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Syrophenician Woman, 4,000 Fed (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg analyzes the story of the Syrophenician woman who pleaded for Jesus to heal her daughter. Initially, Jesus appeared to ignore her plea, stating that his priority was to the Jews. Despite this, the woman persisted and expressed her faith in Jesus' ability to heal. This pleased Jesus, who proceeded to heal her daughter and feed thousands in her midst. Gregg uses this story to speak about the privilege of the Jews and the potential for people to extend globally whatever their own problem or choice may be.

Transcript

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 15, and we should, I hope, without much difficulty, finish Matthew 15. I always say that kind of thing at the beginning of a class, and I probably should learn long ago not to make such predictions, because it only makes me lose credibility if I don't fulfill the predictions, actually. Very often I don't cover as much in a session as I hope to.

It all works out in the end. We usually catch up somewhere, but too often I let you know what I intend to cover, and then because we fall so far short of it, it would have been better for me to have said nothing. But we have before us at least two stories of significance before we finish Matthew 15 from where we are.

One has to do with a Gentile woman who approached Jesus because her daughter was demon-possessed, and she wished Jesus to deliver her. And then the other is a miracle of feeding the multitudes, very, very much like the feeding of the 5,000. The difference being that in this case the number that is fed is only 4,000.

A different number of loaves are involved, and a different number of baskets of extra food are gathered up. But apart from that, in principle, the story about the feeding of the 4,000 is almost exactly like the story of the feeding of the 5,000. It is less well-known because the feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four Gospels, whereas the feeding of the 4,000 is found only in Matthew and Mark.

All right, that's what we have before us. Now, if we manage to finish those on time, we

actually should, in order to keep up with the schedule, take the first 12 verses of chapter 16 also, which are a sequel to the feeding of the 4,000, but I will not make any predictions about that material today. Okay, we start at verse 21.

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. Then 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. And she said, True, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the master's table.

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.

Now, there's a number of things to observe here. Jesus left the country. He did not very often, not very many times as ministry, leave the country.

He did several times when he was looking for a refuge from simply being besieged by the multitudes. Or on some occasions when he was actually in danger because people were after him, powerful people. Jesus spent maybe, maybe close to a year in Perea, not at this point, but a little later in his ministry.

After his Galilean ministry, it was fairly over. He, prior to his death, spent several months, many months, in Perea, which is on the east side of Jordan, outside of the country, and therefore out of the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. And no doubt he spent his time there because they were actively seeking to arrest him and kill him during that period of time.

So there are times when Jesus left the country, either to escape persecution or simply to find respite from the multitudes, which would give him no rest unless he got away from them. Now, Tyre and Sidon are to the north of Israel. He crossed the border to the north into the area that's modern Lebanon.

And Tyre, as you may know, we haven't studied it yet in the prophets, but Tyre was a major trading city, not in the days of Jesus, but in the days of the Old Testament prophets. Before the Babylonian exile and even after that, to a certain extent, Tyre was a major trading center. It was the principal seaport on the east coast of the Mediterranean and one of the wealthiest cities in that part of the world.

But not at the time of Jesus, because Ezekiel had prophesied that Tyre would be overrun,

that it would be scraped clean like the top of a rock, that all of its stones and timbers would be thrown into the sea, and that Tyre would be a place for the spreading of nets. In other words, a fishing village. That happened, at least most of that happened, when Alexander the Great conquered Tyre in the 4th century BC.

And therefore, Tyre was no longer the powerful nation or city that it had been in the time of Jesus. And if you go there today, you'll find it to be, in fact, a fishing village where our fishermen spread their nets, just as Ezekiel said. Now, in this region, of course, dwelt mostly Gentiles.

This was a country that we now consider to be an Arab nation. This woman is said to have been a woman of Canaan. I believe it's in Mark's parallel, since I think only Mark gives us a parallel to this, that it tells us she was Syrophenician.

Mark 7.26 says the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. Now, how many ways can she be designated? She's called a woman of Canaan in Matthew. She's called a Greek in Mark, who also says she's Syrophenician.

Now, Syrophenician means Assyrian by race, and Phoenician in terms of where she lived. Phoenicia was modern Lebanon. It's the ancient name for what we call Lebanon today.

