

Today's reading, is a story about the lost opportunities of those who had a Godly heritage (and a Godly calling), while those who were **very far off** from God, **received** a blessing.

The greatest start to life, that any child can be given, is a Godly heritage.

You know, when I look at the world, it just seems absurd – the lengths that some parents will go to, to make sure their kids get **every** opportunity in life:

- Some people spend a fortune, to ensure that their kids get the very best education that money can buy;
- They run all over town all weekend and many mornings and afternoons, so that their kids can be trained in all sorts of sports and cultural pursuits...
- They do everything they can for their kids, so that the kids don't have to put themselves out much at all, because they don't want to put them under any 'undue pressure'
- They make sure their kids are equipped with the latest i-device, or whatever other gadget they think might help them to get ahead in the world; And
- they pay for their phone credit and laptop and data...
- they'll do everything they can, to help their kids 'get ahead'...

But you know what::: **the greatest start to life**, that you can give your child, is a Godly heritage... In the long-run, none of that other stuff matters.

Growing up in a Christian home (**especially** if the **Dad** of that home is a worshipping Christian) – it exponentially increases the chances, of children, who are born into that home, becoming Christians too.

I was reading some research the other dayⁱ - it's an older study, and it was actually conducted by the Swiss government (I'm not sure why), and it was published in the year 2000... So it is old, and it's not from Australia, but I think it still reveals something very important...

According to this study:

- In families where the Father & Mother both attended worship regularly, 33% of their children grew up, to become regular church-goers... Now, that doesn't mean they all became Christians of course, because going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a shearing shed makes you a sheep... But today, most people who regularly attend worship, do so because they're Christians...*
- But in families where the Father **irregular** & Mother regularly attended, 3% of their children became regular worshippers when they grew up*
- Father non-practicing & Mother regularly attends, 2% of their children became regular worshippers*

- *Surprisingly, if the Father was committed to God and worshipped regularly, and the mother didn't attend, 38% of their kids, grew up, to become regular worshippers.*

I find those figures staggering – the difference that a Godly father makes. Now once again, those figures come from Europe, and the figures are old, so of course it's different here in Australia... But the pattern remains the same, And I'm sure you've seen (as I have) – over; and over; and over again...

A Christian woman marries a non-Christian man, they have children, and while mum does her best to encourage the kids in the faith, because Dad's disinterested, the kids often don't engage either... That's the sad reality...

The greatest start to life, that you can give your child, is a Godly heritage...

*As a parent, my greatest hope; My greatest prayer, was that **when** my children grew up, they would choose to follow Jesus for themselves... And hopefully, all of you parents here today, are praying that same prayer for your children...*

Bringing our children up in the way of the Lord, is the greatest legacy we can give them... A Godly heritage is so valuable...

And children, the Godly heritage that your Parents have given you, and maybe your Grandparents have given you, is the most valuable **start** you can have, to following Jesus – But it's only a start... Be warned: Do not despise this Godly

heritage... Don't ever take your Christian heritage for granted...

You see, there are many people who have **had** Godly parents & they've **had** the Godly heritage:

- Their parents have taken them along to Sunday School; and
- church; and
- youth group;
- They've read them bed-time stories about Jesus; and
- they've taught them to pray,,,

but they didn't value it, and they rejected Jesus...

Oww, they mightn't believe they rejected Jesus – they might still have the attitude: “I was brought up in a Christian family – I'm a Christian... But in reality, they're not....

No matter how Godly your upbringing, you, are **not** a Christian until you're born again. You're not a Christian, – until **you** turn from **your** life of sin, and give **your** heart **wholeheartedly** to Jesus...

Our God is a heavenly **Father** – He's not a Heavenly Grandfather... God has children and He has enemies – He doesn't have grandchildren... So, which one are you??? Are you a child of God? Have you been born again? Or are you under the delusion that your Godly heritage is going to save you???

And so, my plea to you today is, “Do not take your Godly heritage for granted.”...

In our message last week, we encountered the Jewish religious leaders: the Pharisees and the Scribes – These, were the leaders of the People of Israel. These people, had a **magnificent** Godly heritage – they had a Godly calling – they were God’s chosen people.... And yet, when they encountered the Son of God, they rejected Him...

They had everything going for them:

- They’d been taught the Law of God;
- They’d been schooled up in the ways of God, from the time they were children;
- They’d heard the teaching of the prophets for years;
- They knew the Messiah was coming...

But when Jesus did come, they rejected Him... They were more interested in the ceremonial washing of their hands (a ceremony that they’d created BTW) – They were more interested in that, than the very presence and work of God Himself...

And to these people, Jesus set them straight, and Jesus said “It’s what’s on the inside that makes a person unclean – out of the heart, is where wickedness comes from...”

That’s where we left it last week, and so last week, we saw an example of those who had a Godly heritage rejecting Jesus... And now today, we get to see an example of some of those who were far from God, receiving Jesus, and being blessed by Jesus...

So: Jesus goes into the regions of Tyre and Sidon... These were predominantly Gentile regions. Alright, He's left the Jewish rural countryside of Galilee, and He's headed West, over the mountains, to a port on the Mediterranean sea (a place called "Tyre").

In the Old Testament, Tyre itself is depicted as a really arrogant and ungodly sort of a place... In fact in Ezekiel 28, the prince of Tyre is seen as a picture of "greed" and "pride & arrogance", and before long, it seems that God is describing "Satan" himself...

And in this ungodly place (Tyre), Jesus is there (incognito)... He's hiding-out in a house – I don't know why – maybe He's having a bit of time out – I don't know... But a Gentile woman, Syrophenician by birth, discovers where He is...

