be compared to a sweeping epic like Gladiator or Braveheart and Matthew and Luke a drama like Good Will Hunting, Mark is action oriented and fast paced like John Wick or Mission Impossible.
- Even in the way that Mark tells the story its more compact. In Matthew's rendition, the woman is continually crying out.
- So this woman comes and look at how she is described. Count the red flags if you're a first-century Jew.
- She's a woman which was a lower status, she's a Gentile, according to Matthew, a Canaanite. Remember the Canaanites were the inhabitants of the land that Israel was commanded to displace when they came into the land. So she's not just a Gentile, but the worst kind. And she has a little girl with an unclean spirit.
- So you have an unclean woman in an unclean land with an unclean daughter with an unclean spirit. All of that stands in stark contrast with the Pharisees of the previous two pericopes and the battle over cleanliness.
- They condemned Jesus and His disciples for eating with defiled hands. And Christ responds in a way that at least by implication declares all foods clean.
- Now, according to church tradition, Mark writes his gospel on the basis of Peter's preaching. And perhaps you recall that Peter has a vision in Acts of God telling Him to

eat unclean food. Or, rather, God tells Him to eat because food is no longer to be considered unclean. There is therefore now no longer a ceremonial distinction between clean and unclean foods. That's why I had bacon yesterday. And all God's people said amen.

- But anyway, immediately after that vision of food, God sends Peter to preach the gospel to some Gentiles and so Peter makes the connection that the fact that food is no longer unclean implies that people are no longer to be considered unclean and off limits. In other words, the vision about food wasn't just about food.
- Well, the same idea plays out here. The narrative moves from unclean food to unclean people and the same principle holds. If we should no longer consider certain types of food to be inherently defiling, then neither should we consider certain people beyond God's redemptive design. Yes, this woman was unclean by Jewish standards, but an encounter with Christ and the new covenant changes those standards.
- So this woman hears and comes and falls down which is a sign of faith. She's risking everything. For a woman to talk to a rabbi was offensive enough. For a Gentile to do it would be unheard of.
- But she comes and falls down, which is in keeping with Mark's presentation of discipleship as being very action oriented. Faith works, it moves, according to His gospel. It comes and bows and begs.
- So she begs Him to help. What does that imply? Desperation.
- She sees her own need and sees Christ ability to meet that need. She's asking for mercy, for grace.
- She doesn't plead her own merit, she doesn't claim her own rights, she abandons herself and casts herself on Christ. Again, think of Christ's words later in the gospel, that discipleship entails denying yourself. That's what she's doing.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 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." **(Mark 7:27)**

- I can just imagine the headlines of the Galilean Times: Canard of a Christ Calls Canaanite a Canine.
- This isn't very PC of Jesus.
- But then again, Jesus isn't very PC.
- Christians love to talk about being Christ-like, but unfortunately many don't have a great understanding of Christ. We use the phrase as shorthand for Jesus' nicer qualities. His gentleness and humility, when He maintains silence before His accusers, when He cares for the weak and marginalized.
- But a half-truth presented as a whole truth becomes an untruth if we aren't careful. This picture of Jesus is a caricature. The same Jesus who welcomes the children also makes a whip and drives people out of the temple. The same Jesus who is silent before His accusers, calls His opponents serpents and whitewashed tombs. The same Jesus who died for sin will one day destroy all sinners.
- We need to grasp this if we are going to do justice to what Jesus is doing here. He is kind, but kindness and niceness aren't exactly the same thing. He wounds in order to heal. He

is offensive. Any caricature is going to distort Him, making Him more palatable. But Christ doesn't need a hype man, He doesn't need PR. The problem is never Him. We are the problem. Our assumptions need to be discarded if our presuppositions are offended or our fragile feelings hurt.

- The offense of this statement is even more pronounced in Matthew's telling where she's crying out and it says that He didn't answer her a word at first. In other words, He just ignored her. Imagine if a pastor were to do that today. Imagine if a Christian were to do that today.
- We'd be accused of all kinds of indifference and pride and lacking empathy. But, as Joe Rigney has pointed out, the biblical command isn't toxic untethered empathy, but rather biblical sympathy which is always grounded in truth.
- So this is offensive. Now, it could be MORE offensive. The word that Jesus uses for dog isn't the most offensive Greek term for a dog. He doesn't use the term that refers to street dogs, but this is still offensive. The word He uses might soften the offense, but it doesn't remove it.
- After all dogs were not man's best friend in the ancient world.
- As one commentator says, "almost all OT passages illustrate the loathing that devout Israelites felt toward dogs." They were associated with uncleanness because dogs ate garbage and corpses.
- In rabbinic tradition "dog" remained a term of reproach, referring to "the most despicable, insolent, & miserable of creatures." As 1 rabbi declared, "The peoples of the world are like dogs."
- And in the NT, the word is used with similar sting:
    - *Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.* (Philippians 3:2)
    - *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.* (Matthew 7:6)
- So what's happening here? Well, as we'll see Jesus is speaking in a parable. He's testing her. God never tempts His people because temptation has failure as the aim, but He does test. He tests us that we might be approved. And that's what Christ is doing here. He is offering a rebuke to test the degree of her humility.
- How do we know that? Well, we know it by virtue of His ultimate response and the fact that He does what she requests, but also from the fact that He says, don't give what is holy to dogs, but He is willing to help her so at least in some sense, he must not consider her a dog. As we'll see there are other hints in the text that He's testing her.
- She has come and begged for mercy and fallen at His feet. But does she really grasp who He is or will she rear up in self-righteous offense? That's the situation.
- Its almost like Christ, the consummate teacher, is playing the devil's advocate.
- He's speaking in parables. In a sense the entire book is a parable. And in chapter 4, it had said that His entire teaching ministry was summed up in parables.
- So He speaks this parable to her. And buried within the parable is a deeper hidden meaning. Perhaps we can grasp it if we concentrate on two words.
- First, the word first. Let the children be fed first. Notice He doesn't say only. There is an intentional order to His work. As Romans 1 says, the gospel is for the Jew first, but also

to the Greek. That happens even historically as the first few thousand converts were all Jews before the gospel went forth to Gentiles.

