

WEEK 4

Jesus Pursues and Overcomes Sin from All Nations

Mark 7:24-30, Luke 7:1-9



MARK 7:24-30

²⁴He got up and departed from there to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, but he could not escape notice. ²⁵Instead, immediately after hearing about him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she was asking him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, because it isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she replied to him, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹Then he told her, "Because of this reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter." ³⁰When she went back to her home, she found her child lying on the bed, and the demon was gone.

LUKE 7:1-9

¹When he had concluded saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. ²A centurion's servant, who was highly valued by him, was sick and about to die. ³When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, requesting him to come and save the life of his servant. ⁴When they reached Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy for you to grant this, ⁵because he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue." ⁶Jesus went with them, and when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell him, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, since I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷That is why I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸For I too am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ⁹Jesus heard this and was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found so great a faith even in Israel."

SERMON NOTES

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

TEACHING SUMMARY

Jesus shocked the Jewish community when He performed miracles for those on the outside—the Gentiles. Jesus came to bring forgiveness to people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. His pursuit of all people has not stopped, and He has invited us to join Him. As we do, we enjoy the miracle of God uniting people together.

LEAN IN

Have you or someone you know had a near-death experience? If so, describe the experience and how you or the person you know survived.

LOOK DOWN

READ MARK 7:24-30 (pg. 60)

What is the significance of the description of the woman? Why is her background important in this story?

What social barriers are crossed by the woman and by Jesus in this story?

What does this reveal to us about Jesus? How would religious Jews have looked upon this?

What did the Syrophenician woman ask of Jesus? Why did Jesus resist before granting her request?

READ LUKE 7:1-9 (pg. 60)

The definition of faith is provided in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.” How was the centurion’s faith revealed in this story?

What does this passage reveal about the gradual process of faith? Why is faith not just a one-time only event?

LOOK OUT

Are there any categories of people in our community that might be quick to dismiss Jesus simply because they believe He did not come for them? Why might they think this? How can we help overcome their doubt or skepticism?

LOOK IN

Describe a time when you had no choice but to put your faith and trust in God and let Him work out His purposes in a desperate situation you were facing. What was the outcome? How was your faith affected? How was your relationship with Him impacted?

The faith of the centurion rested solely in the power of Jesus’ words. In what ways do you feel your faith in Jesus shows itself to be too small? How can you more readily trust Jesus’ words?

RHYTHM REMINDER



share your
story



repentance



worship

The Glue to the Great Divide: How Christ's Beauty Closes the Gaps of Brokenness

written by: Mareya Low and Lexi Ragan

EIPHANIES ON THE PLANE

In the summer of 2022, a team from Mariners Church traveled to Uganda, Africa on a Faith Adventure. Mareya and Lexi, two of the participants, first met at one of the outreach training sessions prior to departing overseas. Initially, their connection sparked over an acknowledgement that they were both involved in the Mariners Creative Arts Ministry. But it wasn't until the Lord placed them next to each other on the plane that they truly began to understand how He intended to use them in unique partnership for His glory.

From the moment they were sent into the sky, Mareya and Lexi couldn't help but marvel over God's creation in the clouds as they reflected on the many expectations they had for this trip. With a sketchpad in Mareya's lap and a journal in Lexi's, they observed the shifting skies as the many hours drifted by.

During their travels, Psalm 139:8 (NIV) naturally surfaced in conversation: "If I ascend to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there." With this, they were reminded of God's all-consuming presence, no matter how far away they were from home.

While they processed this in the air, little did they know how deeply they would reckon with it on the ground; He would come to show them the reality of His reconciliation between the darkest of spaces and widest divides.

MIRACLE OF HOPE DURING THE HOUSE VISITS

Few words can sum up the stunning nature of Uganda. It is a special place where God's glory is painted everywhere, where the rich and vibrant glow of His creation beams with life despite every fragmented valley in the dust. Even more so, the rare radiance of the people, who celebrate community and prioritize connecting with Jesus, shined like Mareya and Lexi had never seen before. At the same time, there was an unfamiliar need within the streets. Regardless of who they were, everyone waved back, showing Mareya and Lexi the desire to be seen on an entirely new level. As they would come to find out, it was obvious that while the need was high, the country's contentment in Christ was even higher. This caused Mareya and Lexi to challenge the bubble of comfort that existed back home and ask themselves what they really needed in life.

Their first day of serving showed them an abundance of opportunity to extend the hands and feet of Jesus, particularly through relationship. Splitting off into small groups with the teen volunteers of Gaba Community Church, Mareya and Lexi traveled to lower income communities with gifts and the gospel. As Sarah led the way with new friends Shaka and Glory by their side, they carried mosquito nets, bars of soap, beans, and posho with them to each household they visited. The first home sat at the bottom of a slope and consisted of four young brothers who

were living together in a small house. As Sarah interpreted what they were saying, Mareya and Lexi listened to the pain harbored in losing their grandmother, looking for work, longing for community, and lacking resources to thrive. The older brother expressed that he enjoyed art and pointed to a cow horn behind the tree he painted green and speckled white. In that moment, the Lord began bridging a gap as they connected in a conversation about creativity.

