

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 7: 24-30

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Mark chapter 7, verses 24-30.

The Gospel of Mark, chapters 4 through 9, records Jesus' three times travelling ministry with His disciples, each time starting from Capernaum and returning there afterward. These three preaching trips begin in chapter 4, by the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus speaks the parable of the sower. They conclude in chapter 9, returning to Capernaum, where Jesus instructs the disciples about the judgment of the end time. These three preaching trips can be seen as three stages of training for the twelve disciples, corresponding to the three annual Jewish festivals.

The first stage, from Mark 4:1 to 5:43, corresponds to the Passover festival. This marks the beginning of discipleship training, where the disciples receive basic instruction and gain a fundamental understanding of Jesus' earthly ministry. The content of Jesus' ministry includes preaching the word, casting out demons, and healing the sick. Moving on to the second stage, from Mark 6:30 to 8:12, corresponds to the Pentecost festival. After receiving basic training, the disciples begin to apply what they have learned. Jesus first feeds the 5000 among the Jews with five loaves and two fish, then extends His ministry to the Gentiles, performing exorcisms and healings, culminating in the feeding of the 4000 with seven loaves and a few small fish, all of whom are Gentiles. The third stage spans from Mark 8:13 to 9:32, corresponding to the Feast of Tabernacles. Discipleship training concludes at this point. Having truly understood who Jesus is, the disciples are now called to accompany Jesus on the road to the cross.

We are currently in Jesus' second preaching trip. This segment begins with the miracle of feeding the 5000 with five loaves and two fish, which took place in the wilderness near Bethsaida and was directed towards the Jewish audience. Afterward, Jesus takes His disciples to Galilee, where He preaches and heals. During this time, scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem deliberately come to see Jesus,

seeking to find fault with Him. However, Jesus' primary focus during this period is the training of the twelve disciples. To avoid direct confrontation with those from Jerusalem, Jesus leads His disciples to Gentile territories, fulfilling the spiritual significance of Pentecost.

In Leviticus 23:16-17, we see that during Pentecost, the Israelites were required to offer a sacrifice: "You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the first fruits to the Lord." Here we observe the offering of a new grain offering during Pentecost. How were grain offerings presented previously? Moses made it clear to the Israelites that all grain offerings were to be unleavened. This is because, symbolically, grain offerings represent the pure and sinless humanity of Jesus Christ, while leaven symbolizes sin. Therefore, all grain offerings were to be unleavened. What's unique is that during Pentecost, a new grain offering is required, and this offering must include leaven and be baked into two wave loaves to be presented to God. Hence, this new grain offering no longer symbolizes Christ but represents the Church.

These two loaves symbolize the Jews and the Gentiles. In historical fulfillment, we see that on the Pentecost after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out, filling the apostles, who began preaching the gospel and establishing the Church. Initially, the Church was in Jerusalem, predominantly Jewish. However, in the church at Antioch, there were many Gentiles. This corresponds precisely to the symbolism of the two leavened loaves, which would become a historical reality in the near future. In the year leading up to this, during Jesus' second preaching trip, He laid the groundwork, or more accurately, sowed the seeds of the gospel. Firstly, Jesus is the bread of life; He broke Himself open in the wilderness near Bethsaida, feeding 5000 Jewish men. He first reached out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, satisfying the needs of the Jewish people. However, due to their rejection, the gospel would turn towards the Gentiles. With this background in mind, let's read Mark 7:24.

Verse 24: "Then He arose and went into the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden".

Jesus arose from there, where "there" refers to the city of Gennesaret in Galilee. Jesus then journeyed northwest, passing through the region of Phoenicia, to the area of Tyre and Sidon, which is present-day Lebanon. Let's first examine the historical relationship between Tyre, Sidon, and the Israelites. Initially, when Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan, they began to divide the land. This region was originally allotted to the tribe of Asher as their inheritance. Unfortunately, the tribe of Asher was unable to conquer this territory, resulting in it becoming inhabited by the Phoenicians. It wasn't until the time of King Solomon, during the zenith of Israel's power, that they briefly occupied this area. During the construction of Solomon's temple, it is recorded in 1 Kings 9:11 that "King Solomon gave the king of Tyre twenty cities in the land of Galilee". These cities likely included the twenty cities in the northwest region of Galilee, which also encompassed the vast area of Tyre and Sidon, all of which were given to King Hiram.

And when the wicked King Ahab ruled over the northern kingdom of Israel, as recorded in 1 Kings 16:31-33, he was perhaps one of the worst kings of Israel, for he married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. Jezebel was a Phoenician, and she was the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon. King Ahab followed Jezebel in worshipping Baal and even built temples and altars for Baal, leading the Israelites into the depths of idolatry. Jezebel's actions provoked the anger of the Lord God, and as a result, the region of Tyre and Sidon had a very dark history, becoming a disgrace to the Israelites. This was the territory that the tribe of Asher had failed to conquer, and it was from this region that Jezebel emerged, leading the Israelites into sin.

However, these scenes of corruption and decay were completely reversed in the life of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to this region with great humility, choosing not to draw attention to himself but quietly entering a house. Though the glory of His divinity was veiled, the beauty of His humanity and the radiance He emitted could not be hidden. And around Him, constantly, were the twelve disciples, a visible testament to His mission.

Verse 25: "For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet."

Jesus, accompanied by His disciples, passed through the region of Tyre and Sidon and likely performed many deeds there. Mark records one such incident involving a woman whose daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit. Upon hearing that Jesus could cast out demons, she came and fell at His feet. She must have been aware of the Jewish perception of Tyre and Sidon as sinful places, yet seeing Jesus there, she seized the opportunity to plead for her daughter's deliverance. Mark portrays this mother as extremely humble, as she came before Jesus and prostrated herself at His feet. In parallel passages in Matthew's Gospel, specifically Matthew 15:22-24, we see the courageous side of this mother. It reads, "And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.' But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.'"

