

## Fed by Grace | Food in the Gospels

### *Give Her Nothing to Eat*

Mark 7.14ff

3.9.14

*After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. <sup>16</sup> "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." <sup>17</sup> When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. <sup>18</sup> And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup> because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) <sup>20</sup> And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. <sup>21</sup> "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, <sup>22</sup> deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. <sup>23</sup> "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." <sup>24</sup> Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. <sup>25</sup> But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. <sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>28</sup> But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." <sup>29</sup> And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." <sup>30</sup> And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left. <sup>31</sup> Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him. <sup>33</sup> Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; <sup>34</sup> and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" <sup>35</sup> And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. <sup>36</sup> And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. <sup>37</sup> They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."*

This current series is a look at the life of Jesus Christ in the FOUR GOSPELS using the theme of FOOD. And you really SEE in this whole section of Mark's gospel how prominent that theme IS.

This whole slice of Mark is really focused on food and especially on bread... In the previous chapter (6) Jesus Christ feeds the 5000 (gives them BREAD in the wilderness) and the disciples are supposed to see that He is the source of life ...He's better than Moses...Moses didn't really GIVE the Israelites bread...that bread in the Exodus came from God...and JC says, "I AM that bread...I am the source"...but we doubt whether the disciples get it.

Then the disciples see Jesus walk on water and freak out and it says, “they had not gained any insight from the incident of the bread” (Mar 6.52)...TURNS OUT THE DISCIPLES DID NOT GET IT... They didn’t draw the right conclusion about the Bread in the Wilderness!

Then this chapter starts with more discussion on how eating the wrong foods or eating the wrong way makes a person defiled or not holy...

And it raises the question among a people who were REALLY careful about what they ate and HOW, the question is: does your obedient eating make God like/embrace/bless you? Is that why God embraces some and excludes others? AND DOES God embrace and exclude? If so, on what basis DOES God exclude? How does a person get defiled or make himself incompatible and rejected by God?

What does our society think about those questions? What doe YOU think?

Is your understanding that God embraces us ALL because we’re ALL good people at heart...is it your opinion that, even people who are selling methamphetamine to children, their heart is still pure and we’re all precious and perfect souls...some of us just get a little lost sometimes...OR...Are you of the opinion that some people do their best (even with the little they’re given) and due to their persistence and moral tenacity they sort of rise above and they prove to God (and to themselves/others) that they’re worthy and do indeed belong in God’s kingdom...others are just irresponsible and constantly late/rude and don’t vote and are selfish and lazy and they’ll get what they deserve.

What will the Gospel or basic message of Christianity do to your understanding and your experience of exclusion and embrace?

And WWJD? Whom Would Jesus Dis(qualify)?

This is an exploration of what Miroslav Volf called Exclusion and Embrace and an exploration of whether and how/on what basis and why GOD either excludes or embraces?

And, as we’ll see, it has a lot to do with a word that is NOT EVEN FOUND IN THIS WHOLE TEXT...but it’s the main idea...we’ll get to that in a moment. Let’s look at 1) Story in Ancient Context 2) Working It Out in the Modern Context.

Three Parts – the disciples are desperately seeking a vacation...and Jesus Christ WANTS them to have it...wants to be with them and teach and retreat...but He’s become WAY too famous (even though He keeps issuing these gag orders [“tell NO ONE...”]) and then they meet this delegation of clergymen and theologians from Jerusalem come to check them out – that must’ve been a lot of fun! YUCK!

And these critics from Jerusalem foreshadow the kind of reception Jesus Christ and the 12 and going to get when they reach Jerusalem – a VERY hostile group.

And the critics pick up on the EATING! They criticize the way the disciples DON'T CEREMONIALLY wash their hands before they eat bread (2). They are DISQUALIFIED, and DEFILED because of their bad religious manners.

Pharisees had all these washings that the LAW didn't prescribe but their traditions had added them over the years...and all the serious rabbis observed these traditions but Jesus and his students did NOT. Thus, THEY MUST NOT BE SERIOUS RABBIS and STUDENTS! They must not be as close to God as we heard they were!

