

Three Strikes? NOT OUT!  
Mark 7:24-30 (Matthew 15:21-28)

*Read the account in Mark and the parallel account in Matthew. Matthew fills in a few more details.*

**I. What is happening here?**

**A. The Story: An Unexpected Response from Jesus**

1. After the confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees over the authority of traditions and the definition of “unclean,” Jesus retreats to a decidedly non-Jewish area northwest of Galilee for a time away.
2. Jesus, unable to remain anonymous, is approached by a woman whose daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.
3. Jesus appears reluctant and dismissive toward the woman and her request.

**B. The big question:**

1. **What is going on here?**
2. In order to understand and fully appreciate what is happening in this interaction, we need to identify the three people involved in the scene.
  - a. The Woman
  - b. The Watcher
  - c. The Wonder

**II. Three VIPs**

**A. The Woman:**

1. Three Strikes
  - a. **Woman** - under Jewish cultural considerations of the day, as a woman, she is one with whom no respectable Jewish rabbi would associate.
  - b. **Gentile**
    - (1) Mark clearly points out that this woman is a “Greek,” a Gentile as distinguished from a Jew
    - (2) She is Syrian in nationality
    - (3) Phoenician in race (Syrian, not North African Phoenician)
  - c. Her daughter for whom she pleads, because of the demon, is **ceremonially/ritually unclean**, cementing the woman’s rejection as well.
2. Her burden for her daughter
  - a. Matthew tells us that the woman followed after Jesus as He and the disciples were walking, presumably returning to Galilee, and that she kept asking Him, kept imploring Him for His help.
  - b. She is both desperate and certain.
    - (1) Desperate that He alone can help her,
    - (2) certain that He alone can help her.
    - (3) She has heard of Jesus and she is ready to have from Him what He offers.
  - c. “So closely was her heart wrapped up with her child that ‘the daughter’s demon was the mother’s torment.’”
    - (1) Some of you know exactly how this feels.
    - (2) The burden your child bears weighs more heavily on your soul than even on theirs.

**B. The Watcher**

1. **You are the watcher**

- a. The reader is intended by the author (the Spirit) to encounter truth
    - (1) About the reader
    - (2) About the reader's world
    - (3) About Jesus
  - b. This is an interactive text in which you are to find your place and fulfill your role
    - (1) You are not absent from the intent or the content of Scripture
    - (2) **2 Timothy 3:16-17** *All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
2. How are we like this woman who came to Jesus?
- a. We come as those outside the covenant of grace, separated from God, with no hope in the world
    - (1) **Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*
    - (2) **Ephesians 2:11-12 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*
  - b. We come as those cast off in the eyes of the world
    - (1) **1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*
    - (2) We come as those, like her, with three strikes against us!
    - (3) Foolish, powerless, and common - totally nonimpressive from the world's point of view
  - c. We come with a condition beyond any human remedy, which only the Son of God can resolve.
    - (1) **Romans 3:23 (ESV)** *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*
    - (2) **Acts 4:12 (ESV)** *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*
      - (a) No educational achievement

- (b) No career choice
- (c) No economic/social status
- (d) No religious or philosophical practice
- (3) Jesus said, “No one come to the Father but by me!”
- d. **This is not merely her story, this is your story!**
  - (1) If she wins, perhaps you have a shot at grace.
  - (2) If she loses, you have no hope of mercy.

### C. The Wonder: Jesus

1. Three Facts to Keep in Mind as We Encounter Jesus in the Gospels
  - a. Jesus discerns the heart of those He encounters
    - (1) Gospel assertions
      - (a) **Matthew 9:4 (ESV) *But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”***
      - (b) **Luke 9:47 (ESV) *But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side***
    - (2) Biblical revelation of God’s insight into the heart
      - (a) **Psalm 44:21 (ESV) *would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.***
      - (b) **Jeremiah 12:3 (ESV) *But you, O LORD, know me; you see me, and test my heart toward you.***
      - (c) **Acts 15:8 (ESV) <sup>8</sup>*And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,***
  - b. Jesus continues consistent
    - (1) **Hebrews 13:8 (ESV) <sup>8</sup>*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***
    - (2) Past, Present, future
      - (a) What he was in ages past, he is in this woman’s present
      - (b) What he was in our past, He is in our present
      - (c) What he is in ages past, and ages present, he will be in ages to come
    - (3) Just as he discerned the woman’s heart and faith and real need, so He discerns and build sour heart faith in the midst of real need

T.S. In order for us to experience this truth for ourselves there is one other fact about Jesus we must know

- c. Jesus remains committed to God’s integrity
  - (1) The promise to Abraham
    - (a) **Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV) <sup>1</sup>*Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”***
  - (2) The promise came to Abraham
    - (a) God must demonstrate His faithfulness to Abraham and Abraham’s people if we are to trust His promise to the rest

of the world.

