

“Our Need to Need Jesus”  
Mark 7:24–30  
Rev. Seth Richardson  
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In this study we will be looking at several passages in the Gospel of Mark and I want you to be able to see the movement of this text as we look through this book. I want to begin in Mark 1 to give you a little bit of a road map that leads to Mark 7. I am going to give a fly over of the first six chapters so that you can see the movement and structure of it and then we'll spend some time with this encounter that Jesus has with a group of Pharisees in the first part of Mark 7. This encounter with the Pharisees will be the backdrop and the contrast of the encounter that Jesus has with the Gentile woman who is desperate for Jesus to heal her daughter. So let's begin.

If you have read the Gospel of Mark what you immediately find is the word *immediately*. This word is littered throughout the book of Mark. This language choice combined with the pace in which the book seems to move through distance and the sequence of events, it creates this dynamic speed or momentum. It's a Gospel of action, movement, climax and momentum. I think we can begin to see why Mark lays it out this way in the first chapter.

Mark 1:14–15 says *[14] Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, [15] and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* We see the speed and the urgency of this book as it lends itself to the apocalyptic message that the Kingdom has come. It is a pronouncement that the King has arrived, the Kingdom is coming and the King is on the move. Immediately after this announcement you see action.

Jesus begins His ministry and calls His first Disciples. Then He heals a man with an unclean spirit. He begins to miraculous works among the crowds. He preaches the Gospel. He cleanses lepers. He heals paralytics. He calls more Disciples. Other than a couple of instances where there is this opposition between His own family and some of the religious leaders, you get the sense as the crowds and multitudes are growing that the Kingdom is picking up speed. Then we get to Mark 4 and it is presented in such a way to explain now the nature of this Kingdom. He will give us a series of very important parables.

In Mark 4:1–9 we see the parable of the sower and the seed. Jesus will take this moment to explain to His Disciples that there is a mysterious element to this new Kingdom, almost a secret dynamic to this Kingdom. While the Kingdom has arrived, not all will receive it. In fact, the only ones who do receive it are those who have been given ears to hear and eyes to see.

Mark 4:1–9 says *[1] Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. [2] And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: [3] “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. [5] Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. [6] And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. [7] Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. [8] And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” [9] And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Then Jesus will share in Mark 4:26 the parable that the Kingdom is like a growing seed. Mark 4:26–29 says [26] *And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. [27] He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. [28] The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. [29] But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”*

The illustration here seems to be the fact that the Kingdom seems to be unnoticeable, almost mysterious and inexplicable. It’s difficult to put it in a certain category yet there is this growth, movement and maturation that is happening with this Kingdom. Then starting in Mark 4:30 we see the parable of the mustard seed.

Mark 4:30–32 says [30] *And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? [31] It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, [32] yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”* Jesus is saying here that there is this invisible quality to the Kingdom that is inconspicuous and moving yet as it grows and develops it’s undeniable, unmistakable and ultimately will be fully visible.

So here is a good opportunity for a word of encouragement. If you look around this world you see brokenness, degradation, and perversion or perhaps you look at the brokenness of your own life and the situation of our own circumstances, it’s easy to despair, isn’t it? It’s easy to have moments of doubt, melancholy, worry and anxiety and it’s easy to lose hope.

I want to say be of good hope and courage for what Jesus is saying here is that the Kingdom does not sputter. The Kingdom is not like a firework that shoots off with heat, flare, power and brightness and then burns out, fizzles as it falls to the ground, dies. While it may seem invisible at times there is this surety, steadiness, and momentum to the Kingdom that continues to move and grow. It is right on time and right on schedule. So we can find a great deal of hope and rest in the King and His Kingdom.

So here are the realities of the Kingdom. One, it has come and it must be received. Two, not everyone was able to receive it. Three, the Kingdom can’t be fully explained in some degree and is mysterious. Fourthly, the Kingdom is inconspicuous. It is ultimately undeniable and unstoppable. It is this unstoppable nature of the Kingdom that Mark is about to display in the next few chapters.

At the end of Mark 4 Jesus will calm a storm and demonstrates that His Kingdom reigns over the natural world. Starting at Mark 5 we’ll see that Jesus is going to walk on water because He is King over all. He will cast out demons because He not only rules over the natural world but he rules over the spiritual world. In Mark 5 He will heal a woman with an issue of blood because by His grace the Kingdom has come to drive back the effects of the fall. He is King over sickness and illness. We even see in Mark 5 that Jesus raises someone from the dead. He is King over life and death, driving back the curse of sin.

