

Word you think of when you think of Jesus: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bigot? Sexist? Misogynist? Racist? Intolerant? Prejudiced?

### **READ TEXT – Mark 7:24-30**

Here in Mark 7 a woman comes to Jesus, begging him to heal her daughter.  
His reply? “*It isn’t right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.*”

This should make us say – *wait, what?*

In 2016 the Harvard Dean of Education gave a commencement address that went viral and sparked the Times bestseller – “*Wait What?*” In his speech he said - “*Wait, what?*” is actually a very effective way of asking for clarification. “*Wait what?*” is at the root of understanding.

It pays off in life to slow down and make sure you understand.  
These moments in scripture that make us scratch our head aren’t meant to be skimmed over.  
They are invitations to come to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, why he came, and what that means for us.

I don’t just scratch my head when I read this passage. I cringe. I flinch.  
It comes off as prejudiced and **sexist**...  
A mother wants healing for her daughter and she gets this vicious clap back from Jesus.  
It comes off as prejudiced and **racist**. Jews saw Gentiles as unclean by their very nature.  
And Jesus seemingly wants no part of her company, like she’s the dog covered in fleas.

This is one reason I’m all the more confident that the Gospel accounts are true.  
If the disciples were writing the Gospels as a made up account that would elevate Jesus to a place of adoration and worship – they never in their right minds would have included a story like this!!  
Because to me there’s only one explanation for it being included: *it happened*.

But OK - if it happened, one massive question remains... *why?*

Many in wrestling with this passage and Christ’s behavior within it try to explain away the sting.  
Or they make excuses for it.

Some say this was Jesus in the weakness of his flesh, being fully **HUMAN**...  
The week he had just had included being rejected in his hometown, his friend John the Baptist dying, and along the way is this crowd that won’t leave him alone...  
He was caught with his compassion down. After all... he was human.  
**BUT** you could argue this isn’t human. This is less than human, even sinful, to treat another person like trash and equate their dignity to that of a dog.

Some say this was Jesus in his humanity realizing the scope of his **MISSION** for the first time  
This is Jesus **MATURING**. Coming to a deeper understanding of the scope of his mission.  
**BUT** Jesus had already crossed the border into Gentile territory and had shown no pause in ministering to Gentiles.

This was a **TEST**. He was seeing if she had the necessary faith.

**BUT** Jesus makes no mention of her passing a test, and he doesn't commend her faith in the Greek, but her reasoning. (And what happened if she didn't have the faith? In Mark 9 he heals another man's son in spite of his lack of faith)

Other still **SUGARCOAT** it and try to remove the sting by examining the Greek for dog. Many will say his use of the diminutive form of dog- "little dog" - doesn't speak to a street dog, but one kept in the home. OK, that's mildly reassuring. But he still calls her a dog! Sub-human! If I come to you for help and you tell me no, get lost, and call me a dog, I'm not going to be comforted if you tell me I'm a golden retriever.

We make excuses or explain away the sting.

But if you read the Gospels, you realize that Jesus is often **deliberately shocking**. He calls the religious leaders whitewashed tombs and a brood of vipers, among other things. But when he does this, he does it for a reason.

So we come to the question again... **WHY?**

Mark gives us a clue in the way he writes the passage: "*Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia*" It's a literary two step progression Mark uses to get the reader to notice something. The second detail typically contains a crucial element.

She's from a region that the Old Testament prophets painted as a wealthy and godless oppressor of Israel. Syrian Phoenicia. It's a fancy way of saying she's a resident of Tyre, where Jesus runs into her... this city has a lengthy history in the Bible... one that's typically not rosy:

For instance, the entirety of the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of **Isaiah** is a prophecy about Tyre's downfall.

**Ezekiel 26-28** is much the same,

Three full chapters, complete with God saying, and I quote, "*I am your enemy O Tyre...*"

He caps it all off with a funeral song dedicated to them.

