

## INTRODUCTION

This year we've been going through the Gospel According to Mark and we're picking up where we left off before we started our emphasis on Missions and Christmas. This message is entitled, "Faith That Feeds on Crumbs." When I first read this passage, I was in for a big surprise. Speaking of surprises, here are seven interesting facts that have also surprised me; maybe they will surprise you, too.

1. The Texas State Capitol is taller than the United States Capitol in Washington D. C. (so are the Capitols of Illinois, Florida, Louisiana, and Nebraska)
2. The electric chair was invented by a dentist.
3. The microwave oven was invented after a researcher walked by a radar tube and a chocolate bar melted in his pocket.
4. Sherlock Holmes never said, "Elementary, my dear Watson." (in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's books)
5. Every second, Americans collectively eat 100 pounds of chocolate.
6. A snail can sleep for 3 years.
7. The Bible is the #1 most shoplifted book of all time.

But I was more surprised when I first read this passage. It appears on the surface that Jesus insults a mother by calling her a dog. In our text today a woman from the area of Tyre, modern-day Lebanon, comes to Him asking for help and He basically calls her a dog—or at least Jesus compares her to a dog. In Jesus' time, it was common for Jews to call Gentiles dogs, but it was a highly offensive label. Even today it is an insult when someone calls a person a son of female dog or a female dog.

So, at first, I'm surprised Jesus used the d-word. I was shocked the first time I read it. I couldn't believe these words came from the lips of the Savior. But when I took the time to dig into the passage, I learned it is an awesome lesson about great faith.

Mark 7:24-30. "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. 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. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. '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.' '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.' She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone."

This was a woman with a quick mind and a quick wit. She responded to Jesus' statement with a sharp reply. I admire this woman not only for WHAT she said, but how quickly she took the statement of Jesus and turned it into a profession of faith. I've always admired people who are quick on their feet. I have to think and plan ahead to say something corny, but some people are just naturally witty.

It's like the college guy who was working at a grocery store. He was in the produce section and a little old lady came up to him and said, "Sonny, I see heads of lettuce here, but can I buy just half a head of lettuce?" He said, "Ma'am I don't know, but I'll go ask the manager." So the guy went up one aisle and down the other and found the manager at the back corner of the store. He walked up and said, "Sir, there's an idiot over there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce." What he didn't realize was that this little old lady was fast and she had followed him step for step. Just as he was talking to the manager he caught a glimpse of her in his peripheral vision and so he said, "Sir, there's an idiot over there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce...and this dear lady wants to buy the other half!"

So they took care of the lady, and the manager picked up on what the guy had done. He said, "Son, you're pretty sharp. Where are you from?" He said, "I'm from Minneapolis, Minnesota; home of the world's ugliest women and greatest football players." The manager frowned and said, "Son, my wife is from Minneapolis." Without missing a beat he said, "Really, what team did she play for?" Like that boy, this Gentile woman had a quick wit. But Jesus didn't just admire this woman's wit—He admired her faith. Let's examine four characteristics of great faith.

## **1. GREAT FAITH APPROACHES JESUS BOLDLY**

The reason Jesus and His disciples were in this area of the seacoast of Lebanon was because multitudes of people were chasing Him for a miracle. He just fed 5,000 people; so many of them saw Jesus as their miraculous meal ticket. No more working. No more fishing. No more farming. Just hang around Jesus and He'll feed us.

Jesus didn't come to just feed people, He came to redeem the world, so He was trying to escape the crowds and spend some down time with His disciples in a secret place. But it's impossible to keep Jesus a secret. This Gentile woman heard about Him and ignored all barriers to get to Him. First a Gentile would never speak to a Jew. Second a strange woman would never address a man who wasn't a family member.

She crashed the party. One pastor said it would be like us crashing a private party and going up to the guest of honor and asking him if he has jumper cables to help us start your car. It was inconvenient and inappropriate, but she was desperate.

