



# Hard Passages in the Bible

Gaining confidence for engaging the  
biblical story

# Mark 7:24-30

**24** 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 impure 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 the dogs.”

**28** “Lord,” she replied, “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.

# Reaction to the readings

- What words or phrases stand out to you?
- What emotions does this bring up for you?
- Does this passage present a difficulty for you? If so what?
- What are you confused or unclear about?

## Mark

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<sup>28</sup> “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

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<sup>30</sup> She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

## Matthew

<sup>21</sup> Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, **crying out**, “**Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.**”

<sup>23</sup> **Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”**

<sup>24</sup> **He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”**

<sup>25</sup> **The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.**

<sup>26</sup> He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

<sup>27</sup> “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their **master’s** table.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed **at that moment.**

# Observations

- In Mark, Jesus consents because of the woman's "logos" – what she said.
- In Matthew, Jesus praises the woman for her faith.
- In Mark the woman's actual ethnic origin is given; Matthew calls her "Canaanite"
- The word for "dog" is in the diminutive form ("puppy"), but this doesn't necessarily soften the insult.
- In both Matthew and Mark, this passage follows the account of Jesus criticizing the purity teachings of the Pharisees: "Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them... For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come."
- In Matthew the passage is followed by the feeding of the 4000, possibly symbolizing the gospel reaching the nations (4 winds)
- In the culture of Jesus' day, a woman, let alone a Gentile, would never publicly approach a Jewish male.

# Some Proposed interpretations

- Jesus is testing the woman's faith when he calls her a "dog."
- Jesus chose the diminutive form ("puppy") to soften the insult or signal an openness to the woman's petition. Maybe Jesus is joking.
- Jesus did indeed insult the woman with the attitude Jews felt toward Gentiles.
- Jesus accepted the influence of the woman.
  - Jesus intended to focus his ministry on Israelite populations, and this woman's persistence convinced Jesus to have compassion on a broader group.
- The woman won a verbal argument and actually shamed Jesus with her reply (Mark)
- The woman's faith impressed and changed Jesus (Matthew)
- Jesus reveals God's nature not by being "right" from the get-go, but from his willingness to learn, to let his prejudices be challenged, and to be moved by the person before him.
- Mothers will do anything for their kids.

# Questions

- Where does this passage fit in the trajectory of Jesus' ministry?
- What is the main question this passage raises for you?
- What is the most helpful idea you take away from this conversation?
- What wisdom, insights, or call can we take from this passage, as followers of Jesus, reading it in light of the witness of Jesus ?