

Mark 7:24–30

Who Let the Dogs In?

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CONTEXT: In the story last week, Jesus had His second showdown with an elite group of religious people from Jerusalem, and He accused them of playing around with worship. He accused them of pretending in their relationship with God. Their profession of faith was a fraud. A fake. It wasn't real. They were playacting. All of this is what he means when he calls them "hypocrites" (Mark 7:6). Elsewhere, we hear Jesus call him whitewashed tubes full of dead man's bones.¹ In another confrontation, he referred to them as a brood of vipers.²

They were Jewish, and so they were part of the chosen family of God under the old covenant. The promises of God belonged to them (Rom 9:4). The word of God was given to them (Rom 3:2). The prophets were sent to them (Heb 1:1–3). The temple of God was in their holy city. They had every spiritual advantage when it came to having a relationship with God, and yet when he showed up in the flesh, the only thing they wanted to do was kill him (Mark 3:6). And so, in our story today, Jesus leaves this Jewish region and travels to a faraway city of Gentiles.

Jesus leaves Galilee and crosses many miles on foot to a far away place with the result that one person is rescued from the clutches of darkness. This is not the first time we have seen a story like this. In **Mark 5:1–20**, Jesus crosses the sea (through a raging storm), and the only thing that happened on the other side was the rescue of a demon-possessed man.³ In the story this morning (7:24–30), Jesus again goes on a journey, and the only result that we read about is the rescue of a demon-possessed girl. If you take both of these stories together, the picture is of **Jesus crossing land & sea just to save one**. We often evaluate success based on numbers (*How many people were in attendance? How many people joined you in your ministry? What was the size of the congregation? How big is your church?*). It helps me to see the great lengths to which our Savior would go where *the immediate effect was just one person's life being changed*.⁴

From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it,

but He could not be hidden.

~ **Mark 7:24**

If you know the history of this city, you might be thinking to yourself, why would Jesus go to Tyre? If you don't know the history of Tyre, here's a couple of trivia questions.

- Who do you think was the most wicked queen in Israel's history? **Jezebel**
 - Any guesses as to where she was from? *Tyre*
- What would you say is the most infamous idol in Israel's history? **Baal**
 - Any guesses as to how Baal worship was integrated into Israel? *Through Tyre*.
- Any guesses as to how many OT prophets pronounced judgment on Trye? **Many**.⁵

So, Jesus leaves the region of Galilee to travels many hours to a far away city that is renowned for its idolatry and divine judgement. And He enters a house in secret, but His presence doesn't stay secret! Now, we've also seen a story like this before. Earlier in Mark's Gospel (2:1–2), word got out that Jesus was in one of the nearby homes, and "*immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door.*" But the scene is different here in Tyre. Word got out that Jesus was there, and (in Mark's account) we only

¹ Matt 23:27–28.

² Matt 12:23.

³ Mark only tells us about one of the men who were rescued that day (Mark 5:1–20). Matthew includes both men in his account (Matt 8:28–34).

⁴ Application: a mom nurturing her children, a pastor of a small church, a Sunday school teacher of a small class, a missionary with what appears to be very little success...

⁵ Isa 32:1; Jer 25:22; Ezek 28:1–19; Joel 3:4; Amos 1:9–10; Zech 9:2–4.

hear about one person who came to Him. It's hard to imagine!⁶ Why is she here? Because she's desperate, and she believes that Jesus can do something about it. Her daughter is severely demon-possessed, and she's heard that Jesus has power and authority over demons.

For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him,
and she came and fell at His feet.

This woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth,
And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

~ *Mark 7:25–26*

This woman is a native of this far away place with a history full of wickedness, idolatry, and divine judgment. She has come to Jesus, fallen at His feet in worship, and we read that "she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter" (7:26). I think it's worth asking the question: *why does she keep on asking?* Well, we get the answer to that question by looking at Matthew tells this story (**Matt 15:21–28**).

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon.
And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying,
"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."

But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying,
"Send her away, for she cries out after us."

