

Let The Little Dog Eat

Mark 7:24-30 November 19, 2025

Who here considers themselves a dog person? I also love my dog. What's not to love - other than all the problems and expenses she introduces to my life?

But, I must say, our society *may* have gone a little crazy when it comes to how we treat our canine friends. Did you know 64% of dog owners cook their dogs a separate meal three times a week?¹ A 2019 veterinary journal study found that 53% of dog owners give an *equal* priority to buying healthy food for their pets compared to food for themselves and 43% say they give a *higher* priority to their dog food than they do their own.

Many high-end pet foods now the label "human grade." One nutrition researcher says it's part of the growing anthropomorphization or *humanization* of animals in our minds.²

Now in our text tonight, it's as if the *opposite* happens. A desperate woman falls at Jesus' feet in need of help. And, at first glance, He *seems* to *dehumanize* her and makes her out to be a dog.

Is this a moment of harsh reluctance or is something else going on here? Let's take a look.

Mark 7:24 - 24 He 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.

In our last text, the scribes and Pharisees came accusing Jesus and His followers of not being *clean* enough by the standards of the oral traditions. Despite all He said and did, they did not care. They only cared about their traditions and their man-made regulations for purity.

In response, Jesus now *leaves* Judea and hangs out in a Gentile country for a bit. *That's* what He thought about their ceremonial legalism.

There have been times where Jesus worked among Gentile populations, but this is the *only* time He actually crossed out of Jewish borders.³ Tyre and Sidon are what we know as Lebanon today.⁴

We're not told the exact reasons why He went there, but it doesn't *seem* like He went to do public ministry. In fact, He was hoping not to be recognized. In this section of Mark, Jesus *keeps* trying to get some time away to rest and be with His disciples, but so far it hasn't worked. Despite His desire for secrecy and seclusion, people came knocking anyway.

¹ <https://artfulliving.com/luxury-pet-food-trend-2024/>

² <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20240214-human-grade-luxury-pet-food-market>

³ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

⁴ Frank Gaebelein, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

There are those within Christianity who teach that God controls every single atom and activity in a *causal* way. Meaning that *anything* that happens, God *makes* to happen - no rogue molecules. This theology suggests that *if* God is sovereign, He *must* ultimately decree both good and evil.⁵

But the Bible says that God *does not always get what He wants*. Peter said, “the Lord is not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance.”⁶ The Lord *wanted* the first generation out of Egypt to go into the land, but they refused. Jesus *wanted* a quiet weekend away with His disciples, but didn’t get it. In the next passage, He tells people not to talk about what He did, but they do.

This does *not* mean He lacks sovereignty or power or that His will can be thwarted. It means that He, *in* His magnificent, powerful sovereignty, has freed our wills to give us genuine choices. And we can choose to do things God does not *want* us to do. He is sovereign enough, powerful enough, to allow that, while also accomplishing His will.

Mark 7:25-26 - ²⁵ Instead, immediately after hearing about him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she was asking him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Matthew also records this story in his Gospel. He labels her a Canaanite, which was likely her religious affiliation.⁷ So Mark is driving home the point that not only is she a Gentile, *everything* about her is Gentile. She is *not* a Jew by birth, by culture, by language, and by religion. She’s not a Ruth or a Cornelius. She is *totally* outside the community of God.

But, here she was, at the feet of Jesus. People need Jesus everywhere. *Every* person from every place in every situation of their lives *needs* Jesus. It is so important that we not get drawn off into the Us-vs-Them mentality that is so prevalent in our culture today. On every issue, it’s about who’s on *our* side and how the *other* side is the enemy.

A person *may* be your enemy, but we serve a God Who *loves* His enemies. And Who commands *us* to love our enemies.⁸ Christianity means we do what we can to make our enemies into brothers through the power of Gospel. Because what people need is *Jesus*.

How had she heard about Jesus? Well, if we recall, back in Mark chapter 3 a delegation from Tyre and Sidon had come down to Galilee to listen to Jesus, and, naturally, they brought back word.

Mark 7:27 - ²⁷ He 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.”

Wow. Have *you* been called a dog recently? This is *not* something we would expect to hear from Jesus, the Friend of sinners.

⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/if-god-desires-all-to-be-saved-why-arent-they>

⁶ 2 Peter 3:9

⁷ Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

⁸ Luke 6:27

Commentators rush to point out that Jesus *did* use a softer term for dog. He uses the word for house dog or lap dog, not mongrels in the streets.⁹ It was also used for puppies.¹⁰ But, listen, this is *not* a term of endearment. It doesn't help all that much to just add "little" before calling someone a name. If I said, "You're a dirtbag," does it *really* make it better if I said, "You're a *little* dirtbag?"

So, what's going on here? It's unsettling to see Jesus respond this way. And in Matthew, He comes across even more harsh on surface level.

But the truth is, there's *more* than a surface level. There are several other layers here. First, we can only read the words in black and white. We aren't able to hear how they were said or see the Lord's face or know exactly what was going on around this statement.

Second layer: there was a prioritization in God's plan. Paul discusses it in Romans 1 and 2.

Romans 1:16 - ¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek

The work of the Gospel would start in Jerusalem, then go to Judea, then the half-Jewish state of Samaria, and *then* the rest of the world. It's not *prejudice*, it's the *progression* of God's plan. And in this little mini-parable Jesus was sharing with this woman, He's saying, "Listen, you wouldn't cook a meal, set the table, call everyone to supper, and then once the kids sit down grab their plates and toss it to the dog."¹¹ That would be strange and inappropriate.

Third, we know the 12 needed to be taught lessons about what *God* considered to be clean and unclean. As Christians, *they* would have to give up their prejudices, which ran deep in their culture.

Now, Matthew's Gospel explains that the disciples were annoyed with this woman. They went over to Jesus and said, "You've gotta get rid of this lady." Maybe *they* had invoked the dog slur as well, which was common for Jews to use against Gentiles. One thing this scene would teach them hereafter is that, yes, God had love and compassion, *even for those they considered less than humans* - Gentile dogs. That Christ came to save *the world*, not just a select few.

A fourth layer is that Jesus needed to dialogue with this woman and draw out the truth of her faith. Did she *really* believe in *Him*, or was she chasing some sort of paganistic power?

You see, when she came to Jesus, Matthew tells us she *kept* crying out, "Have mercy on me, *Son of David!* Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁹ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

¹⁰ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Vol. 23: Mark*

¹¹ Lane

But what did the offspring of the Jewish King David have to do with a Gentile woman? Nothing. If you got into some legal trouble and went running to the French embassy and said, "Help me! Protect me!" They'd say, "Where's your French passport?" And you'd say, "I'm not French." And they'd throw you out because you do not fall under their protection.

In His reply, Jesus points out the reality that she was *not* Jewish in heritage or in religion. There were Gentiles that had become God-fearers or converts. She was not one of them. So this was a moment for *her* to stop and think through what she was really asking. What did she really believe. To whom did she want to belong? He was challenging her to justify her request.¹²

Finally, there's a fifth layer. And that's that sometimes Jesus says some *hard* things to us. This was the time in His ministry where a *ton* of people had abandoned their walk with Him because of the so-called "hard sayings of Jesus" we read about that in John 6.

Jesus has some hard things to say to us. Things that challenge our attitudes, our comforts, our assumptions, and desires. If we read God's word and are *never* confronted, then we're reading it with blinders on.

Now, with all that said, Jesus *did* leave the door open for this woman. Because He *did* use the term for the household pet. If a mangy, stray dog wandered into your living room, you'd run them out. But your beloved puppy has a place in the family, doesn't he?

And Jesus did not say the dogs *wouldn't* be fed, but that the children should be fed *first*, implying the pups *would* have their turn. It's a subtle signal that the time was coming that the Good News would go out to everyone.

Remember, just before the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus sent out the 12 on their mini-mission trip. And He told them, "Don't take the road that leads to Gentiles, go to the lost sheep of Israel." But He went on to explain that eventually they *would* be going to Gentiles, too. And now He has taken them on a road that leads to Gentiles. And just before this, what had happened? The flocks of Israel had been *fed*. Jesus said, let the children be *fed* first. And He used the same word that was used at the feeding of the 5,000 when we read every ate and was *satisfied*.

