

## **Bread for dogs**

**Mark 7:24-8:10**

**Covenant Waterfall, 13 September 2020**

Read

Pray

### **Introduction**

Another week in South Africa, and unfortunately our racial divisions are exposed yet again. The moment we think things may be getting better, something happens, and the media gets holds of it, and we see that these issues are still with us. Seems never ending.

Why? Racism – part of our sinful nature. Base human instinct to stick to your tribe and think your tribe is better than the other tribe. Story of human history for thousands of years.

Even a problem during Jesus' time. The Jews, as God's chosen people, had for a long time felt superior to the Gentile nations around them. Because they knew God had elected them, they become arrogant in their election, instead of being humbled by it, and looked down upon the Gentiles as inferior to them. By the time of Christ, there were all sorts of extra-biblical oral laws that the Jewish religious leaders put in place to keep themselves from being defiled by the dirty Gentiles. Couldn't enter their houses, couldn't eat with them, or socialise with them. Seen as dirty dogs.

It's important to remember that right from the beginning, though God had chosen Israel as his people, his ultimate plan was to create a people of his own from every nation, tribe and tongue. God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 was that it would be through him that all the nations of the world would be blessed. Many of the OT prophecies of the Messiah also showed that God would one day include the Gentiles in his plan of redemption. E.g. Isaiah 42:1, "He will bring justice to the nations" – basically God's salvation would not just be restricted to Israel, but through the coming of the Messiah, salvation would extend to the nations too.

Jesus arrives – he is this promised Messiah, starts fulfilling all those OT expectations of him. As we've been seeing on our journey through Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been ministering the gospel mainly to Israel – his chief calling. But if you remember from two weeks' ago, when we looked at the passage immediately before this one, chapter 7:1-23, we see there in verse 19, that Jesus does something pretty radical – declares all foods clean. Jews had been forbidden to eat certain foods – OT Law – keep them distinct from the Gentiles.

Now, there is a shift in redemptive history with the coming of Christ. Gospel is now also going to the Gentiles, not only the Jews. So what we see Jesus do in this passage of Scripture is start to fulfil those OT expectations that the Messiah would bring salvation to all the nations of the world.

- Crumbs for dogs, 7: 24-30
- Healing for dogs, 7: 31-37
- Bread for dogs, 8:1-10

#### **A. Crumbs for dogs, 7: 24-30**

**(24-26) 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. <sup>25</sup> But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.**

In verse 24 we see that Jesus leaves the Galilee, Jewish part of the world, and travels north-west, to the region of Tyre and Sidon (modern-day Lebanon). Highlighted to us – Jesus is entering a Gentile area! Even though he is out of his homeland, people still recognise him, as his fame has spread far and wide. Tries to hide and keep undercover, yet the text tells us, “he could not be hidden.”

In the next verse we see that a woman who has heard about Jesus, approaches him and falls down at his feet, telling him that her daughter has an unclean spirit and asks that he would cast it out.

Let's pause here – Mark has told us three important things about this person who has approached Jesus. Firstly – she is a Gentile, secondly, she's a woman, thirdly, her daughter has an unclean spirit. Why is this information significant? According to Jewish oral law, it is taboo for Jesus to be associated with her. She's an unclean Gentile – he'll be defiled by her interaction with him, she's a woman – not proper for a rabbi to minister to a woman, daughter has an unclean spirit – taboo / defiling on three accounts!

So how does Jesus respond to her? Verse 27:

**<sup>27</sup> 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's going on here? Sounds like quite a shocking response from Jesus, almost out of character! Some have accused Jesus here of being deliberately offensive, even racist and sexist!

So what is Jesus saying here?! If we look at Matthew's version of this account, in Matthew 15, he adds an important statement in Jesus' reply which sheds some light for us here. In verse 24, in Jesus' reply to the Syro-Phoenician woman, he says, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."** We've seen, especially as we've been going through Mark's Gospel, that Jesus has ministered almost exclusively to Jews. Only exception so far – man with the legion of demons in the Gadarenes. Jesus' ministry – on the cusp of a great change in redemptive history – God's dealings with man. His primary calling – to the Jews, they need to receive the gospel first – they are the children who need to be fed *first*. Other nations, the Gentiles – not excluded, but their time has not quite come, they come second in the providence of God. They are what Jesus calls, "the dogs".

It is true that the Jews used the term "dogs" in a derogatory way to describe Gentiles – dogs seen as scavengers, unclean. Yet the way Jesus uses the term is not meant in the same derogatory way. For sure his intention is to provoke the woman, but this statement about giving bread to dogs has to be seen in the broader context, which we'll get to in the third point of this sermon.

Verses 28-30 continue...

