

Begging to Get In

Key Verse: *“The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.”*
—Mark 7:26

Selected Scripture:
Mark 7:24-30

AT THE TIME OF JESUS’

First Advent, the Jews were God’s specially favored people, and he first went to them with the message of the Gospel. “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt. 15:24) Jesus realized that Israel as a nation was not prepared in heart to receive him. In particular the religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, were hardened in heart and sought to criticize, belittle, stumble, and even kill, the one who had come to redeem the nation. In the verses preceding this lesson, Jesus had reproved the scribes and Pharisees, saying they had rejected God’s commandments, and instead “hold the tradition of men.”—Mark 7:8

After Jesus finished his reproof of the Jewish religious leaders, perhaps having had enough of their ‘traditions,’ he left Galilee and went to the area of Tyre and Sidon—a heathen Gentile region. He entered the house of a Gentile woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit. (Mark 7:25) Verse 24 says that he had tried to enter the house secretly, but to no avail. Perhaps he felt it might be best if none of his Jewish brethren found out he had entered the house of a non-Jew. In any case, the woman, showing great humility and faith, “fell at his

feet: . . . and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.”—vs. 26

The following exchange took place between Jesus and the woman. “Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.” (vss. 27,28) Jesus had spoken in symbol. The ‘children’ were the Jews, the lost sheep he had especially come to recover. The ‘bread’ was the Truth, the message of the Gospel which he preached. The ‘dogs’ were the Gentiles, including the woman and her afflicted daughter, for that is what the Jews considered them. It may seem that Jesus’ reply to the woman was harsh, but he sought to illustrate the truth of the matter that the nation of Israel was still God’s chosen people, and still rightly claimed the scriptural promise, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”—Amos 3:2

An even more important reason for Jesus’ response was to test the woman’s faith. She immediately demonstrated her understanding of the symbols Jesus had used, as well as her great faith, by simply requesting that the ‘dogs’ be allowed to eat the crumbs of bread left by the ‘children.’ In her faith, she recognized that the Jews still were Jesus’ primary focus, but she saw also that they had left not just crumbs but much of the ‘bread of life’ that Jesus had fed them. The woman simply desired that she might have the opportunity to feed on what they had left, and receive the related blessing of her daughter’s healing.

Jesus replied to the woman, “For this saying [demonstrating your great faith] go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.” (Mark 7:29) Perhaps the sentiments in Jesus’ heart echoed the words he had spoken on another similar occasion, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”—Matt. 8:10 ■