~ *Matt 15:21–23*

"She kept asking Him" because "He answered her not a word". What in the world is that? Is Jesus just blowing her off? Is He distracted with something else? Is He being insensitive to her cries? The disciples are urging Him to send her away – that's their reaction to her presence. *And He answered her not a word?* If that wasn't shocking enough, the shock value intensifies in what comes next...

But Jesus said to her,
"Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

~ *Mark 7:27*

At this point, you almost want to throw your hand over your mouth! Did Jesus call her a dog and refuse to help her? **No.** He doesn't call her a dog, and He doesn't refuse to help her. So then, what in the world is going on here!? I think Matthew helps us gain some clarity on what Jesus is doing here in this situation:

But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"

But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

~ *Matthew 15:24–26*

Jesus tells her, I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. *Meaning: what?* Meaning: the **Israelites**. The **Hebrews**. The **Jews**. "Wait a second; I thought the gospel was for all people (**Luke 2:10**). I thought that God gave His only begotten Son because He so loved *the world* (**John 3:16**)."
Yes, God so loved the world. Yes, the good news of great joy is for all people, but God's rescue plan started with the Jews. Every rescue mission has a starting point, a phase one. And, obviously, you don't move onto phase two until you have finished phase one. In God's rescue plan, the Jews were phase one – going all the way back to Abraham in Genesis 12. As of this moment in the history of redemption, the door of salvation was not yet wide open to the Gentiles. Reaching the nations was always part of the plan, but the plan starts with the Jews. As of this moment, the mission was still in phase one. Jesus was laser focused on reaching the Jews with the good news of salvation.

⁶ During my childhood, the Newsboys was my favorite band. There was a day when **Peter Furler** (their lead singer) was hanging out at the Christian bookstore in Maple Grove, and so I did what any normal fan would do: I made my way that that bookstore as fast as I could! Here in Tyre, the Creator of the world was in town, and one person showed up.

Why is that? The fancy answer would be: because of the “**Ordo Amoris**”: which is a Latin phrase meaning: the “*order of loves*” or “*rightly ordered loves*”. This is a concept that our country is really struggling with right now, but it just means that this is a right order to how we love others – and we see this order of loves in the way that God Himself loves...

1. Who does God love more than any other being in existence? **Himself** (**Ezek 36:22**).⁷
2. In the story of redemption, where does God’s love go from there? *To His chosen people under the old covenant: the Jews* (**Lev 20:26; Deut 7:6–7**; **Jer 31:3; Rom 1:16; 9:13**).
3. From there, where does His love go? *It extends to His chosen people from all the nations* (**1 Pet 2:9; 1 John 3:1**).
4. From there, His love extends to the **entire world** (**John 3:16**; **1 John 2:2**).

We see this same right ordering of loves on display in how we are to love one another here on earth:

1. Who are we to love more than any other being in existence? **God**

As created beings made in the image of God, we are to love Him above all else. We are to treasure Him above all else. “Rightly ordered loves” means pledging allegiance to God before you pledge allegiance to your country. It means honoring God above your spouse (**Matt 10:37; Luke 14:26**). It means loving caring more about what He thinks than what your children think.

In the words of Saint Augustine: “*He loves Thee too little who loves anything together with Thee, which he loves not for Thy sake.*”⁸

From that center, our love moves intentionally and sequentially outward...

