

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Riddle and the Sharp Response, Mark 6:24-30

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INTRODUCTION: As I've taught you, the Old Testament is God's story working through his chosen people. Among the stories of the Old Testament, we read several hopeful accounts of people outside of the chosen family of faith becoming part of the family of faith.

For those watching by television, you might be shocked to hear me say none of this salvation was really meant for us and only because of grace we've been included. If you read the Book of Acts, you learn more about this, and the Apostle Paul explains it as well in his epistles. Romans Chapter 11 tells us extensively of our being grafted in. I challenge you to read Romans 11. You might have to read it several times for it to sink in. In today's lesson, we have a solid account of a woman being included in the family of faith.

There are two points I want to make in today's message:

1. Jesus challenged the woman's faith by posing a riddle.
2. The woman gave a sharp response to the riddle.

BACKGROUND: Jesus' travels took him to the region around Tyre, outside of the area and north of where he did most of his ministry. There he worked three miracles for Gentiles, and the first one was for a girl possessed by a demon. Her mother approached Jesus, and she had several things going against her:

- She was a Gentile; Jesus was a Jew. In most circumstances, Gentiles and Jews did not speak.
- She was a woman approaching a man. This was almost unheard of in a culture so dominated by men.

- The main thing she had going against her was Satan himself, as a demon had possessed her daughter. We don't have any details as to why the girl was demon-possessed, but what we do know is the woman believed Jesus could help her.

Even though she had these things going against her, none of this stopped her. Perhaps she had tried everything else to get help for her daughter, as a good mother would do. Let's read from Mark Chapter 7.

SCRIPTURE: 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."*

In this passage of scripture, Jesus went to get some rest. In fact, he went so far from home it's clear he wanted a vacation. Perhaps we could call it a working vacation.

First, JESUS CHALLENGED THE WOMAN'S FAITH BY POSING A RIDDLE.

SCRIPTURE: *"First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs"* (verse 27).

EXPLANATION: Doesn't this sound like a bizarre answer to a woman who wanted her daughter rid of a demon? I don't think Jesus referenced her as a dog because she was a Gentile. I think he meant "dog" as a pet or something like that.

Was this the time to tell riddles? It didn't seem so, but then again, Jesus tested people to see if they really meant business.

In his statement, Jesus meant he had come for the Jews and they were the ones who were to feast on the bread of life he brought with him.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 1:16 says, ¹⁶*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*"

EXPLANATION: This woman was a Gentile, and Jesus challenged her faith right then and there. Was she really serious? Had she given up all hope of anyone else helping her daughter? Was she really to the point she would trust a Jew to help her? Had she really abandoned every other possibility?

APPLICATION: Here's some practical application at this point. We are not truly trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord if we have a backup plan. If we are merely coming to Jesus as a convenience, then we are not really trusting Jesus. If we see Jesus as one of several options, then we are not really trusting Jesus.

Jesus posed a riddle and—

Second, THE WOMAN GAVE A SHARP RESPONSE TO THE RIDDLE.

SCRIPTURE: Look in verse 28 ²⁸ *"Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."*

EXPLANATION: She called him Lord, which clearly meant she recognized and honored his superiority. The scripture says she was Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. This is interesting because as a Greek, she was not born in Greece. Apparently, she had Greek parents who lived far from their roots.

Do you realize she broke nearly every social rule of the day? Not only did she address a man she was not related to, not only did she address a Jew, but she challenged a man and a Jew. She was indeed a bold woman!

Some background about this woman is important. By this time in history, the Greek culture was fading. The Romans had permeated everything. She would have known of the Greek gods who were revered in her culture's distant past but were not considered powerful any longer. And, living in Syrian Phoenicia, the dominate religion, was the old Canaanite religion, which focused on Baalism. As you may recall they were known for Baal temples, which worshipped fertility and the powers and processes of nature. On top of all this were the Roman gods, who were in the forefront of everyone's minds of the day.

In other words, this woman grew up and lived in a world which was confused. But when she said, LORD, she had settled it all. She was no longer confused. She no longer needed the Greek gods, the Canaanite paganism, or the Roman gods. They had all failed her, and she was ready to move on. She looked at the one, true Savior and called him LORD.

When she replied to Jesus' riddle, her statement "*even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs,*" she meant it would be better to have the crumbs of the bread Jesus gave to the Jews than to have nothing at all.

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 84—

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 84:10 ¹⁰*Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.*

EXPLANATION: Consider the incredible humility of a begging woman who thought if she could only have the crumbs, it would be a blessing.

Wow, how far away is this from the prosperity Gospel heresy which is so prevalent today? The prosperity false prophets say, "God will make you rich." Here we have a woman who just asked for crumbs.

Jesus drove the demon out by proxy, and when the woman returned home, her girl was OK.

CALL TO ACTION: We come to our commitment time, and I ask you: Where is your heart? Have you ever reached a point where, like this woman, you'll do whatever it takes to get the spiritual help you need? Are you ready and willing to abandon every other option? Simple trust in Jesus Christ may not be so simple at first if you have to give up on one thing, then another, then another.

Don't we live in a world like this woman? A world where belief systems are falling apart, where governments fade and new ones dominate? If you listen to all the voices around you, you'll never know what to believe. But, if you reach a point like the woman in today's message—a point at which you abandon all else and call Jesus "LORD"—then you've made the best decision you'll ever make.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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