The woman had heard about Jesus and persistently followed Him, crying out loudly, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." Typically, women are more reserved, but for the sake of her daughter, she abandoned all restraint, shouting like a madwoman. Despite this, Jesus remained silent, prompting the disciples to urge Him to send her away. Jesus' response was enlightening: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." By calling Jesus "Son of David," she implied that He was exclusively for the Israelites; a gentile woman had no right to request His help. The mother's love for her daughter was deeply moving, yet her addressing of Jesus was mistaken. Just as in prayer before God, while the heart may be right, the stance from which one prays is also crucial.

Verse 26: "The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter."

Mark specifically informs us that this mother was a Greek, meaning she was a Gentile, not only a Gentile but also a Syro-Phoenician. Jezebel, who was from Phoenicia, led the Israelites into idolatry. So, what position did this Gentile woman have to ask Jesus to cast out the demon from her daughter?

Verse 27: "And He said to her, 'Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.'"

Jesus, recognizing the bravery and humility of this Gentile woman as she pleaded for her daughter, responded with a seemingly sharp statement: "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." At first glance, this remark may appear discriminatory and insulting. However, if you look beyond the surface, you'll see the revelation and grace Jesus offered. When Jesus spoke of letting the children (referring to the Israelites) be filled first and not throwing the children's bread (referring to Himself) to the little dogs (referring to Gentiles), He was revealing that He is the bread of life meant for God's children. Therefore, it wouldn't be right to offer it to the "dogs," representing Gentiles. In the Old Testament, Israelites often viewed Gentiles as dogs or even pigs because they considered themselves God's chosen people. While Jesus came to fulfill salvation for all, the execution of salvation follows an order: first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Verse 28: "And she answered and said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs.'"

The gentile woman didn't react with indignation or embarrassment when Jesus compared her to a dog. Instead, she humbly accepted her position and pleaded for Jesus' grace, saying, "Yes, Lord." Here, she first acknowledges Jesus as Lord and then admits her status as a dog, recognizing that she is unworthy of grace. She seems to be telling Jesus, "Yes, Lord, you're right." She acknowledges that the master and the children eat at the table, while dogs are under the table, but even

dogs can eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table. This gentile woman's response is insightful. First, she seizes upon Jesus' words. Since Jesus compared her to a dog, she understands that even dogs have rights, and dogs under the table can eat crumbs. So, she approaches Jesus from the position of a dog. Second, she acknowledges Jesus' power. She doesn't ask for what's on the table but only for the crumbs on the ground, believing that even these small fragments of grace are enough to heal her daughter. Third, she reminds Jesus of their location in a Gentile area, under the table. While Jews are indeed children of God and worthy of sitting at the table, due to their rejection, it's as if the mischievous children have crumbled the bread and left the crumbs under the table, where dogs have the right to eat them.

Verse 29: "Then He said to her, 'For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.'"

Indeed, it was because of this statement, the one made by the Gentile woman, acknowledging that even dogs have the right to eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. This statement demonstrated the woman's faith. She knew that Jesus was full of mercy and grace, and she also knew her own unworthiness, likening herself to a dog. Therefore, she only sought the crumbs of grace from Jesus, knowing that would be enough to save her daughter. Faith is the conduit through which people draw grace from the Lord, and because of her faith, Jesus said to the woman, "Go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

Verse 30: "And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed."

Through the faith of this Canaanite woman, her daughter was saved, and the demon was cast out. Here we see a stark contrast: the scribes and Pharisees sought to find fault with Jesus and accuse Him, preventing Jesus from fulfilling His ministry among the Jews and leading Him to the Gentile regions. Yet this Gentile woman,

with unwavering faith, simply by a word from Jesus, obtained salvation for her daughter, and the demon was cast out. This incident occurred in Tyre and Sidon, with the woman being a Phoenician. In the time of Joshua, the land that the tribe of Asher failed to possess was now touched by the salvation of Jesus. In the era of King Ahab, the Phoenician woman Jezebel brought idols into Israel, corrupting the people. Now Jesus came to this idolatrous land and cast out the demon afflicting the daughter of a Phoenician woman.

God's salvation, which was unavailable to certain lands and people in the Old Testament era, is now made available to these lands and their people through the coming of Jesus. Looking forward 20 years, about 300 kilometers away from Tyre and Sidon, there was a city called Antioch. It was in this city that the first Gentile church, the Antioch church, was established. The entire gospel work to the Gentiles began from Antioch and was furthered through Paul's three missionary trips, spreading the gospel to the known inhabited of earth at that time. During Jesus' second travelling preaching trip, He came to the region of Tyre and Sidon, where He sowed the seeds of life. This was not considered good soil by the Israelites, but God made all things work together, making it a significant base for advancing the kingdom of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, we were all originally Gentiles. If we are willing to humbly approach the Lord like the Gentile woman, acknowledging that we are not worthy to sit at the table and eat the bread, but willing to accept the crumbs under the table, then God's grace will abundantly come upon us.

Let us pray together: Lord, grant us the faith of the Canaanite woman, who on the one hand recognized her unworthiness, and on the other hand understood that You are full of mercy and grace. We dare not ask for much, but only desire the crumbs of grace. Just as You once fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish, and yet the fragments filled twelve baskets. Help us to recognize that the fragments of grace are abundant, capable of leading us to eternity; fragments of grace are meant to be experienced, enjoyed, and internalized; and as we experience these fragments of grace, they become richer and more substantial. May every time we read Your Word, every time we come before Your presence, You shower us with

these fragments of grace, allowing them to become a part of us; may my life also bear witness to the beauty of these fragments of grace. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.