



RESILIENT PEOPLE, RESILIENT RELATIONSHIPS

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The Text

Mark 7:24-30

I. Introduction

The most sacred symbol in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (in the United States of America) is a tree: a sprawling, shade-bearing, 80-year-old American elm. Tourists drive from miles around to see her. People pose for pictures beneath her. Arborists carefully protect her. She adorns posters and letterhead. The city treasures the tree, not for her appearance but for her endurance.

She endured the Oklahoma City bombing (Wednesday, April 19, 1995).

Timothy McVeigh parked his death-laden truck only yards away from her. His malice killed 168 people, wounded 850, destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, and buried the tree in rubble. No one expected it to survive. No one, in fact, gave any thought to a dusty, branch-stripped tree.

But then she began to bud.

Sprouts pressed through damaged bark; green leaves pushed away grey soot. Life resurrected from an acre of death. People noticed. The tree modelled the resilience the victims desired. So, they gave the elm a name: the Survivor Tree.

Today, many marriages and family relationships – in and out of the church – are experiencing a similar type of assault, intimidation, and violence; threatening to



destroy their very existence. Yet, like the resilient *Survivor Tree* in Oklahoma City we must find them, help them, and nurture them back to emotional, physical, and spiritual health, regardless of who they are, what they look like, where they come from, and what they own. We must help them to survive and thrive and be accepted into the family of God before it is too late.

Our topic today is titled, ***Resilient People, Resilient Relationships. Let us pray.***

II. The Text: Mark 7:24-30 (A Gentile Shows Her Faith)

²⁴ From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden. ²⁵ For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ But Jesus said to her, 'Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.' ²⁸ And she answered and said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs.' ²⁹ He said to her, 'For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.' ³⁰ And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.' NJKV

III. Explication and Application

Dictionary.com offers the following definitions for resilient: “returning to the original form or position after being bent, compressed, or stretched.” Also, “Recovering readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyant.” Like a tennis ball that gets hit at great speeds, yet, readily recovers its shape and is ready to face another menacing tennis racket.

The setting for the story in Mark 7:24-30 finds Jesus coming from having a major conflict with the religious leaders about ceremonial uncleanness when He encounters the Syrophenician woman. As a rule, Jews didn't have contact with Gentiles because this made them ceremonially *unclean* according to their tradition. And even though Jesus was not in any way disregarding the important



of the kind of food that was good to eat, HE shows by His example that what's in a person's heart – that which results in their actions towards others – is what truly matters. So, Jesus illustrates how ridiculous the tradition of the elders was when He takes the time to talk with this Gentle woman – the Syrophenician – who was in great need.

By using this story, Mark makes the point that God's mission of salvation includes Gentiles. That the gospel of God's love and kingdom are not limited to Israel, even though Jesus indicated that Israel must have the first opportunity. The truth is Mark's motive for using the example of the Syrophenician woman in this passage is because he wanted his Roman (Gentile) readers to understand that the good news of salvation was for everyone, including them. That message is still true for us today.

Reading the narratives of the Gospels very carefully will lead us to recognize that only once before had Jesus crossed over into Gentile territory – in Mark 5:1-20 when He met a demon-possessed man in the country of the Gadarenes on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. However, this time Jesus appears to stay in the region for some time. He had travelled to Phoenicia – which is present-day Lebanon - where the city of Tyre was location, without an obvious public ministry agenda in mind. The biblical account seems to indicate that Jesus was looking for a place to rest with His disciples and to escape the persecution of the religious leaders who were always following Him. He knew the scribes and Pharisees did not want to defile themselves by going to Gentile territory. Yet, despite His efforts to get some rest, Jesus was unable to keep His presence in the region a secret.

It is important to observe how God's providence works in His mission to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), despite the barriers erected by the social customs of His day. While it is true Jesus was attempting to get some rest with His disciples after a difficult time with church leaders who had twisted God's plans to suit their preferences; it should not escape our attention that the major focus of Jesus was to always alleviate the pain of people and give them access to His life-giving presence. Ellen White describes this scene in *The Desire of Ages* by



stating: “In coming to this region He hoped to find the retirement He had failed to secure at Bethsaida. Yet this was not His only purpose in taking this journey.”

Matthew Henry – the great English Bible expositor of the 17th century – describes what is taking place with Jesus while in the region of Tyre and Sidon when he suggests:

“How graciously he was pleased to manifest himself, notwithstanding. Though he would not carry a harvest of miraculous cures into those parts, yet, it should seem, he came on purpose to drop a handful, to let fall this one which we have here an account of. He could not be hid; for, though a candle may be put under a bushel, the sun cannot. Christ was too well known to be long incognito-hid, anywhere; the oil of gladness which he was anointed with, like ointment of the right hand, would betray itself, and fill the house with its odours. Those that had only heard this fame could not converse with him, but they soon say, “This must be Jesus.””

