

Dogs Welcome

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Date: 06 March 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, it is a great privilege to be preaching to you this evening. And I must confess that this is my first service at Bon Accord.

I know very few of you. I hope to get to know some of you afterwards. But something I do know about you guys is one of your key church policies.

I know that here at Bon Accord, you run a dog's welcome policy. Yes, in fact, every week you invite small ones, big ones, dirty ones, scruffy ones, ungroomed ones, young and old ones, yappy, deaf ones, hungry ones, thirsty ones.

Yes, every single Sunday, morning and evening, the doors are open for dogs to come running into the warmth of the inside.

And even better, they're allowed to meet other dogs. And in fact, there's food as well, a meal in fact, something for them to chew over. Now, before you all come rushing back next week with your dogs in hand, and I've got to explain myself to Joe, I'm not in fact talking about your four-legged friends.

[1 : 27] Rather, this is the language that we see used of this woman in the first part of our passage today. And it's the language used to mark her from where she has come from.

In fact, that is one of the key things that Mark is trying to do here in this story and in the two stories that follow. Look at verse 24 again.

Verse 26. Verse 31.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Decaples. And the end of the section, we just read verse 10.

And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. That is, they have now moved away from the Gentile area.

[2 : 36] It's very easy to kind of gloss over the geography in this passage. But Mark is trying to communicate that here in these episodes, we are in Gentile land.

He wants us to see that we're encountering a rather different group of people than we see in the first half of chapter 7.

Now, we haven't read that this evening, but in chapter 7, there is a huge collision between the Pharisees and Jesus. And at the heart of the collision, at the heart of the issue was chapter 7, verse 14.

The Pharisees did not understand that nothing from outside a person by going into him can defile him. But rather it's the things that come out of him that is what makes him unclean.

For the Pharisees saw sin as something out there rather than something in here. They saw that the washing of the outside of the cups and pots as essential.

[3 : 47] They elevated their own traditions. And by doing so, they were rejecting and leaving behind the commandments of God. But here in the second half of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8, Jesus is surrounded by the very people that the Pharisees would turn their nose up at.

The very people they saw as dirty and unclean. And so this evening, I've got three points to try and help us to see what Mark is trying to show us this evening.

So number one, dirty and humble. Number two, mute, now singing. And number three, hungry, now satisfied.

So number one, dirty and humble. From verse 24 to 30. So Jesus arrives in the region of Tyre and he enters into a house.

And as is common in Mark's gospel, he wants to be hidden and yet he could not be hidden. In fact, as soon as he's in through the door, the bell is ringing and the woman is at the door.

[5 : 05] And as soon as the door creaks open, she's falling down at his feet. She is desperate. And the reason she is in this desperate state is because her daughter is being plagued by an unclean

spirit.

Verse 25. And her maternal instincts are clear to see, aren't they? She's wanting the best for her daughter. And that's what's driven her to begging.

Verse 27. And as we touched upon earlier, in this part of Mark's gospel, we have come to Gentile land. We are in non-Jewish land.

And Mark is really drilling that home to us here. Look at verse 26. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth.

It's like he's writing it in bold and then underlining it and underlining it again. This woman is not a Jew. And that is really significant in Jesus' response to her.

[6 : 09] And it's a really rather provocative response, isn't it? Look at verse 27 again. Let the children, that is the Jews, be fed first.

For it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. That is her, the Gentiles. Now, we live in a bit of a dog-crazy society, don't we?

You know, people love their dogs. They buy presents for their dogs. They buy jackets for their dogs. I know several people whose dogs have more beds in their house than they do. And even if that's you, even if you're that dog-obsessed person here this evening, I think that even you wouldn't see being called a dog as a compliment.

I wouldn't advise you calling anyone that over coffee afterwards. No, this is not a compliment, is it? This is provocative. But it is appropriate language of the human condition.

If we just have a wee look back at chapter 7, verse 21, here is what comes out of the heart of man. Evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride.

[7 : 49] Foolishness. We've all used the phrase, or perhaps heard the phrase, I'm only human, haven't we?

You know, we do something and we realize that we're in the wrong or someone doesn't live up to a standard that they've set. And what is the response?

Well, I know that wasn't great, but I'm only human after all. You know, it just slips off the tongue, doesn't it? And you just go about our days.