**<sup>28</sup> But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” <sup>29</sup> And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” <sup>30</sup> And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.**

Despite Jesus' response to her that her turn as a Gentile for him to minister to her had not quite yet come, she persists, saying that even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. Jesus is really impressed at her response, and so he heals her daughter. How come?

She clearly has faith in him, as she believes he'll do it – verse 28 – even the dogs get to eat the crumbs. She in a vague manner understands the nature of God's plan – to reach first the Jew, and then the Gentile with the gospel – that the bread will eventually overflow to the “dogs”. This is why Paul, in Romans 1:16, declares, **“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.”**

Right here we begin to see the fulfilment of God's great plan of redemption – the inclusion of the Gentiles to form a new Israel, a church, comprising of people from every nation, tribe and tongue. And this is a part of Jesus' calling as God's promised Messiah, as prophesied in Isaiah 42:1 **“to bring forth justice to the nations** (goyim = Gentiles).” Right here, Jesus does just that – sets free a little Gentile girl from demonic oppression.

#### **B. Healing for dogs, 7: 31-37**

**<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup> And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha”, that is, “Be opened.” <sup>35</sup> And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup> And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup> And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”**

Jesus is still in Gentile territory, as we read in verse 31, he's in the Decapolis. He comes across a Gentile man (a Gentile dog as the Jews would have called him) who is deaf and mute, and the crowd begs Jesus to heal him.

We see then that he puts his fingers in the man's ears and spits and touches the man's tongue, looks up to heaven, takes a great sigh and commanding him to be healed in Aramaic.

In verse 34, Jesus' great sigh at this man's condition, shows us how dismayed he is at witnessing before him the effects of the fall. Adam's curse, under which the whole world is now under, is manifested here vividly – a son of Adam, in sin, ravaged by disease and brokenness. Now Jesus, the second Adam, the seed of Eve, God's promised Messiah has come to crush the head the serpent and break the curse. So with a word of his authority, as the Son of God, he heals the man, and he begins to speak plainly.

Then verse 37 tells us that the crowds **“were astonished beyond measure”** and that **“he even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”** This is actually a quote from Isaiah 35:5. Whole chapter is a glorious prophecy about God making the desert blossom, his glory shining on Israel, but also on the Gentile nations, specifically mentioning Lebanon (v.1). That he will return to his people, reversing the ravages of the curse – in particular – bringing salvation to his people – opening blind eyes and deaf ears, causing the lame to walk, making the mute tongue sing for joy.

Here we see Jesus, God's promised Messiah, do just that – shine his glory on this Gentile man, this “dog” - reversing the curse by healing him – opening up his ears to hear and his tongue to sing for joy!

### **C. Bread for dogs, 8:1-10**

Now in chapter 8, we see that Jesus is still in Gentile territory. He's with a great crowd – assume most of them are Gentiles. They have been with him for three days, as we see in verse 2, and had nothing to eat. Jesus has “compassion” on the crowd and wants to feed them. This all sound familiar at all? Jesus has been in a similar situation in Mark 6:30-44, where he miraculously fed the 5000 with five loaves and two fish.

Now we see from verse 5 that he and his disciples have seven loaves and a few fish with which to feed 4000 people. Then in verse 6, Jesus “gives thanks” for the bread and broke it and gave it out to his disciples to distribute to the crowd. Verse 8 says that everyone ate and was satisfied, and there were seven baskets of food over.

Why does Mark include this miracle, which is almost identical to the miracle we’ve heard before? Well this is very significant. In the first feeding miracle, Jesus revealed himself as the Good Shepherd who feeds his sheep – Israel - with bread of life.

Now, Jesus is feeding other sheep – Gentiles with his bread of life, showing that he’s also their Good Shepherd – including them in God’s plan of redemption. That bread that was initially given to the children, is now falling off the table in abundance for the Gentile “dogs” to feed on. Jesus is busy breaking down that dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, as Ephesians 2:14 says, and including the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation.

## **Conclusion**

It’s easy to get despondent at this racial division in our land that never seems to end. Yet this is all a sign of the reality of deep-seated sin in all of us. The nature of this sin is that it separates us from each other, divides us, and also separates us from God. The good news is that Jesus went to the cross for our sins. He endured the punishment for sins that we deserved in our place, and trusting in him, he forgives us. As a result, not only does he reconcile us to God, but as Ephesians 2:14 tells us, he reconciles us to each other, **“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”** In Christ, Jew, Gentile, black, white, are all reconciled as brothers and sisters in his church, the new Israel. Yes – imperfect in this age – still struggle with our sins now, but will be completely perfect in glory – Rev 5:9-10 describes

**for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
<sup>10</sup>and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”**

Trust in Christ, receive him our promised Messiah who died for your sins, reconciling you to God and to his glorious Bride – his chosen people made up from every tribe and tongue and nation. Eat of the living bread of Christ that he offers now to all, and receive his true life!

Amen