Syria, obviously, was another nation, so she was of Syrian extraction. She's said to be a Greek in Mark 7.26, because Greek was a word that simply meant Gentile in many respects. Almost everybody, except Jews, were Greeks.

There's three categories, actually, mentioned that Paul says he has an obligation to preach to. To the Jews, and the Greeks, and the barbarians. Almost everybody was in one of those categories.

The barbarians was any people that had not been conquered and had not assimilated the Greek language and culture. There were very few civilized people that were in that category. Certainly, most of the world had been conquered by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C., and Greek had become the language of them all.

Thereafter, almost every Gentile, at least all those that knew the Greek language, and that was almost everybody, except for barbarians, were called Greeks. Even though they weren't Greek ethnically, they were Greek culturally. Of course, the Jews stood out as an exception.

Even though they assimilated some Greek culture, they nonetheless were still fairly aloof. Certainly, to the Jew, there was a massive distinction between Jews and Greeks. When Paul said, the gospel is the power of God for salvation, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek, the word Greek there doesn't just mean people from the Grecian peninsula.

It means, of course, any Gentile, almost any Gentile was included under the word Greek. So, when Mark tells us this woman was a Greek, he simply means a Gentile. She spoke Greek.

She was not a barbarian nor a Jew, but she was a Greek, which put her in the category of the majority of Gentiles that Jesus or the apostles would ever have contact with. She was somewhat ethnically Syro-Phoenician. I said that means she was Syrian, from Phoenicia, but she's said to be a woman of Canaan also.

And it's not exactly clear how that is to be understood. Canaan, you know, was the name of Palestine before the Jews conquered it. And it was so-called because there were groups of nations living there before the days of Joshua who were called Canaanites.

But they were a lot of ethnic groups. There were the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Hittites and the other Perizzites and others. And so there are quite a few different ethnic groups that were all under the general rubric of Canaanite.

And I don't know, but that the Syrians may have, in some manners of speaking, been called Canaanites. I simply can't answer that. But one thing is clear.

Those who would maybe try to find a contradiction here between Matthew and Mark are not well advised to do so. Because in this particular portion of the life of Christ, Matthew and Mark follow each other very closely. They do have their individual details they give.

But whereas Luke tells nothing about this entire section, Matthew and Mark, one of them follows the other quite point by point. And therefore, it's almost certain that one of them would have been familiar with the other's work. That's not necessary to say, but it's almost necessary to say.

And therefore, it's probable that Matthew was aware of Mark's work or vice versa. And that being so, they would have been aware of what the other had said. And there must have been, in their way of thinking, it was a point of clarification, not a point of contradiction.

To say, on one hand, the woman was Canaanite. On the other hand, she was Syro-Phoenician. Syria or Phoenicia may have, in the thinking of Matthew, been part of what he would include under the general term Canaanite.

But I don't know that it would have been commonly used that way. We simply can't comment further without more expertise than I have on these ancient ethnic boundaries. You know, what the range of meaning was of a particular ethnic designation.

Okay, the woman was in the region that Jesus had come to. She was outside of Israel. She was a Greek, or that is, a Gentile.

She came from that region, and she said, Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David. My daughter is severely demon-possessed. Now, it doesn't say so outright, but it would appear that the daughter was not with her on this occasion.

And I think it is stated in somewhat unmistakable terms in Mark. Because at the end of the story, Mark tells us in Mark 7, 30, When she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out and her daughter lying on the bed. So, it seems this woman left her daughter at home, went to Jesus, had her conversation with Jesus.

Jesus said the daughter was well, and the woman went home and found her daughter well. So, Matthew doesn't specify that the daughter was not with her, although there is no mention of the daughter being with her. Mark clarifies that the daughter was not with her.

This woman came on behalf of her daughter. Which means this is yet another of the very few instances recorded in the Gospels of Jesus healing or helping somebody who was not there. In the first case, we have the nobleman in John chapter 4 who came to Jesus.

At the end of John chapter 4, a nobleman of Herod's household came to Jesus because his son was near death, and Jesus healed him from a distance. Basically said, your son is better, go on home. And the man went home, and sure enough his son was healed.

Another occasion was when the centurion came to Jesus. And the man had a sick servant, and Jesus said, I'll go heal him. But the man said, I'm not worthy to have you under my roof, just say the word, and I know he'll be better.

