



Speaker:
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From Dogs to Kings

◀ Series: The Gospel of Mark • 24 of 24

10/25/2020 (SUN) | Bible: **Mark 7:24-30**

We're in chapter seven and verse 24 today.

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The story we've just read together is an example of great faith; but my purpose today is to present to you, not so much the one displaying faith, but rather the one who this person trusted—Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man and Son of God. Faith in him alone is the only way a man or woman can be saved from their sin and inherit eternal life.

So today, we've read an account of Jesus healing someone. She was a young woman, who was vexed with a devil—she was demonised. Jesus healed this girl at a distance, at the earnest request of her mother. And such was the depth of the mother's God-given faith, that it's been left as an example for us.

God help us to learn something from this woman today. God help us to think more highly of the healer himself: Jesus the Lord. And if you're outside the kingdom right now, just maybe God will give you faith in his son.

We read that Jesus came into "the borders of Tyre and Sidon". He'd come from Gennesaret, on the edge of Lake Galilee. There, he'd taken on the religious leaders and exposed them as blind, false teachers, pretend believers, and religious hypocrites.

He'd determined now to keep a low profile. But once again he was interrupted. Yet even this interruption was ordained by God, that Jesus might help someone—but, more importantly, that his ministry would be more greatly endorsed as a result.

I want to firstly recap what happened here. A woman goes to Jesus, saying her daughter is possessed. She pleads with him. Then Jesus effectively calls her a *dog*, one of those who are not of the tribes of Israel, and so not due anything of the goodness shown to them by God. She replies with a wise answer, showing her great faith, and Jesus remotely, and immediately, heals her daughter.

Now I feel it would be useful to look very briefly at the account from three points of view.

Firstly, the *literal* understanding

You have the master of the house, the husband and father. He sits at the family's dining table. His family's there too. He's provided food for his family, and in this example it's the children who are spoken of.

He feeds bread to his children. They are fed first, and are fed plenty. However, some crumbs fall to the floor, and the dog gets them. It's a sign of the dog's status that it eats crumbs off the floor, and only when the children have been fed.

Secondly, we have the *Jewish* understanding

Remember that God singled out a nation, Israel, in order that he might use them as a picture of the true Israel, the church, the elect of God from all nations. So in this picture of the feast:

- The master of the house is Jehovah
- The children are the Jewish people
- The table is the basis of their unity, or communion
- The bread represents God's provisions
- The crumbs represent the smallest of those blessings
- And the dogs symbolise the Gentiles, or non-Israelites

This is probably the level of her understanding: that she, as a Gentile, was not worthy to partake of the blessings she knew belonged to the Jews. Yet she begged for help, believing Christ to be the only one who could heal her daughter.

And thirdly, we come to the *spiritual* understanding

- The master is Christ Jesus the Lord
- The children are the true Israel of God, the people he elected from eternity
- The table is our unity in Christ
- The bread pictures all the blessings promised in the gospel
- The crumbs are the mercies God shows to undeserving sinners
- And the dogs are unbelievers

The whole purpose of this account being recorded for us is to magnify Jesus Christ; and in order to see this, we'll have a look at this woman more closely.

But I'd like to take a moment to comment on this treatment of the woman. It's often said this is an example of one of the "hard sayings"—that is, the *harsh* sayings—of Jesus. I'm not going to criticise anyone for using that term, but I do feel it reveals a problem within the church today.

My suspicion is many people have a wrong idea of what Jesus Christ is like. It's this sentimental view again, which has poisoned the thinking of the Lord's people, and led to many errors.

If we simply look at the gospel accounts of Jesus's life, we can see he displays a *range* of emotions, and acts in a variety of ways. One minute, he's healing someone who's been blind their whole life, the next minute he's throwing tables over brandishing a stick.

One minute he's speaking of himself as the Good Shepherd who gives his very life for his beloved sheep; the next he's speaking of himself as the Judge who will give the order for millions of people to be cast into a place of eternal torment.

The real Jesus gives life and destroys life. The real Jesus loves people and hates people. But because people are sinners, they want an impotent Jesus. They're happy with the baby Jesus, or with an adult Jesus who is nice to people and gives wise advice—a sort of ancient Gandhi. So they naturally recoil from acknowledging him as the holy, almighty creator, as the hymn-writer describes:

*There thy kingdoms all adore thee,
Heaven above and earth below,
While the depths of hell before thee,
Trembling and defeated, bow.*

To the one who stands, puzzled at the "hard sayings" of Jesus Christ, they need to be shown that these sayings are not out of character for our saviour, but natural expressions of who he is.

So let's examine some things about this woman.