But it's not true, is it? It's not a Christian idea that. For back in the garden, but before the fall, there was true humanity. Everything was very good.

It was a world without sin and pain and suffering and problems. It was true humanity. But ever since Genesis 3 and sin entering the world, we've been on the road to destruction, refusing to worship and honor God whose image we bear.

[9 : 00] Our foolish hearts have been darkened and we have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man.

Our actions and our thoughts, our words, have made us less human. But we are tempted to believe the opposite.

Not only just when we make mistakes do we say that, but often when we're tempted to sin, we're made to believe that we're missing out on what it means to be human by not participating.

You know, your work colleague tells you about the winnings they made at the weekend, betting on the football. They tell you how exciting it is, the adrenaline they get from it, getting them away from the mundane, ordinariness of daily life, getting big winnings.

Or perhaps your university friends. You know, they don't understand why you're not going out and getting drunk or sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend. You know, don't you know that you're missing out?

[10 : 14] Wasting your university experience? But what does God say? Psalm 84.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Friends, sin, rejecting God's law. They never, ever make you more human.

Only ever less. Sometimes even animal-like. And did you notice that in this woman's answer, there is a recognition of this.

Look at verse 28 again. Notice that she doesn't act appalled, does she? You know, she's not horrified by the language that Jesus has used.

[11 : 18] No, look at how she responds. She's as sharp as a razor, isn't she? Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

For she knows, like all smart dogs, that at dinner time, there is always a chance of a second helping of food. Now, growing up, we had a cocker spaniel called Chloe who was never, ever missing when the food was about.

Now, she usually didn't show much interest when we were at the table. She knew that that was the no-go zone. But as soon as we stood up, that was when Chloe was in red alert mode because that meant that the dishwasher was about to be opened.

And that was the best time of Chloe's day because she would dart straight to it, all paws up on the dishwasher and licking those plates to her heart's content. Now, what Chloe knew was that she wasn't getting a seat at the table, but she knew that the dishwasher was fair game.

And the woman's response is similar here. For notice her humility. What does she recognize? She recognizes that she is not one of the children.

[12:44] She recognizes she doesn't have the right to the bread. And so she begs for the crumbs.

It's a deep humility, isn't it? This is a woman who recognizes that the problem is not out there in the world, but that it is deep inside of us.

And as the children earlier in chapter 7 are wasteful of their bread, the bread that in chapter 6, the feeding of the 5,000, left the crowd satisfied, there is crumbs for the outsider.

And the crumbs are enough for her, aren't they? A mere morsel of bread from the Lord Jesus is greater than anything the world could ever offer her.

I read verse 11 from Psalm 84 for us a moment ago. But do you know what comes in verse 10? For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

[13:58] I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tent of wickedness. This woman gets that, doesn't she?

It's almost as if she's echoing the very psalm as she speaks. And so, verse 29, Jesus said to her, for this statement, you may go your way.

The demon has left your daughter. And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone. She is dirty, but she's humble.

And the Lord Jesus shows her mercy and grace. Now, secondly, mute now singing, looking at verses 31 to 37.

So now, as the woman departs, so too does Jesus, verse 31, as he returns from the region of Tyre, going through Sidon.

[15:01] And it's actually a roundabout way of going because Sidon is north of Tyre and then he makes a journey southeasterly to the Sea of Galilee, to the region of the Decapolis.

Now, this is not the first time that Mark records events in the Decapolis. Back in chapter 5, he gave us an account of the demon-possessed man. And that episode finished with the locals begging for Jesus to depart and the demon-possessed man proclaiming to his friends about all that the Lord had done for him.

And he's clearly had a bit of joy in his evangelism because as we arrive back in the Decapolis, people are eager to see him. Now, there are some similarities in the miracle we see here from ones previous in Mark's Gospel.

If you just look down at it, we see miracle as done privately before. That's happened before in Mark's Gospel. We see Jesus charging people to tell no one about them.

But the description of the miracle is rather unusual in this incident. I mean, just look how immensely detailed it is.

[16:19] Verse 33. You've got putting his fingers in his ears, spitting and touching his tongue. And it's emphasised in the results and the response.

Verse 35. And his ears were opened, his tongue was released and he spoke plainly. And verse 37. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.

And as we see the emphasis here, I want us to see how powerful the grace of God is here. for look how hopeless the situation of the man is here.

