

Includes
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Allen Power

Mark 7:24-37

I almost changed the title of this lesson to: “Jesus loves the little children and puppies too.”

Those of us who have owned pets know how they can become a beloved member of the family. Some pet owners take that to an extreme giving their pet the same status as a child. A divorcing couple in Canada in 2016 came before a judge asking the judge to decide custody of their three dogs. The judge wrote: *“Dogs are wonderful creatures, ...Dogs are often highly intelligent, he wrote. Sensitive. Active. Constant and faithful companions. “Many dogs are treated as members of the family with whom they live,” the judge noted. But none of that matters when it comes to the court of law, “After all is said and done, a dog is a dog, At law it is property, a domesticated animal that is owned. At law it enjoys no familial rights.”ⁱ*

Remember Leona Helmsley? *“Upon her death in 2007, the real estate mogul left [her dog] Trouble more than she did two of her grandchildren, whom she deliberately left out of her will entirely. [A judge] determined that [the dog] could get by on \$2 million. Six million were given to the two grandkids and the rest went to charity.”ⁱⁱ*

- What does this have to do with Mark chapter seven? We’ll see.

Big Idea: Though no one is worthy or entitled to Jesus’ mercy and compassion, He came to seek and save anyone from anywhere who comes to Him in faith.

- Before we read the text, some context. Attempting a private retreat with His inner circle, Jesus took them forty miles to the Gentile city of Tyre.
- As usual, word got out that the miracle-working teacher was in town.

- Jesus was confronted by a “Canaanite” woman with a serious problem.

Mark 7:24–37 (ESV)

²⁴ And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. ²⁵ But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

- More context: Mark stressed the woman’s non-Jewish identity: she **was a Greek**, not from Greece, but a Gentile by culture and religion. She was a Syrophenician **born in Phoenicia**, part of the province of Syria. Matthew called her a “Canaanite woman” (Matt. 15:22).ⁱⁱⁱ
- It was bold for her to approach Jesus. She was a woman in a male dominated culture. She was a Gentile and He was a Jew.
- **Why would bringing her problem to Jesus have been intimidating?**
- She “fell down at His feet” in desperation (remember Jairus?)
- **Use your imagination. If you had a demon-possessed child in that day and time, what would life have been like in that household?**
- Matthew says the disciples urged Jesus to “send her away.”
- Jesus initially stood silent as she begged. **What was she feeling during the silence before Jesus spoke? What was she thinking?**
- Then Jesus responded with a shocking statement.

²⁷ And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

- What? Did Jesus just compare this suffering woman to a dog?
- The Jews would have nodded their heads in agreement. They often called Gentiles “dogs” – wild scavenger dogs (In Greek *kuon*, “wild cur”)
- But Jesus used a different word for dog. (**kunarion**; *little dog*^{iv}) a puppy.

- This wasn't an insult. It was a metaphor in order to make a point.
- His rough response to this woman was really a challenge to test her faith, and a comparison to make a point to His disciples.
- What is this whole thing about children and puppy dogs about?
- Matthew 15:24-26 sheds light: *"I was sent only to help God's lost sheep—the people of Israel."* He said, *"It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs."*^v
- Jesus was sent first to the Jews, God's chosen people. That's truth...but He was about to reveal MORE truth about why He came to earth.
- **How was Jesus challenging the woman to see if her faith was real?**
- Back to the story. This Gentile woman was not only motivated, persistent, humble, and full of faith, she was quick on her feet in a debate!

²⁸ But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

- **What was her point in response to Jesus' challenge?**
- She acknowledged she was entitled to NOTHING, yet she knew Jesus was so powerful all she needed were the "crumbs" from His table.
- Remember the hemorrhaging woman? Just the hem of His robe!
- Another Gentile, a Roman Centurion knew Jesus was so powerful he didn't even need to go to the man's house to heal his servant!
- This woman was saying: *"I know I'm a nobody who is entitled to nothing, but Jesus, please have mercy on me. All I need are the crumbs."*
- Jesus was impressed at her logic and more importantly with her faith.

²⁹ And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

- So, what's the lesson for you and me? There are a couple of them.
- First, we need to join Jesus in taking note of this woman's faith.
- In Matthew's account, Jesus said: *"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."*^{vi}
- **Why would it be surprising that this woman would have such faith?**
- Jesus' reaction to her faith was similar to His reaction to the Roman Centurion: *"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."*^{vii}
- In other words: *"I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust anywhere in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know about God and how he works."*^{viii}
- Truth: True faith in Christ is trusting Him when the "deck is stacked" against you! This woman was working against a "stacked deck."
- Wiersbe: *"...her nationality was against her: she was a Gentile and Jesus was a Jew. Besides that, she was a woman, and society in that day was dominated by the men. Satan was against her, for one of his demons had taken control in her daughter's life. The disciples were against her; they wanted Jesus to send her away and let Him (and them) have some rest. For a time, it looked as though even Jesus was against her! It was not an easy situation, and yet she triumphed because of her great faith."*^{ix}
- Despite all these challenges, this woman persisted in trusting Jesus to meet her need. True faith in Christ is trusting Him when the "deck is stacked" against you!
- Another lesson: Though Jesus came first to the Jews as God's chosen people, in this incident He made it plain that He came to bring salvation for ALL people.
- **What emotions or beliefs about her self might have kept her away?**
- Paul wrote: Romans 1:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
- NO ONE is worthy, but Jesus came for EVERYONE.

- Ever feel unworthy? Good, that's when Jesus can meet your need!
- If we really see Jesus for who He is, we will react like Peter in Luke 5:8: *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*^x
- This Gentile woman had connected the dots. She knew she was a nobody from nowhere unworthy to ask Jesus for help, yet she sensed He would have compassion on a "puppy dog" like her.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We said, no one is worthy or entitled to Jesus' mercy and compassion.
- That's the whole point. He came to seek and save anyone from anywhere who comes to Him in faith.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: *"...this woman is a lesson to all outsiders—to you who think yourselves beyond the pale of hope, to you who were not brought up to attend the house of God, who perhaps have been negligent of all religion for almost all your life...[this woman was] one of the accursed seed of Canaan! And yet, for all that, she became great in the kingdom of heaven because she believed! And there is no reason why those who are reckoned to be quite outside the church of God should not be in the very center of it—and be the most burning and shining lights of the whole! O you poor outcasts and far-off ones, take heart and comfort! Come to Jesus Christ and trust yourselves in His hands!"*

- Do you have the kind of desperate faith this Canaanite woman had?
- Are you persistent and confident that God will respond to your crisis in the right way at the right time according to His plan for you?
- Are you willing to come to Jesus despite your feelings of unworthiness?
- Remember, true faith is trusting Him when the "deck is stacked" against you. And when you feel unworthy you're exactly where Jesus can really meet your need.

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- ⁱ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2016/12/21/a-divorcing-couple-asked-a-judge-to-treat-their-dogs-like-children-here-was-his-reply/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.24afadca27de
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.everplans.com/articles/the-10-biggest-inheritances-ever-left-to-pets>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Grassmick, J. D. (1985). [Mark](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 135). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^{iv} Thomas, R. L. (1998). [New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition](#). Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.
- ^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Mt 15:24–26). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{vi} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 15:28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- ^{vii} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 7:9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- ^{viii} Peterson, E. H. (2005). [The Message: the Bible in contemporary language](#) (Lk 7:9). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- ^{ix} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 136). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^x [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 5:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.