

JESUS ADMIRES A HUMBLE WOMAN'S FAITH

Mark 7:24-30

Key Verse: 7:29

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

Today's passage is a story of how Jesus admired a humble woman's faith. To ordinary people, just to have faith in God in this generation is hard enough. But this woman was admired because of her faith. Let's see what kind of faith she had.

First, she came to Jesus by faith (24-26). As we studied, Jesus defended his disciples' breaking the tradition of the handwashing ceremony. The hungry disciples attacked the food without washing their dusty hands. Thus the disciples broke the tradition of the handwashing ceremony. This was a serious matter to the Pharisees. Traditions were the tools for the people in the upper class. After defending his disciples with the word of God, Jesus withdrew into Gentile territory, the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, Syrian Phoenicia, which lay between Galilee and the seacoast (24). There Jesus wanted to take a breath and then he wanted to take care of his disciples. But it did not work as Jesus had expected. When Jesus entered the house secretly for a retreat with his disciples, what happened? Look at 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." The gospel of Jesus widely spread to the Gentiles.

What did Jesus do for all these people? It is always Jesus' compassion that he wants to take care of them one by one so that no one is left uncared for. But one woman drew Jesus' full attention. Jesus had to pay full attention to one particular person. Who was it? She was a woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit (25). She had many reasons not to come to Jesus to ask for the healing of her demon-possessed daughter. Usually many a mother thinks that her daughter is the most beautiful in the world, even if her daughter is obviously not the most beautiful in the world. Usually many a mother expects her daughter would be very popular among her peers. But the Syrophenician woman's daughter

was not beautiful or attractive because she was demon possessed. The demons disfigured the daughter's beauty. The demons made this little daughter foam at the mouth and crawl on the ground when she had to practice classic dance. The demons made this little daughter screech in the middle of the night so that her mother would get up from her bed and wait for her until the power of demons in her subsided. The demon made the little daughter rush in madness, sometimes to the top of a steep bank and sometimes into the rushing water of the river after heavy rains. The mother must have felt like dying whenever she watched her little daughter sitting in melancholia without talking at all for two or three days. Her mother felt like dying when her little daughter was talking all by herself at the top of her lungs for two or three days. The mother was very sorry. She was helpless.

Many sick people were going to Jesus. But for this woman, to come to Jesus was not easy. There were many hindrances when she wanted to come to Jesus. First of all, the mother felt she would rather die than reveal her demon-possessed daughter in public. As we know well, many a mother wants to hide her daughter's weaknesses and exaggerate her daughter's achievements, whether people hear or not. No mother wants to reveal her daughter's ugliness. This seems to be a small matter, but to the mother, her daughter's illness was everything to her. Yet this woman was afraid of what people would say. She was really afraid. But she overcame the fear of people and came to Jesus by faith, if only her demon-possessed daughter would be healed.

It was not easy for the mother to come to Jesus with her demon-possessed daughter because she was a Gentile woman. Mark comments in verse 26 that the woman was Greek, a Gentile woman; so she had nothing to do with Jesus, the Jew. Therefore, to her, coming to Jesus was even more difficult because of ancient racial barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles. For example, they were one nation and one people Israel. But Assyrians invaded and made northern Israel a mixed-blooded people (722 B.C.). Since then the Jews in Judah stopped talking to the people of northern Israel, regarding them as unclean animals. In the ancient times, when the world was not fully civilized, racial prejudice or discrimination was exercised more than was necessary. Because of racial prejudice she was helpless to bring her daughter to Jesus. But by

faith, she came to Jesus and begged him to drive the evil spirit out of her daughter. Her coming to Jesus was her great faith. Her coming to Jesus, overcoming her emotional feelings and racial prejudice, was a great victory.

Second, she humbled herself (27-30). As we remember and never forget, Jesus understood women very well. The beautiful conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan by the well of Jacob, where the mountains Gerizim and Ebal met in a valley, was a conversation between the heavenly prince and a sinful woman. Through the conversation Jesus opened the Samaritan woman's closed heart and quenched her thirst with the living water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14). We also remember when a widowed woman was following her only son's coffin, crying, Jesus raised her son by saying, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" (Lk 7:11-17) In this way, Jesus comforted the widowed mother. Jesus was a father to Mary and Martha (Jn 11:1-44). One day Lazarus, the mainstay of the sorrowful sisters' family, got sick and soon died. Jesus came to Bethany two days after he had received the news of dying Lazarus. When Jesus came to Bethany, the sisters expressed their regret that if Jesus had come earlier their brother would not have died. Jesus gave them the promises of eternal life and resurrection in John 11:25,26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Still the sisters did not receive God's words of promise. Then Jesus went to the tomb to raise the dead Lazarus. Before raising him, Jesus said to the sisters in John 11:40, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" In this way Jesus helped sorrowful sisters to look at the glorious heavenly sunshine.

But Jesus spoke to this woman harshly. Did Jesus speak harshly because she was a Gentile woman? No. Jesus wanted to plant personal faith in her heart. In other words, Jesus wanted to test whether she had faith or not. Jesus did not see her as a tragic woman because her daughter was demon possessed or because she was a Gentile woman. Jesus saw her as tragic if she had no faith in the Son.

