

Reading: Mark 7:24-30

Sermon

The Servant-Teacher (Mark 7:1-8:26)

“...“It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”” (Mark 7:20-23 NLT)

- So said Jesus to a group of people who knew that they had no hope of getting into heaven.
- He says it to a group of people who are beyond the pail.
- He actually says this to his disciples in explanation after he has been having a discussion with some Pharisees and Teachers of the Law about being clean or unclean. It is not what goes into your body in the form of food that is important, but what comes out of your heart – what is seen in your behaviour - **evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness**. Even the things we cannot see openly like **evil thoughts, lustful desires, envy and pride** will all eventually come out in actions, in behaviour.

Then Jesus meets a Gentile woman, one who is described in Mark as a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician. One who was not in the chosen race of Israel, but who instead of being blasted, hears

“...“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.” (Matthew 15:28 NIV)

Words reported by Matthew rather than Mark, but both follow on from the words said about the Pharisees and the Teacher of the Law. But we get ahead of ourselves.

We read that Jesus moved on, he leaves Capernaum and goes north east towards Tyre. Tyre was in a region that was called Canaan, which is why Matthew describes her as a Canaanite woman. But Mark describes her as a Greek and a Syro-Phoenician woman. Both are correct. Tyre was in a region which was called Canaan, although technically the whole of Israel could be called Canaan, but this part was the only part that retained the name. However it was part of Syria and called Phoenicia and hence Syro-Phoenicia or Syrian Phoenicia. It had two principle towns, that of Tyre and Sidon. Both ports and it made the towns very rich and the Phoenicians were renown for their trade, for their ships. This led to them being very proud but it was their pride that led to their downfall – but that is a tale for another day.

So this woman is from a proud nation, and I want to look at three things she did, one thing she did not do and the result of those four things.

She Searched

Firstly she searched. 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. 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.” (Mark 7:24-25 NIV)

As soon as she heard about him being in the area, she went and searched for him. There are many people who are searching. They are searching for something, at times they do not know what, but they know they are missing something in life. For some they try to find it in:

- Work – it takes over and becomes the be all and end all in their life. These people can burn out at a young age, or when retirement comes they do not know what to do. Their life has ended effectively.
- Family – they live for their family. The kids are the most important part of their lives, ferrying them here and taking them there. Then the children turn into adults, fly the nest, although today that is happening later and later when people are often in their thirties, and what do they do then. Life has finished. They look at their spouse and see a stranger and so a divorce comes along. The second highest time for a divorce is when the children have left home or at least when they have stopped being dependent on the parents.
- Alcohol and drugs – some search for meaning in more destructive ways – in alcohol and/or drugs. They are search for a release from life, for something more exciting that what they have.

So many people are searching and this woman was searching. She was searching for Jesus to cure her **little daughter** (Mark 7:25). Did you notice that lovely touch by Mark? It is the mother's little daughter, so we know she is young and she has this problem with being possessed by an evil spirit. How distressing that must have been for the mother to watch.

So something she had heard about Jesus meant that she sought him out, the Servant-Teacher, ready to help people. When I read this I asked myself the question:

- Does my life attract people to Jesus or not? I am a firm believer in the fact that Christians do need to speak about the gospel they believe in, but they must also walk the talk as well – it is both. Unless we speak people will not know the reason why we live the way we do, but unless our lives match up to our words, then people will not believe that what we are saying is true.

Maybe you are here because you are searching. Maybe there is/are some question or question in your mind, some doubt that is there. However you are honest enough to still be searching and you are looking in the right place – looking to Jesus.

Some years ago now, Susan came to the church we were in. She was married to Jack. Susan had had quite a turbulent past but then had become a Christian, had become more stable in her life, had stopped threatening to commit suicide and was looking after their daughter very well – it had not always been like that. Jack could see the difference in Susan and wanted to investigate how it had happened. So he came along with Susan to a discussion group that was looking into questions of life. Jack was searching, just like the Syro-Phoenician woman.

She Worshipped

The next step for the woman can be found in verse 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.” (Mark 7:25 NIV)

She came and **fell at his feet**. She worshipped him. The best way to get to know God is to worship him. Does this mean coming to church and singing and doing all that religious stuff? For this woman, this Gentile woman, all it meant was falling at the feet of Jesus – giving him his worth – that is what worship is. If we come to worship for our sake, then we are coming for the wrong reason – we are coming to give God what he deserves. This means our worship is not confined to a Sunday but is the whole of our lives.

Giving someone worth comes in many different. Remember Jack, who was searching. Jack use to spend all day walking the streets. It was a different set of streets each day, although he found himself going down the same street some four times a year. Jack was a meter reading, calling house to house to read a utility meter. One day, whilst he was coming to the group, an old lady asked him

to do a little task for her whilst he was there, and then, as he was leaving she told him of something that was troubling her and asked him to 'say a prayer for her'. Jack went home and that night, in the early hours of the morning, he suddenly woke with a start and couldn't get back to sleep. As he lay there, listening to the rhythmic sound of his wife's snoring, he remembered the old lady on his round. And so he thought and thought, and began to pray for her. In his way he was worshipping God. He didn't start singing – that might have disturbed the snoring! But he worshipped in a way he knew – he gave God worth knowing that he had made a promise that the maybe God had heard him as well.