And sure enough, that happened. Interestingly, none of these cases are instances of Jesus healing mainline Jewish people. I mean, Herodian, the Herodian nobleman that first came to Jesus in John chapter 4 probably was Jewish ethnically, but he would have been something of an outcast to the majority of Jews because he was attached to Herod's household.

That made him a collaborator with the enemy. A little bit like a tax collector, only probably worse. And therefore, he was a Jew who probably most Jews would have nothing to do with, it would seem.

In the case of the centurion, obviously he was a Gentile, he was a Roman. This woman also was a Gentile. Now, that may be significant, since Jesus very seldom did miracles upon people who were not present.

It's possible because Jesus, as he says in the story, was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that he was, at this point, avoiding such ceremonial defilement as would offend the Jews, would close them off if he went into the house of a Gentile or of a person who was a... Well, of course, he did go into the house of Zacchaeus and other tax collectors, so I don't know about the case of the Herodian. The problem with the

Herodian was probably just that the guy lived in another town and Jesus wasn't there. But in the case of the centurion and this woman, it may be that Jesus did a miracle from a distance because he did not, at this point, want to venture into a Gentile's house.

You might recall that some years later, even when Peter was told by the Holy Spirit to go to Cornelius' house, he still got flack, not just from the Jews, but from the Christians. The Christians in Jerusalem criticized Peter for going into a Gentile's house. Now, of course, I believe Jesus would do the right thing, no matter how much criticism it would occasion him.

But as he says, in this place he was not yet sent to the Gentiles. He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and that reason may have kept him from doing something so scandalous as going into a Gentile's house and basically turning off every Jew to him, including his own disciples, possibly. I don't know.

But there are very few occasions, this is one of them, where Jesus healed somebody without going to their house, where the sick person in each case was at home, but Jesus didn't go to their home. He just gave a command from a distance, and they were healed. This woman said that her daughter was severely demon-possessed, but initially Jesus ignored her.

He didn't answer her a word. In fact, reading this story has really bothered Christians. It's bothered me.

It seems like Jesus is somewhat rude. The woman is begging him for help, and he just keeps walking and acts like she's not even there. He didn't answer her even a word.

And finally, it was the disciples that came to Jesus and said, Listen, if we're not going to deal with this woman, just send her away. Let us send her home. But that wasn't what Jesus wanted.

Now, of course, the disciples would have no love particularly for this woman. She was a Gentile, and the disciples were still quite bigoted sometime after this, still against Gentiles. But they knew that Jesus on occasions did scandalous things like help Gentiles.

And so initially they probably weren't sure if Jesus was going to grant this woman the request or not, but since Jesus was ignoring her, they just figured, Well, you know, this woman is very tenacious. Lord, why don't you just tell her to go away? Instead of saying nothing, just send her away, for she's crying after us. At that point, rather than send her away, Jesus finally addressed her.

Now, why didn't Jesus speak to her more early on? I don't know. Why did Jesus treat her this way? I suppose Jesus was testing her tenacity. There certainly are times when Jesus indicates in his teaching and even in his behavior that a person is going to have to be a little bit tenacious and determined to get anything out of it.

In particular, a Gentile, since he was not initially sent to the Gentiles at this point, they were to receive the scraps. After Israel would reject him, then he would be sent to the Gentiles, but he must first go to his own people. That was the promise the prophets had made, that God would send him aside to Israel, and that he would make his new covenant with Israel.

And so Israel had to be given a first chance. You might remember Paul, when he came out of Pisidian Antioch Synagogue, not very well received there, he said to the people, I'm in the wrong book, John, let's see, Acts chapter 13. In Acts 13.46, when Paul and Barnabas were not well received by the Jewish synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first.

But since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. So Paul indicated that the Jews had the first claim on the word of God. It was necessary to give it to them first, but if they rejected it, the Gentiles could have it.

And of course many Jews did reject it and many Gentiles received it. That seems to reflect the same conviction that Jesus was uttering here. He says in verse 24, his first statement to the woman or about the woman, in any sense acknowledging her presence, was in verse 24, I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Now Jesus taught from time to time that it was necessary to persist in prayer. He told the story of the widow who wished to have justice done by a judge who couldn't have cared less about justice or about her. But because of her persistence and pestering and so forth, he finally gave in.