As soon as Jesus saw her kneeling down at his feet, he said something unusual to her. Look at 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.'" Figuratively speaking, Jesus was comparing the Jews to children and the Gentiles to dogs. These days a dog is known as a good friend to lonely Americans. But in those times, a dog was a symbol of shame and disgrace because he did not wear shorts. When a Jew said, "You dog," it meant a dog-like Gentile. Gentiles were despised by the Jews like a dog.

As we know well, women are very emotional due to their sensitivity. Most women like admiration, even if it is nothing but lip service. Women never expect any insult from men. If a woman is insulted, the one who insulted her will get respect or love from her never again. This woman was also a human being and a sensitive woman. Because of her daughter her heart was broken. Nevertheless, when she heard Jesus' testing words, her pride was not offended. Rather, she humbled herself, admitting that she was a dog. In this way, the mother wanted to receive the Messiah's mercy. In short, she was a humble woman. In addition, she was a woman of faith, worthy to receive the Messiah's mercy.

We can see many examples of those who had humble faith and received God's mercy. Naaman was a commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. When he came to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy, Elisha, the bald-headed prophet, did not even come out to see him, but said through his servant, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan" (2Ki 5:10). General Naaman was greatly humiliated by Elisha. But he humbled himself and went to the Jordan River, washed, and was cleansed. General Naaman was a true general who knew how to overcome and humble himself. James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Isaiah 66:2b says, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." This woman deserved the Messiah's mercy when she humbled herself, admitting she was a dog before the Messiah, and begged the Messiah's mercy for her sick daughter. There are many kinds of women. Each woman is so delicate that the world seems to have too many kinds of women. But when we study the Bible, there are only two kinds of women. One is a proud woman. The other is a humble woman.

There was Queen Jezebel, whose husband was King Ahab (1Ki 16:29 ff.). She had a political idea that agricultural development would

make her country prosper. So she became a Baal worshiper. Baal is the god of agriculture. She raised many Baal priests and, at the same time, destroyed the prophets of God. At that time, Elijah was the leader of God-believing people. They lived underground and worshiped God and raised many disciples in that circumstance. Queen Jezebel should be the mother of her suffering people. But she was not. When we study the Bible, her vanity only made her husband King Ahab a coward and made her people suffer endlessly. Moreover, she persecuted Elijah the prophet and God-fearing people. Another example is Herodias. She was also a woman of vanity. After the death of King Herod the Great, his kingdom was divided into four parts (Lk 3:1). Herodias' own husband, Philip, had no territory. So she somehow managed to marry King Herod, her husband Philip's older brother, in the vanity of ruling the nation. But it did not work. She only became so proud that she became the cause of executing the righteous man, John the Baptist.

Now let's think about humble women of God in the Bible. Sarah was Abraham's wife. After hearing God's command (Ge 12:1-3), Abraham said to his wife, "Sarah, Sarah, we are going to leave our hometown. We are going to leave our parents. We are going to leave our relatives. We are going to leave our dog Mike and go where God wants us to go. But I don't know where it is" (Ge 12:1-3). But Sarah did not rebuke him that he did not know where he was going. Sarah didn't say anything and just followed Abraham. Many people who study the Bible characterize Abraham as a vague man. But Sarah liked Abraham always.

In the past, the former USSR completely annihilated Christianity. But they kept several millions of pictures of Mary the mother of Jesus, called icons. It was because Mary humbly obeyed God's will to conceive the baby by the Holy Spirit before marriage. God honored her simple and humble obedience to God's will and made her the mother of Jesus and a comfort even to communist people.

Luke 8:2,3a says, "...and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others." These women served the twelve smelly and unruly disciples with their own expenses. If they had not served

his disciples Jesus would have had a hard time to raise the disciples. They knew his disciples were smelly and unruly, but they served them because these women were humble and lowly.

Third, she was a woman of prayer (28). Let's go back to the passage. Look at verse 28. "'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'" She knew that she did not deserve the Messiah's mercy. But she begged the Messiah's mercy by saying, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Her begging the Messiah's mercy was not begging for the sake of begging; it was her earnest prayer. We must learn this kind of prayer for our daughters. Her prayer came from her humble heart. Women are physically weaker than men. But they are wiser than most men because most women know how to pray humbly like this Syrophenician woman. Women are beautiful because they are born beautiful. Women are beautiful because they know how to pray.

Fourth, Jesus admired this Gentile woman's faith (29). Look at verse 29. "Then he told her, 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.'" Jesus said, "For such a reply." Her reply sprang from her faith in Jesus and moved Jesus' heart greatly. Because of her faith, Jesus saved her daughter from demon possession. To Jesus' eyes she was a woman of faith, for she seized on the bread of heaven which the Jews had ignorantly rejected and thrown away. Because of her the door of salvation was widely opened to the Gentile world. Moreover, her daughter was healed and was sleeping (30).

Today we learned the Syrophenician woman's broken heart for her demon-possessed daughter. When she brought her daughter to Jesus by faith, even though she was a Gentile woman, Jesus healed her daughter. Jesus also admired her faith greatly. As long as mothers have humble faith in God for themselves as well as their daughters, God can bless this country as a nation of prayer mothers. May God raise many mothers of faith in this country.