

- Let's start with a little get-your-imagination-going exercise. Close your eyes and take a deep breath, clear your mind, and picture Jesus. Make it a detailed picture. Put it front and center in your mind. Alright, do you have an image in your head? Great. You can open your eyes.
- Did he have a full beard?
- Was he wearing a white robe?
- Did he have a calm, serene look on his face?
- Was he surrounded by children and/or cute farm animals (i.e. lambs, puppies, or kittens)?
- Were his arms outstretched or in some kind of a welcoming posture?
- Was he performing a miracle or doing some kind of charitable activity?
- My guess is that many of you had at least two if not three of these in your mind.
- I wonder if that is because even though we all have unique experiences in our upbringing, we have been more influenced than we admit by the images presented to us throughout our lives.
- For many of us, the picture of Jesus is the one from the cover of our children's bible, that painting that hung in our grandma's house, or some stained glass in the church we grew up in.
- And much of the time, Jesus always looks the same: calm, happy, and inviting.
- Keep that image in mind as we read this account.
- We are in Mark 7 and we are looking at verses 24-30. It is a small story, and feels almost like a sidebar, a side story, that is a bit confusing and doesn't seem to paint Jesus in a good light.

7:24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." 28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

- Seems a little insensitive doesn't it? Jesus isn't exactly flattering or helpful to this woman, especially initially.
- This is one of those accounts of Jesus that is also recorded in another of the 4 gospel writings. Maybe Matthew's recollections will help flesh this out a bit. Maybe Mark left some stuff out.

Matthew 15:21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." 23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." 25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." 27 "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

- Nope. If anything, Jesus comes off even more insensitive.
- Why would Mark include this? Remember, this is an account written by Mark that all likelihood records Peter's reflections on events from Jesus' life.

- Before we look into this, let me ask you this – did you even feel like this woman? You were asking Jesus for something and he seemed to be ignoring you? You were begging for something that was not happening? You wondered if he even heard you?
- What do you do with that? What happens when Jesus appears to be paying more attention to others than to you? What do you do when Jesus doesn't act or look like that picture you have in your mind?
- There is no formula to manipulating God to do what you want. Mark is not showing us how to get what we want. I do think he was focusing on something far more important.
- Something that if it shapes our interactions with Jesus, it will change how we see him and how we see his responses. Something that if we embrace can lead to whole new lease on life.
- This story is all about **FAITH**. What we are going to see is that **FAITH ACTIVATES GOD'S RESOURCES IN MY LIFE.**

7:24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it;

- We need to set the stage.
- Why was Jesus going here? He rarely ever left Israel.
- We have to go back to our last chapter. Do you remember that he went away with his disciples to have a retreat to debrief and discuss and relax with them? Do you remember what happened? The 5000. He fed them. No rest. If you read on, the disciples are on the lake and it was a little rough and Jesus comes by walking on the water. They have another crisis here. They land and ministry picks right up with crowds, people and having conflict with the religious leaders.
- They still haven't had their retreat. Jesus figures he has to get outside of Israel to get a proper getaway with the disciples.

yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet.

Mark 3:8 When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.

- Mark goes on to describe this woman.
 - While it might not be like near Galilee, even here people had heard of him.
- 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia.*
- Why did he feel the necessity to point this out? She was a Gentile. A non-Israelite. Matthew calls her a Canaanite. She is a pagan, a woman, with an unclean daughter.

She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

- It seems kind of obvious here, but it bears repeating.

I. Great faith begins by a focus on the greatness of Jesus.

- This woman had heard of this Jesus and probably heard enough that she believed he could do something.
- This was a plea to a rabbi that had a reputation. A reputation as one who with a spoken word or touch could heal, do miracles and change the world.
- Had she seen him? Heard him herself? Or just heard about him?
- You have often heard that there is little value to faith in and of itself. You could step off the balcony of your 10th floor hotel room with all the faith in the world that you would be fine, and that faith would last about the amount of time it took to fall 10 floors to your death.

- Faith does not focus on whether or not I am worthy of God's attention. It is focused on the greatness and character of Jesus. As long as we think that God "owes us" or that he somehow is obligated to be "fair" then we will struggle.
- I wonder how often our eyes are focused on the difficulties of our circumstances rather than the supremacy of our risen King.
- It's only when our attention is on the surpassing greatness of Jesus that we can develop the kind of deep **FAITH** that **ACTIVATES GOD'S RESOURCES IN MY LIFE.**
- She entered the house without an invitation. Jesus was trying to get privacy yet somehow she found about it and barged in.
- She fell down at his feet. A position of complete humility.
- She began to beg Jesus to heal her daughter. The verb beg here is a present progressive – which simply mean that she kept on begging. It did not stop.
- Nothing and no one can stop her. Do you know what she is acting like? A parent!

II. God responds to a desperate faith.

- The word for daughter is the word used for a little one. A young girl. It might even be translated "my darling little girl." Her little girl was afflicted and whatever she had tried it hadn't worked.
- She had done all she could. There was nothing else left.
- I wonder how often our faith is desperate?
- When I was 20 I figured that I could do all kinds of things for God that he could admire.
- When I was 30 I could do stuff for God and I wanted him to help me do it.
- When I was 40 I asked God to take the lead on the many things I couldn't do myself.
- Now, at 50, I find myself often coming to God and telling him I have nothing and it is ALL him and if he doesn't show up, I am cooked.
- There is a difference between desire and desperation.
- Desperation is simply the deep realization that I really have no control over a situation. I can't make things turn out a certain way. I can't change things. I cannot affect real change. I am not able to do this myself.
- In this place of deep desperation we cry out to God.
- God wants us in that place where we have nothing and KNOW we have nothing.
- *"Desperation is often the platform of breakthrough. Desperation fuels humility, and humility results in great faith."* (Deep Faith, Rob Reimer)
- **FAITH ACTIVATES GOD'S RESOURCES IN MY LIFE.**
- How does Jesus say and do to this desperate faith?
27 *"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."*
- It kind of sounds like an insult. This seems so out of character for Jesus. He's basically calling this woman a dog.
- I don't think this is it at all. Jesus, in his usual masterful way, is teaching a lesson to both the woman AND the disciples at the same time.
- **The Woman**
- But Jesus uses an unusual word for "dogs" here. It's not the word that Jews often used to describe Gentiles, a word his own disciples had probably heard and used over the course of their lives. He uses a diminutive form, a word that really means "puppies."