- (b) If God does not keep His promises to His specially chosen people, through whom He is to demonstrate His true nature to fallen people, how then can those fallen people believe any of the good He promises them?!
- (3) The promise to the Gentiles: through Abraham, “all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

#### **D. Summary of what we know**

- 1. Taken all together, here is what we know going into this story:
  - a. Jesus knows this woman’s heart and need
  - b. Jesus continues in her life to be all that He has ever been and ever will be as God and Savior
  - c. Jesus commits to the promise of God to Abraham to bless all the peoples of the earth, of which both the woman and the watcher are prime examples!
    - (1) Everything that follows in this encounter must be, because of Who Jesus is, a living example of God’s heart acting in real time with real mercy to build faith and bestow blessing on the peoples of the earth.
    - (2) Jesus mercy to this woman points to His intention to fulfill God’s promise to Abraham as part of His mission as Messiah: in you ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH will be blessed.
      - (a) Christ extends to all people a new covenant based on faith.
      - (b) Christ accepts faith from all people regardless of status or history.
      - (c) Christ the sin and grants new and eternal life to all who believe.
- 2. Let’s look at how Jesus reveals the mercy of God in fulfilment of the promise of God.

### **III. The interaction of the Woman and the Wonder**

#### **A. What the Watchers see**

- 1. She falls at his feet and begs His help
- 2. He deflects her request
- 3. She persists
- 4. He finally relents

#### **B. What the Watcher should see**

- 1. Jesus’ words
  - a. In the dialogue, Jesus makes it clear, I think, that there is an order of priority for the gospel in His mission, which would be appropriate given God’s covenantal relationship with Israel.
  - b. Her reply affirms there is an appropriate order to consider here, but that everyone has their opportunity somewhere.
  - c. It reminds me of Haiti when the women are cooking for large groups.
    - (1) They make a huge pot of rice over the fire.
    - (2) They are constantly shooing the hungry dogs away, but when the rice is done and they have moved it from pots to serving bowls, they take that layer of fire browned rice at the bottom of the pot and throw it to the dogs.

(3) **Everyone gets what is appropriate for their need.**

(4) So the question here, in my thinking, is, "What grace and mercy is appropriate for those outside the covenant who come to the covenant making God for mercy? What is God's heart toward those who are by covenant definition 'unclean'?"

d. NOTE: the word for dog that Jesus uses here is "little dog" a word that better signifies a puppy and a pet, not a mongrel or feral stray, but a recognized part of the family.

(1) It is important that we not make more of this designation than intended by Jesus.

(2) Jesus is making a statement about appropriate priorities relative to God's promise to Abraham in Gen 12, NOT social distinctions!

2. Her words

a. The picture: a little child who secretly hands a morsel of food to the puppy looking expectantly up from the floor, knowing that at that moment, this is the best place on earth to be.

b. yet the dogs eat of the children's crumbs—which fall from their master's table" (Mt 15:27).

(1) "I thank Thee, O blessed One, for that word! That's my whole case. Not of the children? True. A dog? True also:

(2) Yet the dogs under the table are allowed to eat of the children's crumbs—the droppings from their master's full table: Give me that, and I am content: One crumb of power and grace from Thy table shall cast the devil out of my daughter."

(3) Oh, what lightning quickness, what reach of instinctive ingenuity, do we behold in this heathen woman!

**C. Conclusively we must say that God responds to genuine faith with abundant mercy.**

1. "All things are possible to him who believes."

a. Faith is a gift of God.

b. If you have faith in Christ this morning, it is a gift He has given you in order to make the salvation and mercy of God accessible to you.

2. The faith that you have you must put in Christ.

a. Faith in His finished work on behalf of your soul.

b. Faith in His promise to send the Spirit.

c. Faith in His ongoing work to fit you in this life for the life in the presence of the Glory that is coming for all who believe.

3. This beautiful story is meant to assure people of faith that it is rightly your story as well, but it also sets out to persuade you who have not put your faith in Jesus that it can surely be your story as well!

a. None of the reasons you may hold out for rejecting Christ as your Savior hold any merit with God.

b. There is no sin, nor volume of sin, no depth of depravity, no measure of resistance, no intensity of filthiness or anger or immorality nor anything else that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus if only you will put your faith in Him, trust Him, love Him, and commit your life to exploring the immense, unending love He has for you!

4. Let us note as well that the resolution Jesus responds with is complete and permanent.

- a. The grammar indicates a condition begun in a moment that continues without end.
  - b. The demon is gone in an instant never to return.
  - c. While God may choose to allow some challenges to remain in our lives, it is for the purpose of sanctification.
    - (1) Sin-guilt, however, he permanently dismisses upon faithful confession and repentance.
    - (2) He does not hold our sins over us when we have sought His forgiveness. (as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.)
5. **Watchers, that Woman had three strikes against her, but because of the Wonder, she was not out.**
- a. Neither are you, if you will put your faith in Jesus today.
  - b. No more waiting, no more messing around.
  - c. Today is the day of salvation.