I don't think we come across a man just as hopeless as this one anywhere else in Mark's Gospel.

Verse 32. He is deaf and he is a speech impediment and he can't even bring himself to Jesus, can he?

No, verse 32. The they of verse 32 bring him and they beg Jesus to lay his hand on him. Here he is in the most awful of plights and he can't even beg for himself.

[17:36] He's utterly helpless. helpless. And he's a picture of each of us without Christ.

Utterly helpless, wallowing in the mire of our own sin, ears spiritually shut and eyes blinded to the beauty of Christ.

Christ. And only by Jesus coming close to the deaf hear and the mute speak and understand who he is.

Remarkable, those words from Gentiles, weren't they? Those who were not God's people in a book where up to now people just haven't seemed to grasp who Jesus is.

and yet they are almost singing the Old Testament to us. These words in Isaiah, listen how similar they are.

[18 : 40] Isaiah 35 verses 4 to 6. Behold, your God will come with vengeance with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

Friends, if you were a Christian this evening, you are not a Christian because God chose you. Not because you chose God or because he saw something good in you that he thought you deserved saving.

No, you were a Christian because Jesus came and he is in the business of unblocking deaf ears.

Now, on to our final point this evening before we turn to some application.

Number three, hungry, now satisfied. verses 1 to 10 of chapter 8. Now, if we had been doing a series in Mark's gospel, we would be coming to a rather familiar looking scene with the feeding of the 4,000.

[20 : 00] For back in chapter 6, we had the feeding of the 5,000. In fact, most of the details are largely same as the miraculous feeding in chapter 6.

Now, if you had one hand in Mark chapter 6, verse 30, 44 there, and the other hand in 8, verse 1 to 10, and if you glance down with me, you'll see the similarities.

Notice, we're in a desolate place in 6, 32 and 8, verse 4. We've got a focus on the 12 in both. We've got loaves and fish, 6, 38, and 8, 5, and 7.

We've got a crowd being directed to sit down, 6, 40, and 8, verse 6. We've got a blessing and a prayer for food, 6, 41, and 8, 7.

And at the end of it, at the end of both of them, all who ate were satisfied in verse 6, 42, and 8, verse 8. So the question we have to ask is what is actually different about the event?

[21 : 10] You know, why is Mark included in his gospel here? Well, liberal scholars will want to tell you that there's an error. You know, clearly this is just the same story twice and someone's just miscalculated the numbers in one of them.

Well, here's what I think they are failing to notice. the significance of this feeding is that it's done in Gentile land.

For back in chapter 6, Jesus' compassion for the crowd is very much dressed up in Israel language. Here's the reason for why he was compassionate to them back in chapter 6, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

It's very Israel language. doesn't it? But it's not so here because here we are in Gentile land. The compassion is because they have been with him for three days now and have had nothing to eat.

Now, the feeding of the 5,000 was supposed to be a big reminder of the Exodus to those who witnessed it and the promise of a greater Exodus. It was a great reminder of his rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt and delivering and delivering them out of that.

[22 : 35] And now, here we have a big Exodus reminder done for the Gentiles and a great Exodus reminder done for the 12 among Gentiles.

So, so why is Mark included this in his gospel then? What is Jesus doing here? Well, here is Jesus saying that the big Exodus rescue for his people, he is bringing it for the Gentiles too.

remarkable, isn't it? The children were to be satisfied first, God's children, and then the dogs, and now we see just how generous Jesus is going to be.

Not just that the Gentiles get crumbs, is it? But loaves and full satisfaction. The Gentiles have the same sin problem as the Jews, and Jesus overflowing mercy and grace is the same for the outsiders too.

Now, as we finish, I want to help us think about the so what. You know, what difference does this make to us as disciples of the Lord Jesus?

[24 : 01] Well, firstly, an evangelistic challenge. I think one of the things that Mark is surely telling us is that there is no one in this world that doesn't need this gospel.

You know, think of the most self-dependent, successful, high-flying person you know. And as you picture them, do you know that they are as helpless as the deaf and mute man?

Think of the happiest non-Christian you know, who always seems positive and doing well. Well, they are actually starving and need satisfied.

It's not often how it looks, is it? But it's true. there is no one you know who does not need this gospel. Now, perhaps you aren't a Christian here this evening.