And Jesus indicated that men ought always to pray and not to faint, not to give up praying. In fact, that's said to be the reason he told the parable. And I think that's Luke 18.1, it says Jesus taught this parable to the effect that men ought always to pray and not to faint, and then he gave the parable.

So Jesus indicated that sometimes prayer needs to be persevered in. Even with the disciples, on one occasion when Jesus came walking to them on the water, we read in one of the accounts that he acted as if he was going to walk past them in the boat until they cried out to him and then invited him in the boat and then he came in. He sometimes wants to make sure that people are desperate enough or eager enough to seek his help.

And that would apparently be why he ignored her at first. It comes clear, as the story turns out, that he had nothing in principle against helping her, except if she as a Gentile was going to, at this point in time when he was only sent to the Jews, he was not yet sent to the Gentiles, there was no Gentile mission yet. If she as a Gentile was going to press in and get something that was at this point only offered to the Jews, she was going to

have to show exceptional tenacity and faith.

Now, this would not be the first time Jesus did something for a Gentile, because we know that the centurion, whose servant was sick, also was helped by Jesus. But Jesus marveled because the man had such incredible faith. Likewise, here Jesus comments on how great her faith was, indicating that although she was a Gentile, and although at this point in time Jesus had not begun an actual mission to Gentiles, but was still concentrating on Israel, a fact that was seen also in the fact that when he sent out the twelve, he said, don't go to any of the boys of the Gentiles, but just go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, when he sent them out in Matthew 10.

Yet, a Gentile could press in just like Gentiles in the Old Testament times could. Certainly, God was dealing principally with Israel in Old Testament times, but there were some like Ruth, or Rahab, or others who were Gentiles by birth, who were able to change loyalties and embrace the God of Israel and come into the covenant with them. And so there always was a time when Gentiles, if they wished to pay the price, could get for themselves the blessings that were promised to Israel.

But they would have to have the proper kind of faith. This woman had the right kind of faith, but Jesus gave her an opportunity to demonstrate that she had it. It's possible that since Jesus didn't know everything, unless his father revealed it to him, that he wasn't sure at this point what the tenor of her faith was, until she persevered like this.

In any case, we're not ever told why it was he ignored her initially, except his own statement that he was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But that statement is not an absolute. It was a statement of general policy at that point in time.

Certainly, after his resurrection, he sent his disciples to go to all the nations, make disciples of all the world. However, during his earthly ministry, prior to Israel's rejection of him, Israel was to be the focus of his activities and of his blessing and of his ministry. But, as we see, it is possible for Gentiles, even at this point in time before Jesus' death, if they have faith enough, to really be assisted.

Now, the woman, when Jesus finally acknowledged her presence and her existence by saying, I haven't been sent to people like you. I've been sent only to Israel at this point. She came and worshipped him and said, Lord, help me.

Even then, he didn't grant her request. He stated his reason for objecting or for not helping her up to this point. He said, it's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.

Now, the word little is inserted here partly because the Greek word does imply little dogs. The older version, of course, the King James just says dogs. And in Jesus referring to her as a dog, it kind of offended the sensitivity of many readers.

I've, you know, being raised with the King James and stuff, I've encountered many times people raising this problem to them. They just don't like this story because Jesus refers to the Gentiles as dogs. And so, the New King James translators and perhaps others, being aware and sensitive of this objection, have emphasized that he used a word that didn't just mean dogs in the sense of showing utter contempt, but little dogs like pet dogs, sort of an affectionate, a creature that someone might have affection for, a little dog.

However, I don't know that that's really bringing out something more clearly or not. I think when Jesus said it's not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs, he was using a regular way that the Jews spoke about Gentiles. The Jews spoke of Gentiles as dogs.

And, you know, in order to really receive mercy from God, you've got to own the fact that you are a dog, in a sense. I mean, that you're a sinner, that you are unclean. A dog was an unclean animal to the Jew.

And I don't think there's anything, I mean, it's sort of tough love, as it were, to let somebody know that they are a dog and therefore have no claim on the mercy of God. But then, in a very real sense, Jews who didn't believe in Christ were dogs, too. They didn't call themselves that, like they called the Gentiles that, but Paul called them that.

