

INTRODUCTION

We're strolling through the Gospel According to Matthew and stopping to admire and study all the Parables and Miracles of Jesus. Jesus used some very interesting word pictures in His teaching. He talked about sawdust and planks in someone's eyes. The next message is "The Parable of Stones and Snakes." Today we're going to talk about "Poodles, Pigs, and Pearls" and in case you're wondering, it's NOT a Mother's Day message!

Most of us know more about dogs than hogs because we have dogs as pets. There were two men who were out walking their dogs. One had a German Shepherd and the other had a Poodle. They walked by a bar and the German Shepherd's owner said, "Hey, let's stop in and get a drink." The Poodle's owner said, "They don't allow dogs in that bar." The German Shepherd's owner said, "Watch this." He put on a pair of sunglasses and walked in with his dog. The bartender said, "Hey, no dogs in here!" The German Shepherd's owner said, "This is my seeing eye dog." The bartender apologized and led him to a barstool. The Poodle's owner decided to try it, so he whipped out his sunglasses and walked in as well. The bartender said, "Hey, no dogs allowed." The Poodle's owner said, "This is my seeing eye dog." The bartender said sarcastically, "No way. Poodles can't be seeing eye dogs!" The owner said, "Poodle? They told me this was a German Shepherd!"

Jesus' comments about not putting holy things in front of dogs or casting your pearls before swine can't be taken alone. His comments are set in the larger context of judging people. So let's read the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 7:1-6.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

With that context, Jesus said,

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

For the past few weeks as I've been contemplating this verse about dogs, hogs, and pearls I found myself scratching my head and asking, "Huh?" I've read these words many times through the years, but I've never taught on it, so I wasn't certain what Jesus was talking about. So I posted a question on my Facebook page asking some of my friends to give me their opinions about this verse. I got some interesting responses. Chris Fowler put it in the context of college football and wrote, "Apparently Jesus wasn't an Arkansas or Georgia fan!" In light of the swine flu, Ronnie Humphrey wrote, "This was a ritual back then to throw your pearls at pigs to keep the swine flu away." Zach Burks wrote, "A swine has no appreciation for the beauty or the value of pearls. I think what Jesus is saying is that we should not persist to offer something sacred to those who will not be grateful for the gift." Our own George Faber echoed that thought when he

wrote, "Why argue with a fence or have a conversation with a wall. Doing either will not make a difference for the fence or the wall." But my favorite came from 10-year-old Jennifer Phillips who cut through all the fluff and wrote, "Don't give your pearls to a pig because a pig is too dumb to know what a pearl is worth."

Jesus never said anything incidentally, so we're not going to overlook this verse. Let's consider three spiritual principles from this parable of poodles, pigs, and pearls.

1. BE AWARE! SOME PEOPLE BEHAVE LIKE VICIOUS ANIMALS (dogs and hogs)

When Jesus mentioned dogs, he wasn't talking about a noble German Shepherd, a well-coifed Poodle, or cute little Pomeranian that will curl up in your lap. The only dogs in Israel were the wild, feral dogs that roamed in packs feeding off the carcasses of dead animals. And hogs were considered the most vile, unclean animals imaginable. So Jesus wasn't talking about Lassie or Miss Piggy! He was talking about people who act like vicious animals.

There are several comparisons in the Bible between animals and people. Isaiah promised we could rise up on wings as eagles. The prophet Amos was either very brave or very stupid when he called the society women of Israel "fat cows of Bashan." That kind of sexist remark would get you fired today.

Even followers of Jesus are likened to animals. The Lord is our Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture. But not every person is a lamb. Jesus warned there are some people who are "wolves in sheep's clothing." We're the sheep, but that doesn't mean we should let people "pull the wool over our eyes!"

Jesus is warning us that some people live such beastly lives that they're like dogs or hogs. They live by raw animal instinct rather than living according to a higher moral standard. Paul warned the Christians in Philippi, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh." (Philippians 3:2) He was referring to Jewish legalists who demanded that every man, Jew or Gentile must be circumcised in order to be a Christian. On the last page of your Bible, the Apostle John described the heavenly city. It will be paradise not only because of who IS there, but also because of who ISN'T there. Revelation 22:15 says, "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, [the word there is *pharmakeia*, from which we get our word "pharmacy." This is referring to drug abuse.], the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

Even King David described some of his enemies as acting like dogs. "Those who slander me .. for the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, for the curses and lies they utter ... they return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied." (Psalm 59:10-15) Doesn't that sound like some people today who prowl around all night looking for trouble? When our choir was in New York City last summer I was walking back from a play after midnight. I was amazed at all the strange people who were crowding the sidewalks—and that was just our folks from Tyler. No, I saw some really strange people. I was told some people prowl around Manhattan all night, I wanted to say, "Who let the dogs out?"

