

Every Dog Has Its Day

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Grab a seat. Oh, good evening, everybody.

My name is Aaron. If you're a visitor here, I'm a minister here. Nice to meet you. Come and say hi afterwards. Okay, so a passage this evening. Goodness. So Jesus goes on this sort of horseshoe-shaped trip around Gentile territory.

And there are three stories, right? Three kind of big sort of stories here. There's the Syrophenician woman who, it would seem, just listening to it, right? It would seem that Jesus says that she's a dog, you know.

And then there's the deaf guy, that's the next story, who can't speak. He has a speech impediment. And Jesus does this very elaborate sort of healing involving spitting and fingers and ears and stuff. And then there's the feeding of the 4,000, which is kind of like, you know, it's like another one?

It's kind of like the red-headed stepchild of the feeding of the 5,000, right? It's kind of this obscure other one that you kind of, you don't really know about too much, but it's there. And you sort of go, wow, why is there a bonus one there? Why is there an extra one here?

[1 : 15] It seems very similar, you know. So it's an intriguing passage that the dog call and the spit and the other sort of miraculous feeding.

These are the kind of passages that scholars really love. And unfortunately, I think a lot of scholars focus on the wrong things because these kind of interesting little things in there.

And the stuff I read this week as I was studying this passage, that everyone wanted to talk about, did he really call her a dog? Why the spit?

Was this another feeding? Or was it just a retelling of the first one? Everyone wants to talk about that stuff, right, because it's kind of interesting. And it's such a shame because the really big point of the passage can get lost if we focus on these kind of funky little details, right?

And the big message of the passage is something our hearts so desperately need to hear. So let me just get right at it. At the end of last week's passage that Jordan here preached on, and it was a wonderful sermon.

[2 : 22] If you weren't here last week, you should listen to it online. It's fantastic. At the end of the passage that Jordan preached on, there was this list. And it wasn't a fun list. So let me read it to you from Mark 7, 20.

And Jesus said, What comes from a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. So sexual immorality. I'll just pick out a few here. Sexual immorality. See, that's a problem, right?

That's a problem for people, eh? That's a problem. It's a problem. Coveting. We've got problems with that, I think, probably. I would think. This overwhelming desire to want something that's not ours.

I get that. You probably get that. I'm sure we do, right? Deceit. Lying. Sure. Yep. Sensuality. Making physical gratification quite a real primary concern for ourselves.

[3 : 38] Sure. That's a problem, right? That's a problem. It's a big problem, I think. I would think. And this stuff here, this arises from our hearts, and Jordan sort of succinctly said that our hearts are a fountain of evil.

That was a big point from last week. So how do we deal with this stuff? You know, I just mentioned four here, which kind of jumped out at me, right?

Sexual immorality, coveting, deceitful, and sensuality. How do we move from that feeling of, you know, that sense you get a feeling quite dirty sometimes, or angsty, or two-faced, or ashamed? You know, how do we move from that to feeling or knowing that we are clean and forgiven and hopeful and satisfied?

How do we get there? How can we get there as much as we can this side of the new creation? And the answer is in the passages we are looking at today, which is why it follows directly on from that.

So if the problem is our hearts are this fountain of evil, the answer, the solution to stem the tide is the overflowing, abundant grace of God.

[4 : 52] And that's what this section is about. So let's have a look at each story. Okay, verses 24 to 30, the Syrophenician woman, who's so great.

I love her. So Jesus went away to Tyron's side, and he was staying at this house, and he likely wanted some kind of rest or respite.

I'm assuming it doesn't actually say. That's probably my best guess. But it's hard to stay hidden when you're the son of God, it would seem. And so this Syrophenician woman came to him, fell at his feet, and begged him and said, My daughter has this unclean spirit.

And Jesus responds, Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. And she says, Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

And Jesus says, Good response. When you get back, your daughter's going to be sorted. Now, before I talk about what that is exactly about, I think, I want to make five points about it.

[5 : 57] Five, well, no, they're not points. They're five comments, just a little bit of background to help you understand it. All right? Five things. One, Tyron and Sidon historically were enemies of God, these places.

These guys were, during famine, they'd send their armies into Galilee and steal all the bread. And Jesus, it would seem, makes this rather deliberate trip to this place, which has historically not been very friendly with God's people.

So hold that. Okay, two. Jesus' Christ's primary earthly mission was to the Jews. It says in Matthew 15, Jesus says, I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

It was after the resurrection that the mission changed to include the Gentiles. Now, of course, it was always going to be the Gentiles. That was the idea eventually, right? But initially, Christ's earthly mission was mostly about the Jews.

Now, this is not some freaky, radical teaching. This is not some weird thing I'm saying to you. This is just the story of the Bible. The Jews were this historically privileged people with God's special favor on them.

