

A Sunday School helper was delivering a station wagon full of kids home one day when a fire truck zoomed past. Sitting in the front seat of the fire truck was a Dalmatian dog. The children began discussing the dog's duties. "They use him to keep crowds back," said one youngster. "No," said another, "he's just for good luck." A third child brought the argument to a close. "They use the dogs," she said firmly, "to find the fire hydrant."

*Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen*

Today's scripture speaks to us of faith and reveals the power and action our faith produces. But most unfortunately, many times our faith is weak or misrepresented in that we desire our own results instead of accepting God's plan for us. We all know who Jesus Christ is, but we also must understand that it is not Jesus who grants faith to the people He encounters, this is a sole function of God the Father and Jesus makes this absolutely clear to the people he addresses in His life among us and to us today!

The woman in the gospel text has faith that has come to her from God alone and Jesus is declaring to her that the words of the prophet state 'first to the Jew; and then to the Gentile.' You see, the woman is not a Jew and all who are not Jews are in fact: Gentiles. No further distinction is made between groups of people with Jesus. This is because the nation of Israel was chosen by God as the people to bring the Messiah in the world.

And still, when we hear the words of the Gospel text today, some will become uneasy and even take offence when Jesus uses the word 'dog' to refer to anyone that might be the recipient of a blessing, care, or gift from Jesus who can heal and restore as He wills. When we become uneasy or offended...is there a chance that we have misinterpreted the meaning or the message?

Consider the following [possibly true story, again about a dog]: Upon entering a little country store, the customer noticed a sign warning, "Danger! Beware of dog!" posted on the glass door. Inside, he noticed a harmless old hound dog asleep on the floor beside the cash register. "Is that the dog folks are supposed to beware of?" he asked the owner. "Yep, that's him," came the reply. The stranger couldn't help but be amused. "That certainly doesn't look like a dangerous dog to me. Why in the world would you post that sign?" "Because," the owner explained, "Before I posted that sign, people kept tripping over him."

We make assumptions all the time, and even more so when we see a message or hear a phrase in the context of our current culture or understanding. Pets, namely cats and dogs, are big business in American culture. Huge! Measured in 1994 as a \$17 billion industry, this trend will exceed \$100 billion within the next two years. Why is this industry growing my friends? Why is it...? THRIVING!? The pet industry is doing so well because all the best experts in various fields of study all agree that pets have a beneficial effect on human life, behavior, emotion, and overall well-being.

Jesus makes reference to a dog with regard to the woman's request for help, to which HE replies; "it is not right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Obviously in today's context, this sounds harsh; however, I cannot imagine it sounding any better to the woman Jesus was speaking too. Still, the current translation we use (the NRSV) is not entirely clear with another word in today's text.

The woman refers to Jesus (in this translation) as, "Sir", where most other translations will use the word Lord. The un-translated Greek word is Χυριοσ (Koo-ree-os), meaning: Lord, Master, Messiah, a title

of honour expressive of respect and reverence.<sup>1</sup> So the difference in the translation is clearly also the means by which the woman's faith has been identified.

The woman looks at Jesus and calls Him, Lord; an identity that faith has revealed to her and a gift that is given by God alone. Once the woman call Jesus, "Lord", her request for mercy is granted. But we still have the matter of the use of the word, 'dog'.

Consider the following: A man took his Rottweiler to the vet and said to the vet: "My dog's cross-eyed, is there anything you can do for it?" "Well" said the vet "lets have a look at him" So he picks the dog up and has a good look at it's eyes. "Well" says the vet "I'm going to have to put him down" "Just because he's cross-eyed?" says the man. "No, because he's heavy" says the vet.

Here again, we expect the worst for the dog, when in fact it is our use and understanding of terminology that fails us. The word dog appears several times in the bible, mostly in the Old Testament and even in Revelation, and it refers to the people outside of the faith. There is no indication or reason to think that Jesus has dealt with this woman in a derogatory or unkind manner. However, the translators also failed to provide a clear image of this word as well.

Two translations, the NIV and Young's Literal correctly translated dogs to 'puppies'; and in the context of Jesus' words, a companion to a child. Jesus is telling the woman, it is not fair that Israel should wait longer for the Kingdom of God to be established among them as they have endured all that God asked of them. The Kingdom will come to her also in time, to which the woman replied, with the full faith she has been granted; Lord, your Kingdom is wherever you are and all belong to you.

The woman's faith speaks to Jesus and is recorded in Holy Scripture for the world to see that the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been eliminated and the Kingdom of God is here for all people. The promise of salvation cannot be for a group, a selection, or anything less that ALL PEOPLE! Furthermore, when our faith is used to make a request of God, regardless of who we are, our prayer will be heard, answered, and acted upon because we are ALL children of God; the same Heavenly Father!

We have no greater Companion in the world and no greater Provider of all that we need for life together with all God's people of any faith. We all eat the bread of life, we all share the blessings and gifts of the Spirit and individually and collectively we grow and thrive. We need to read the story that God has already written for us my friends and stop thinking we know what is going to happen next.

This is not a story about a Dalmatian, a Hound, and a Rottweiler. This is a story about the love we have for our dearest family members, our loved ones, our neighbors, and the countless best-friends we have not met yet because God gave us the faith to know we are living in His Kingdom with Him today with ALL that He has created.

There is still more to be revealed to us my dear friends in Christ; our wisdom is far from complete, our faith is not yet sight, and we continue to misinterpret the message from time to time. But rest assured; the best of care has always been established for us, protection is in place, and our inheritance of a peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord is God's promise to us. Amen? Amen!

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.greekbible.com/l.php?ku/rios\\_n-----vsm-](http://www.greekbible.com/l.php?ku/rios_n-----vsm-)