Over in the book of Philippians, in chapter 3 and verse 2, Philippians 3-2, Paul says to this church, this is a Gentile church in Philippi, Greeks by actual ethnic origin, Greek Christians, he says to them in verse 2, Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilators. For we, including his readers and himself, are the circumcision, that is the true Jews, the true circumcision, who worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. It's quite clear when he says, beware of dogs, he's talking about the circumcision party, the ones who are trying to persuade Gentiles to become full Jews before they'd be fully accepted.

That is, through accepting circumcision. He says, beware of those people. Those people are Jews.

And those people call Gentiles dogs, but Paul calls those Jews dogs. Because he says, it doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a Gentile, if Paul was a Jew, his readers were Gentiles, but he includes himself in them both and says, Jews and Gentiles who believe are the true circumcision, as long as we worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. The Jew who is merely a Jew outwardly, he may think himself superior to Gentiles to the point of calling Gentiles the derisive name dogs, but Paul says any Jew as well as Gentiles who reject Christ are in fact the dogs, they are the unclean ones.

And really there's nothing unloving about saying that somebody is a sinner, that

somebody is unclean if that happens to be true of them. It is in fact the surest way of bringing them to the point of humility to realize that they don't have any claim on the mercy of God and that they need to cry out for grace. Jesus didn't say, you know, you're a fairly decent woman.

Your problem is you're just a Gentile, but I know you're really a good woman and well-intentioned and so forth and you're really quite a nice person. She may or may not have been, but that was not the issue. She was in fact an unclean person.

She was a Gentile, but all people are unclean until they receive mercy from God. And I don't think that Jesus, I think Jesus was being very direct and blunt with her in saying, listen, the Jews think of you people as dogs and you've got to accept the fact that you're dogs too. You might be insulted by the arrogance of the Jews who think themselves superior to you.

But with or without reference to what the Jews think about themselves, you've got to think about yourself properly as a dog too before you can really receive any crumbs from the master's table. Now he said, he spoke as a truism, what everybody would acknowledge to be true. It's not right to take the children's food and give it to the dogs.

Now, of course the point he was making is it's not right to take that which is at this point just really the property of the Jews. The Messiah is the Jews. The kingdom at this point was being offered only to the Jews.

They were the children of the kingdom, at least until they rejected it. And the Gentiles were not entitled yet to the blessings that the children would have that would come later. So he was just saying it's not right to take what belongs to the Jews and give it to the Gentiles.

It's not right to take what belongs to the children who are the natural heirs of the estate and give it to the family pets, to the dogs. Or maybe even in terms of dogs, he might not have been thinking of family pets so much as the wild packs of dogs that would go and raid garbage cans and stuff. Just the vicious, foul, filthy, despicable creatures that the Gentiles were.

Now, by the way, the Gentiles were. Gentiles still are. So are unsaved Jews.

We're all dogs. But I mean, back then, Gentiles were even worse in terms of culture than we are today because Gentile culture in the West at least has been strongly affected by Christian values and Judeo-Christian ethics and worldview over the past centuries. But in those days, anyone who wasn't a Jew was an idol worshiper.

A fair number of them actually practiced infant sacrifice and a good number of them had immoral practices in their religions where actual prostitution was practiced as a priestly function in their temples of their gods. And being a Gentile was really to be abominable

unless they were exceptional and followed the God of Israel. And that's perhaps what Jesus was testing about this woman.

Where were her loyalties? What commitment did she have to putting her trust in Jesus Christ? And so if possible, he's going to put her off. If this woman can be dissuaded, he's going to do his best to dissuade her. If she can't be dissuaded, if she's one of those ones who take the kingdom by force, if she's one of those who presses in to it, well, then she's welcome to the kingdom.

But she's going to have to overcome a few obstacles here, including almost insulting language from Jesus, but not unreasonably insulting. Because Jesus himself called the religious Jews hypocrites and children of hell and things like that. So to call a Gentile a dog is actually relatively mild compared to what he called the scribes and Pharisees who were not Gentiles.

Jesus is not making a racist statement. Although, of course, he's using language that the Jews used, often with racist mentality behind it when they used it. But he's just making a truism that everybody would see the reasonableness of.

You don't take the food that belongs to the children of the household and give it to the pets. Now, while it's true that he's really making a statement here about Jews and Gentiles, the illustration he uses is expected to be true in the natural as well as in that which it symbolizes. And for this reason, maybe we should take a look at it just for a moment.