God is talking serious trash when he writes your funeral song in advance. Why would he?

### **AMOS 1:9**

*The people of Tyre have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished!*

*They broke their treaty of brotherhood with Israel, selling whole villages as slaves to Edom.*

They had a troubled history...

In Jesus' time: as this woman referenced bread crumbs with Jesus, Tyre was taking bread from the table of Jews in Jesus' hometown Galilee economically.

**Acts 12** speaks to how Tyre was reliant on the region for its food supply, and those who grew the food in Galilee often went hungry.

It is for these reasons that Josephus, the renowned Jewish historian, spoke of the people of Tyre as "our bitterest enemies"

So what does all of this mean about this woman?  
She was a privileged member of a hated class of people.

We don't know her age. We probably can't call her a rich young ruler.  
But she was likely a "*Middle Aged Mom of Good Means*"

Just as Jesus was deliberately shocking in his conversation with the Rich Young Ruler, telling him to go and sell every dime of what he owned and give it to the poor, I believe Jesus is deliberately scandalous here. To remove the sting and lessen the scandal is to miss the moment.

Jesus, being all but deliberately shocking with the Rich Young Ruler when he tells him:  
*"sell everything you own and give it to the poor, then follow me."*

This isn't a universal command to empty our bank accounts, but rather to empty the throne of our heart of anything that isn't Jesus.

Jesus knows this when he asks this of a ruler whose wealth ruled his heart.

We talked about how we'd best pay attention to it as we're in the upper echelon of global wealth. And this accumulation of assets gives us a god complex. The security of a bank account and a retirement plan gives us a sense of earning our security. The narrative we buy into is I'm tapping into my goodness and potential through freedom and willpower.

I'm a self-made man. I'm a self-made woman.

I'm master of my fate and captain of my soul.

This is the chorus of our American Dream.

Hard work and ambition don't run contrary to scripture. But when we listen to this chorus on repeat, our pride prevents us from receiving the kingdom as little children.

Let alone a dog!

This middle aged mom of good means humbly does just that.

Her words don't just contain humility and wit.

Her words contain theological insight.

Israel were the children of God. The children of Abraham. God's chosen, covenant people.

Israel had precedence over the Gentiles – which is what Jesus is speaking to in his analogy.

Paul affirms this in Romans when he speaks his famous words "***I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes:***

Then he adds: ***first to the Jew, then to the Gentile***"

Yet rather than being offended as a Gentile, this woman is the first person we see engage Jesus with a constructive exchange about his mission, and ultimately about the Good News.

It's a part of the good news that we miss, even with Jesus' entire ministry and the New Testament's full treatment of it in our Bibles.

What part of the good news am I talking about?

The bad news.

Jesus is deliberately shocking with people because it prepares them for the shock of the Gospel.

**With the Gospel, the starting block is a stumbling block for many.**

The stumbling block? The bad news that comes before the good news.

You're broken. I'm broken.

As we mourned more victims of violence right here in VA Beach, one of my first thoughts was to an old **Malcom Muggeridge** quote: *The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact*

We resist this reality. The reality that we're broken.

The reality that our righteousness- our best – is but filthy rags.

That we don't deserve a crumb from the table of a holy God.

What keeps us from fully embracing the Good News is the fact the bad news is so bad...

And it's about us. We struggle to accept that we could be unacceptable before God.

It comes off as scandalous or appalling to us. Revolting even. Like being called a dog.

We like to take our notes from Nike commercials- Just do it. Dream it and achieve it.

Our reality is a lot closer to old *Life Alert commercials*–“*I've fallen and I can't get up!*”

And the stumbling block is this: if we don't believe the bad news, we'll never truly believe the Good News: that Jesus didn't come to reward the deserving, but to reach the needy.

**Romans 3:23** – ALL have sinned and fallen short.

**Romans 6:23** – the wages of sin is death.

**Romans 5:8** – while we were still sinners, dogs spiritually- Jesus died for us.

Jesus didn't come to reward the deserving, but to rescue the needy.