Notice the context of this parable is within the larger statement Jesus made about judging others. There are two extremes that must be avoided if we are going to make wise evaluations about people. At one end of the judgement spectrum is a harsh, condemning attitude. But the other dangerous extreme on the judgement spectrum is an attitude of total permissiveness—no judgement whatsoever. The motto of total permissiveness is “Live and Let Live.” Today this attitude is often concealed within the politically-correct cloak of tolerance. Tolerance has become the catch word for “anything goes.” Tolerance means you can’t disagree with me because if you do, you’re intolerant—and the only people we DON’T tolerate are those like you Christians who are intolerant. What a double standard!

A few weeks ago at the Miss California Pageant, one of the finalists, Carrie Prejean, was asked by Perez Hilton, a member of the homosexual community, whether or not gay marriage should be legal in every state. She spoke about how everyone should have a choice, but for her and her family she believes marriage should be between a man and a woman. Now, 20 years ago, that answer would have been acceptable, but many believe it cost her the pageant, and she has been under withering attack from critics for her “intolerance.”

So if harsh condemnation is at one extreme of the judging spectrum, and total permissiveness is at the other end of the spectrum, what are we to do? We are to make wise evaluations about people. Some people are good, kind, and harmless—like sheep. But others are cruel, mean, and evil—like dogs and hogs. We must use wise discernment about the people. The Bible teaches that all of us are born with a sinful nature that would turn us into dogs and hogs unless something happens to change our nature. A dog acts like a dog because it has a dog nature. You can take a hog from the pig pen and wash him up with shampoo, and blow dry his hair, shine his hooves, even dab a little cologne behind his ear. You can tie a red ribbon around his neck and he’ll look fairly presentable. But as soon as you open the door that pig is headed back for the mud and slop. Why? That’s his nature.

We all have a bad nature until Jesus Christ comes into our lives and changes our nature from the inside. The Bible says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old [hog and dog] things have passed away; behold ALL things have become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV)

2. BEWARE! DON’T WASTE YOUR SPIRITUAL TREASURES ON THOSE WHO ARE HOSTILE TO THE TRUTH

This idea is also found in Proverbs 23:9 which says, “Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.” So if the poodles and pigs are vicious people, what are the sacred things, the pearls? This has been interpreted differently through the centuries. In earlier times, the Catholic Church interpreted this verse to mean the Elements of Mass—the wafer and the wine. They would refuse to give communion to non-Catholics or even Catholics who had lapsed in their confessions.

Later, even Protestants who believed in predestination refused to practice missions, because they thought it would be casting pearls before swine. In 1792 when William Carey stood up at a church meeting in England and issued a passionate call for missionaries to take the gospel to

foreign lands an old pastor stood up and said, "Sit down, young man. If God wants to save the heathen, He will do it without your help." By the way, some Baptist churches believe the same way, so that's why we have what are known as "Missionary Baptist Churches" (and we're one) to distinguish us from the Baptist churches that don't believe in missions; to them it's casting pearls before swine.

I think Jesus was primarily speaking about the precious truth of the gospel of grace. This glorious treasure of the gospel has been entrusted to us, but we aren't to bury it, we're to share it with others. But there are some people who are so resistant and hostile to the truth that it's like tossing pearls to pigs.

The New Testament scholar John Stott wrote: "The saints are not judges, but the saints are not simpletons either. The clear teaching of Jesus is that it can only be detrimental to Christians to continue chasing after people and trying to reason with the 'dogs' and 'pigs' when they have consistently demonstrated this kind of animal behavior." Jesus made it clear that we shouldn't retaliate or get angry with those who refuse the truth. Once when He sent out His disciples in two-man teams He gave them these instructions: Jesus said, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town." (Matthew 10:14) He was telling them to simply move on to the next village. Shaking the dust of their feet wasn't some kind of curse; it was an action that symbolized they didn't want to carry with them even the residue of the attitude of unbelief.