Interestingly, the rules the religious leaders had put in place to separate themselves from other people rather than allowing God to use them as instruments of His grace to those in great need unquestionably make this story provocative in the Gospels. Ethnic divisions, prejudice, and social separation, seem to be more important to these church leaders than accomplishing God’s purpose for calling Israel as His special people. We must admit, though, that the encounter of the Syrophenician woman with Jesus breaks all kinds of social boundaries and customs as seen through the perspective of the Jewish leaders. “In the thinking of first-century Palestine this woman had a number of disabilities. She was a Gentile, a woman, and perhaps a single parent. But none of those factors kept her from approaching Jesus for help, or from engaging in a challenging conversation with Him.” The Syrophenician woman demonstrates remarkable resilience in the face of overwhelming odds.

Giving a more complete description to the context of the central character unfolding in the story, Ellen White shares:

“The people of this district were of the old Canaanite race. They were idolaters, and were despised and hated by the Jews. To this class belonged the woman who now came to Jesus. She was a heathen, and was therefore excluded from



the advantages which Jews daily enjoyed. There were many Jews living among the Phoenicians, and the tidings of Christ's work had penetrated to this region. Some of the people had listened to His words and had witnessed His wonderful works. This woman had heard of the prophet, who, it was reported, healed all manner of diseases. As she heard of His power, hope sprang up in her heart. Inspired by a mother's love, she determined to present her daughter's case to Him. It was her resolute purpose to bring her affliction to Jesus. He must heal her child. She had sought help from the heathen gods, but had obtained no relief. And at time she was tempted to them, what can this Jewish teacher do for me? But the word had come, He heals all manner of diseases, whether those who come to Him for help are rich or poor. She determined not to lose her only hope."

What becomes abundantly clear in the text – to the discerning Bible reader – is that “the desperate need of her daughter and her radical faith in God’s goodness caused her to humble herself before Jesus – falling at His feet – and risked crossing all kinds of social barriers.” The Syrophenician woman, no doubt, knew about Jesus and believed He was a prophet sent from God. In Mark chapter 3, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were angry about what Jesus did and went out immediately to plot with the Herodians to destroy Him. Mark 3:7, 8 gives us clues about how the woman may have known about Jesus. The text shares: “But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; *and those from Tyre and Sidon*, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him.” Here is a tangible clue of how the woman may have found out about Jesus. Perhaps a cousin or a friend of the Syrophenician woman had been in the crowd that had witnessed the power of God in Jesus and came back to Tyre and Sidon with news about the Rabbi from Galilee.

In vs. 26, we encounter the conversation between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman – most likely in Greek, rather than Aramaic – according to several commentators. Although not Greek by birth (since she was Syrophenician), she evidently had been Hellenized in her culture and language, the reason the text refers to her as being Greek. “Let the children be filled first,” Jesus says to her in vs. 27, “for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little



dogs.” The language Jesus uses in His conversation with the woman sounds like fighting words. These words were really demeaning, degrading, and hurtful. But the Syrophenician woman demonstrates incredible resilience, as she remains focused on the objection of her mission – the healing of her daughter from an unclean spirit.

Jews often used the word ‘dogs’ to refer to Gentiles. And although it seems out of character for Jesus to do so, He almost certainly used the term in the same way. The obvious meaning was to point out that Jews took precedence over Gentiles during the time of the ministry of Jesus. Yet, Jesus somewhat softens the harshness by using the diminutive form of dogs, which could be translated as ‘puppies,’ with reference to house pets rather than the scavengers on the streets. The seeming roughness of Jesus’ words could have served to test the woman’s faith. Yet, she holds fast to her motivation for coming.

Commenting on the out-of-character response of Jesus to a woman in pain and torment, Ellen White says in *The Desire of Ages* (p. 401): “Although this answer appeared to be in accordance with the prejudice of the Jews, it was an implied rebuke to the disciples, which they afterward understood as reminding them of what He had often told them,--that He came to the world to save all who would accept Him.”

Despite the seemingly sarcastic, cynical, and biting response of Jesus to the Syrophenician’s request to cast the demon out of her daughter (vs. 26); her faith would not be deterred. In fact, her resilience – recovering readily from adversity – she remains steadfast, in what may be dramatized by the words of the negro spiritual sang by James Cleveland, that says: “I don’t feel no ways tired, I’ve come too far from where I started from. Nobody told me that the road would be easy, I don’t believe He brought me this far to leave me.”