And Jesus says, "Truth is YOU clergy and theologians are the ones not near to God...you are close with your words but not with YOUR HEARTS! Isaiah said it best, THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. (Mar 7.6-7)

Then He says to the crowds...these washings and EVEN the true food laws God HAS given, they have served their purpose...I've come to fulfill them...You don't get holy by eating the right foods and you don't get disqualified/defiled by what goes into the stomach... but by what comes OUT of your souls...

The disciples don't know what He means and He rebukes them "Are YOU so lacking in understanding also?" (They didn't get the significance of the bread in the wilderness and they didn't get the whole idea of this disqualification thing...that washings don't make God like you...God is looking at the real YOU/the HEART and not the outside...) "Once again you don't get it".

Then He states it again: "Do YOU not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.)" (Mar 7.18-19) And then a long list of the KIND of things that COME out of our hearts that DO indeed DISQUALIFY us, "For from within, out of the heart of people, come the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evils come from within and defile the person." (21-23)

You should be MUCH LESS concerned with the dirt on other people's hands and much MORE concerned about the DIRT IN YOUR OWN HEARTS...

And with that said... then... finally...the disciples and their Teacher get a little vacation...they boldly go where no Jew has gone before...into Gentile-land.

But it turns out that even though they will SURELY be unknown here...that they are NOT unknown here; "He could NOT escape notice!" (24)

A woman...a Greek...a Gentile... who has a little daughter...with an unclean spirit ("What IS an unclean spirit?" you ask... Well, I'm not entirely sure... except to say that it looked like what we might call mental illness but had a very definite supernatural component... You may, as a Westerner or modern, scientific South Floridian, you may dismiss this sort of thing as simplistic or pre-critical or superstitious BUT maybe this is a part of what makes people do what they do. Maybe WE who think its all chemicals and environment MAYBE we're the ones who are naïve ...MOST of the world...is NOT as reductionist as we are. And many people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have this as a definite part of their world-view [that evil spirits can occupy or possess the human mind and soul]. You may think YOU are more enlightened than most of the world...maybe, however, maybe YOU are more narrow-minded and elitist than you think you are...

Whatever this is...and we're not told how you GET an unclean spirit...but whatever it is it's apparently terrible. In Matthew's account, the woman comes pleading and screaming for Jesus Christ to help her daughter... The disciples are snooty and indignant (thinking they're on vacation!) and she says, "'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is CRUELLY demon-possessed.' But He did not answer her word. And His disciples came and begged Him, saying, 'Send her away, because she keeps yelling at us.'"

And Jesus Christ... remember...He's on the "other-side-of-the-tracks", where the Gentiles live...She's a Syrophenician ...Matthew calls her a "Canaanite" (as if to say, "Yuck! It don't get any worse than that! They were the ones who tormented our ancestors and they practiced witchcraft and child sacrifice and they probably have bugs and probably vote Republican...or Democrat [depending on what's your affiliation]) "A Canaanite" Gross!

And Jesus says to her (in Mark's version) "... 'Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered and said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs.'"

Why does Jesus respond like that ...so exclusive... so dismissive ...so mean? Well, the British scholar F.F. Bruce wondered, "What if there was a twinkle in his eye as he spoke?" In other words, what if she knocked on the door...and he unlocks it and says... "No thanks..." and then He goes back inside but leaves the door open...and you're wondering, "Why didn't he lock the door...does he mean for me to come inside?"

And I think he DID look at her with a twinkle in His eye...there's some evidence. He uses a word for dog that's not "wolf" or "stray" or "yard-dawg" (and there WERE words like that!) but Mark records the diminutive: a little dog, a puppy. And then He says, "First the children have to eat..." as if to invite the question, "Well, if the children eat first, what happens SECOND?"

He leaves the door ajar...He lobs a pitch across the plate...and she rears back and swings with all her might and that ball sails over the wall and way out of the park!

Matthew's version... (which is more complete) says, "Then Jesus said to her, 'O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed at once."

And when she answers with such wit and wisdom and...FAITH (even though that word isn't used in Mark)...I picture Jesus looking at the disciples as if to say, "You guys didn't get the significance of My multiplying bread in the wilderness that I am the New and Better Moses, the Maker of Moses!...You didn't GET the meaning of the bread...but she does! This dog...this screamer...this frantic...freak with bugs in her hair...You want to exclude her but she has what I'm looking for...what qualifies people and gets them INCLUDED in My kingdom...she believes...DO YOU?"

