

# “Jesus and the Underdog”

Mark 7:24-30

February 11, 2018

Sermon Series: “Mark’s Gospel: The Crown and The Cross”

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## THE BIG IDEA

Jesus uses this interaction with the Gentile woman as a teaching opportunity. He had just interacted with Pharisees who challenged him about the Jewish ritual purity laws – the distinction between “clean” and “unclean.” Jesus told them that it is not the external (unclean hands or unclean food) which makes us unclean, but rather what is in our hearts that makes us unclean. Sinfulness is not a result of eating with dirty hands, but rather a result of living with a dirty heart. When Jesus retreated into the Gentile territory, hoping not to be recognized, a Gentile woman found him and begged him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. The Gentiles were seen as “unclean” by the Jews and often referred to as “dogs.” Jesus saw the condition of this woman’s heart – her humility, her belief in him, her persistence in faith – and granted her request. Jesus is a savior for the Jews and the “underdogs” – a savior for us all.

## GETTING STARTED

1. Who is your favorite famous “underdog?” Is it a sports team or athlete? A book or movie character? A Bible character? Why do you root for this particular underdog? What qualities does he/she possess?
2. Researchers have proven the phenomenon of “rooting for the underdog.” They have also studied why people tend to root for the underdog, and it has to do with the heart of the person. Jesus also loved the underdogs. Though the Pharisees and others were judging them according to their outsides, Jesus saw the beauty of their hearts. Can you think of some of the underdogs Jesus lifted up during his ministry? What made them underdogs and what did Jesus see in them?

## LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read **Mark 7:1-23** then read **Mark 7:24-30**.

3. When you read the story of the Syrophenician woman in the context of verses 1-23, how do you get more out of the story? What is Jesus trying to teach the disciples? What is he trying to teach the woman?
4. Why do you think Jesus praised the woman for her response to him?
5. What was Jesus saying when using the metaphor of children’s bread not being given to the dogs? What was he referring to? How might you have responded if Jesus had said this to you?
6. After Jesus taught the disciples (using the Pharisees as an example) that it is the condition of their HEARTS that matters, not whether they’re eating food a certain way,

he encounters an “unclean” Gentile woman whose heart was clean. What are some of the characteristics of the kind of heart Jesus praises?

## **LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”**

7. As we go into the season of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter Sunday, it is an ideal time to ask Jesus to help you examine your heart. There are several ways to engage in this spiritual practice.
  - A. The spiritual practice of abstinence. Is there some habit like watching TV or spending time on social media that might be a “time waster” you could refrain from during Lent? Is there something you enjoy, like a daily latte, that you could sacrifice during Lent? Is there a bad habit you’d like to work on, like running late all the time? Or perhaps you could turn off your electronics for a period of time every day to abstain from the busyness that comes from always being plugged in? Find something that is meaningful for you to abstain from during Lent.
  - B. The spiritual practice of the “Examen.” Here is a simplified process to take an inventory of your motives on a daily basis:
    - a. Relish. Ask God to reveal to you all the gifts and graces He has given to you over the course of the day – from the really big ones (your health, security, love) to the really small ones (a good night’s sleep, a phone call from an old friend, a compliment you received). For each gift that comes to mind, spend a moment giving thanks and praise to God.
    - b. Request. Ask the Spirit to help you see yourself from the perspective of God’s merciful love and lead you through the process of looking at yourself.
    - c. Review. Review your day hour by hour. In your imagination, relive each significant moment of your day. Linger at the important moments, and pass quickly through the less relevant ones.
    - d. Repent. As you review your day, continue thanking God for all the gifts that you find in it. Pause at the difficult moments of the day – perhaps when you had a bad thought, said something you shouldn’t have, or did something inappropriate. Also pay attention to any missed opportunities, such as when you could have acted in a more Christian manner but didn’t, or moments in which you were not fully the person you’re called to be. Stop and ask forgiveness from God. When doing so, try to sense his healing mercy washing over you, making you clean and whole.
    - e. Resolve. With what you have learned during this prayer time about yourself and your life, ask God to show you concretely how he wants you to respond or what he wants you to do tomorrow. Ask God to show you what kind of person he is calling you to be tomorrow. Resolve to be that person, asking God for his help, and to give you courage and strength.
  - C. Random acts of Kindness. Could you go through each day during Lent and find 1-3 opportunities to bestow acts of kindness on people? Things like holding the door open for someone, picking up trash off the street, running an errand for a friend, calling someone you haven’t talked to in a while, giving a compliment to someone, sending a card to a long distance friend. Find ways each day to focus on how you can help bring God’s love to others’ lives.

**SHARING & PRAYER REQUESTS**