I knew a man in ministry who felt like it was not right for Christians to have pet dogs. His argument was based on this scripture. He said, well, the protein that feeds a dog could be used to feed starving children somewhere else.

And certain researchers like Ronald Sider who wrote to rich Christians in the age of hunger cited statistics like if all the food we fed to our dogs, if all the meat byproducts were ground up in the dog food or even the soy or whatever, and the cornmeal and stuff that's put into dog food were made available for human consumption, we could keep just from what the dogs in America eat, could keep the whole subcontinent of India alive. Therefore, by us having dogs and feeding good food to dogs, you might have doubts about whether we should call it good food, but there are poor people in this country who actually buy dog food for human consumption because it's cheaper. But this guy argued, if you buy a dog and feed a dog, you are giving what should be children's food to dogs.

And Jesus assumed everyone would accept the validity of this truism. You don't give children's food to dogs. Now, this guy may have been taking it too far.

It's really hard to say. Jesus did not condemn the maintenance of domestic animals. We don't see anywhere that Jesus condoned or condemned having pet dogs.

We do know, though, that he acknowledged that people had things like sheep and oxen and certainly didn't oppose it. In fact, he considered himself a good shepherd. He apparently considered the keeping of sheep to be an honorable and moral thing to do, although presumably some of the grain and stuff that's fed to livestock could conceivably be sent off to starving people somewhere and keep some of them alive.

I personally wish to put a balance on what my friend felt about the subject. Obviously, I have a couple of dogs right now. But for years I didn't, and I still didn't agree with him.

I don't feel that every individual Christian is personally responsible for every starving person on the planet. I do think that we should be more concerned about people than we are about animals. But then again, we should be more concerned about people than we are about cars.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't spend any money at all on cars if they serve some useful purpose in the way of life that we're called to. And there are a number of things that we spend some money on that someone wishing to be very critical about could say, well, you could have lived without that, and you just think of how that money could have been spent to keep people alive somewhere. True, we could all live as, you know, paupers, and perhaps it would be commendable to do so in order to help others live.

But even if we did so, there'd still be people starving. And some would argue, well, you can do as much as you can. I'd say that these matters of stewardship are every man's responsibility before God and no man's responsibility to judge another.

And as I've said many times, I don't judge another man about how he lives. Sometimes I believe a lot of Christians live more luxuriously than they should. But there are probably some who live less luxuriously than I do who would criticize the level of luxury that I live at.

So I figure that no matter what standard of life you've accepted for yourself, there's always someone who's living more poorly who could criticize the amount of liberties you take and the expenditure of your money. So we need to be careful to let God be the judge in these matters. But I would just point this out, that there are at least some Christians, I don't know very many, I've only met one, but there may be more, who understand this principle to be literally true.

You don't take human food and give it to animals when there's humans who need it. Some would even say it's a violation of this principle to even own a dog. However, I don't have any reason to believe that that's true.

Certainly the shepherds of Jesus' day used cattle dogs and must have fed them something. And Jesus must have known there were hungry people around too, so they're within reason. What he's referring to is not that you should never feed a dog anything, as

long as you know there's someone on the planet who could use the food.

But what he's saying is the parents don't give the food that their own children need to their family dogs. They don't put their family pets above their children. That's all he's saying.

Now the extent to which someone wants to extend that globally or whatever is their own problem or their own choice. What he's saying is the Jews were in fact the ones most entitled and first entitled to be called the children of God. The nation of Israel was his firstborn, as it was called in the Old Testament.

And yet the Gentiles had not yet been made a blanket offer, as we now have been in Christ. But he had not yet made such an offer to the Gentiles. They were not heirs of the promises.

As Paul says in Ephesians 2, we who are Gentiles were aliens to the commonwealth of Israel and we were without God, without hope in this world, without any promises, without any covenant relationship with God. And just as the dogs don't have any claim to the inheritance of their masters, so the Gentiles had no claim to any of the benefits that God had promised to his children, the Jews. And that's what Jesus was saying, and to whatever extent he wanted to extend it beyond that, I don't know.

And that's for every man's conscience to decide for himself. I would point this out, though, and it goes without saying, in most generations except in ours, our generation has lost sight of biblical values to such a great extent that there are many people who think that animals and people have equal rights. You may be aware of an organization called PETA, which is People for the Equitable Treatment of Animals, or something like that, or I don't know if equitable is the right word in PETA, but something like that.