Then in Mark 6 we miracle of the loaves and fishes as Jesus feeds the five thousand with only two fish and five loaves of bread. His Kingdom is such that He multiples from a few loaves and fishes to satisfy all that would eat and partake. His grace is so abundant that there are bountiful leftovers. So we see this movement of the Kingdom and as the Kingdom goes forth it’s as if it’s gobbling up the natural world, taking over the demonic and even conquers death for the Kingdom of God is unstoppable as it slowly and surely moves forward. We can find great hope for the broken, sin-cursed world is no match for the Kingdom.

Now we get to Mark 7 as the Kingdom has been moving forward with momentum and no opposition up until now. Mark 7:1–2 says [1] *Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, [2] they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.* So those who are refusing the Kingdom are not the dirty pagans or the unclean Gentiles or the lost reprobate but the religious elite (leaders) of the time.

Mark 7:5–8 says [5] *And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” [6] And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; [7] in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ [8] You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”*

Here are the cultural elite who like the status quo, enjoy the comfort of their own cloister. The Pharisees are the arch nemesis of Jesus and His ministry but there are some other things about the Pharisees that is important for us to know, particularly about their history. The Pharisees were a sect of Judaism that developed during the intertestamental time – the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament. There were two primary factors that birthed this new sect.

The first factor was they had experienced the judgment of God because of their lack of appearance to the law as they were exiled to Babylon. So they built hedges around the law. They began to adhere to the oral law which was in essence was a prescription or a hedge that there was no way possible that we were going to break those laws again. So they put rules on top of rules on top of rules in order to hedge the law. So following Yahweh or walking with the Lord was about keeping the script, keeping the law – not even the law of God but the traditions of men that they had piled on them.

The second factor that birthed the Pharisees was that they came out of the time of the Greek Empire and under the leadership of Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was different in his leadership than many that came before him, because not only did they want to expand their kingdom and overtake territory but they believed their culture was superior to all other cultures. So Alexander the Great was committed to enculturating any lands in which he conquered. So through a very deliberate agenda there was this enculturating Israel within the Greek culture. As the Pharisees began seeing this cultural degradation around them or even the loss of their own children contaminating their heritage, they began to amplify and magnify the ceremonial rituals of the Old Testament to ensure that they would be pure from the world around them.

Over time these traditions would become a part of their world and life view and Jesus is going to confront them head on as we have started to see in Mark 7. He is going to explain to them that it is not what goes into someone that makes them clean but what goes out of them. In essence He is confronting the very generational, historic, animating assumptions of their world and life view, that which they held dear and had shaped much of their life.

The only thing I can equate this to was when I moved back to Alabama some years ago on a Saturday in the fall, I was with a bunch of young guys playing basketball. I said ‘What’s the big deal?’ The way they looked at me I could feel them stabbing me with their eyes thinking ‘How dare you!’ I had touched on one of the core animating assumptions of their culture that had been passed down for generations.

Jesus is confronting one of the core animating assumptions of the Pharisees' world and life view. It is this encounter with the Pharisees that is the backdrop for this incredible encounter with this Gentile woman. Let's look closely now to Mark 7. As a side note the region of Tyre and Sidon was one of the only forays that Jesus would make outside of Israel. It was some 40 miles northwest of Galilee. For the Pharisees to see Jesus do this it would have been the equivalent of going to Samaria, known as polluted Gentile country yet Jesus' fame has already preceded Him at this point and has reached this region.

Mark 7:24–30 says [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.*

It's not quite clear why Jesus didn't want to be noticed. There was some sense that a Rabbi going into a predominately Gentile culture that He didn't want to draw inordinate attention to Himself. I think the most worthy explanation is the fact that He had withdrawn to this region to get some rest, rest from ministry and spend time with His Disciples. Yet His fame is such that He couldn't go unnoticed. So this creates the stage inside this private home for this encounter and that's important.

In our western culture the dynamics in this story are really difficult for us to get. Matthew gives the same account of this story in Matthew 15 to a Jewish audience and those dynamics are a little bit clearer. So we see that a Greek, Syrophenician woman would broach a home where a Rabbi was present would have been a major breach in social etiquette. In fact, it was inappropriate for Rabbis to break the gender barrier and speak to a woman in public. In conservative circles of Judaism that is still the case today, where Rabbis don't even speak to their own family members in public who are not of the same gender. In Matthew 15 you get the sense that this woman barges in as she touches Jesus and is crying out as she is pleading with Him and Jesus doesn't say a word, where in essence He keeps His appropriate distance.

