

*Where we start . . .*

If you could hang out with any living person, who would you want to be able to spend the day with? Why?

*What we read . . .*

With most people you hang around, there is typically a little "overflow." That is, something about that person, his or her life and life-style, spills over into your life. That's why there are some we really want to be around. And it was that way with Jesus. When people heard about Him, they wanted to be around Him. And that was clearly the case with a non-Jewish woman from the fringes of Palestine. Read Mark 7:24-30.

What strikes you most about the exchange the Gentile woman has with Jesus? Why?

Knowing what you do about Jesus from Mark's Gospel, how do you understand the intention behind His initial remark to her?

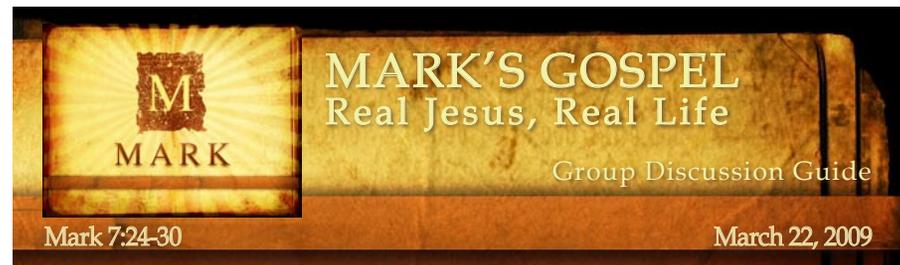
What is it that is so remarkable about her reply to Jesus (7:28) that results in His commending her reply?

Clearly, she doesn't have "all the pieces" to fully understand who Jesus is at this point in her relationship with Him. Minimally, what do you think she knew or thought about Him?

*Why this matters . . .*

How does this woman's approach to Jesus differ from the way you typically approach Jesus with a need?

What accounts for the difference?



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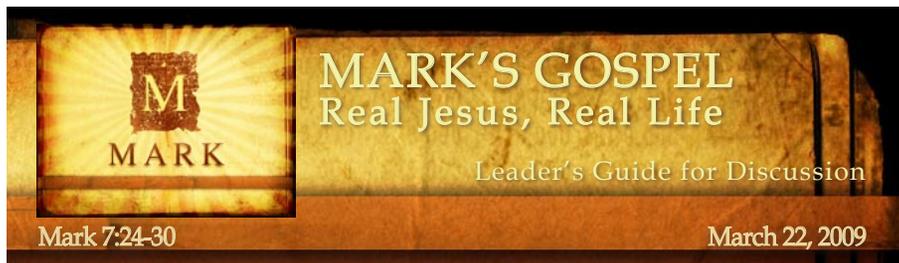
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*Diving in . . .*

Mark often just gives us the picture, without much commentary. And we are driven to look closely and think deeply about what we are being told in picture form. After highlighting the importance of what “comes out of the heart” (Mark 6:52 and 7:14-23), we are given an amazing picture of a woman out of whose heart comes a few simple words and an amazing picture of profound faith in Jesus. If only we could embrace her approach to Jesus!

*Discussing . . .*

The opening question will not only lead us into thinking about what leads us into the account we will read, but will also help us understand how and why the woman we meet responded to Jesus the way she did. Take some time, therefore, to discuss the reason we love to hang around people can experience some of the “overflow” of their lives.

When you turn to the account, this idea of longing to hang around someone because of the anticipated “overflow” is the way in to understand what the woman does. She is a Gentile; she lives beyond the boundaries of Palestine. She, most likely, would not have been familiar with the Jewish Scriptures nor the promises about a coming Messiah. But she did have something—she had heard about Jesus (7:25). According to Mark 3:7-8, Jesus’ reputation had spread not only throughout Palestine, but beyond the boundaries of the land—even extending to the areas of Tyre and Sidon where this woman was from. She had heard the reports; she knew something of His power and His apparent care for those in need. And that was enough for her. If she could only get there, perhaps something would “spill out” on to her in her great need. If she could close to Him, she might benefit from the “overflow.”

When we read of the exchange Jesus had with her, we might be tempted to think that Jesus is either rude or abrasive. Some read His words (about the “dogs”) as an insulting rebuff. But that is hardly the picture we have seen of Jesus so far. To conclude this would force us to read against all we have come see of Jesus in Mark so far.

Jesus has touched lepers; ritual uncleanness doesn’t seem to bother Him. He ministered to “mixed groups” (as seen in Mark 3:7-8); that everyone isn’t “from around these parts” does not appear to be a problem. He delivered a demonic who not only lived in the (unclean) tombs but might well have

been a Gentile (given the locale; 5:1-20); this woman may not have been His first Gentile “case” to address. And, perhaps what is most telling, is that Jesus has just recently finished teaching that the widely accepted categories of “clean” and “unclean” were not the way that life was to be understood (7:14-23). It would be wholly inconsistent to disavow such clean and unclean rules and to hold Himself aloof from an “unclean” Gentile.

Although the Jews would often refer to Gentiles as “dogs” and intend the remark to be disparaging, Jesus does not use the typical word for “dog.” He uses the diminutive form; think “little dog” or, perhaps even, “puppy.” The “dogs” were those who roamed in packs, in the street, scavenging for food in the gutters. But the “little dogs” were the pets; those loved by the children of the house.

So, Jesus is not calling the woman a dog as much as He is affirming that His presence in the Gentile region is not an indication that He has jettisoned His call to minister “to the children” (i.e., the Jewish people). Why tell the woman this? Because Jesus wants it to be clear that if He ministers to her it is not because He has left the Father’s plan and entered “her story.” He is making it clear that He is living out the Father’s story and if He were to do anything, it would have to be in keeping with that.

And, wonderfully, the woman agrees. The woman’s response to Jesus’ statement makes it clear that she is willing to enter Jesus’ “story.” In fact, she goes so far as to picture herself *in the parable Jesus told*; that is how comfortable she is with affirming the rightness of Jesus having His way.

When she first approaches Him, she lays out prostrate before Him. A huge demonstration of her submissiveness. When He speaks to her about what He is “all about,” she affirms His words with a firm “Yes!” Addressing Him, she calls Him “Lord.” (Whether she knew fully all that such a title might mean for Him or not, she clearly is using the title as more than a casual formality. She is, in fact, the only person that Mark records who addressed Jesus that way.)

And then, she replies in dependent, hopeful, humble, and submissive faith: “I’ll take the crumbs!” (Mark 7:28) That seems to be the gist of her last remark. She is so impressed with Jesus, she is so confident of His goodness and His gracious mercy, that she will be happy to be on the receiving end of whatever “overflow” might spill out into her life from Him. Thus, what drew her apparently is what also shapes the way she relates to Him.

What a picture for us! How dependent she clearly is on receiving from Him *whatever His grace and mercy deems fit to bestow*. And she is fully accepting of that. If we could but have such an enlarged view of Jesus so that we might approach Him that way! What might spill over on us, from the table of His grace, and how we might be changed if only we would look to Him that way.