Notice she approached Jesus with humility. She fell at His feet and begged Him. This was an act of worship and surrender. She also approached Jesus with a profession of faith. In Matthew's account, the woman says, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly." Now this was a Gentile woman, yet she understood and believed Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. She called Him, "The Son of David," which was a term signifying Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Her daughter was tormented by a demon. She didn't ask for something for herself, she was interceding for her little girl. There is great power in intercession. If you have a need or someone you love has a need, are you willing to boldly approach God with your request?

The writer of Hebrews invites us with this encouragement: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

The problem with some of our prayers is they are timid and have no sense of desperation. I've often said God always meets you at the P.O.T.D. That stands for the Point Of Total Desperation. You've heard of potted plants, well you've got to be a POTD person before you seek help. I've used that acrostic so many times people write me and say that they were "POTD." God brings us to these points of desperation because He knows some of us are so hardheaded that we will only seek Him in times of desperation. Vance Havner used to say the problem with unanswered prayer is that "the situation is desperate but the saints are not." Are you desperate enough to cry out to Jesus?

## **2. GREAT FAITH DOESN'T QUIT WHEN INSULTED**

She approached Jesus correctly. She fought through the crowd and fell at His feet and offered a legitimate request. But I think there's no way she could have been prepared for the harsh response Jesus gave her.

In Matthew's account Jesus replies "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, and it wouldn't be proper to take the children's bread and toss it to dogs." Since she was a Gentile, Jesus was comparing her to a dog. The word He used is in the diminutive form which we would translate "puppy." But a dog is a dog is a dog.

According to one rabbi, every morning a Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank thee that I was not born a Gentile, a dog, or a woman." Isaiah compared false prophets to dogs. When Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi, he warned them to "watch out for dogs," a reference to false teachers.

There's no way to escape the fact that comparing someone to a dog is an insult.

How do you react when you are insulted? The Bible says, "A fool is quick-tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted." (Proverbs 12:16 NLT)

Now if one of us had been in the sandals of this woman we might have reacted negatively. Some of us would have said, "Who do you think you are calling me a dog? I'm going to file a complaint with the SPCLU—the Syrophoenician Civil Liberties Union, and you'll be hearing from my lawyers."

Or when we get insulted, sometimes we strike back with vengeance. "Me, a dog? You're the dog!" Or we could have just walked away thinking, "I don't know who this man is, but he certainly isn't the Son of David. He's just another male chauvinist, rude Jewish man."

But instead, she ignored the apparent insult and continued to trust that Jesus would answer her prayer. There is great power in persistent praying.

Are you a persistent in your prayers or do you give up quickly? Jesus taught us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) But those verbs denote continuous action. He literally said, "Ask and keep on asking...seek and keep on seeking...knock and keep on knocking." You wouldn't walk up to a closed door and knock once would you? Have you been praying for something for days or weeks and you haven't received an answer yet? Don't quit praying. God rewards persistent praying.

In Genesis 32, Jacob was facing a dangerous encounter with his brother, Esau and four hundred of Esau's soldiers. Jacob had stolen Esau's birthright and blessing and Esau had been chasing him for years. That night Jacob cried out to God, "Lord, save me from the hand of my brother." Later that night he met an angel and he wrestled with the angel all night. That's a picture of persistent praying. Near morning, Jacob had the angel in a full nelson headlock apparently because the angel said, "Okay, let me go." Jacob said, "I won't let go until you bless me." God answered the prayer and changed his name from "Jacob" the grabber to Israel, which means one who struggles with God. Jacob teaches us a great lesson about persistent prayer. Sometimes we just need to hold onto God tenaciously until we receive an answer. Don't let go of God until He blesses you. This Gentile woman didn't give up, even when she was insulted.

