

Is the World Going to the Dogs?

Summary: All are loved by God and therefore the Church should reach out to everyone.

Scripture: Psalm 125

¹ Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

² As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people
both now and forevermore.

³ The scepter of the wicked will not remain
over the land allotted to the righteous,
for then the righteous might use
their hands to do evil.

⁴ LORD, do good to those who are good,
to those who are upright in heart.

⁵ But those who turn to crooked ways
the LORD will banish with the evildoers.

Peace be on Israel.

James 2:1-10

² My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"^[a] you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Mark 7:24-37

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." ²⁸ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then he told her, "For

such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. 31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. 36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Call to Worship

L: We gather today to worship the One who created us,

P: The One who calls us,

L: The One who equips us,

P: The One who loves us without end.

L: With joyful hearts, let us worship God. AMEN!

Prayer of Confession (unison)

So many days, we are like the blind beggar in Mark's gospel, sitting on the side of the road hoping to hear the sounds of your coming.

We are like the Canaanite woman begging for the crumbs that fall from your table.

We are like the woman who was sick for so many years who reached out to touch the hem of your garment.

Jesus, have mercy upon us! Amen!

Message: Is the World Going to the Dogs?

How many of you have dogs?

Dogs come in all shapes and sizes

My children's first dog—was a black and white mutt. I have no idea what kind of dog she was, but she was a very lovable and dependable pet. Her name was Maxi-moo and she lived for 18 years.

Most of the time when we think about dogs—we think of them as a pet. (man's best friend)

Because they are loyal—and loving.

But there is another kind of dog. The vicious killers—

Like wolves and coyotes.

They are dangerous and they will kill even humans.

But there's another kind of "dog" which can be described as a derogatory term for a person.

I can remember when I was younger, I would hear a person being called a dog and it meant they were common, ugly and disgusting.

But now days—the term can be used sort of teasingly and you may say to someone, "You ole dog!" or when a person is known for being of salty character, you may say, "You sly dog." So, I find it interesting that Jesus speaks using a dog parable with this woman.

We have to take a minute to consider the background.

Last week—we read about Jesus being in a Jewish area, where the Pharisees were after him, because Jesus’ disciples didn’t wash their hands before eating. They didn’t do the ceremonial cleansing ritual before they dined.

Jesus—in a way—says—you guys are “barking up the wrong tree!” It’s not what food you eat that makes a person unclean before God. It’s a sin sick heart that makes a person unacceptable to our Holy God.

After that episode and being tired of being “hounded” by leaders, Jesus and His “pack of friends,” (His disciples) take a road trip. They travel 20 + miles up to a town called Tyre.

Tyre is located in current day Syria, and at the time it was a non-Jewish area. The city of Tyre and the city of Jerusalem had a long history.

From what I’ve read, both were major cities of commerce, so they were competitors of sorts.

So, when Jerusalem was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar, the people of Tyre rejoiced.

Why? Not only because of competition, but also because the Jews hated them—because they were Gentiles.

And for those of you who know a lot about the city of Tyre, we know it is the hometown of the famous evil Queen Jezebell. Queen Jezebell and her husband Ahab instituted the worship of Baal and the worship of Asherah. There was a lot of evil doing their reign.

So, where is Jesus? His journey led Him into Gentile areas. And of all places to go! He retreats first to Tyre!! I think He went there knowing it was a Gentile area. He figured it would be quiet, and He wouldn’t be bothered.

So here is Jesus, trying to have some “chill time,” and low and behold, along comes a woman of solid Gentile ancestry. She is tied to the Syrians—who attacked the Israelites, and she wants Jesus to heal her demon possessed child.

If you take Mark’s and Matthews’ account together, we see that this woman came to Jesus’ disciples.

They tried to stop her from seeing Jesus—Why?

She’s a female, in a society where women were not supposed to approach men. She is also a gentile, from a town that Jews hate and a region that Jews despise.

So here is a woman, living in an area where she would have been aware of the Jewish customs. She knows she has none of the religious, moral, and cultural credentials necessary to approach Jesus the rabbi. But, we have to remember this woman was a mother, and would do anything to save her child. I think all of us can identify with doing whatever we can for our children.

She enters the house without an invitation, falls down, and begins begging Jesus to get rid of this demon that had taken over her daughter. She continues to beg, and no one could stop her. She simply will not take no for an answer.

So, what is the response from Jesus as this woman is on the floor begging.

Jesus says to her, “First, let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

On the surface, this appears to be an insult. We are a canine-loving society, but in New Testament times most dogs were scavengers, wild, and dirty. Their society was not canine-loving and to call someone a dog was a terrible insult. In Jesus' day, the Jews often called the Gentiles dogs because they were "unclean." So, was what Jesus says to her and insult, then? No, it's a parable. One key to understanding the very unusual word Jesus uses for "dogs" here. He uses a diminutive form, a word that really means "puppies." Remember, the woman is a mother. Jesus is saying to her, "you know how families eat: first the children eat at the table, and afterwards the pets eat too. It is not right to violate that order. The puppies must not eat food from the table before the children do. In Matthew's account of this parable, he gives a slightly different meaning: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." He was sent to show Israel that he was the fulfillment of all Scripture's promises, the fulfillment of all the prophets, priests, and kings, the fulfillment of the temple. But after he was resurrected, he immediately says to the disciples, "go to all the nations." His words, then, are not the insult they appear to be. What he's saying to this woman is, "Please understand, there is an order here. I'm going to Israel first, then the Gentiles (the other nations) later." However, this mother comes back at him with an astounding reply: "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he told her, "for such a reply you may go, the demon has left your daughter." In other words, she says, yes, Lord, but the puppies eat from that table too and I'm here for mine.

Jesus has told her a parable in which he has given her a combination of challenge and offer, and she gets it. She responds to the challenge: "okay, I understand. I am not from Israel, I do not worship the God that the Israelites worship. Therefore, I don't have a place at the table. I accept that."

This is quite amazing! She doesn't take offense; she doesn't stand on her rights. She says, "all right. I may not have a place at the table, but there's more than enough at that table for everyone in the world, and I need mine now." She is wrestling with Jesus in the most respectful way, and she will not take no for an answer. I could only hope that I would have the courage to do the same.

In Western cultures we don't have anything like this kind of assertiveness. We only have assertion of our rights. We stand up for our rights, we stand on our dignity and our goodness and expect change because society owes it to me. We are witnessing in this world today that many people feel that they are owed something. What happened to putting God first, working hard and trusting that God will give us whatever we need.

In this passage, this woman is not saying, "Lord give me what I deserve on the basis of my goodness." She's actually saying, "give me what I don't deserve on the basis of your goodness, and I need it now."

This should be our response as well. None of us are worthy because we are sinners. None of us are owed anything because God will simply provide. There is room at the table for all of us through God's grace.

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Meaning of Mark 7:24-30 Commentary Working Preacher