Jesus predicted we can expect two reactions from spiritual dogs and hogs:

(1) They will reject and ridicule the message

Jesus said they will "trample it under their feet." In most cultures, stomping on something is a sign of an insult. We don't want anyone stomping on our flag or stomping on our Bible. But there are plenty of people out there who think Christians are a bunch of misguided fanatics. There is a growing movement to silence or stamp out the Christian message here in America. A recent A.P. article reported: "The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist, and Secular Student Societies is planning an offensive against Christianity in schools this summer. The AHS supported by Richard Dawkins (who wrote *The God Delusion*) is aiming to set up a network of atheist groups in schools to oppose Christian groups. It will also be launching its first atheist summer camp for children, which will teach that religious belief can prevent ethical and moral behavior. They are hoping to combat the dangerous Christian doctrines such as the belief that homosexuality is a sin and that God created the world." But these that Jesus called dogs and swine not only reject the message,

(2) They will attack the messenger

Jesus said they will also turn on you and tear you to pieces. There are multitudes of websites that attack Christians and say all kinds of perverse and unspeakably obscene things about Christians. Here's a rather tame one from a "I hate Christians" website: "Christians are a bunch of fools. They plan out their entire lives, according to rules set by a kooky, ancient book of myths. And

hey, doncha just love how they ever-so-conveniently excuse themselves from providing proof, by using crutches like 'faith.'"

There might have been a time earlier in America when all a church had to do was to ring its bell and members of the community would gather. Today, you're more likely to have someone call the cops and complain about the noise!

I can actually remember the first time I was attacked for my faith. I wasn't physically attacked, I was verbally attacked. But that whole "sticks and stones may break your bones but words will never harm you" saying is a lie. I was in high school and I had started trying to live for Jesus and even witness to my friends. It was after football practice and all the students gathered at a place called Ray's Grill to hang out and eat burgers and drink shakes. On that particular afternoon I walked in and some of the guys said, "Look everybody, it's the preacher! Hey, preacher, give us a sermon!" That made everyone laugh, and it made me embarrassed. I wish I could tell you that I said something clever, but I just sat down with some of my friends and waited for the laughter to die down.

So how are we to respond to people who reject our precious truth? I know that some of you have friends and even family members who aren't Christians. You've talked to them about Jesus many times, and they have become hostile toward you and your message. What should you do? Try this: Stop arguing or debating with them if they are hostile to your message. Stop casting your pearls before them. Live the Christian life before them. Remember actions speak much louder than words.

You may be wondering, "Should I just give up on them?" No, NEVER give up on them. There is something you can keep doing: Don't stop praying for them. Verse six comes right before verse seven where Jesus is going to teach about Asking, Seeking and Knocking. Prayer is the greatest weapon we have. Prayer can travel at the speed of thought to any place on the planet—and prayer is irresistible—there's nothing a person can do to keep you from praying for them!

Pray that God will open their eyes to the truth. Pray that God will put someone in their path who might have a better opportunity to share Christ with them. Don't mark them off your list. It may be a matter of timing. Some of the greatest testimonies have come from people who resisted for years, and then God sent someone to them and they trusted Christ.

Jesus followed His own advice about not laying pearls before swine. After He was arrested He was put on trial before Pilate. When Pilate learned Jesus was a Galilean, he sent Him to Herod Antipas, because Antipas was the governor of that area. This was the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded. Jesus had gotten word earlier that Herod wanted to kill Him also. When someone told Him, Jesus said about Herod, "Go tell that fox I'm going to keep on doing what I'm doing—I'm not afraid of him." (paraphrase of Luke 13:32) Jesus didn't call Herod a dog or a pig, but He did call him a fox.

The French artist James Tissot captured the scene as Jesus appeared before Herod Antipas. The Bible says, "When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer ... then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate." (Luke 23:8-10) Herod asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus knew Herod wasn't truly interested in the truth, so He didn't even speak. Sometimes silence is golden—especially when it comes to those who are enemies of the gospel! Here's our third principle:

3. SHARE! TARGET PEOPLE WHO ARE OPEN TO THE GOOD NEWS!

Did you know for every negative command in the Bible, there is always a corresponding positive command? For instance, the Bible says, "You shall not murder." That's the negative, but the positive is "love your neighbor as your self." If you love your neighbor, you don't have to worry about murdering him! So, although Jesus spoke in the negative here, "don't put sacred things before dogs" we should be looking for the positive directive on the flip side. We should be looking for people who are open to the gospel and ready for the good news.