Mareya and Lexi began to realize these people, who were from an entirely different culture and context of life, were just like them. On a heart level, they too had similar dreams and desires to realize their creative potential. The only difference was the opportunities they had, and a limited access to art supplies. This was the first encounter God used Mareya and Lexi as artists to inspire others to dream—despite barriers causing dreams to feel unattainable. During this time, Sarah encouraged Mareya to tell the brothers about the pursuit of her own artistic dreams and share the hope she has from a future empowered by God. Shortly after, Lexi remembered she had a small Bible in her backpack and felt the nudge to give it to the older brother. Mareya had also packed extra art supplies before the trip, believing she could share the universal gift of art in Uganda. At that moment, she clearly understood this was an opportunity to inspire a fellow artist to exercise the gift God gave him. With great purpose, she handed him the extra sketchbook and colorful pens she had packed that very day. Suddenly, something beautiful began to unfold: he received the sketchbook as a treasure, holding the paper with utmost care, and started sketching a portrait of her. It was a powerful event altogether.

MIRACLE OF PEACE UNDER THE PRAYER TENT

From then on, seeing Jesus move among the ministry in Uganda only became more real. As the Mariners team continued to dive into the community on deeper levels, something significant took place during the medical outreach day. Accompanied by Gaba Community Church under white tents, several medical stations were made available to those needing care. But they didn't only prioritize physical health here—an entire section was dedicated to soul care. Without intentionally planning it, Mareya and Lexi both chose to serve under the prayer tent. This was yet another moment when the Lord led them to partner with each other in His divine work of bridging gaps between pain and peace.

Mareya and Lexi ended up praying under the tent for two hours straight, but in this period, it was as if time stood still. As Pastor Fred translated each request, they took turns lifting up prayers for the people. While they didn't have a physical Bible with them, the Word that was pressed intentionally into their hearts began pouring out to minister to each situation. Of course, the stories were not always easy to digest. Mareya and Lexi could clearly see the need in each person's eyes; however, in every story there still glimmered a thread of hope that could not be snapped because of Christ. With hands interlocked and heads bowed, His peace was always available in the midst of the battle.

As Colossians 3:15 (NIV) exhorts, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." Without realizing it, Mareya and Lexi were living out this Scripture in real time as they prayed continually and allowed the Word, alive and active, to guide them.

THE GLUE TO THE GREAT DIVIDE

Jesus is in the serious business of redeeming a world that desperately needs mending. And as the Mariners team witnessed, to this present day God is working purposefully with His active hands and feet of love.

Throughout the remainder of their faith adventure, Mareya and Lexi continued to see God working to bring beauty even in the broken through the actions of ordinary people. At the Wentz Medical Center they saw doctors and surgeons keep Jesus at the center of all they do as they provided accessible care for their community. On the streets of Uganda, they saw joy in the spontaneous worship that broke out among the Mariners team and the local children; together, they sang, danced, and praised Jesus freely in an unconventional space, reflecting the beauty of God's Kingdom.

From artists dreaming during the house visits, to the breakthrough under the prayer tent and spontaneous praise spreading throughout the streets, two realities were simultaneously present: *brokenness and beauty*.

But how can beauty and brokenness dwell in the same place, and what does this speak to? If the great divides in life are breaking this world apart, Jesus is the ultimate glue putting all things back together. ●

Psalm 100: Crossing The Divide

by Mareya Low



Leah's Story: Miraculously Mended

written by: Lexi Ragan



AN UNEXPECTED TURN

When Leah found out that she was pregnant, what is usually cause for celebration sent fear down her spine. Such unexpected news brought life to an extremely emotional halt in 2020 while she was working with Africa Renewal Ministries in Uganda—a ministry attached to Gaba Community Church. Her first instinct was to disappear from the local community before anyone had the chance to cast her out. So, she began the process of resigning from her job.

Leah refrained from telling the father of her child about the pregnancy. In fact, she confided in the pastor before anyone else. “In my head, it made sense...my dad had run away from my mom when she was pregnant. I didn’t want to look at him like the person who ran, so I just gave him permission to go before he ran.”

RUNNING BACK TO ABBA FATHER

With the pandemic creating waves of isolation, Leah was left to sit in solitude with her unborn child. As her baby began to grow, family and friends eventually found out. “Not everyone took the news with grace.”

With no more job, no reliable friends to confide in, a family that was distant, and no father for her baby, Leah pushed everyone she knew away until she could not lean on them for help. “Everything seemed like it was falling through the cracks.”

But it was here, in recognizing that she could no longer bear the challenge alone, that she made the life-changing decision to turn back to Jesus with everything she had. The running was over and she was coming home, into the eternal arms of the Abba Father who never once let her go.

Leah’s pregnancy started becoming the most beautiful season of her existence as she began

to reacquaint herself with the compassion of her Savior. She was now ready to be vulnerable with God and she started to ask Him to help her work through feelings of deep-seated resentment and pain.