The woman knew she was a "dog"

In our society, if a woman is called a "dog", it's used to cruelly express how outwardly ugly they think she is. Thank God he doesn't look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. He sees past your possessions, your clothes, even your religious activities, and sees you.

But Jesus's use of this word was different. The Jews commonly referred to non-Jews as "Greeks", but also "dogs". The dog was despised. Most ran around in feral packs, although some were owned as working animals. And, you know, they do eat their own vomit!

And being an animal familiar to people and being thought little of, it's not surprising it's used in the Bible as a term of loathing for rebels against God. You can have a look later at Revelation 22 and verse 15 as an example.

This woman was a Syrophenician, a Canaanite. She came to Jesus most likely from Tyre or Sidon itself. And living so close to the Israelite people, she would have been very familiar with the application of that title to her and her people.

The woman knew Jesus was the only one who could help her

It was to *him* she came. Perhaps she knew the Psalms: Psa. 33 and verse 20 says, "Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield." Or maybe this one, from Psa. 46, verse 1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Friends who are yet unsaved, this woman's is the very knowledge you need: you must **know** that you are unworthy of the least of God's blessings; you must **acknowledge** Jesus Christ as the promised Son of God and God the Son; and you must **believe** that he alone can help you with your sin.

Let's continue with this woman.

The woman came

She heard that the helper was in travelling distance, and she came to him. It might sound too obvious to mention, but she had to *go* to him. And in leaving her home to seek out the master, she was already showing her faith.

Of course, what was driving her to him was love for her daughter. She was so desperate for her daughter's well-being, that it's as if she was the one afflicted.

You believers: you are THE body of Christ. Read 1Co 12:27—"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

When one member of this body is afflicted, share in it, and help ease their burden.

The woman pleaded

She begged for help. And when Jesus ignored her plea, she even tried persuading the disciples to speak to him on her behalf. To be honest, she made a nuisance of herself for the sake of her daughter.

You children, you will never fully know the love your parents have for you. But don't feel too bad, because your parents are the same: they don't know just how much their parents have loved them. And, if you grow up and have children of your own, be prepared: they won't see the love you have for them either.

It's when you have your own children that you start to say to yourself, "Hang on: if I'm having to make all these sacrifices for my children, then maybe my parents did the same for me. Maybe their purpose in life wasn't to make my life a misery after all!"

But the worst thing of all is that none of us appreciate fully the love of God for us. There's the real sin.

The woman fell down at his feet and worshipped

There was no shame here. She really did throw herself on the floor. Is there any place lower?

Worship belongs to God alone. When, in a vision, the apostle John spoke with an angel, he was so overawed with the revelations that he fell at the angel's feet and worshipped him. But the angel told him immediately to STOP IT. He said, "I am thy fellow-labourer", and went on to say, "Worship God".

This is how she behaved. And when the time comes for God to rein in one of his chosen people, THEY must come to him, just as they are, reeking with sin. THEY must plead with

God for mercy. And the only way of approach is on the floor—not necessarily literally, of course; but they must within themselves—in a spiritual manner—*cast themselves at his feet and worship him as Lord and Saviour*.

Let's say just a little more about the woman.

We see her humility

Most people wouldn't bow down like she did. We're a proud race of creatures, and it KILLS US to humble ourselves. But this woman knew she had a need, and she just didn't care what she looked like, or what people thought.

But more than that: consider how she reacted when Jesus referred to her as a "dog", who was unworthy of help. She said, *That's true, Lord*. She didn't defend herself, or remind him what a good person she was. She said, *Yes, that's all true*. Such humility.

And let's go even further. Think about the modesty of her request. She wasn't asking for the wealth of Israel. She wasn't asking for multitudes of blessings. She asked for, as it were, *crumbs* of mercy, and readily admitted that she didn't deserve even these!

We see her persistence

This woman wouldn't give up, would she! She pestered Jesus, then made a nuisance of herself to the disciples. Then she went back to Jesus and tried again! SHE WAS IGNORED BY THE SON OF GOD, BUT IT DIDN'T STOP HER!

Have any of you wondered why Jesus ignored her? It's a fair question to ask. I've no doubt he did it to test her faith. To see if she would give up. But despite being ignored, despite people wanting her to just go away, despite being addressed as nothing more than a dog; DESPITE THE COMPLETELY NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO HER PLEA, SHE CONTINUES, until the blessing comes, and she gets her request.

You know, if I didn't know Christ at all, I'd have wondered who this woman thinks she is! I mean, you don't pester Jesus Christ, do you? He is God, after all! But the book of God tells me that he *encourages* this type of approach.