2. If you are married, the next most important relationship in your world (after your relationship with God) is your relationship with your **spouse**. No other relationship is described as one flesh.⁹ In the beginning, man was called to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife (**Gen 2:24**). Husbands are called to lay down their lives for their wife (**Eph 5:25**). Wives are called to come alongside their husbands and submit to their leadership just as Christ submits to the father (**Eph 5:22**).¹⁰ The relationship between a husband and a wife is created by God to be closer than any other human relationship on the planet.
3. Now, for all the children in the room, the most important relationship in your life (after your relationship with God) is your relationship with your **parents**. You are called to honor them more than your honor anybody else in the world (**Exod 20:12**). You are called to obey them above anyone else (**Eph 6:1–2**; cf. **Mark 7:6–13**).
4. For those who have **children**, they are the next most important relationship in your life (after your God and your spouse). Far too many parents have sacrificed their children on the altar of their career or their hobbies or cultural expectations or addictions or any number of other things. After your God and your spouse, your children are the highest priority in your life (**Deut 6:6–7; Pro 22:6; Eph 6:4**). It is right and good for you to turn down other opportunities or requests or desires when they compete for your time and energy and devotion to your children. **I'm learning this the hard way as someone with two very full-time jobs**. Far too many fathers were wonderfully successful in their careers. but paid the price with their children; it cost them their children to have that education or get that job or pursue that advancement or maintain that relationship or succeed in that hobby. “*If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*” (**1 Tim 5:8**).

⁷ Isa 42:8; 46:10; John 17:23.

⁸ Confessions, X.29

⁹ Gen2:24; Matt 19:5; Mark 10:8; Eph 5:31.

¹⁰ Comp. Luke 22:42; Psa 40:7–8; Heb 10:7; Phil 2:8.

5. After your God and your family (spouse, parents, children), the next most important relationship in your life is **your local church**. In our culture today, our church family is something we try to squeeze into an already established schedule wherever it is convenient, but that isn't the picture we see of the church in the NT or in the first centuries of church history. For the majority of church history, God's people organized their lives around their church – not vice versa (e.g., Acts 2:46–47).

I often wonder what that would look like for a church like North Center... What if, instead of looking for a home that was conveniently located next to our place of employment, we looked for a home that was more conveniently located within our church community? What if, instead of organizing our weekend around sports and hobbies, we organized our sports and hobbies around the church? If the church gathers for worship on **Sunday morning**, then our schedule is unavailable for anything else – because our church comes first. If our church family gathers on **Wednesday evenings**, then this after-school activity is not even an option. After your God and your immediate family, this covenant community is the most important relationship in your life.¹¹ It comes before your job, before your neighbors, before your extended family, before your golf buddies, before your coworkers, before your friend groups (Gal 6:10).

I think it's worth noting that, in the *ordo amoris*, loving your church family means loving your whole church family, not just a little **clique** within your local church. I don't think it will probably be shocking to anybody to hear me say that NC struggles with cliques just like almost every church I have ever been part of. Most of you will end up talking to the same 4–6 people after the service today that you talked to last week – and the week before – and the week before (*meanwhile, there are maybe dozens of people in this room whose names you don't even know*). The *ordo amoris* moves beyond your insular bubble to the whole body with whom you are in covenant community.

6. And then there are kinds of other relationships that we need to make sure are rightly ordered in our love: friends, neighbors, coworkers, community, city, state, country...

Finally, our love is to follow the love of God into **all the world**. "*Go into all the world*" (Matt 28; Mark 16). As we follow God in His rightly ordered love, His footprints will eventually lead us into all the world – because that's always where this gospel story has been heading.¹² But...it's not where He starts, and if we miss that, we will not understand what Jesus is saying to this woman. He isn't degrading her in any way; He's simply telling her where they are in the unfolding story of God's redeeming love: they are at the beginning part where Jesus is focused on the family of God, and (*as of this moment*) this woman is not a member of the family. She isn't a child in God's household. And so, Jesus gives the illustration of a father rightly prioritizing the feeding of His children before feeding someone who is clearly not part of His family. The father has no obligation to feed the little dog, but he does have an obligation to feed his family, which (*at this point in the story*) is the Jews.¹³

That's the stage for what Jesus says. For the people in the house that day, there was nothing unusual or unkind about what He says. The woman herself even acknowledges the truth of what He said. She responded by saying, "**Yes, Lord...**" (Matt 15:27). She affirms that what Jesus has said is true. She's not offended at His words, because He wasn't being offensive. In reality, it would seem that the only people offended at this moment were the disciples with the fact that Jesus wasn't sending this woman away (Matt 15:23).