[7 : 05] And the part they play in salvation history is that they receive God's grace and mercy first, and then they become a light to the world. Okay, that was kind of like a timetabling thing, I guess.

And so Christ's mission initially was primarily to the Jews. And at the end, before the ascension, that's when it is this big commission, a go out, go out to all the world. See, that's what this whole kind of feed the children first before the dogs line is about in the passage.

The children are the Jews and the Gentiles are the dogs. You got that so far? It's pretty sweet, eh? All right. It'll all make sense, surely. Three.

Bread, as we've talked about a few times in Mark so far, bread is a picture that's very important. Bread equals life. Bread is not just a snack. It's not, oh, have some bread. That'd be nice.

Feeling a bit peckish, right? Back in the days, food was scarce. So bread meant food. Food meant life. Hold that one.

[8 : 11] And in verse 27, it talks about being fully satisfied. There's a sense of being like, oh, just like, oh, I'm so full, you know? So when it talks about being fed, it's like being fully fed like after Christmas dinner.

Yes? It's an abundance kind of word. Fourth. Fourth. The grammar of the sentence where Jesus has healed the little girl, without getting technical, it suggests that the daughter was healed right back at the start when the woman first came to Jesus.

Before the back and forth banter, that she was healed right at the start. Fifth. Fifth. Jesus is not calling the woman a dog.

I want to get this out of the way because people spend a lot of time on this. It was a parable, right? It's a parable. And like most of Christ's parables, they talked about a typical scene in daily life to try and explain something really important.

And this is like a, I guess this is a Gentile parable because Jews didn't keep dogs. They were unclean animals. But this is a Gentile territory, right? So they would have little pet dogs. And the word dog, there is its diminutive form.

[9 : 18] It's like little doggy, little doggy. And so it's like a scene of, in a family, in a house where, you know, the little dog is eating the crumbs under the table.

Like when we had a dog, the dog would always sit under Sadie's high chair. If you have kids and a dog, you know that's where dogs love to be, under the high chair of a little kid eating, right? That's the best place in the house to be for them.

So Jesus is not calling this woman a dog. He's using like a scene that will be very familiar to her to help her to understand something.

Okay, so that's five little comments. Now, let's go back to the story again and let me explain it to you again. Pulling in all of that stuff, all right? So Jesus' primary mission was to the Jews.

Yet he visits these enemies of God, the people in Tyre and Sidon. The woman with a possessed daughter finds Jesus and begs him to heal his daughter. He does. He heals her.

[10 : 17] She doesn't know it yet. And Jesus deals with her in the same way he deals with the woman, the bleeding woman, a few weeks back, right? He doesn't want her to just have a healing. He calls her out to draw faith from her.

And he says, Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. In other words, my mission is to the Jews. That's my kind of primary mission right now.

Not you guys. It's actually to the Jews. And the woman is great. She's awesome. She gets it. And actually, I think she might be the first person in the gospel so far to actually understand one of the parables.

And kind of like get it straight away, which is this wonderful picture of grace. You know, the first person to get it is this pagan woman, right? So she gets it. And she says, Yes, Lord. That's her first response.

Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord. I understand. And she cleverly responds, Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. In other words, yes. There is so much bread.

[11 : 20] There is so much life. There is so much restoration. There is so much grace. You have to give. There is an abundance of it. I'd be happy with just the overflow. I'd be happy with the crumbs.

What you've got for the Jews, I get it. You've got, you know, I totally get it. For the Jews, you guys, for the Jews right now, that's your thing right now. But there is so much grace you have for them.

There's got to be a bit falling off the side. You know, I'd just be happy with that. Because it's so abundant. She's my new favorite woman in the Bible, this woman. She gets Christ's submission.

She understands it. She believes he is good. She believes there's so much grace on offer that even she, this pagan woman, from a place which is enemies to God's people, that even she can get some of that grace.

She understands that. And she's grateful. And her faith is blessed. Now, what does this mean in practice for us? Like, so what? You know, this cool thing happens to this woman a long time ago. What does it mean for us?

[12 : 23] Remember I said that there is a reason this passage comes immediately after this long list of sins. You know, the flow of evil from our hearts.

Why is that? When we think of grace, what do we think of? We mostly think of forgiveness, right? And it's important to know you are forgiven.

But this picture here, the picture of abundant grace that comes out of the story, is a grace that leads to restoration. I mean, the little girl is restored, right?

And that is because grace is not just a clean slate. It is not just forgiveness. Grace is new life. Grace can stop, stem, slow down that flow of evil from our hearts.

And here's how it does it. If you understand the abundant nature of grace, the overflowing nature of grace, if you understand God's grace is sufficient, then you're less likely to look for sex outside of marriage.