Jesus had left any opening by stating that the Gentiles would get their turn to hear the gospel and profit from his ministry. As far as the Syrophenician was concerned, that time was now. In fact, it was time to *seize the moment* – *carpe diem*. She agreed with Jesus that Israel was first. But her radical faith refused to believe she was excluded. In fact, she answers in vs. 28: “Yes, Lord, yet even the



little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.” By responding in this way, she expressed persevering faith and belief in God’s goodness. She sees the barriers of race, cultures, and gender as superficial issues in the face of her great need. The genuine requirement is authentic healing on the inside, and only the gospel can rise above the barriers to create such healing for this soul, desperate for her daughter’s healing.

Demonstrating the dept of her faith in God, despite the social barriers between Jews and Gentiles; Jesus honours her resilience as we read in vs. 29: “For this saying go your way”; He says to her, “the demon has gone out of your daughter.”

Contrasting the resilience and profound faith of the Syrophenician woman with the superficial spirituality demonstrated by the scribes and Pharisees, Ellen White shares:

“Jesus had just departed from His field of labor because the scribes and Pharisees were seeking to take His life. They murmured and complained. They manifested unbelief and bitterness, and refused the salvation so freely offered them. Here Christ meets one of an unfortunate and despised race, that has not been favored with the light of God’s word; yet she yields at once to the divine influence of Christ, and has implicit faith in His ability to grant the favor she asks. She begs for the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table. If she may have the privilege of a dog, she is willing to be regarded as a dog. She has no national or religious prejudice or pride to influence her course, and she immediately acknowledges Jesus as the Redeemer, and as being able to do all she asks of Him.”

The highpoint of this story is found in vs. 30 that says: “And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.” Hallelujah!!! Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

The resilient faith of this unassuming, yet undeterred Syrophenician woman, allowed the power of God to work on behalf of her household; healing her daughter from the unclean spirit that had tormented her. The Syrophenician woman modelled in a clear way what it means to wrestle with God and not let Him go until He blesses you. She must have known something about Jacob’s



story in Genesis 32:26, where he cries out as he wrestles with the angel of God: “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

IV. Conclusion

The opposite of depression isn't happiness, writes Peter D. Kramer in his book *Against Depression*. The opposite of depression is resilience. It's not the absence of guilt and sadness, but it is the ability to find a path away from those feelings. Jesus frees us to be resilient and to find the path to abundant life.

The challenge before us today, as persons who have been favoured with a knowledge of God's salvation and grace, is to do something to represent the real purpose of our faith. How we can be resilient people with resilient relationships. We must determine not to be like the scribes and Pharisees – majoring in the minors – when people are dying of COVID-19, and so many families are in deep and dangerous despair. We must not allow ourselves to be held back by matters of minor importance like cultural, ethnic, and racial biases that tend to separate us from the people in need of our care and regard.

People of God, it is almost midnight in the history of our world. We must be serious about taking advantage of the opportunities given to us by God to introduce Jesus to our neighbours, relatives, and friends. Rather than squandering opportunities that come our way, we must intentionally determine to be salt and light to Syrophenicians in our circles of influence who are floundering in darkness and despair every day.

There are women and men, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, parents and children, widows and divorcees, grandparents and single adults who need our support and interest in their brokenness and pain. Behaving like the scribes and Pharisees – arguing about useless dogmas, conspiracy theories and political ideologies – will render us ineffective, fruitless, and unproductive, like salt that has lost its flavour (Luke 14:34). So, it is time to wake up from our slumber and sleep. It is time to make up our minds and say to ourselves in the strength of the Lord: “I Will God with My Family” to the Tyres and Sidons of my specific



context, trusting in God's providence, power, and grace to send a resilient Syrophoenician who is looking for a miracle to rid her family of the grip of the evil one, and find deliverance in the Christ we claim to know, through the assistance of our love and concern.

May we, like the Syrophoenician woman, find the path to Jesus, and with unfaltering resilience, beg for the crumbs of His blessings. May we also be eager to share the blessings we have received with joy and delight to wondering seekers in need of God's saving love and grace. Then we will be able to join in singing that powerful hymn of the church:

*¹ I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.*

Refrain

*I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory,
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.*

*² I love to tell the story; more wonderful it seems
than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams.
I love to tell the story, it did so much for me;
and that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.*

*³ I love to tell the story; 'tis pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard
the message of salvation from God's own holy Word.*



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*⁴ I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
'twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.*

When Jesus comes again, it is our desire that, like the resilient *Survivor Tree* in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, despite the attacks and assaults of Satan, we too will be resilient people in resilient relationships and be able to stand firm through the grace of God. May God bless us today and always as we trust him with our family relationships and all other relationships to be salt and light until Jesus comes again.