What is ironic here is that the Disciples hearts are going to be revealed and in Matthew's account they beg Jesus to send her away. So Jesus taking an opportunity to always instruct His Disciples is going to show an incredible amount of compassion and shrewdness in the way that He interacts with this desperate woman.

I have two daughters and the idea here of being possessed with an unclean spirit very well may have the connotation that this unclean spirit caused this unclean girl to do immoral and lewd behavior. So this mom does what any mom would do for there is no social protocol or cultural barriers that are going to get in her way. If your own child was in the throes of demon possession, captivated by sin, the reality is that some reading this have been in that situation and you have felt the slow, constant, dull ache of a broken heart for some other person that you love dearly and you're just desperate for something to happen.

Jesus response to the woman is in Mark 7:27 which says [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."* What a startling response! Was Jesus calling this woman a dog? I do think this is a derogatory statement but not a pejorative for clearly our Lord and Savior doesn't insult people. Perhaps it's

liken to if I were talking to a friend and someone came up and I said ‘Speak of the devil’ I’m clearly not calling him Satan. There is good evidence as a Syrophenician she would have not understood this term or this vernacular language but Jesus’ Disciples would have.

The children He is referring to who are supposed to eat first, it was known that Israel was the children of God. The Gospel of the Kingdom was meant to go to Israel so that it might go through Israel. Paul said in Romans 1:16, *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* The reality was the Jews were supposed to enter into the joys of the Kingdom and then through them be a blessing to all nations but because they wanted to cloister themselves from the culture, were afraid of being defiled, worried about their own safety, their status and control, they knew not the joy of the Kingdom and were useless to the world.

So Jesus exposes this incredibly, crucial point in the lives of His own Disciples that they were going to have to embrace. Notice the contrast of the heart of this desperate, dirty, Gentile woman with that the self-righteous elite. The woman’s response to Jesus is in Mark 7:28 which says *[28] But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”* She is saying, ‘yes Lord You are the Messiah, You are the King who has come, You are good, You are able and You’re my only Hope. I only need a morsel of Your Kingdom. Just give me one crumb of Your grace for it is enough and all that I need to heal me and my daughter.’

I believe she is saying “I am a dog, a dirty dog unless You make me clean and I’ll be a dog all day long if You will just heal my daughter. In Matthew 15 the woman cries out to Jesus ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.’ This interaction with this dirty Gentile woman reveals the deep waters of her own heart and it’s this; our desire and love for Jesus always stands in a direct correlation to our need for Him.

In this year and season of desperately wanting the Gospel to go forth through evangelism and discipleship I think one of the challenges we face in our modern, fluent world is for the most part, daily people can get along and they don’t functionally need Jesus. That’s why we walk along beside them, not monologuing the Gospel but dialoguing the Gospel caring for them, serving them, loving them, answering their questions, and asking them questions because people don’t need Jesus until they do.

Also there are many days that I get along fine without Jesus too. I go to work and I have the resources I need, I have enough money in the bank, my kids are happy and healthy, I’m pretty equipped to do my job, my bills are paid and for the most part I can just get right along without a need for Jesus. So to follow after Jesus is to cultivate in our hearts a deep desire and need for Him, to recognize how much we desperately need Him in our lives so that our biggest need is to fill our need for Him.

Jesus responds to the woman in Mark 7:29–30 which says *[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.* I just imagine Jesus smiling because He is so pleased with this woman’s heart. She doesn’t want a sign or ask for a hand shake or a hug. He who she needed the most became her greatest delight and He made her daughter whole.

So as we approach this Table it reminds us that outside of Christ we are dirty dogs yet in Christ we have been made clean. It reminds us that our greatest need is to need Him and when we by faith partake of this Lord’s Supper, I pray it would cultivate a fresh affection, a new need for Jesus in your heart so that you might experience a new, dominating delight in your life and a sweeter attitude for grace. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, we love You and thank You for Your Word. We pray that You would meet us now at this Table and that we would commune with You. You promised to be here and so we expectantly accept to be in Your presence. We love You Lord Jesus. We thank You that You are all we need, Amen.