Perhaps you're coming along to find out more about this Jesus. Well, here's what Jesus wants you to see this evening. You are unclean.

[25 : 24] We are all desperately unclean. We are not deserving of his grace. We are beggars scrounging around for crumbs.

But wonderfully, if we see our state, if we come to him in humility, he gives us loaves and fish. He gives us a feast. He gives us himself. So, come to the one who satisfies. And secondly, these passages should lead us to gratitude and not entitlement.

Gratitude and not entitlement. I wonder if you noticed how startling the disciples' response was to Jesus wanting to feed the crowds.

You know, it's literally as if they weren't even there back in chapter 6. It's amazing. Look at verse 4 again. And his disciples answered him, how can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?

[26 : 39] It's incredible, isn't it? You know, have they completely forgotten what happened in the feeding of the 5,000? Or have they just got the worst memories in the world?

Well, here's why I think that they don't have a clue here. I think that they just could not possibly conceive of Jesus doing this Exodus-type miracle amongst the Gentiles.

Remember, these are the people, the last group of people that they'd ever expect Jesus to be for. These people are dogs.

These people are under the table strangers to the covenant of promise. These people are sinners who are uncleaned, defiled on the inside.

But Jesus is saying, I am here for them too. And if you're here this evening and you're not a Jew but are a follower of Jesus, then he is here for you too.

[27 : 52] Now, it's probably not something that we find hard to get our head around, is it? I think probably for us today, we get that, don't we?

Of course, Jesus is for everyone. Tickbox, we've got that. But friends, we need to see that as the privilege that it is.

For we are not entitled to Jesus' grace here. We are outsiders. others. And remarkably, Jesus has welcomed us in.

I think we need to hear this because it's so different from the culture that we live in, isn't it? it. We live in an entitlement culture. Every day, there's just hundreds of things that I just expect to happen or have provided for me.

electricity, fuel in the car, Wi-Fi, food on the table, the list goes on. And when I don't get one of those things, that's when the blood boils.

[29 : 04] That's when the pride and the envy and the slander, they rush straight from my heart and onto my lips. And why? Because I see these things as deserved rather than privilege.

And friends, it's so easy for this to creep into how we feel about being God's children. I think that's especially true of us who have been Christians for a while.

It's very easy to start going through the motions in the Christian life. Every Sunday at Trinity, we say the Lord's Prayer together in the morning.

As we join together in voice and pray to our Father, our Father, the creator and sustainer of everything, is the one who draws near and calls us his own.

The Holy One who hates sin, who does not repay us according to our iniquities, but shows us compassion as a father does to his children.

[30 : 13] children. And yet, it's so easy for those words to slip off our tongues and barely to give it a second thought. Friends, Mark wants us to see that what we have in the Lord Jesus is all privilege, not entitlement.

to close, I want to give you this story, these words from a little excerpt in the appendix of John Stott's book, Problems of Christian Leadership.

Here's a story one of Stott's assistants told of him. Every morning at 11am sharp, I would bring him a cup of coffee.

I would find him hunched over some letter or manuscript at his desk, consumed of the work before him, putting his unparalleled powers of concentration to whatever task was at hand.

Not wanting to disturb him, I would quietly set the cup and saucer adjacent to his right hand. And oftentimes he would mumble a barely audible word of thanks, I'm not worthy.

[31 : 26] Initially I thought this comment was amusing, but after a few months I began to find it slightly bothersome. How could someone pronounce himself unworthy of an acidic cup of instant coffee?

One morning I was feeling a little cheeky and when Uncle John mumbled his usual expression, I'm not worthy, I quipped back, oh sure you are. Uncle John stopped and I saw the powerful magnetic look of his concentration ease from the papers before him.

He slowly raised his gaze and with a look of immense seriousness, yet boyish playfulness, he responded, you haven't got your theology of grace right. I laughed, grinned awkwardly and then said, it's only a cup of coffee, Uncle John.

as I turned round and headed back into the kitchen, I heard him mutter, it's just a thin end of the wedge. What was it that John understood?

He understood that he was a beggar like the women, that he was as desperate as the deaf and mute man, man, and that Jesus, only Jesus brought him complete satisfaction.

[32 : 45] May we always be marked by our gratitude and not entitlement. Amen. Amen. Amen.