### **3. GREAT FAITH IS CONTENT WITH THE CRUMBS OF GRACE**

Jesus said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she didn't miss a beat. She agreed with Him. She said, "Yes, Lord, but even the puppies under the table get the children's crumbs." What a reply! What an amazing woman!

She had such great faith that she was saying, "Lord, I may be a puppy, but You're so powerful that I don't need the first serving. Just like the puppies, I'll be happy to feed on the crumbs of your grace, and that will be enough to help my daughter."

She demonstrated great faith and great humility. Are you a humble person? If you answer, "yes" then you aren't. It's like the guy who was given a button for being the most humble guy in his church. When he wore it they took it away! Instead of asking if you're a humble person let me ask it a different way. Are you easily offended? Do your feelings get hurt quickly? Are you always thinking you deserve better treatment?

How do you react if someone calls you a dog? If you don't growl and the fur on your back doesn't stand up, chances are you're a fairly humble person. We can learn something about humility from dogs. How many of you own a dog? How many of you own a cat? Wrong. You don't own a cat, a cat owns you. Dogs have owners but cats have servants.

We have a 10-year-old cat named Myrtle Mae. When some friends gave us Myrtle Mae as a kitten, they said it was a female cat, so she got the name Myrtle Mae. But it only took one visit to Dr. Doyle Starnes to learn that Myrtle Mae was a male. But by then, the name stuck, so we have a male cat with a female name. Now Myrtle Mae never begs for food. You can put cat food in front of him and he looks at you with an expression that says, "Do you expect me to eat that? I may do you the favor of eating, or I may not."

But we also have a 12-year-old Boxer named Boomer, who is more grey than I am. Boomer isn't too proud to beg. In fact, she begs all the time. Whenever we're eating a meal, Boomer is always nearby looking up with those big eyes as if to say, "I'm starving, can't you give me a few crumbs?" And when we give her a little morsel, she is so excited and grateful. When it comes to receiving God's grace are you more like a finicky cat, or a grateful dog?

Now when it comes to contentment and the grace of God, are you humble enough to be willing to take the crumbs? Or do you think maybe you're too good for the crumbs? The Apostle Paul knew what it was to feed on filet mignon of faith, but he was also in prison enough to be content with the crumbs of grace. We love to quote this verse, but sometimes we forget the context. Paul found himself in prison, and unable to be free to do the one thing he wanted to do—travel the world preaching the gospel. He wrote, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13)

The secret to this woman's faith was that she wasn't ashamed to beg for the crumbs of grace. She didn't mind being called a puppy. Humility is valuable because it's rare today. It's a lot easier for us to make demands before God than to beg Him for mercy like a dog begging for a crumb.

In 1707 Isaac Watts wrote a great hymn, "Alas and Did My Savior Bleed." The first line says, "Alas and did my Savior bleed and did my Sovereign die; Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" Later the word "worm" was considered to be too insulting so it was changed to say, "Would He devote that sacred head for sinners such as I?" And in some hymnals, even "sinner" was considered too offensive and it has been sanitized to "Would He devote that sacred head for someone such as I?" I can imagine the next edition will say, "I don't need that sacred head because I'm a good person." Admit it, without God's grace we are like a lowly worm and you can't get much lower than a worm.

#### **4. GREAT FAITH IS TESTED BY GOD**

Jesus looked at the woman kneeling at His feet and said, "It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Now at this point, my sanctified imagination kicks in and I see Peter and John high-fiving each other saying, "Oooh! Smack down! Did you hear what the Master called her? Who let the dogs in?" But I believe Jesus said these words with a twinkle in His holy eye. He said those words with his holy tongue placed firmly in His cheek. I believe He was testing her. And because Jesus knows all things, I believe He knew she would pass the test with flying colors.

In Matthew's account we read, "'Yes, Lord' she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.'" (Matthew 15:27-28)

I've been a student of faith for many years, and I still consider myself in the first grade of faith. There's so much more I need to know. But I have learned three things about faith. First, without faith it is impossible to please God. Second, God always rewards our faith. And third, God

always tests our faith. He was testing the faith of this woman when He made the statement about the children and the puppies.

