

## Cowboy Jake

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Matthew 15:21-24

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Jake, the rancher, went one day to fix a distant fence. By the end of the day, the temperature had fallen and snow began to blow. When he finally reached his pickup, he knew by the sound of the ignition it wouldn't start. So Jake did what most of us would do if we had been there. He humbly bowed his head and prayed. They found him three days later, frozen stiff in the truck. In Heaven Jake talked with St. Peter. "I've always heard that God will answer prayer. But the one time I ask for help He just plain wasn't there." Peter listened very patiently but replied, "That day your truck wouldn't start and you prayed, a thousand angels rushed to check the status of your file. But you know, Jake, we hadn't heard from you in quite a while. Although all prayers are answered, God didn't recognize your voice and started a truck in North Dakota."

Someone sent me that story intending to bring a smile to my day. But as I read this story about Cowboy Jake I became angry. I didn't get angry because I know lots of people like Jake, but because there are too many Christians in this world that believe what Peter said is true.

Some Christians have a certain arrogance and a level of selfishness about Jesus that just seems to rub me the wrong way. It's almost as if they draw a line between themselves and the rest of the world, and proudly proclaim that Jesus is on their side; an attitude that many Jews had about God

After Jesus condemned some Pharisee's for loving tradition, and after He pointed out that it's not what you eat that defiles you, it's what comes out of your heart, He leads the group about 50 miles north from Capernaum all the way to Tyre, a coastal city along the Mediterranean Sea. Watch what happens though shortly after He gets there. <sup>21</sup> Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." <sup>23</sup> But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." <sup>24</sup> But He

answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>1</sup>

(Matthew 15:21-24)

Why do you think Matthew points out where this woman was from? She was a Canaanite woman (descended from Noah's grandson Canaan). She was also from an area that is now modern day Lebanon. In the eyes of a Jew she would not only have been an unclean Gentile (which is someone who was not Jewish by birth) but a long time enemy of the nation of Israel as well (see Noah's curse in Genesis 9:25). Matthew wrote his gospel account specifically for a Jewish audience, so you can almost see them cringe as he reveals this woman's background. Of course He wouldn't talk to her! And the disciples had every right to be irritated by her presence. But notice what happens next. <sup>25</sup> But she came and worshiped him, pleading again, "Lord, help me!" <sup>26</sup> Jesus responded, "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> "Dear woman," Jesus said to her, "your faith is great. Your request is granted." And her daughter was instantly healed. <sup>2</sup> (Matthew 15:25-28)

Sometimes I think we read too much meanness into the words of Jesus. Sometimes I think we miss the tender side of our Savior. Here is a great example of what I'm talking about. So often I hear people read this passage placing anger in the voice of Jesus. In reality, it should be in a more tender mood. I know it sounds like Jesus is calling her a pesky mongrel, but the word should more accurately be translated as "puppy". Jesus didn't see this woman as some kind of mutt that roams the streets but as a house pet that stares up at you with begging and pleading eyes. And instead of looking at this story as some kind of lesson on how to get what you want from God, I think this is a lesson on His tenderness. But a lesson for whom?

Look at what transpires here. When Jesus didn't answer this woman, she began pestering the disciples. So they come to Jesus saying "Do something about this woman." In spite of His answer to the disciples about being sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, He answers this woman's request to heal her daughter anyway.

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<sup>1</sup>*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995 (Mt 15:21-24). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.* Wheaton, Ill.

What's the lesson? Who has been taught? To find the answer, we need to look beyond His conversation with this woman and consider what impact this scene must have had on those who were following Jesus. Considering what they must have thought about this woman, how do you suppose they responded to His tenderness and mercy?

We're often taught that this is a lesson on persistence to get what you want from God. But I think it was a demonstration to those watching just how tender and loving and merciful Jesus can be. Think about it: His response about only being sent to the lost sheep of Israel was directed at the disciples. Christ is basically saying, "So you think that this woman is beyond the reach of my love and grace, do you?"

It appears this is what Christ was thinking because right after teaching about the cleanliness of all foods (and okay, I concede that this also means shrimp), Jesus demonstrates this truth on people by traveling to a Gentile land and being merciful to a Gentile woman. Jesus crosses the line that most Jews had drawn between themselves and the rest of the world and shows this woman compassion; her daughter is healed.

Cowboy Jake did not die because of his poor relationship with Jesus. But I guarantee you that if he had called out to Jesus to rescue His lost soul, Jesus would have been there in a heart beat. He's been doing this for centuries. The Apostle Paul confesses for all of us when he says "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." <sup>3</sup> (Ephesians 2:13) And Paul distinctly points out that it was only by the blood of Jesus they came near to God. Not right living or right heritage.

Even though some Christians have drawn a line between themselves and the rest of the world, our Savior still boldly crosses that line for anyone who calls out to Him; regardless of how they are currently living, and regardless of their background. It's important for you and I to understand this because if Christ will not do this for one person, He would not do it for anyone, which includes you and me. But He did. And for that, I believe, we should be eternally grateful.

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<sup>3</sup>*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995 (Eph 2:13). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.