- So if Christ says the food is for the children first, there is at least a chance that it is for others second.
- Second, as mentioned earlier, the word for dog isn't the common street dog, its instead a dog that would live within the household. So perhaps this woman thinks, I'm fine being a housepet as long as I'm in the house.
- Now, if you have a dog, I assume you care about that dog. But I hope you care about your kids more than that dog. A few months back our ice maker went out and we'd have to buy a bag of ice every few days. Well, I kept coming home and finding the bucket much emptier than I would have assumed and I found out that the kids were giving our dog ice all day. So I made a rule that they couldn't do it without permission. Not because I don't care about the dog but because the desires of my wife and kids take precedence over the desires of my dog. Keep that analogy in mind. We'll come back to that.
- But that's what Jesus is saying here as well. So let's see if she grasps that. Vs. 28.

But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." **(Mark 7:28)**

- Notice, she doesn't say, how dare you call me a dog. Who do you think you are? I'm not a dog. I'm a queen.
- She absorbs the offense because she grasps the parable. She thinks, I'm fine being a dog, because at least I'm at the house. And I'm fine waiting for leftovers because at least I'll get something.
- Better to be a servant in the Lord's house than a king in another kingdom. As the Psalmist says:
    - *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.* (Psalm 84:10)
- So not only is she humble, but shrewd. Like solving a riddle takes a degree of insight, so understanding a parable takes wisdom, shrewdness.
- Now, there is another little linguistic clue that's helpful to see to really grasp whats happening here in this story and that is the word eat.
- The word eat appears over 20 times in Mark's gospel, but almost every one is the generic word for eat. Not so with this story. Rather, a much rarer word is used. Cortazo. Besides this usage, that word appears in only 2 other stories in Mark.
- One is in chapter 6 and the other in chapter 8. In chapter 6, its used in the feeding of the 5000. In chapter 8, its used of the feeding of the 4000.
- What's the significance of the word? Well, it doesn't just mean to eat, but to be satiated, to eat to the point of satisfaction. So whats unique about the accounts of the feeding of the 5 & 4000?
- At the end of both of those stories, there are leftovers. More leftovers than they even began with.
- Well, that's always true of God's mercy. His love and grace aren't a zero sum game. It isn't a pie chart in which increasing someone's portion decreases anothers.
- Jesus can satisfy Israel and have more than enough leftovers to satisfy the Gentiles.

- So let's go back to the story of my icemaker, I had to institute a rule because my ice maker was broken, and my ice supply was limited. But once the freezer is fixed, once the supply is relatively unending, the rule no longer applies. There is more than enough for Kaci, Canon, Larken, and Finn.
- And likewise with God's mercy. Its never exhausted. Like God Himself, His mercy is infinite. At least to some degree, this woman makes that connection.
- "She took Christ at his own words. He then treated her not as a dog but as a child of Israel." (Luther)
- Let's keep going. Vss. 29-30.

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

- Here's what is fascinating about this story. Up to this point, no one has understood any of the parables of Jesus without further explanation.
- Jesus would teach the crowds in parables and then withdraw with the disciples and they would ask him to explain and he would clarify.
- So this woman is perhaps the first person in Mark to actually hear and understand a parable without help. Now, obviously, she has help. Because of original sin, because of total depravity, we all have eyes, but don't see, ears, but don't hear. Any slightest ability to perceive kingdom truth is dependent on grace. So her ability to perceive is rooted and grounded in God's grace, but at least in the way that the story is told, there is no further revelation.
- She does what all hearers of parables are to do. She enters into the story and allows herself to be absorbed into it, claimed by it. She hears the word and experiences the word.
- Like Jacob at Peniel, she's struggled with God and walked away changed by the encounter. In a sense, she's overcome. Not that she defeated Christ, but she defeated the devil's advocate parable and she experiences victory as a result.
- What does Christ say: you may go your way, the demon has left your daughter.
- Not is leaving, not will leave, but has left. That's a perfect tense signifying a completed action with ongoing results. The demon has gone and will not return is the sense. She's free. She's healed.
- Because this woman was willing to be called a dog who eats the crumbs from the children's table, her child will eat and be satisfied.
- And notice that there is no elaborate ritual, no discussion with the demon. Christ doesn't talk with or to the demon, there is no elaborate battle. Once again, we see a demonstration of His authority.
- We see Christ's omnipotence, His sovereign authority over all things. And we see His omnipresence which doesn't mean that He is everywhere, but that He can exercise his power and will anywhere.
- So as we wrap up the story, we are left to wrestle with the implications of the authority of Christ. This whole pericope becomes a parable for us to see if we truly grasp just who He is and what He has done. If we can see his sufficiency. If we can humble ourselves,

hear, come and fall down before Christ, to receive His wounds, if we can be desperate and dependent and persistent in our pleas for mercy.

- If we are willing to wrestle with God by wrestling with our own pride and crucifying our offense and believing that He and He alone can satisfy.
- Let's pray.

<u>Communion</u>

- Fence table
- *And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."* (Mark 14:12–25)