We see her wisdom

I've always been impressed by the woman's answer, when Jesus shot her down with an apparently unsympathetic reaction. He started the analogy—this picture of bread, and crumbs and dogs—but she continues with it. There was wisdom in her saying, and all true wisdom is from heaven.

It's been said that her people were noted for their...smooth talking. But this here was not due to inherited intellect, but born from a simple child-like faith, which said, "He's God. Therefore he can do it."

At the appointed time of God's love, when the elect sinner is still acting like a child of the devil, God comes and gets hold of that man, that woman, that child:

- And he humbles them, by having them put themselves in a place of submission
- He encourages them to persist in pleading with him for mercy
- And he imparts to them wisdom from on high.

This wisdom is not the type the world calls “wisdom”. They’d say Confucius was wise. The wisdom I’m talking of is *heavenly* wisdom. Read 2Ti 3: 15—“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee **wise unto salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The wisdom God gives results in their conversion. It is wisdom **unto salvation**.

You do know, don’t you, that unconverted men can be experts in the study of God? They read books about theology, they go to college to study theology, and then they *write* books about theology. Yet, in all this, their hearts are far from God.

Their theology is limited to here [head], whereas the knowledge of God for the believer is in here [heart] also. There are things that go on in the relationship between God and his children the world can never understand. Why? 1Co 2:14 tells us: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: **neither can he know them, because they are SPIRITUALLY discerned.**”

If you’re listening today because you’re interested in finding out about God, then we ask God right now that he’d give you this wisdom from above, that you might **feel** your need of a saviour.

So we’ve looked at this woman, we’ve reminded ourselves about how the story relates to God saving his people from their sin, and we’ve confessed together that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Saviour.

Perhaps I could encourage the brethren now.

I’m going to do this by giving you three final points—basic points, because it’s the simple things we often forget. And they’re to do with our approach to God:

Firstly, like this woman, we should COME to God

We’re to pray always—pray without ceasing.

The word of God is overflowing with encouragement for God’s children to pray to him, yet they don’t do much of it! For example, regarding the things we ask for, God says in James 4: 2—“...ye have not, because ye ask not.”

Can it be that simple? That’s what it says. How often I’ve struggled with some problem, only to realise after some time after that I haven’t asked God for help. God has all the things you need right there. He’s willing to give them you. But you haven’t asked yet!

Jesus gave us a wonderful promise when talking to the disciples one day. It’s recorded in John 15: 16—“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that **whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.**”

Secondly, like this woman, we should WORSHIP God

We approach God through worship in general. People associate the word “worship” with singing hymns; but it’s much more than that. *The entire life of a Christian is an act of worship.* How so?

- You worship him when you pray, which is supposed to happen throughout the day
- You worship him when you read, study and meditate on his word
- You worship him when you listen to the word expounded by a preacher
- You worship him when you fellowship with other members of your heavenly family
- You worship him when you present the gospel to others
- *And you worship him in song*

If you’re feeling a bit short of joy, worshipping God will get it back. Get into the word more, share what you read with the rest of us, spread the gospel, pay attention to the preaching and make notes, and read the words that you sing.

And finally, like this woman, we should be PERSISTENT

You know, it’s always astonished me how we are encouraged by God to “pester” him. I’m not making this up. He really does give us the go-ahead to make a nuisance of ourselves in prayer—that’s what being persistent is.

Let’s look at two examples, so you know it’s in the Bible. Gen 32:26-28 describes how Christ Jesus came in the form of an angel and entered into a physical struggle with Jacob. “And he [that’s the Lord] said, ‘Let me go, for the day breaketh’. And he [that’s Jacob] said, ‘**I will not let thee go, except thou bless me**’. And he said unto him, ‘What is thy name?’ And he said, ‘Jacob’. And he said, ‘Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, **and hast prevailed**’”. Jacob’s perseverance left us with an example, which we can follow in prayer, in saying to God, “I will not rest, Lord, till this prayer is answered”.

In the eleventh chapter of Luke, Christ Jesus gives an example of a man who goes to his friend’s house at midnight. The man’s asking his friend for some food, because he has guests at his own house, but has nothing to give them. His mate shouts out the window, “Do you realise what time it is? The doors are all locked, and everyone’s in bed. I can’t help you mate.”

Reading from verse eight: “I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his **importunity** he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall

ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Believer! What privilege you have! How greatly you are blessed in being able to approach God at all! You are clothed in a robe of the very righteousness of Christ himself! Make use of it, and come to God in heartfelt worship, and pray with earnestness. He loves you, and delights to give you good things.

You don't get crumbs that fall from the master's table: you sons and daughters of God are sitting at the table with him, and he daily fills you with all blessings in Christ Jesus.

Amen.