[13 : 33] If you understand God's grace is sufficient, not just sufficient, but overflowing, you can be satisfied with daily bread, be less inclined to steal, to covet, to be envious.

And if we understand that God's grace is not just sufficient, but overflowing and abundant, then we can be satisfied, right?

We can be satisfied. With what God has for us. Let me look at the next two stories really quickly. Verses 31 to 37.

This is the deaf man here. A terrible thing to be deaf back in these times because it was an oral culture. The man is deaf.

Can't talk properly, probably because he's deaf, I would think. The healing is very elaborate, but I think that's a... What we make of that, I'm not sure. I think probably what Jesus is doing when he's putting his fingers in his ears is explaining to the guy visually, I'm going to heal your ears.

[14 : 41] Because he can't tell them, obviously, right? The spit stuff, I don't know. The key to understanding this is actually the word, or is it? Verse 32, if you can see it there.

Speech impediment. That word there is the key to understanding this section. Let me tell you why. It's a very rare word. It's found nowhere else in the New Testament.

And it's found only one other place in the whole Bible. The Old Testament version of this word is found in Isaiah 35. It's a song, you know, prophecy about coming salvation.

And what salvation will look like when it does come. I want to read it to you. I want to read 12 verses, actually, of verse 35. And you'll get a bit of a feel for what it's about. So Isaiah 35, 1 to 12.

So it's talking about, it's this picture of salvation, of grace. The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad.

[15 : 41] The desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it. The majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of God and the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands. Strengthen the weak hands. Make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, be strong. Fear not. Behold, your God will come with a vengeance.

With the recompense of God, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of a mute.

That's the word right there. The tongue of the mute. Sing for joy. The waters break forth in the wilderness and the streams of the desert. The burning sand shall become a pool. And the thirsty ground springs of water.

And the haunts of the jackals where they lie down the grass shall be made reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there. And it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way.

[16 : 42] Even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there. Nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it. They shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall attain gladness and joy and sorrow. And sighing shall flee away.

So when it talks about, when it's trying to paint a visual picture of what salvation looks like, of what God's grace looks like, what does it look like? It looks like flowers in the desert. It looks like the lame are leaping like deers.

It looks like dangerous animals gone. It looks like everyone being healed. It looks like springs and rivers and lakes and stuff in the middle of dry land. It looks like laughter.

It looks like joy. This is the picture of salvation that the Old Testament uses. And Christ, Mark here, references this.

[17 : 42] And he's saying, I'm the guy. This is an example of this. My grace is abundant. The last story.

Chapter 8, verses 1 to 10. Very similar to the feeding of the 5,000, except this time it's Gentiles. Now this is an unusual question, but let me ask it. What does Jesus want you to take away from this passage?

This particular little section. Chapter 8, 1 to 10. What does Jesus want you to take away? Well, luckily, we have a very specific answer to that question later on.

In chapter 8, verses 17 to 20, Jesus explains what he wants us to take away from this little section. Let me read it to you. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, why are you discussing...

They had no food, right? They're taking off somewhere. They've got no food. And Jesus, aware of this, said, why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand?

[18 : 40] Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves of the 5,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?

And they said, 12. And the seven for the 4,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said, seven. And he said, do you still not understand? What is it about the feeding miracles that Jesus wants them to remember?

It's the overflow. It's the abundance. It's all the stuff that's left over. Because it was such an incredible, miraculous sign. It wasn't just sufficient.

They didn't just get there. There was an overflow of food. There was an overflow of life. There was an overflow of grace. Now, don't mistake me here for a prosperity gospel guy, okay?

Don't be thinking that I'm telling you God is a God of abundance. You know, you can pray for a Rolls Royce or whatever, and you're going to get it. That's not what I'm talking about. When it talks about the overflow, when it talks about the abundance, it's within the category of salvation and grace.

[19 : 52] Let me finish with this. This backs on to that very heavy list, right?

Very heavy list of sins, the stuff that comes out of our heart. The way we deal with ongoing sin in our life, this flow of evil, the way we deal with that is not facing the sin and trying to stop.

It's by looking into the gracious face of God. If you face God and you think he is stingy in his grace and his forgiveness, if you think he is stingy, you can expect an ongoing struggle with evil thoughts, with sexual morality, with theft, with coveting, with wickedness, with deceit, with sensuality, with evil, slander, pride, and foolishness, you can expect an ongoing battle with that if you think, God, it's stingy.

But if you believe God has overflowing grace, has an abundance of grace for you, then you can expect life.

Life. Amen. Come and pray for us. Amen. Amen. So comment on, Amen.

[21 : 25] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.