Now, Mark is at pains here, to get across to us, just how far away from God, this woman was:

- She is in the ungodly city of Tyre
- She is a Gentile. The Greek here, is literally "Hellenist" (meaning she was a Greek), and the Greeks were Pagans – they worshipped a multitude of Gods. To the Jews, the Greeks were amongst the uncleanest of the unclean (because they were thoroughly pagan)
- She is a Syrophenician – she's everything that the Jews hated – Syria and Phoenicia came together under the rule of Rome:
 - In the Old Testament, the Syrians were hard against Israel...

So here she is – by all accounts, this is somebody who’s heritage, probably can’t get much further from God, but **she’s** the one who seeks Jesus out, (and she finds Him). Why is she looking for Him? Because her daughter has an unclean spirit (a demon).

Wow!!! Can this family get any further from God... All this uncleanness, just seems to be stacking up:

- An unclean woman;
- in an unclean city;
- of an unclean religion;
- with a daughter who has an unclean spirit...

And **this** is the woman who comes to Jesus, and she and begs Him to cast the Demon out of her little girl...

A reasonable request, wouldn’t you think...

But how did you like Jesus' answer? I reckon most people today, would probably take enormous offence at Jesus' reply to this woman. In fact, some preachers try and explain the offence out of it, when they just can’t...

Jesus said: **"Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."**

Wowh!!! Did Jesus really say that??? Yeah, He did... Some preachers say “He’s using the word ‘little dogs’ here, and He’s not calling them dogs – He’s not disparaging them – he’s referring to them as ‘cute little puppies’ Rubbish!!!

To the Jews, this woman represented everything that was unclean!!!

- The **Jews** were the chosen ones – not the Gentiles...
- The **Jews** had the Godly heritage – not the Gentiles
- Jesus came – (The Jewish Messiah came), for the people of Israel...

And so Jesus said: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

I wonder, "How would you respond, if Jesus gave that answer to you???" I reckon **most** people would be **truly** offended, and say "Well blow you", and walk away from Him...

But not this lady... The understanding that this woman displays in her reply, is amazing:

"Yes Lord"... She agreed... I **am** but a dirty dog... "Yes Lord"

"yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

I'm waiting here for You Jesus, for whatever you'll give me...

Jesus did come first for Israel, but the fact is, Jesus was largely **rejected** by Israel... Crumbs under the table (you see)...

Crumbs for the dogs... Jesus had much grace to give, but they despised it... He came, as the bread of life... But most of Israel rejected Him – dropped Him to the ground – crumbs for dogs...

This Syrophenician woman – she actually understood her unworthiness; She knew she couldn't legitimately make a

claim on God... She knew she didn't deserve the mercy of Jesus... She understood that Jesus came first, for the people of Israel... But it seems, she also understood that the grace of God, could extend beyond the people of Israel, to all those who would seek Him...

And Jesus says “Good answer... Because of that, the demon has left your daughter.”

³⁰ And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Righto, so from Tyre, Jesus continues Northwards to Sidon (we don't hear anything about what He does there), and then back over the mountains, inland to the Sea of Galilee, and around to the SE of the Sea, to the region known as “the Decapolis” (a group of 10 Gentile cities).

^{v32} And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

But Jesus didn't do it there for everyone to see – This is something that He did privately

³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting, touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he

sighed and said to him, "**Ephphatha,**" that is, "**Be opened.**" ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Alright, so Jesus has been pretty much rejected by those who had a Godly heritage, but now we've got 2 examples of the godless Gentiles **receiving** the blessing, and you couldn't shut-em-up about Jesus... The more He tried to keep them quiet, the more zealously they proclaimed how good He was...

BTW, praising the Name of Jesus, is a natural response, when we experience the grace of God...

Let's come forward to today... Having a Godly heritage, is a wonderful thing, but it's not our Godly heritage that saves us... Nor does having an **ungodly** heritage mean that someone **can't** be saved...

Those who are saved, are those who **know** they're unworthy, and that they need a saviour....

It's only when **I** realise that **I'm** completely unworthy – **I'm** but a dirty dog – it's only when I recognise this truth about

myself, that I'm ready to fall at the feet of Jesus, and be saved...

But, do you know the biggest barrier to this??? The same old enemy – Pride...

It's only a humble heart, that bows before Jesus, and agrees, Yes Lord, I'm but a dirty dog, but I know your grace is big enough for me...

And no matter how Godly your heritage, or how **ungodly** your background is, God's grace is plenty big enough. It extends to the most vile of sinners, when they fall on their knees, and submit to Jesus as Lord... That's how mighty God's grace is.

Let's Pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me of my pride.
Before I came to You, I was but a dirty dog;
full of sin and evil..
That was me...

And Lord, I call out to You,
Have mercy on me, a sinner...
Please extend to me, Your amazing grace.
And forgive us our sins...

And Lord, fill not only our hearts,
but our mouths,
with praise for Your mighty Name.
And thanks for Your marvellous salvation.

in Jesus' Name,

Amen

ⁱ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/fathers-key-to-their-childrens-faith.html>
“The Demographic Characteristics of the Linguistic and Religious Groups in Switzerland” by Werner Haug and Phillipe Warner of the Federal Statistical Office, Neuchatel. The study appears in Volume 2 of Population Studies No. 31, a book titled The Demographic Characteristics of National Minorities in Certain European States, edited by Werner Haug and others, published by the Council of Europe Directorate General III, Social Cohesion, Strasbourg, January 2000