- It's as if Jesus is saying to her, "You know how families eat: First the children eat at the table, and afterward their pets eat too. The puppies must not eat food from the table before the children do."
- I am here for my disciples. It is not appropriate for him to interrupt his ministries to his disciples to give services to her.
- Notice that he actually doesn't say "no." He makes a statement of what he is doing. He even allows that the puppies get the crumbs, but not until after the children get theirs. He leaves the door open a crack. And she jumps all over it.

28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

- Her point was that the dogs get some food at the same time as the children and thus do not have to wait. He not be interrupted – she was only asking for a small crumb of his grace for her desperate need.
- Her reply demonstrated deep humility and great faith.
- Jesus was delighted to see that kind of deep faith and humility and responds.
- **The Disciples**
- But He is also teaching His disciples a lesson.
- They see the Gentiles as generally unworthy. Their own position as Israelites gave them a leg up on others.
- Some interpreters go for the broader meaning that Jesus is talking about going to the Israelites before the Gentiles and that he had not died yet so the ministry to the Gentiles had not started yet . . . while true, that kind of overplays Mark's point.
- As you read Matthew's account, he is silent for a bit to the point where the disciples want this woman to be dealt with and sent away. They were not compassionate but annoyed at this woman. I wonder if Mark focuses the woman's identity because this is exactly the kind of person that would expose the prejudice of the disciples.
- When Jesus initially refuses the woman, he does so to test her faith.
- When Jesus responds to the woman, he demonstrates to the disciples that he is most interested in the heart, not in nationality.
- **FAITH ACTIVATES GOD'S RESOURCES IN MY LIFE** because:

III. God's great desire is to grow your faith.

- Just as with this woman, he wants to know how you will respond when you don't get the answer you want. She could have turned away after his silence. She could have concluded that he couldn't or didn't want to help her based on his first reply. But she didn't.
- Her faith was such that she pushed. She pushed in hard.

29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

- She believed him. She took him at his word and went home. She had no evidence that he had really healed her daughter until she got home.
- What stands out in this entire account is her faith more than the healing.
- What do you do when you get God's silence?
- What do you do when God seems to ignore your pleas?
- Take a step back and see this in the context of the accounts that preceded it.
- The crowds loved Jesus because he fed them. Their hearts got excited about Jesus because he gave them what they wanted.
- After Jesus walked on the water, he rebuked the disciples because their hearts had been hardened (6:51).
- Then Jesus had a run-in with the Pharisees and rebuked them because their hearts were distant from God (7:6-7) and unclean.

- And now, in the unlikeliest place with the unlikeliest woman, Jesus finds a heart that is soft, that has faith in him.
- Have you ever wondered what gets God excited? It is our faith in him.
- In all of the four gospel accounts about Jesus, in the hundreds of parables, miracles, interactions, crowds, disciples, there are only TWO times that Jesus recognizes the great faith of those around him. Both are from non-Jews, the very ones who probably should have had the least faith. And one of them is this woman.
- You see, what impresses Jesus is a heart that recognizes its desperate need and comes to Jesus for help, not just once, but time and time again.
- It's a lesson Jesus' disciples needed to learn & it's a lesson we need to learn as well. True righteousness comes from learning to trust Jesus.
- **FAITH ACTIVATES GOD'S RESOURCES IN MY LIFE.**
- Why? You might hear someone say that you just "gotta have faith" (to quote George Michael). If I have more faith, God will do what I want. That misses the point entirely.
- Why is faith so important? The fundamental answer comes down to trust. Trust is the foundation of all relationships. You simply cannot build depth without trust – in ANY relationship, including with God.
- Faith and a deeper relationship with God hand in hand. The more you trust the power and goodness of God, the greater the strength in your relationship with God. The closer relationship with God, the greater your faith.
- Somewhere along the line, we were told that our faith is grounded in Jesus's response to our incessant requests. If God gives us whatever we want, when we want it, how we want it, then God must be real, our faith must be real. Otherwise, not so much.
- I wonder how many times Jesus wants to encourage our wobbling faith, knowing we are so close to a miracle, an answered prayer, so close to a divine intervention. I wonder how many times we turn and walk away just before the breakthrough would come?
- We must consistently look to Jesus instead of focusing on the circumstances that seem to deny his power.
- **FAITH ACTIVATES GOD'S RESOURCES IN MY LIFE.**
- The number one question on the heart of people for God is: Do you love me? God's answer is the incarnation of Jesus that led Him to a blood-stained cross, ultimately culminating in an empty tomb. God's answer is this: "I love you enough to send my Son to die for you. Now that I've proven my love, will you trust me?" This is the number one question on the heart of God or each one of us: Will YOU trust ME?
- Faith that believes He is fundamentally good, honorable, loving, righteous, and therefore worthy of all our trust – no matter what comes our way.