“This was the time I started telling God about my dad, how I felt about him, and the questions I had.” In telling her Heavenly Father about the hurt her Earthly father had caused, such release brought divine healing in her relationship with Jesus. She continued to pour out all of her fears about motherhood, and prayed that her daughter would not fall into the same cycles she had been susceptible to—believing that even if circumstances did not change, God was still in control.

MOTHERHOOD MIRACLES

As a soon-to-be mother, the Lord heard Leah’s prayers and was faithful to give her the strength to let go of the past. She began healing and letting go of the ill feelings she harbored. God gave her grace to forgive.

When the time came, God enabled Leah to carry her baby girl, Malaika, without any complications. During this tender time of reliance on the Lord, she was learning more about the capacity of God’s heart and realizing how the birth of her daughter inspired the rebirth of her relationship with God; new motherhood was starting to feel Heavenly. All along, God was using her pregnancy to restore the parts of her that were broken. “God started showing me, ‘Regardless of how far you have fallen, you are still mine and I am going to prove it to you.’ And indeed, he proved it to me.”



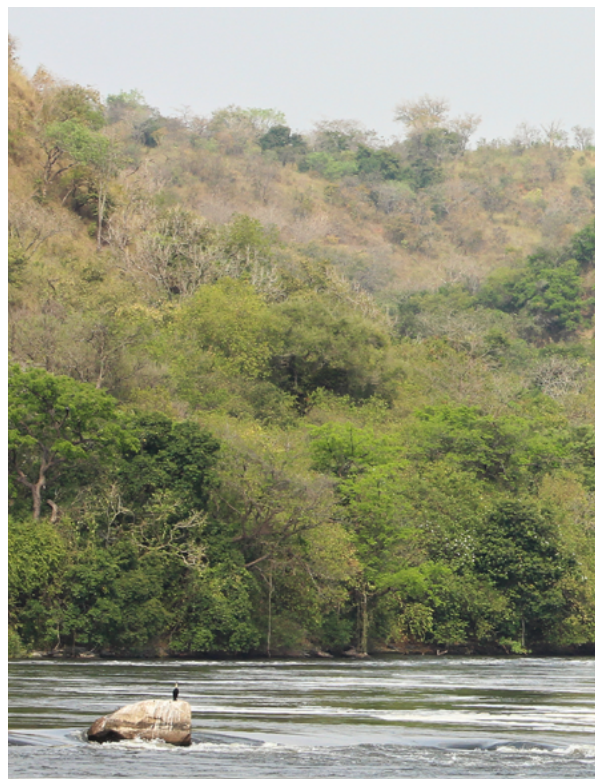
A BRAVE RETURN

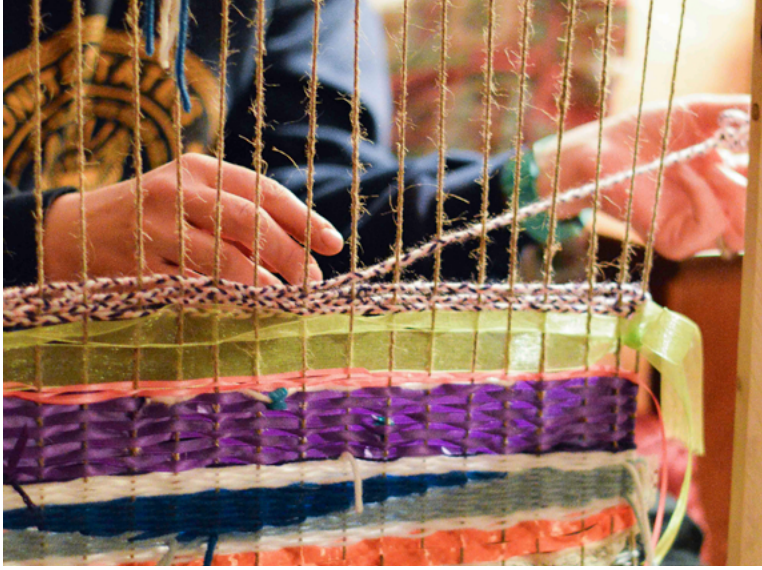
As the demands of raising a baby became a reality, the time came to return to work. “When I was pregnant and I had really given myself to God, there was a time when the Holy Spirit told me I would go back to Africa Renewal Ministries. But in my head it was impossible due to the nature of my pregnancy.” That is, until the Lord started reviving her spiritual gift of writing.

At the same time she was looking for a job, Africa Renewal Ministries needed someone in the partnership facilitation office who could write. “Because I had resumed writing and posting, Pastor Peter had read my blog. When he saw me writing again, I think the Holy Spirit, who told me to write again, went to him and told him, ‘She deserves a chance again.’”

Before she knew it, God had opened a clear door for Leah to return to the ministry. In trusting the Lord and prioritizing the life Malaika deserved, she finally allowed herself to live a life worth living—free from the past weight of burdens as she embraced her calling to help others. “God can bring healing in ways that we least expect; He can use everything for His glory.”

Today, Leah’s days are filled with gratitude beyond what her heart can contain or words can express. She is currently thriving at Africa Renewal Ministries, growing with the Lord as she watches her daughter Malaika grow up. “I am so grateful God is using my story to bring others hope.” ●





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