The problem is we don't always recognize when God is testing us. Most of the time the tests are disguised as trouble, trials, and adversity. The Apostle Peter wrote these words, "These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold." (1 Peter 1:7 NLT)

How we ACT determines our reputation. But how we REACT reveals our character. The way the woman reacted to an apparent insult revealed her character.

There was a true incident in which a young man named Bill was being interviewed by a mission agency to serve as a missionary. He was going to be interviewed by a retired missionary. The retired missionary contacted the Bill and told him to arrive at his home in Wisconsin for the interview at 4:30 a.m. Bill traveled to Wisconsin. It was the middle of winter, and the snow was deep, but he arrived at the home of the retired missionary before 4:30 a.m. At 4:30 he knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He knocked again—no answer. He stood there blowing on his hands and running in place to keep the blood flowing to his toes. Finally, the door opened and the retired missionary's wife opened the door with her housecoat on.

Bill said, "Good morning. I'm here for the interview with your husband." She said, "Yes, come inside and sit in the living room. He'll be down soon."

Bill sat down on the couch. Five o'clock rolled by, then six, then seven. Finally at about 8:30 the retired missionary came into the room and shook the young man's hand. He said, "Have you read the missionary orientation workbook?" Bill said, "Yes, sir." The retired missionary said, "I have a question for you. Spell the word 'Bible.'" Bill replied, "B.I.B.L.E." The retired missionary stood up and said, "That concludes the interview. Thanks for coming. We'll let you know what we decide."

As Bill left, he was baffled. He thought that he must have made such a poor impression that he didn't even merit a full interview. He was surprised a week later when the appointment board summoned him. When he arrived, the retired missionary told the board, "I have tested this candidate in every area necessary and he passed." Bill interrupted and said, "Excuse me, sir, but I don't think you really tested me at all."

The old man said, "First, I tested you for diligence. Anyone who would travel to Wisconsin in the middle of winter has a streak of determination that every missionary needs. Second, I tested you for punctuality. I was awake and saw that you arrived before 4:30 a.m. Every missionary must make the most of their time. Third, I tested you for patience. I had you wait for me for over four hours and you didn't complain about waiting. Patience is one of the most important characteristics of a successful missionary. Finally, I tested you on humility. I knew that you had studied the manual and were prepared to answer many questions. I asked you a simple question any third grader could answer. Yet, you didn't seem offended, you simply answered the question. You passed the test of diligence, punctuality, patience, and humility. Congratulations, Bill, you've passed all four tests!"

The problem with God testing our faith is that we don't recognize it as a test. Between 1976 and 1997, television programs were regularly interrupted with a tone and test screen with a voice that said, "This is a test. This station is conducting a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. This is only a test." You don't see those anymore because the EBS has been replaced by the Emergency Alert System, which doesn't have to be tested on the air.

Are you in the middle of some kind of trial right now? It may be that God is testing your faith. Whenever you go through adversity, if you listen carefully you might hear this message: This is a test. This is a test of your faith. This is only a test.

## **CONCLUSION**

Are you content to receive the crumbs of grace? Martin Luther wrote some very deep theological truth, but as he neared death, his writings became more basic. He suffered from poor health for ten years before he died at 62. His last recorded writing before he died is an interesting reflection on this passage. He wrote, "We are all beggars at God's table. We are not worthy to gather up the crumbs under that table, but nonetheless God invites us to come and eat the morsels of the bread of heaven and drink from the cup of salvation. When we beg, God cannot help but take notice. The only problem is that we are too proud to beg. Maybe we should be as bold to ask, 'Can I have your scraps?'"

You're going to be insulted, but when you are, don't give up. Keep on praying. Keep on trusting, and don't be too proud to beg God, and He will reward your faith.

## OUTLINE

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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