And until you understand the depths of depravity, you can't grasp the glory of God's grace.

If we aren't not admitting to ourselves that we are in daily and desperate need for the grace of God, the alternative is that we're going to give ourselves to the work convincing ourselves that we're OK. So when God reminds us of our brokenness to bring healing... we flinch and pride kicks in, keeping us from the source of our help.

**Dwight Moody** once said *Jesus sent no one away empty except those that were full of themselves*

Just chapters before this, likely the same week, Jesus was rejected by folks in his hometown, Nazareth. Why? They couldn't see it. They couldn't see how Jesus was any better than they were. They were flush with pride, no room for humbling themselves and honoring Jesus.

So the Bible says they saw no move of God.

And then as Jesus leaves that region and heads to Tyre– the region of Gentiles, the unclean – this woman humbles herself and sees a miracle.

This isn't the way it was supposed to play out! But Jesus – in the midst of Gentile territory speaking to someone the Jews would have reviled – sparks a miracle.

This miracle shows the time was coming when the Gentiles, the unclean, the enemy, those considered dogs by the so called insiders - they too would be invited in.

In 1665 a missionary – Morgan Godwyn – came here to Virginia to begin doing mission work amongst slaves. The reply from slave owners was less than cordial, one was quoted as saying: *“What, such as they? What, those black dogs be made Christians? What, shall they be like us?”*

**“They”** – us and them. A line drawn by generations of broken theology and distortion of the Bible like the “curse of Ham” - that produced a tier of whites above blacks.

**Dogs** – the same way Jews would have seen Gentiles – unclean and lesser by nature.

**Shall they be like us?** Yes. The answer is always yes.

These outsiders- these viewed as lesser than or as far from God as they come- they will be like us  
They are us.

We are all outsiders who have been invited in.

In Romans 1:16, when Paul says the Gospel saves EVERYONE who believes, first Jew then Gentile, he's really humbling both groups of people. He's reminding both groups that they rely on God's grace, not their own merit.

The words “then to the Gentile” would have been as offensive and shocking to the Jews as the words “first to the Jew” were to the Gentile.

Both sides would be shocked.

Both sides would have to humble themselves.

Neither side had merit. Both sides need mercy.

Who you see as “those dogs.” Who you see as an opponent.

Who you look down on from your high horse. Who you see as the “them” to your “us”

God sees as a target. God sees as a recipient. God sees “that they shall be like us.”

Covered in grace. Covered in love. Covered in mercy.

**The Gospel is shocking.**

It reminds us we are about as close to God's holiness as dogs are to the human species.

**Grace is just as shocking.**

It's for everyone, EVERYone who believes.

Feel broken? That's a taste of the bad news.

Taste and see just how good the good news of Jesus Christ is.

Embrace grace and memorize mercy.

The Enemy like to get us to forget how the good news is for “everyone” and remember the whole part about “first the insider, then the outsider.”

He will make us feel like outsiders, pointing to the fact that we’re broken.  
My favorite part of this woman’s story is that she realizes her state doesn’t cancel God’s grace.  
It’s why she persists in spite of it. She doesn’t cut herself off from Jesus’ grace.  
She humbly persists. She shows us: God’s grace is bigger. God’s grace is better.

If the enemy doesn’t make us feel like outsiders by loading us with shame,  
He will try to make us behave like privileged insiders by loading us with pride.  
He puts the saddle on our high horse and invites us on it.  
But this episode is also all about crossing boundaries.

Obliterating “us vs them” and Jesus replacing it with “us for them”  
“Shall THEY – those people- be like us?”  
God’s desire is always yes. That his grace would cross boundaries and lines in the sand.

Jesus we think you that you never send anyone away empty except those who are full of themselves.

We humble ourselves.  
We worship you in your holiness.