And these people object to even the use of the word pet. And speaking of your dog or your cat, they say that pet is a demeaning term. You should call them animal companions.

Really? This is serious. If you get the politically correct dictionary, you'll find that the word pet is a very politically incorrect word, and animal companion is to be preferred. Some of these PETA people actually have gone on record.

I recently saw in a magazine a fashion model who was nude but holding up a sign in front of her body so you couldn't see her nudity and said, I'd rather go naked than wear fur. Well, that's typical of PETA people. I wonder if they wear leather shoes or if they go barefoot.

I don't know. Such people often are not consistent. But the problem is these people, no matter how much we may love furry little critters, and I mean there's every reason to enjoy the animal creation and certainly to avoid cruelty to them, the fact is that animals

are there for man's judicious and un wasteful use.

To eat animals is not only something that's okay, it's actually something that is sanctioned outright and even commanded in Genesis chapter 9. In addition to plants, every creature should be available for man's food. Some of the laws that God gave Israel required sacrificing animals. Well, certainly the sacrificial system involves sacrificing animals but never would allow sacrificing humans.

To kill an animal is not murder. To kill a human is. Obviously, in almost all societies it has gone without saying that animals are a lower level of being than human beings are.

But because of the total rejection of biblical ideas in our modern culture, people have simply lost track of reality. Now, what Jesus said, you don't take children's food and give it to the dogs, would not be at all obvious to the PETA people, to the modern advocates of animal rights. They said, why not? Dogs have as much right to the food as the children do.

What are you, a speciist? Are you familiar with the politically correct word, speciism? You know what racism is? That's thinking your race is better than other races. You know what sexism is? Sexism is thinking your sex or your gender is better than the other gender. Speciism is thinking that your species is better than other species.

And since the only people who think that their species is better than other species, is the only species that thinks at all, is humans, therefore speciism is humans thinking that humans are better than animals. That's called speciism. It's on the level with sexism and racism to the politically correct.

And so, you know, this is how paganized we become. Here, this woman, this woman was a Gentile, a Canaanite, a Greek, not informed as far as we know by Jewish scriptures. She may have had some familiarity with Jews.

I don't know what contact she had with Jews prior to this, but she was basically a pagan anyway. And yet, Jesus knew that she would at least recognize that children, human children are more important than animals. Now that's not the point he's making.

He's making a more obscure point, that Jews at this point had privileges that the Gentiles did not. But he did so by stating what he expected to be accepted without question. As an illustration, you don't give animals the children's food.

You don't deprive humans in order to give special rights to animals. And yet, although she was, you know, a pagan and in darkness and alienated from God, she was still smarter than modern pagans are in our culture who don't know even that. They don't even know that there is something, that human beings do have superior rights.

As far as we know, animals don't have any rights. Although that doesn't mean that we

have any right to be cruel to them or to be bad stewards of the animal creation. Now, Jesus said, it's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.

But she answered, true Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said to her, oh woman, great is your faith. Let it be to you as you desire.

And her daughter was healed that very hour. Now, what was it about the woman's reply that pleased Jesus so much? His reply to her seemed to be putting her off. Saying, don't even expect anything from me.

You're a Gentile dog. I've been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Sheep are clean animals, by the way, dogs are unclean animals.

And I've been sent to the sheep who are also the children and are entitled. But the dogs are not entitled to anything. And it sounded as if he was holding out no hope to her at all.

But obviously, he was willing to grant her request if she showed actual faith. So we must assume that his comments were calculated to see just how persistent was she going to be. It's obvious from his final response to her that a show of faith such as she demonstrated was going to result in his willingness to help her.

But he gave her no clues along those lines. She had to come to that herself. She had to persist.

If she was the kind of woman who took no for an answer easily and was easily discouraged, she would have never seen her daughter healed. But she pressed in and she just said, hey, I'm not going to let this gruff treatment put me off. I'm sure that this man will help me.

I'm sure he's reasonable. And even when he said what was undeniably true, you don't take the children's food and give it to the dogs. I mean, how could she answer that? How could she possibly withstand such ironclad, logical truth? Yet she came back with a very insightful statement.