She Believed

Then we move on in the story of the woman and her little daughter. We have that this lady believed. Verse 26

“The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.” (Mark 7:26 NIV)

Matthew records the words she said

“... "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”” (Matthew 15:22 NIV)

She knew, she believed that Jesus could deliver. Maybe she had heard that there was this miracle worker, this healer in the area called Jesus. But she believed that he could make a difference, so she begs him on behalf of her daughter, “Make her well, get rid of this evil spirit that keeps possessing her.” Do we talk to Jesus, to God with that same sense of belief, or do we do it half-heartedly?

And of Jack? As he was praying for the old lady on his meter round, he believed that what he was doing was making a difference for the old lady. We need to believe that pray, that talking to God is important and also does have an effect. Maybe this is why up and down this country churches are practically empty for one meeting that is held – this is the prayer meeting. What do you think of when you are invited to a prayer meeting? Does it make you want to go, or stay at home? Why is this? Our perception of prayer or of God? Jack had no problem praying, even though he was not a Christian!

Salvation Came

So the three things that the lady did was to search, to worship and to believe. So what was the result before we move on to the thing she did not do? Verse 30.

“She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.” (Mark 7:30 NIV)

Salvation had come to that house. The daughter was healed, the demon had gone. There would have been much rejoicing in that house, that day. There would have been much telling of friends how it all happened. The name Jesus would be well known to all the friends of that Syro-Phoenician mother and of the friends of her little daughter. They would have been followers of Jesus.

For Jack. What happened for him? As he was praying that night at around 3 in the morning lying next to his wife, he suddenly had a thought. Maybe as I am praying for this lady I ought to become a Christian. So then and there, he said to Jesus that he knew he had done wrong and repented of that and asked that Jesus take over control of his life. Then he continued to prayer for the lady that he had met that day.

He did not wake up his wife and tell him – he knew better that to wake his sleeping wife up in the middle of the night! He told a group of us about three days later.

But I said that the lady did three things, did not do one thing and the result of those four things. We have looked at the three things she did, search, worship and believe, we have seen the result of the things she did and did not do, but we have not looked at the one thing she did not do. In the middle of this story we have this odd conversation between Jesus and the woman. 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.”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” (Mark 7:27-28 NIV)

Was Jesus really calling her and her little daughter a dog? Well, yes and no. In the eyes of the Jews who would have been around, they would have seen themselves as children, as children of God. They were the favoured nation and all so often in the Old Testament we have the parent-child relationship being spoken about explicitly or referred to implicitly. They would see themselves as the children. The Gentiles, non-Jews were so often referred to as dogs. They were not worthy – they were low. But what was her reaction to the statement by Jesus?

“First let the children eat all they want,...for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” (Mark 7:27 NIV)

She does not rant and rave and say, ‘How unfair. Why should the Jews have it all?’ She does not envy the special relationship that they have with God, but she would like some of it. At times we do envy what others have, even spiritually. We may envy someone else because they have a

- Greater knowledge of the Bible – this is probably due to the fact that they have been reading the Bible for many years and also may have studied it. This is not a reason to be envious, but to spur us on to gain that knowledge as well from the best book around.
- Seem to be in touch with God more, or God is in touch with them more as they keep talking about the dreams God has given them, or the pictures they have seen, or the words that God has spoken to them. This may be part of their spirituality and not yours. We need to find our own way to talk to God and he to us and it is not always the same as the person next to you.

So the woman is not envious and when I read her reply it always makes me think of a member of our family who sadly is dead now. His name was Bumble and he was a West Highland White, a Westie and when we ate he would be banned to the kitchen. In fact some visitors thought that his name was Bumble Kitchen because we would say as we began our meal and saw him creeping into the dining room, ‘Bumble, kitchen.’ However at the end of the meal, especially when the girls were very young, we would shout for Bumble and then he would come running into the dining room and become our organic vacuum cleaner, hovering up all the bits of food that had dropped onto the floor.

So with this in mind she replies to Jesus, verse 28

“Yes, Lord,...but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” (Mark 7:28 NIV)

Don’t get envious, but do as the lady did

- As a searcher, keep searching – you will get there because God wants us all to come to him. There will also be times in your life, even as a Christian when you are searching for a particular answer to a doubt you have. Doubting is not wrong, but that is when you still need to keep on with that search. Ask questions of others, look into the Bible, turn to God in prayer and ask him
- As a worshipper, keep worshipping. Keep coming to church, joining with others. Keep serving God where you work, or at home, or being involved in leisure. This means working the best you can. I was having a chat the other day with someone about whether employing a Christian to do a task is better or worse. It should be better because the way they work should be an expression of their love of God, but sometimes that does not always happen. You will then be making your walk with God match your talk – that is worship of God.
- As a believer, keep on increasing your faith, making your beliefs stronger and stronger. Be with other Christians, learning with them. It may be that God puts you through difficult times – recognise that these times are to gain strength.

Then we will know that salvation that comes from God – that life abundant, that Jesus, the Servant-Teacher talks about. For me there is nothing better than to live for God as a searcher, worshipper and believer, knowing his salvation.

PRAYER