And there's no emphasis on what this exorcism looked like...the spotlight is only on HER and her faith (even though the word's not used!) and she is the ONLY one in the whole Gospel according to Mark who calls Jesus Christ, "Lord" (v.29), "Yes, Lord, but even the puppies get the crumbs from the children's table"

And it's a Gentile, Canaanite, woman, with a crazy, unclean daughter who calls Him "Lord"...and it's another Gentile, the soldier near the Cross who draws the big conclusion of the whole Book. As Jesus died, the Gentile soldier concludes out loud, "Truly, THIS was the Son of God!" (15.39)

"Who?" asks Mark, "WHO?" asks Jesus Christ, "WHO is HOLY and COMPATIBLE WITH GOD? Is it...people with flowery religious words on their lips whose hearts are opposed to God's purposes... but who wash their hands and have the right ethnicity and heritage?...OR...a desperate woman...who even when turned away...simply trusts...pushes open the door...desperate and dissatisfied she wants only a crumb...only to touch His garment...ONLY BELIEVES?"

"She", says Jesus Christ to the fat children, the witless, dull disciples, "SHE has what I want...she believes." Why did Jesus provoke her? Because, He wanted the disciples to get a look at real faith – He wanted her to hit a faith homerun. He drew it out of her...for her sake...and for the disciples and for us.

The story ends with another healing in another gentile region (The Decapolis)...an amazing example of Jesus Christ's embrace. And then these beautiful words, spoken in that outcast land, probably by Gentile mouths, "They were utterly astonished, saying, 'He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'"

I'll end with these two issues this teaching addresses for life in the modern world: 1) Faith and 2) Racism

Mark's Gospel shows Jesus Christ abolishing religion. He is making it clear again and again that NOT only is paganism and witchcraft and superstition that sought to manipulate the forces of nature – not only is paganism invalid ...but also that corrupt form of First Century Judaism with

its added traditions and incessant spiritual one-upmanship and fear and hypocrisy AND...even God's own religion is now fulfilled. When Jesus Christ says from the Cross, "It is finished...paid in full" that means all the types and shadows, all the LAW is now over, it's fulfilled and in some sense obsolete.

In its place a perfect life, the Life of God's beloved is given to messed up people on the basis of faith. People who have defilement at our core, our hearts swollen with all the things Jesus mentions (evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.) Messed up people with corrupt hearts who cannot be helped by religion are helped by God becoming flesh and living, dying rising in our place.

Jesus may have winked at that desperate woman...He may then have looked at the wavering disciples as if to say, "See...even this weird woman you call dog believes DO YOU?" But NOW Jesus is looking again into the camera and is asking you, "Are you believing...or are you just religious?"

So T.J. what your saying is "organized religion is bad and spirituality is good, right?" No. I'm saying, Jesus Christ is saying, "Be desperate like these characters in the story...desperate enough to say, 'Lord Jesus, only You can help me...YOU DO ALL THINGS WELL...I fall into Your nail scarred hands. Unite me to Your people...renovate me...I believe...help my unbelief.'"

Last, racism and all other forms of self-righteousness are never compatible with the Gospel (basic Christianity). God promoted Jewish exclusivism for a time...until out of the Holy Nation He brought the One who would form a new humanity.

Christians have a sense that we are (even if we are born Jewish) we were all separated from God...and only embraced because of Jesus Christ's perfect life, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection.

We who ARE the Gentiles, the majority of us here today, WE ARE GRAFTED IN... we are dogs who eat the children's Bread and in so doing WE become children...we are attached to the FAMILY TREE. We are adopted. We MUST have an ongoing sense, a feel for what it is to be excluded...and a JUBILANT sense of relief and rest at being embraced.

This is why RACISM must be detested and repugnant in the Body of Christ and that's why the Church needs the Spirit of God so that within this family the things that NORMALLY divide people would be overwhelmed by grace for the glory of Him "Who does all things well".