Mark 7:28 - 28 But she replied to him, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

She doesn't get angry or storm off in a huff. She *accepts* what Jesus said. She willingly, humbly wears the designation of little dog.

Now, *maybe* it was out of sheer desperation. Or *maybe* it was because she saw something in Jesus' tone or face that we can't see in black and white text. But it does remind us that God has every right to tell us His assessment that we are unlovely, worthless, depraved sinners who *deserve*

¹² Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

judgment for our transgressions against God and man. We have no right to be offended because it's true.

You are *not* a good person. You are a wretched slave to sin apart from the grace of Christ. And we see here that this woman admits it and then appeals to nothing *other* than God's grace.

Two interesting things happen in her reply: First, she's given up the culturally phony attempt to call Him the Son of David. She now speaks to Him using the normal form of polite Gentile address.¹³ And second, she calls Him *Lord*.

This is the *only* time Jesus is called *Lord* in Mark and it's uttered by a Gentile.¹⁴ That should blow our minds. She's the only person who says to Jesus, "You are the *Master*." And not only does she demonstrate that her faith is not placed in a *power*, but a *Person*, she also demonstrates the depth of her faith. She says, "All I need from You is a single crumb and my daughter will be made whole. A *crumb* of Your power is enough to drive out a life-dominating demon."

Mark 7:29 - ²⁹ Then he told her, "Because of this reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter."

Some commentators suggest Jesus was *reluctant* to interact with this woman or help her. I totally disagree. In fact, the way Mark tells it, *the healing was already done*. Without a pronouncement, without a specific word, as soon as she was done responding Jesus said, "Actually, I already did it."

And then notice, He speaks to her as her Master: "You may go." She was not a disciple, but He was her Master. And we can only assume that in the years that followed she became a follower and church member because Jesus said in Matthew, "Woman, your faith is *great!*" In the end, she wasn't a dog. She was a woman whose belief filled Jesus with joy.

Mark 7:30 - ³⁰ When she went back to her home, she found her child lying on the bed, and the demon was gone.

She called Him Master, He commanded her like a Master, and now she *obeyed* her Master. She didn't say, "Well, come with me just in case." She didn't say, "How can I *know* You're telling me the truth?" The faith that drove her to the house to find Jesus now sent her home, trusting Jesus. And with her a testimony of Christ's saving power to share with her family and neighbors and friends.

Not only had a compassionate miracle occurred that day, but yet one more proof that Jesus was Messiah. You see, since His arrival in this Gospel He's been proving that He's the Second Adam, that He's greater than Moses, that He's greater than John the Baptist. But now He proves He's greater than Elijah.

¹³ Hooker

¹⁴ Gaebelien

In 1 Kings chapter 17 we read the story of the prophet Elijah who found himself in the region between Tyre and Sidon. And there he came into contact with a Syrophenecian woman whose son needed healing.¹⁵ And so Elijah *went* to the house and he cried out to the Lord, wondering what God was doing and whether God would supply healing. And three times he stretched out over the boy, then cried out in prayer again and finally the lad was restored to his mother.

But now here is Jesus, able to heal from afar with just a *thought*. He *is* the Son of Man. He *is* the Messiah. He *is* God Himself, Who put on flesh to save us from our sins.

So, Jesus' vacation ended up being a *working* vacation, but that's because He is a God Whose compassions never fail. He never turns away a person who comes to Him in faith.

But tonight a question we can ask ourselves is this: Is God getting what He *wants* from your life? He *is* Master, right? Out in the wider culture the phrase, "Christ is King" has become a political argument. Obviously Christ *is* King of kings. But let's not forget to remind ourselves that *Jesus is Lord*. That means He is the Master and Commander of our lives. That means He has directives for us. That means He has stated opinions and spiritual leadings for us. Is He getting what He wants from our hearts? From our choices? He *wants* repentance. He *wants* faith. He *wants* obedience. He *wants* our attention and our affection. Is He getting what He wants? Or are there areas of our lives where we have denied Him what is rightfully His?

The Pharisees did. The scribes did. At times the disciples did. May we endeavor to be a people who listen and obey and turn to God in trust and submission, enthroning Him, and being transformed by Him.

¹⁵ Brooks