Now that we understand the scene, here's the main feature of this story – and that is: **the extraordinary faith of this woman**. (1) She cries out to Him, but He answered her not a word. (2) So, she kept on crying out. (3) He tells her that His mission here is focused on the Jews, and at that point – instead of leaving dejected and offended, it says, "**She came and worshiped Him, saying 'Lord, help me!'**" (Matt 15:25). (4) So, then Jesus gives the illustration of the family bread and the little dogs, to which she responds: "**Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat**

¹¹ Matt 12:46–50; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21.

¹² This is why **our mission statement** is worded the way that it is: "we exist to treasure God by making joyful followers of Jesus who love the church, engage the city, and pursue the nations with the Word of God." The end goal is the nations, but it's not where it starts.

¹³ Jews and outsiders who have become Jewish (e.g., Rabah, Ruth).

the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (15:27). Jesus hasn't told her no, and so she continues to press in...and Jesus loves it!

He loves it when we wrestle with Him in faith. In fact, His chosen people were given the name Israel because of a wrestling match very similar to this one right here (Gen 32). I think that this is the reason Jesus is here in this far away place, in a far away city belonging to a far away people; He wants His followers to see what saving faith looks like. He knows this woman. He knows her, and He knows what He is doing in His encounter with her (*just like He does with you*). So, He does what He does and says what He says to lead the woman into the deepest caverns of her faith. To borrow from the imagery of CS Lewis, He is calling her farther up, farther in. He knows the depths of her faith, and He knows she isn't there yet. He doesn't leave. He doesn't scold. He doesn't send her away. He leads her through her desperation into the deepest caverns of her faith because He has something better for her than quick answers. And this is how this story ends for this woman.

Then Jesus answered and said to her,
"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire."
And her daughter was healed from that very hour.
~ *Matt 15:28*

The word "great" comes from the Greek word, **μέγας**, which means "*exceedingly large, exceedingly great*". O woman, you have mega faith. And it was our Savior's joy to give this woman the desire of her heart: without speaking a word, Jesus used His sovereign authority to immediately cast the demon out of that little girl.

And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.
~ *Mark 7:30*

I want to close by just noting three characteristics of her mega faith:

1. **We see the object (*the what*) of her faith.** This woman has put her faith in Christ alone. She has come to Him. She cries out to Him. She worships Him. She wrestles with Him. Her faith is not in medicine or doctors or her own abilities. The object of her faith is in Christ alone. She has a mega faith because she has a mega Savior.
2. **We see the persistence (*the waiting*) of her faith. She persisted until He answered.** Notice that, though Jesus doesn't say "yes" right away, neither does He say "no". He tells this outsider woman about the *ordo amoris* of His mission, but He doesn't say no, and so she continues to press in. **She persisted until He answered.** And that sentence is really important. She didn't persist until she got her way. That's not what this story is teaching us. She isn't persisting until she gets what she wants – because that's not the way it works in our relationship with God. He's **not our personal Santa Claus or fairy godmother or genie in a bottle.** We don't always get what we think we want. We don't always receive what we ask for. The gospel is **not about health, wealth, and prosperity.** Sometimes we pray, and the finances still don't come in. Sometimes we pray, and the medical prognosis only worsens. Sometimes we pray, and the relationship doesn't change. This isn't a lesson about getting our way with Jesus. The lesson in her faith is that it persists until God answers.¹⁴ Until God answers, persistent faith refuses to leave!
3. **And we see the worship of her faith.** It doesn't parade itself. It doesn't seek to be a spectacle. She isn't talking about what she deserves (she knows who she is). Her faith is a worshiping faith that enters into His presence with a boldness (because she knows who He is) and with a humility because she knows who she is. She saw herself as *a little dog*. **Isaac Watts** described himself as *a worm*. **John Newton** referred to himself as *a wretch*. All of these people knew who they were, but they also knew who Jesus is: the Son of David; my Sovereign, the Giver of amazing grace...and so they came with a faith that worshiped and waited. *What about you? Will you come? Will you wait? And will you worship in the waiting?*

¹⁴ Like He did in the salvation of my uncle Paul.