We’re studying the fast-paced book of Mark, which presents Jesus as the Son of God & Son of Man.

- When Jesus came to Israel, they had oodles of outward signs, boundaries and badges to mark who was “in” (e.g. circumcision, Sabbath keeping, observing food laws, washing their hands). They disliked Jesus declaring the problem was inside them, not outside. External adjustments could not fix the sin oozing from their hearts. Repentance of sin and faith in Jesus was the sole solution to their purity problem. The Pharisees hated this since it meant they didn’t determine who was “in” or “out” and anyone in the world could be included in God’s family through repentance and faith. Jesus was tearing down their religious and political fences by making faith the qualifier, and today’s passage should help us comprehend this...

BIG IDEA: What is great faith?

Let’s consider some key ideas in our text.

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 at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile (non-Jew), a Syrophoenician by birth (Phoenicia = Roman province of Syria). She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And he said to her, "Let the children (of Israel) be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the (little) dogs (non-Jews)." 28 But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 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.

A socially, politically, and religiously awkward moment. (7:24-30)

- After battling with the Scribes and Pharisees over inner purity, Jesus sought rest for Himself and His disciples outside of Israel. He rarely ventured into Gentile areas because His primary mission was to give Israel, God’s chosen people, the opportunity to repent and be restored to their role as God’s ambassadors to the non-Jewish world. God had not sent Jesus to reach the Gentiles directly but to establish the church to accomplish that; however, going into a Gentile land would prove the point He just made to the Pharisees (i.e. it didn’t make Him impure) and that God’s kingdom is available to everyone (i.e. not just Jews). Most notably, His encounter with the woman would contrast the Pharisees’ beliefs with genuine, saving faith.

- Matthew’s account (15:21-28) offers a better sense of Jesus’ conversation with the woman. We are told she was a Canaanite, a descendant of the people OT Israel tried to exterminate from...
their land. She was a woman, brought up in a foreign culture and language. All Hebrew men (including the disciples) were raised to view women, children, and foreigners as “less” than them. She would have been officially labeled “unclean” by the Scribes and Pharisees. So, no one would have blamed Jesus for ignoring her; in fact, some would have sadly applauded Him.

- While Jesus seemed to repeatedly ignore her pleas, He was actually creating an opportunity for His trainees to discover the depth of this pagan woman’s great faith! Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith, it’s impossible to please God.” Anyone want to be pleasing to God? Faith in Jesus is the only requirement! Our application will explore some qualities of great faith and are necessary whether you’re just starting out or have been following Jesus for years.

**How can Mark’s 1st century writings help our discipleship in today’s God-defying world?**

**Great faith persists.** (cf. Mark 2:1-12; Luke 18:1-5)

- Can you imagine the personal and social implications of raising a demon-possessed child? Her daughter was being ravaged by a demon, and their life was 24/7 misery and exhaustion. This 1st century Gentile woman and child were helpless against this merciless, abusive demon unless someone with greater authority took pity on them.

- This woman finally encountered the one person she believed was her sole solution, but He stood there silent, His male followers dismissed her, and then He announced her people were not His target audience! How would you, wait...how HAVE you responded when you felt God was silent or His church wasn’t what you wanted us to be? Certainly, we can all identify with this nameless woman. Without exception, all of us will encounter needs only God can handle or face God’s deafening silence or meet Christians who don’t seem to care about our problems. How will you respond, and which way will you turn? Learn from this woman...great faith persists...it focuses on God’s promises regardless of what our eyes see.

**Great faith is humble.**

- Jesus’ response seemed insulting. The woman had to ask repeatedly and then Jesus implied she, her daughter, her family, and her friends were dogs! This was a common term for non-Jewish people. Jesus wasn’t trying to insult her. He was simply stating God had sent Him for Israel (the children) and that ministry to the Gentiles (the dogs) would come later. By the way, He even used a term that meant “little dogs” to distinguish her from scavenger dogs.
While the truth was offensive, it revealed another remarkable aspect of this woman’s faith—she accepted having no right to sit at the Lord’s table and being no better than a little family dog begging for table scraps. Although...being a little dog under the table, implied she had a good Master and was part of a loving household. This nameless, marginalized, and scandalized woman was content to just be near the Lord’s table and receive a tiny morsel of blessing. RC Sproul wrote, “Do you see the difference between this woman and the Pharisees? She was not interested in fighting for her rights or her dignity. She knew who she was...true believers savor every crumb that comes from the hand of God...Jesus had not found faith like hers among the Pharisees, the rabbis, or the people of Israel. But here, in a pagan place, He found a woman to whom faith in the Savior had been given, and He permitted her to eat” (cf. James 4:6, 10).

**Great faith is aware.**

- The Pharisees and the disciples were not aware. Frankly, I have no clue how this pagan woman was aware other than by God’s Spirit giving her “ears to hear” and “eyes to see” the spiritual realities taking place. She simply believed, without trying to manipulate Jesus, change the narrative, question His timetable, or demand proof of her daughter’s healing.
- This woman was aware of who she was and who Jesus was. Her faith was confident but not presumptuous. Jesus was not some genie in a bottle that would guarantee her 3 wishes. She was not praying some formula or making a deal. Her persistence was not about “earning” her daughter’s healing, it simply demonstrated great faith! Believers SHOULD pray persistently, humbly and with confident belief in our Almighty and limitless God; but we must NEVER presume God is obligated to obey our commands or pleadings. I can’t improve on the way Chuck Swindoll put this, “Having faith is believing that God is who He says He is, trusting in His integrity to do what He says He will do. It is being confident that He will always do what is right for our good and for His glory.”
- Those with spiritual awareness know God isn’t waiting around to respond until we repeat certain words, in a certain order, the perfect # of times or until we promise to do a bunch of stuff for God if He does for us. That’s the whole point of the gospel--God has come to us! His Spirit is working to make us aware of our place in God’s great story, so we surrender to Him.
- Jesus said our greatest work is to believe (cf. John 6:29), and we must work at faith our entire lives or maybe I should say, “We must let faith work on us our entire lives.” Faith that is
persistent, humble, and aware. I’ll close by finishing the verse I mentioned earlier…Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” We have at least one other thing in common with this woman…our faith isn’t perfect. Thankfully, Hebrews 12:2 informs us “Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith.”