She said, it's true, you don't take the children's bread and give it to the dogs, but some of the children's bread does fall from the table, and generally speaking, the dogs are entitled to that. In fact, she doesn't state it, but she might have even been implying, some of that food that falls from the table falls down because the kids don't want it. Have you ever seen a kid feed the dog under the table food they didn't exactly like? Now she may or may not have been implying something along those lines, that the children don't even want the food.

So if the kids won't eat it, certainly the dogs should get it. If that was implied, that even

makes greater insight in her remark than otherwise. It's insightful enough and commendable enough even without that implication.

But if she was implying, well, hey, the kids don't want the food, they're throwing it off the table. Can't the dogs eat it once it hits the floor? She would possibly be saying, listen, the Jews that you're speaking about, they're not following you, they're not believing you, they're not accepting you. But I will, you know.

If they throw the food off the table, could I have some? Now even if that isn't exactly what she was saying, she was suggesting this much at least, that the Gentiles whom Jesus called dogs, by the way, she didn't mind calling herself one. That's a good sign. She accepted that.

She accepted that rebuff without being insulted. He suggested, you're a dog. She said, okay, fair enough, I'm a dog.

But doesn't the householder care for his dogs too? Is the householder so unconcerned about his family pets that even when the food has fallen to the table and it's no longer accessible to the children, he doesn't give it even to the dogs? Of course he does. Because though the dogs are of a lower rank in the household, they nonetheless come under a certain degree of care from their owner. He still takes it upon himself to feed them.

He gives the children first choice, but whatever is scraps or throwaway food, he does give to the dogs. And what she could be implying by this is, first of all, fair enough, I don't mind you calling me a dog. I deserve the title.

Who doesn't? But a dog is not an object of entire contempt in a household. It doesn't have the rights of a child, but it's still, the master cares for his dogs. The master feeds his dogs, and the master is wealthy enough to feed his children and his dogs.

There is always, in a wealthy man's house, there's a sufficient surplus. That after the children have been fed, there's something to give to the pets. And what she's implying, at the very least, if not more than this, she's implying that God has certainly got enough to go around.

And while it's true that she doesn't stand first in line in terms of privilege and claim upon God's mercy, and there may be others ahead of her, certainly God is not so poor that he doesn't have enough to throw a few scraps her way. And that the thing she was asking for, though it was a stupendous miracle, would be a very small thing for God, like the crumbs from his table. She showed tremendous faith, A, that God was well able, without impoverishing himself, without going to great pains himself, well able to grant her request.

So she had some awareness of the greatness of God's ability. Furthermore, she felt that

even if she was a dog, God was not altogether unconcerned for her. That if the children were given adequate opportunity to eat, God would not mind his dogs having a few things too.

And Jesus just marveled at this woman. It reflected a pretty high view of God and a pretty low view of self. Two very positive attitudes, and very rare in human beings.

The tendency of our nature is to think highly of self and not highly enough of God. And yet this woman, she was confident in God's ability to provide not only for the Jews, but the Gentiles as well. There would be plenty to go around in God's wealth, in God's power.

He could do this for her without withholding anything necessary from the Jews. And in God's mercy and concern. That while he wouldn't be, at this point, as concerned about Gentiles as Jews, he was not completely unconcerned about Gentiles.

And, of course, she was willing to accept this insulting rebuff that she was a dog. Okay, I accept it. I'm a dog.

But dogs need food too. And masters care about dogs too. And so Jesus says, Oh woman, great is your faith.

Let it be to you as you desire. And as we pointed out in Mark 7.30, the parallel here, it says she went home and found her daughter delivered of demons. The demon went out.

Now what I would like to point out to you here is in verse 28, that her daughter was healed from that very hour. Now the word healed is here used. Ordinarily we think of healing as something that you do when someone has a disease.

If a person is demon possessed and is relieved, we usually say they were delivered or they're exercised or the demon was cast out. The word healed is not the most common way of describing relief from demon possession. But here's at least one case, and I think it's an important precedent, to see that the word healed can be used in cases where it's not talking about physical sickness, but it's talking about demon possession.

I say it for this reason. If you'll look with me over at Acts 10. In Acts 10.38, Peter was preaching in the house of Cornelius.

And he said, How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. For God was with him. Now, I just want to respond to what I consider to be a wrong application of this particular statement of Peter.

There are those, the Word of Faith people are among them, though there are others as well, who teach that sickness is strictly the work of the devil.