

ON THE MOVE WITH JESUS
IN MARK
(DAY 29)

*A unique, verse-by-verse,
life-application commentary
by Terran Williams*

DAY 29 – JESUS PERFORMS A MIRACLE FOR A WOMAN (7:24-30)

COLOUR-CODE SUMMARY (the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels):

Blue - something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

- **Green** - something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate
- **Red** - something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives
- **Orange** - insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

In verse 19 above we see that Jesus was challenging the very way that Jews saw the world: clean versus unclean. The mentality of the first century Jew was to refuse to make contact with anything unclean, whether it was a kind of food, or whether it was a sick person, or whether it was a Gentile. It comes then as no coincidence that his next two miracles are performed for Gentiles. He was showing that, with regard to the coming of his kingdom, it was not the clean (that which pleased God) which was corrupted by the unclean (that which was believed to displease God) but rather that the clean (in this case Jesus) could in fact restore the so-called unclean (in this case the Gentiles).

Jesus honours a Syrophenician woman's faith

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. 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. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

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."

Jesus came first as Messiah to the Jews and then as Messiah to the world.

- Things were heating up for Jesus. His family and home town had rejected him (6:3). Herod had become suspicious of him (6:16). The Pharisees and teachers of the law were after him with murderous intent (3:6 and 7:1). So he decided to lay low a while and went about 100 km north of Galilee to Tyre, a Gentile region (v24). He also probably took this as an opportunity to let his disciples feed on him, so to speak (v27).
- A Gentile woman heard he was in town and pleaded with him to set her daughter free from a demon (v26).
- His response is fascinating: "First let the children eat all they want for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs" (v27).
- He effectively says "no". He does it with a bit of humorous, teasing banter that she is after all, a little (the Greek adds the diminutive) "dog". In that day Jews called Gentiles dogs. The fact that he calls her a "little" dog is a form of affection and playfulness not insult upon insult. It turns out that Jesus wasn't as politically correct as we may have thought. Notice Jesus' humour!
- Why did Jesus say bread was for the children? What did he mean? The children referred to the Jews of Israel, the children of Abraham. Jesus understood his earthly mission as being a Messiah to the Jews (see Matthew 15:24). Of course, his long-range plan was to be Messiah to all the nations of the world (which is why Mark records that it would be a Gentile man who would recognize that Jesus is the Messiah when he was crucified (see Mark 15:39)). But his immediate plan was to redeem the nation of Israel. Only once he had been crucified and exalted, and, ruling from heaven, had begun to pour out his Spirit, would he broaden his focus to the entire world. That's why he tells the woman that he is focussed on the children for now.

- (As a side note on this point, we can learn from Christ the importance of focus. Once we know what it is we're meant to do, we will also know what it is we're *not* meant to do. As in this story, this doesn't mean we rigidly refuse all opportunities outside of our focus, but most times we certainly must refuse all opportunities that could side-track us from our central priority and call.)

28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Move the powerful arm of Christ in prayer.

- John Wesley said that prayer is the slender nerve that moves the powerful arm of Christ. We have a helpful picture of effective prayer in these verses. We can learn from her example of prayer in several ways:
- *Though Jesus delays the answer to our prayer, we should persist in prayer.* In Luke 18:1 Jesus taught that we should always pray and not give up. Here we see a woman doing just that. Jesus, as we have seen in the point above, basically had said no to her request. But notice that she refuses to accept his no. She persists with words to the effect of, 'Yes, Lord but...' (v28).
- *We should argue with God on the basis of his mercy.* As Michael Eaton says, "Great faith always reasons with God. It may argue with God using his promises. Or it may argue with God on the basis of his character." This is exactly what the woman does here. She turns Jesus' picture of a father giving the bread to the children not the dog around by saying that a merciful father will still scatter at least a few crumbs to the dogs too.
- *We should pray with faith and humility.* Although the words "faith" and "humility" are not found in these verses, it's clear that this woman had a rich supply of both. The fact that she fell at his feet (v25) demonstrates humility. The fact that she even approached him at all shows faith.
- *We should pray until assurance comes.* Great intercessors often give the counsel that we should persevere in asking God for something until we sense God speaking to our hearts with assurance that our prayers have been answered, and at that point we can stop asking and start thanking in advance for the answer to our prayer. This woman did just that. She kept on asking until Jesus gave her assurance of an answer to her prayer (v29).