So, what’s your NEXT STEP?

• Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes/Additional thoughts:

• Needs: Our needs are designed to drive us to God as our only solution, yet when we finally surrender our self-reliance and go to God, we are confronted with truth. We open God’s Word and learn in Romans 3 that we are undeserving sinners. We turn to Ephesians 1-2 and discover we have been God’s enemies our whole lives. We quickly discover that coming to God isn’t a matter of just proudly walking up to God and saying, “Hey man, if you fix this for me, I’ll get you back one day.” Coming to God is about humbling ourselves, acknowledging that God owes us nothing, accepting that we’re helpless and hopeless without Him, admitting we live in conscious and unconscious rebellion against Him, confessing and repenting of sin, and agreeing to follow His ways the rest of our lives.

• Tyre and Sidon: RC Sproul wrote, “Tyre was twenty miles to the northwest of Capernaum, where Jesus had been laboring. Sidon was farther north. Both were on the Mediterranean coast and had been part of the Phoenician culture. It was from that region that Jezebel had come and tormented the prophet Elijah. By the first century, like all of Israel, Tyre and Sidon were under Roman administration. The Jewish rabbis said that the region of Tyre and Sidon was committed to gross paganism and idolatry. Today, both cities are part of Lebanon.” Chuck Swindoll offered other insights, “The land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants included this fortified port city with its excellent natural defenses. Unfortunately, the Israelites failed to take it, so Tyre became a perpetual neighbor and sometimes ally (cf. 2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kgs. 5:1-11; 1 Chr. 14:1; 2 Chr. 2:3-16). Later, however, the people of Tyre betrayed Israel, earning some of the strongest prophetic denunciations ever written (cf. Isa. 23:1-18; Jer. 25:22; 27:1-11; Ezek. 26:1–28:19; Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:9-10). Ezekiel described the arrogance of Tyre as emblematic of Satan’s hubris against God (Ezek. 28:2).”

• Why Jews before Gentiles?: “Jesus, the Hebrew Messiah, came to the Jews first because they were God’s covenant people, chosen centuries earlier to be His instrument in reaching the world. They were to be His light on a hill (see Ps. 43:3) and become His means of world evangelism (Isa. 43:10; 44:8). Jesus came to redeem Israel and then, while ruling from the throne of David, call all people everywhere to bow before Him as Savior and King (Isa. 45:23). It would be wrong for Him to neglect these “children” and give what is due them to their pets (Mark 7:27).” (Chuck Swindoll)
• **Dogs**: “In most cases at this time, dogs were not pleasant, companionable creatures such as we enjoy as house pets; rather, they were half-wild scavengers. They would eat garbage and carrion, and would even devour corpses. They were the filthiest animals in the towns... (Matt. 7:6a), using “dogs” as a euphemism for those who reject the gospel...the word dogs is qualified by the adjective little. That is because, in the Greek, the word for dog is rendered in the diminutive sense. This is an important detail. Although most of the dogs in Jesus’ day were half-wild scavengers, small, domesticated dogs were kept as house pets, and these dogs tended to gather under the family table at mealtimes. They typically were fed the table scraps, but only after the family had eaten...Jesus was saying: “My ministry has a priority. My ministry is to take care of the children of Israel, not to give the food that is meant for the children to the little dogs.” That was simply another way of saying that His ministry was to the people of Israel and that the outreach to the Gentiles would come later, just as a family eats at the table and the family dogs, the beloved pets, are fed afterward.” (RC Sproul)

• **We are the dogs**: “Those of us who are of non-Jewish descent need to remember that we are wild olive branches that have been grafted into the tree of Israel (Rom. 11:17–18). In terms of redemptive history, we are the dogs. But because the children refused the gift of the Father to them, the Father gave that gift to us who had no claim on it originally.” (RC Sproul)

**Articles:**
**Songs/Videos:**
**Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:**
1. Go for a single, not a home run...don’t drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.

**Challenge Questions**
*Review the BIG IDEA: What is great faith?*
*Simple questions...What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?*

**Preparation questions for Mark 7:24-30.**
- It would help to also read Matthew 15:21-28.
- Considering 7:1-23, what is significant about Jesus going to Tyre and Sidon? (7:24)
- Who came to beg before Jesus and why would this have been awkward socially, politically, and religiously? (7:25-26)
- What was asked of Jesus and what was up with His response? (7:26-27)
- What is significant about the woman’s response to Jesus and why did He grant her request? (7:28-30)

**Application questions from Mark 7:24-30.**
- What truths of Scripture are hard for you to accept?
- How has accepting biblical truths allowed your faith to grow?
- Why is faith the only thing that pleases God?
- Based on this passage, would Jesus assess your faith as great or not so great? Explain.
- In what sense is faith different than presumption or entitlement?
• Share an experience when you persistently and humbly prayed for something.

**Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life…**


Rethinking what we do [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)