Jesus Before Herod
James Tissot
1886-1894
Watercolor on Paper

Don't waste the truth on those who don't appreciate it. Instead, find those who are ripe and ready for the good news. Mike Cope is a pastor who lives on the Gulf coast and he wrote about this verse in his blog and his illustration is worth repeating. Mike loves to fish and he loves to eat fish. He wrote about going fishing and catching some fresh grouper to serve to some friends for supper. Grouper is a very expensive fish that sells for more than \$10 a pound. When these friends tasted the grouper they said, "That's not bad. It tastes like chicken!" Mike didn't say anything to them, but he wrote that their comment was the ultimate insult to a serious fisherman. After he had spend valuable time and money going fishing and preparing the fish, they were saying his \$10 a pound grouper tasted like chicken that sells for \$1 a pound. He realized he was casting his pearls before swine, so the next time these friends visited, he served them chicken! He said he only serves fish now to people who appreciate and know the value of the fish!

So, if you have friends or family who don't appreciate the delicacy of spiritual truth, serve them the chicken of mundane conversation! Save your pearls for those who will appreciate them, because there are plenty of people out there who are hungry for the gospel.

Who are those receptive to the gospel? Let's start with children. There's no such thing as a mean piglet. Remember Babe? Let's devote our effort to sharing Christ with as many children as possible. I became a Christian when I was nine years old. How many of you became a Christian before the age of 12?

Another group we should target is teenagers. I was called to preach when I was 17 and studies have shown most of our missionaries were saved and called into full-time vocational ministry during their teenage years. We ought to have a sense of urgency about reaching teenagers for Christ because surveys have found that for every American who reaches the age of 18 without trusting Christ, only 1 out of 40 of them will become Christians later.

But another application of this truth is that we should be taking the gospel to people around the world who have never heard. America is full of pagans who have a church on every corner and a Bible in every hotel room. But there are millions of people who have never even heard the name "Jesus." I believe no person should hear the gospel once until everyone has heard it twice.

In the early 1990s many of us traveled to the former Soviet Union and after the Iron Curtain fell. Up until that point I had never seen such hunger for the gospel. I would stand up on the bumper of a van with a sound system hooked into the cigarette lighter and preach and hundreds of people would gather and accept Christ on the spot. We passed out hundreds of Bibles, and the people grabbed for the Bibles as if it was the most precious thing they'd ever gotten. It would be like me standing in the middle of Broadway Square Mall on a Saturday afternoon giving out free \$100 bills. Can you imagine the scene? That's the way the people in the Crimea flocked around us and grabbed a Bible and many of them sat down on the spot and started reading!

Right now, Christianity is literally exploding in China. There are more Christians in China than in America. As I've shared the precious pearls of truth with the Chinese people, it's as if a "light" comes on in their eyes; they are so receptive to the gospel, so let's take our pearls there and around the world to the nations who have never heard.

CONCLUSION

One day Jesus sat at a well and told a fallen woman about Living Water, and she was so transformed by this truth that she went back into town and brought some of her family and friends out to meet Jesus. As this group was approaching Jesus and His disciples, Jesus said, "Do you not say, 'Four months more then the harvest?' I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35)

So what can we learn from Poodles, Pigs, and Pearls? Don't waste your time and your truth with those who are antagonistic toward the truth; when you encounter them, shake the dust off your feet and move on to someone who is receptive to the gospel. Lift up your eyes and look—they are all around us!

OUTLINE

1. BE AWARE! SOME PEOPLE BEHAVE LIKE VICIOUS ANIMALS (dogs and hogs)

"Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh." *Philippians 3:2*

"Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, [*pharmakeia*], the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." *Revelation 22:15*

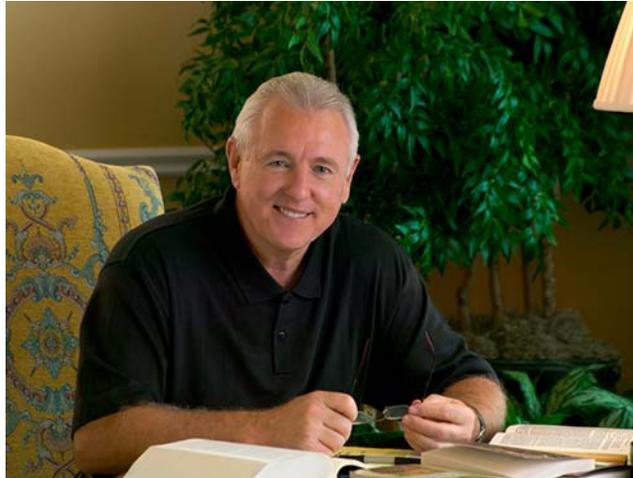
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Jesus said, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town." *Matthew 10:14*

- (1) They will reject and ridicule the message (trample it under their feet)
- (2) They will attack the messenger (tear you to pieces)

3. SHARE! TARGET PEOPLE WHO ARE OPEN TO THE GOOD NEWS!

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes